

VIETNAM

COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

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

Samuel Clifford Adams, Jr.	1952-1955	Education Advisor, Saigon
Randolph A. Kidder	1953-1955 1955	Political Officer, Saigon Chargé d'Affaires, Saigon
George Lambrakis	1954-1955	Trainee, USIS, Saigon
Robert F. Franklin	1954-1956 1962	Radio Officer, USIS, Hanoi and Saigon Press Officer, Saigon
John A. Lacey	1954-1956 1965-1966	Intelligence Analyst, Vietnamese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC Country Officer, Burma/Cambodia Desk, Washington, DC
Rufus C. Phillips, III	1954-1955 1957-1959	U.S. Army and Central Intelligence Agency, Saigon Assistant Director, Rural Affairs, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Vientiane, Laos
Robert J. MacAlister	1955	International Rescue Committee, City Unspecified, Vietnam
John A. McKesson, III	1955-1957	Political Officer, Saigon
Robert E. Barbour	1955-1956 1956-1957 1957-1958	Language Training, Saigon Political Officer, Saigon Principal Officer, Hue
Robert Lochner	1955-1958	Deputy PAO, USIS, Saigon
Samuel T. Williams	1955-1960	Military Assistance Advisor Group, Saigon
Christian A. Chapman	1957-1958	Political Officer, Saigon
David I. Hitchcock, Jr.	1957-1958	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Hue
Chester H. Opal	1957-1960	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Saigon
Alan Fisher	1957-1963	Motion Picture Officer, USIS, Saigon
Elbridge Durbrow	1957-1961 1961-1965	Ambassador, Vietnam NATO, Paris

John W. Kimball	1958-1960	Assistant Security Officer, Saigon
Theodore J.C. Heavner	1958-1959 1960-1961 1961-1963	Political Officer, Hue Political Officer, Saigon Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Joseph A. Mendenhall	1958-1959 1959-1962 1963-1965 1964 1964-1965 1968-1970	Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC Political Officer, Saigon Deputy Director, Southeast Asia Affairs, Washington, DC Chairman, Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC Vietnam Affairs, East Asia Bureau, Washington, DC Vietnam Affairs, USAID, Washington, DC
Cecil S. Richardson	1959-1961	Political Officer/Staff Aide, Saigon
Ben Franklin Dixon	1959-1962	Political Officer, Thailand
James Howe	1959-1962	Program Officer, International Cooperation Administration (predecessor to USAID), City Unspecified, Vietnam
George F. Bogardus	1959-1963	Economic Officer, Saigon
Neal Donnelly	1960-1961	Assistant CAO, Saigon
Thomas F. Conlon	1960-1962	Principal Officer, Saigon
James Marvin Montgomery	1960-1962 1962-1964	Economic Officer, Saigon State Department; Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Keith Earl Adamson	1960-1964	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
John M. Anspacher	1960-1964	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Saigon
John J. Helble	1960-1961 1961-1964 1965-1967 1973	Political Officer, Saigon Consul, Hue Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC Political Officer, Saigon
Douglas Eugene Pike	1960-1962	Assistant Motion Picture Officer, USIS,

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

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

		Washington, DC
John T. Bennett (Interview with Rutherford Poats)	1963-1965 1973-1975	Economic Counselor, Saigon Economic Counselor, Saigon
Rutherford Poats (See interview with John Bennett)	1963-1967 1964-1966	Bureau Chief, USAID, Washington, DC Assistant Administrator, USAID, Washington, DC
Thomas L. Hughes	1963-1969	Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
Robert C. Haney	1964	Deputy Chief, JUSPAO, Saigon
Thomas F. Conlon	1964	Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Broadus Bailey, Jr.	1964-1965	Provincial Advisor, Dalat, Tuyen Duc
U. Alexis Johnson	1964-1965	Deputy Chief of Mission/Deputy Ambassador, Saigon
William N. Turpin	1964-1965	Vietnam Aid Mission, Saigon
Peter M. Cody	1964-1965	Vietnam Desk, USAID, Washington, DC
Ray E. Jones	1964-1965	Embassy and Staffing Protocol Officer, Saigon
David G. Nes	1964-1965	Deputy Chief of Mission, Saigon
Richard J. Dols	1964-1966	Intelligence Analyst, Vietnamese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
James F. Leonard	1964-1966	Intelligence Analyst, Far East Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
Philip R. Mayhew	1964-1966	Advisor, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Clayton E. McManaway, Jr.	1964-1965 1965 1965-196? 196?-1970	Program Officer, USAID, Saigon Vietnam Program, Washington, DC Pacification Program Officer, USAID, Saigon DoD, MACV, Saigon

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

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

		Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
James G. Lowenstein	1965-1974	Staff of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC
	1967-1974	Staff of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, City Unspecified, Vietnam
Mary Chambliss	1965-c1977	Economic Research Service, Junior Economist, Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC
Robert B. Petersen	1966-1967	Assistant Public Affairs Officer, USIA, Saigon
David G. Brown	1966-1968	Political Officer, Saigon
Gerard M. Gert	1966-1968	Psychological Operations, Saigon
L. Wade Lathram	1966-1968	Deputy Director, USAID, Saigon
David Rybak	1966-1968	Refugee Officer, USAID, Saigon
Charles H. Twining	1966-1968	Area Development Officer, USAID, Dalat
Theodore J.C. Heavner	1966-1969	Supervising Political Officer, Saigon
John M. Steeves	1966-1969	Director General of the Foreign Service, Washington, DC
Richard W. Duemling	1966-1970	Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary for East Asia, Washington, DC
James F. Mack	1966-1969	CORDS Program, Provincial Reporting Officer, Vietnam
	1969-1971	Intelligence Analyst, Washington, DC
	1972-1973	Paris Peace Accords Monitor, South Vietnam
Thomas P.H. Dunlop	1966-1969	Political Officer, Saigon
	1972-1974	Political Officer, Saigon
Frank N. Burnet	1966-1967	Political Advisor, Commander in Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC), Washington, DC
	1967-1969	Province Advisor, Bien Hoa

	1971-1975	Intelligence Analyst, Southeast Asia, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
Lawrence H. Hydle	1966-1967 1968-1972 1973	Consular Officer, Saigon Political Officer, Saigon Consular Officer, Bien Hoa
Frank Pavich	1966-1972	Program Officer, USAID
Michael E. Tolle	1967	Civilian, Da Nang
Anthony C. Zinni	1967	Second Lieutenant, Marine Divisions, Vietnam
David C. Miller, Jr.	1967-1968	Simulmatics (Business), Saigon
John E. Graves	1967-1968	Provincial Advisor, Rach Gia
Thomas F. Conlon	1967-1968	Head of Provincial Reporting, Saigon
Vernon C. Johnson	1967-1968	Vietnam Bureau, USAID, City Unspecified, Vietnam
Charles L. Daris	1967-1969	Provincial Advisor, USAID, Saigon
Charles T. Cross	1967-1969	Deputy, I Corps, Danang
Timothy Michael Carney	1967-1969	Rotation Officer, Saigon
Larry Colbert	1967-1969 1969-1970	CORDS Refugee Advisor, USAID, Da Nang Vietnam Training Center, Washington, DC
Thomas B. Killeen	1967-1969	Refugee Officer, Da Nang and Hue
Richard R. Wyrough	1967-1968 1968-1969 1969-1970	Forward Base Commander, US Army, Bien Hoa Vietnam, National Military Academy, Dalat Brigade Commander, Task Force South, South Vietnam
Douglas R. Keene	1967-1970	CORDS Officer, Go Cong Province
Melvin R. Chatman	1967-1970	199 th Infantry Brigade, Vietnam

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

		Saigon
Parker W. Borg	1968-1969	Deputy District Advisor, CORDS Vietnam
William Lenderking	1968-1969	Advisor to Vietnamese Information Rep., Pleiku
	1969	Joint US Public Affairs Officer, USIA, Saigon
Edgar J. Gordon	1968-1969	Economic Officer, Saigon
Carl C. Cundiff	1968-1969	Economic Officer, USAID, Saigon
Galen L. Stone	1968-1969	Political Counselor, Saigon
Samuel Vick Smith	1968-1969	Deputy District Advisor, Bien Hoa
Lloyd Jonnes	1968-1969	Counselor for Economic Affairs/Associate Director, USAID, Saigon
William Veale	1969-1969	Captain, U.S. Army, Vietnam
Andrew F. Antippas	1968-1970	Political Officer, Saigon
Dennis G. Harter	1968-1970	CORDS Officer, Ba Tri District, Vietnam
	1970	Special Assistant to Ambassador Colby, Saigon
Stan Ifshin	1968-1970	USAID Officer, Saigon
Stevenson McIlvaine	1968-1970	Province Advisor, Camau
Thomas Macklin, Jr.	1968-1970	Youth Affairs Officer, Saigon
William A. Weingarten	1968-1970	New Life Development Program, My Tho
James J. Gormley	1968-1970	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Da Nang
Eugene Rosenfeld	1968-1970	Chief of Mission, Press Center, Saigon
Charles S. Whitehouse	1968-1970	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Saigon
George A. Anderson	1968-1971	Political-Military Affairs Officer, Saigon

Lawrence J. Hall	1968-1972	Deputy Director, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Theresa A. Tull	1968-1970 1970-1972	Political Officer, Saigon Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Frederick Z. Brown	1968-1970 1971-1973	Province Advisor, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Vinh Long Consul General, Da Nang
Carl Edward Dillery	1968-1969	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Quang Ngai
Morton R. Dworken, Jr.	1968-1969 1969 1969-1971	Vietnam Training Center, Arlington, VA Military Assistance Command Civil Operations, Saigon Member, Principal Advisory Team, Phouc Long
James B. Engle	1968-1970 1970-1973 1973	Province Senior Advisor, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Phy Yen Director, Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC Consul General, Nha Trang
Morton I. Abramowitz	1968-1969 1972 1974-1978	Staff Member, Senior Interdepartmental Group, Washington, DC Director, East Asia Division, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC Political Advisor to Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command, Washington, DC
Robert S. Zigler	1968-1975	Program Officer, USAID, Saigon
Richard Sackett Thompson	1968-1972 1974-1975	Provincial Reporting Unit, Saigon External Affairs, Saigon
Clarke McCurdy Brintnall	1969-1970	Major, U.S. Army, Phouc Vinh
Charles Stuart Kennedy	1969-1970	Consul General, Saigon
Eugene Kopp	1969-1970	Deputy Director, USIA, Washington, DC

Lange Schermerhorn	1969-1970	Consular Officer, Saigon
James W. Chamberlin	1969-1970	Artilleryman, U.S. Army, Vietnam
Lacy A. Wright	1969-1970	Political Officer, Saigon
Frederick (Ted) G. Mason, Jr.	1969-1970 1970-1971	JUSPAO Affairs Officer, Saigon CORDS, Saigon
J. Richard Bock	1969-1970 1970-1971	Refugee Officer, Bien Hoa Special Assistant, Saigon
William K. Hitchcock	1969-1970 1970-1972	Director, Refugees and War Victims, Saigon Political Counselor, Saigon
Bruce W. Clark	1969-1970 1970-1971 1971-1972	Deputy District Advisor, Tuy Hoa Office of Inspector General, Foreign Assistance, Washington, DC Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Ernestine S. Heck	1969-1971	Political Officer, Saigon
William A. Root	1969-1971	Transport/Communications Officer, Saigon
Ints M. Silins	1969-1970 1970 1970-1973	Vietnamese Language Training, Washington, DC District Senior Advisor, Duc Thanh District, Mekong Delta Aide to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Saigon
James D. Phillips	1970	Vietnam Inspection Team, Da Nang
Parker W. Borg	1970	Policy Programs and Plans, CORDS, Saigon
David Lazar	1970-1971	Director, CORDS Region I, Da Nang
Dell Pendergrast	1970-1971	Psychological Operations Advisor, Saigon
Maurice E. Lee	1970-1971	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
John M. Reid	1970-1971	Political Officer, JUSPAO, Saigon
Michael W. Cotter	1970-1971 1971	CORDS, Mekong Delta Staff Aide, Saigon

Richard A. Virden	1970-1971	Wireless File Correspondent, USIS, Saigon
Natale H. Bellocchi	1970-1971 1971-1972	CORDS, Da Nang Commercial Attaché, Saigon
David Winn	1970-1972	CORDS, Long Khanh
John Gunther Dean	1970-1972	Deputy, CORDS, Danang
Michael E. Tolle	1970-1972	Refugee Officer, Saigon
Richard Funkhouser	1970-1972	CORDS, Saigon
Howard H. Lange	1970-1971 1972	Pacification Program, Hue Political Officer, Saigon
Harry Haven Kendall	1970-1972	Economic Policy Officer, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Frank E. Schmelzer	1970-1972	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Tuy Hoa
Roy T. Haverkamp	1970-1972	Area Development Advisor, Saigon
Anthony C. Zinni	1970-1974	Company Commander, Marine Divisions, Vietnam
Donald McConville	1970-1974	Economic Officer, AID, Saigon
Arthur Mead	1970-1975	Foreign Agricultural Service, Washington, DC
Melvin R. Chatman	1970-1976	Senior District Advisor, Cuchi and Bien Ho
Robert H. Nooter	1970-1975	Assistant Administrator, USAID, Washington, DC
Charles Higginson	1971	Junior Foreign Service Inspector, Vietnam
Lillian E. Ostermeier	1971	Secretary to Ambassador Bruce, Paris
Craig Dunkerley	1971-1973	Consular/Political Military Officer, Da Nang
Douglas Watson	1971-1973	Province Development Officer, Saigon

Robert A. Lincoln	1971-1973	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Irwin Pernick	1971-1973	Office of Political Military Affairs, Washington, DC
Michael G. Wygant	1971-1973	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Pleiku
Gary L. Matthews	1971-1973	CORDS, Da Nang
John A. Bushnell	1971-1974	Program Analysis, NSC, The White House, Washington, DC
David Lambertson	1971-1973 1973-1975	Spokesman, Paris EAB, Regional Affairs, Washington, DC
John Wolf	1972-1973	Consular Officer, Da Nang
J. Richard Bock	1973	TDY, Bien Hoa
Michael W. Cotter	1973	Vice Consul, Can Tho
Douglas R. Keene	1973	Temporary Duty from Warsaw, Saigon
Richard W. Teare	1973	Deputy Principal Officer, Nha Trang
Samuel B. Thomsen	1973 1973-1974	Principal Officer, Saigon Liaison, Joint Military Commission, Hue
Marshall Bremet	1973-1974	Public Affairs Officer, Saigon
John N. Irwin, II	1973-1974	Ambassador to France, Paris Peace Talks, France
Hugh Burleson	1973-1975	Program Officer, USIS, Saigon
Theresa A. Tull	1973-1975	Deputy Principal Officer, Da Nang
Fred Charles Thomas, Jr.	1973-1975	ICCS Liaison Office, Saigon
Charles Lahiguera	1973-1975	Peace Accord Monitor, Third Corps, Bien Hoa
James R. Bullington	1973-1975	Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC

Wolfgang J. Lehmann	1973-1974 1974-1975	Consul General, Can Tho Deputy Chief of Mission, Saigon
Moncrieff J. Spear	1973-1975	Consul General, Nha Trang
Frank G. Wisner	1973 197?-1976	Deputy Consul General, Can Tho Vietnam Task Force, Washington, DC
Parker W. Borg	1974	Member of Peace Agreement Monitor Team, Pleiku
Francis J. Tatu	1974	Principal Officer, Chiang Mai
David Michael Adamson	1974-1975	Rotational Officer, Nha Trang
Razvigor Bazala	1974-1975	Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Da Nang
Robert A. Martin	1974-1975	Political Officer, Nha Trang, Saigon
Lacy A. Wright	1973-1974 1974-1975	Acting Consul General, Chun Tien Province Political Officer, Saigon
Richard E. Thompson	1974-1977	Diplomatic Courier, Bangkok
Charles Lahiguera	1975	Refugee Evacuation Officer, SS Blue Ridge
Parker W. Borg	1975	Assistant to Assistant Secretary Habib, Washington
Robert V. Keeley	1975-1976	Deputy Director, Task Force for Vietnam Refugees, Washington, DC
John Hogan	1976-1977	I Corps, Da Nang
Edmund McWilliams	1978-1980	Desk Officer for Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, Washington, DC
Stephen T. Johnson	1984-1986	State Department, Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Charles H. Twining	1988-1991	Office Director; Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, Washington
Marie Therese Huhtala	1990-1992	Office director, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, Washington, DC

G. Eugene Martin	1992-1996	Consul General, Guangzhou
Marilyn Greene	1993-1996	Reporter, <u>USA Today</u> , Washington, DC
Dennis G. Harter	1994-1996	Director, Office of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodian Affairs, Washington, DC
	1997-2001	Deputy Chief of Mission, Hanoi
Marie Therese Huhtala	1996-1998	Deputy Director, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand & Vietnam Affairs, Washington, DC
Thomas R. Carmichael	2001-2002	Vietnamese Language Training, FSI, Washington, DC
	2002-2004	Public Affairs Officer, Hanoi

MERRITT N. COOTES
Temporary Consul
Saigon (1936)

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

COOTES: I was just about to go back to Hong Kong when a cable came in on January 1, 1936. I said to Henry, "Oh, you can decode this thing tomorrow. Don't bother about it today." Henry said, "No, I think we'd better go down there right now." It's a good thing that we did, because the telegram covered my transfer to Saigon, to fill in for the Consul, Quincy Roberts, who had not been back to the U.S. for 17 years! In those days, if you took home leave, you paid your own way back to the U.S. and then to your post. Roberts decided that, rather than pay his way home from his previous posts in Fiji or Indonesia, he'd stay where he was. So he hadn't been home for 17 years. He wrote to the Department and asked that somebody be assigned to replace him. He received no answer and, three months later, he sent a telegram. That was unheard of in those days. So the answer was a telegram to me in Manila, ordering me to Saigon to take over while the Consul went on home leave. Finally, his home leave was paid, as a special consideration. So I spent seven months in Saigon. It was a one-man post. There were such posts in those days -- they don't any more, as we all know.

Of course, when I arrived in Saigon on January 6, 1936, I thought that I would have to do all of the end of the year economic reporting. I thought that this was going to be a terrible burden. I knew nothing about Indochina -- I barely knew where it was. But when I was met at the dock by Consul Quincy Roberts, he said, "Look, I've got all of my reports lined up. I didn't realize that I

was going to get to go on leave so quickly. I've got all of that done. I'd suggest that you go up to Hanoi, because that's where the Governor General lives. You can establish contact with the office of the Governor General and the Customs, Police, and all of the rest of the officials. So if anything happens while you're down in Saigon, you will have your contacts up at headquarters in Hanoi." At that time Indochina effectively belonged to the French. Cochin China [now southern Vietnam] actually belonged to France, by treaty. Annam [now central Vietnam], Cambodia, and Tonkin [now northern Vietnam] were French protectorates. For some reason the capital was established in Hanoi, rather than Saigon, although Cochin China was the wealthy part of Indochina, where the rice exports were produced. So I stayed there for seven months...

Q: *In Saigon?*

COOTES: In Saigon.

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

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

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

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

Q: *I see.*

COOTES: When I was in Hanoi, I met the Frenchman who was the agent for Chrysler cars. He said that he had just taken delivery on some automobiles which he had to drive down to Saigon. Since I was going back to Saigon, would I drive one of the cars for him? So I drove a car, and it was very interesting. We went through the "pays des insoumis," in the hills of Indochina. It was called "insoumi" because the French had really never done more than occupy the towns. At night it was not safe to walk around. The so-called "natives" had never really been subjugated by the French. So I drove back to Saigon with the Chrysler agent. He was delighted to have someone to drive the car for him.

Q: *There were roads?*

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

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

COOTES: I was back in Saigon for another few months. Quincy Roberts came back from home leave, and I returned to my post in Hong Kong. As I said, your transportation on home leave was

not paid by the Department. I was entitled to some leave, after three years. My father was a great friend of one of the personnel people who served under Mr. Byington. He arranged to have me transferred from Hong Kong to Montreal, with instructions to proceed via Washington.

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

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

Q: *Then where were you assigned?*

HAMILTON: Saigon.

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

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

Q: *Italian Somalia?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Like Devil's Island.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: How did that play out?

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

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

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

Q: *Was it still technically French government there?*

HAMILTON: Oh, yes.

Q: *Were the Japanese calling the shots?*

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

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

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

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

Q: *Did we have military attachés down there?*

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

Q: *This would be June of 1940.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: The first six months particularly.

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

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

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

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

HAMILTON: For the British it was a Consulate General.

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

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

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

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

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

HAMILTON: No, we always had a radio. In fact we had a couple. Well, the Swiss consul was finally put in charge of American interests and became the contact between the Department, the Japanese, and ourselves. I don't know just when that occurred, but it was a while before he was able to get over to see us. Even then what he could say was restricted since the Japanese listened in. He was the outside contact and if we needed money or anything else, we had to get it through

him. He could arrange for us to go to a dentist, or a doctor if necessary, accompanied by a guard, which we had to do a few times. All the information regarding the exchange arrangement that came along ultimately, came through him.

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

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

Q: This would be 1942.

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

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

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

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

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

huge embassy.

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

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

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

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

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

It was in the midst of the hostilities with Thailand that the internal native disturbances that I mentioned earlier occurred in parts of Cochinchina and to some extent in Tonkin. Their rather severe suppression and sending some of those rounded up to the Poulo Condore penal colony undoubtedly had a correspondingly unfortunate attitude and temper of many Vietnamese.

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

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

Mr. Reed had not really operated an office for the public. He was there to report and have direct contact with Admiral Decoux's office. This caused some problems for Miss Johnston. She was at liberty until January 29, 1942, but then the Japanese held her in solitary custody for two months during which she was severely questioned in an apparent effort to learn about Mr. Reed's sources

of information. She was then allowed to go to the mountain resort of Da Lat in Annam because of her health, and was brought to join the rest of us in Saigon a few days before the Asama Maru's departure.

1. Outbreak of the War:

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

2. Treatment of Consular Officers:

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

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

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

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

The British consular officer in Haiphong was at first confined with his family above the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, but was soon removed to a small private house where he has remained with other British subjects in Haiphong. The men have been obliged to remain within the

premises, but the women have been free to go into the city during the day. The French wife of one of the men actually boards with her family.

3. Treatment of American Consular Personnel Other Than Officers.

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

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

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

4. Treatment of Other American and British Nationals:

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

The exceptions are: (1) The American correspondent of the Associated Press was taken into custody on December 12 and brought to the British consular residence on December 13 to remain until July 3; (2) The British manager of the French Manufactures Indochinoises des Cigarettes, an employee of the British and American Tobacco Company, was held with the American Consul from the first; (3) All officers of the British banks in Saigon were held from December 8 to December 31; (4) The Canadian representative of the Singer Sewing Machine Company was held in jail under harsh treatment for 59 days from January 29; (5) A British accountant of the Standard Vacuum Oil Company was similarly held for about 68 days; (6) A British employee of the firm until recently known as Dreyfus and Cie. was similarly held; (7) A Filipino no longer entitled to the protection of the United States while abroad was held for a month and then turned over to the French on a charge of illegal possession of firearms. The object of the treatment given the three British subjects, as well as one Dutch subject not mentioned above, was to obtain information regarding the affairs of their firms and to break their spirit so that they would consent to work for the Japanese as one or two are now reported to be doing.

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

American Consul, and latterly with the other British in Haiphong.

5. Treatment of Chinese:

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

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

6. Treatment of Consular Establishments:

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

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

The Japanese also obtained consular files in Hanoi. The safe has been returned to the Swiss consular agent in Haiphong, but is believed to have been previously opened.

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

7. Political and Military Developments:

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

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

December 8 except that it has been repaired and was in Saigon on July 3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Economic Developments

Economic conditions in French Indochina have steadily deteriorated since December 8, 1941. Business activity is negligible. Supplies of all imported products are extremely low or have already been exhausted. What remains is generally strictly rationed. Wheat flour was exhausted within a few weeks after the outbreak of war; butter and margarine can no longer be purchased except occasionally on the black market; potatoes are a rarity; medical supplies are very low; wines are exhausted and liquors practically so; chemicals for the manufacture of matches are deficient; lubricating oils have to be cleaned and re-cleaned because fresh oil is lacking; iron and steel for construction purposes can scarcely be had; and machinery is not obtainable. Even

supplies of some domestic products such as fruit, charcoal, fish, and vegetables are inadequate, primarily because they are bought up by the Japanese. Milk supplies are exceedingly low. What canned milk remains is reserved solely for infants and the sick. All fresh milk in the Saigon area is now being pasteurized for the same purposes, but it is doubtful whether it will be adequate for the need.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

have remained in Indochina; payments due abroad for imports are negligible; and taxes have been increased either through raising the rates, lowering the exemptions, or both.

9. Axis Propaganda:

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

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

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

French propaganda is directed both towards the natives and toward the French and, in accordance with the Nazi-Vichy stress on youth, special emphasis is being laid on youth organizations and the value of sports for both the French and native young people. Numerous youth demonstrations and sporting spectacles have been staged. Summer camps are being developed, a youth code has been drawn up, uniforms designed, and the responsibilities of youth stressed. The immediate response to this type of propaganda is strong, particularly among the natives who love spectacles, but how effective it will actually prove to be cannot yet be told.

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

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

10. Attitude of the French and Annamites:

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

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

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

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

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

(1) In this connection the following data is given regarding the most vulnerable points on the railway and highway between Haiphong and Saigon, proceeding from Haiphong to Hanoi and south to Saigon: leaving Haiphong there is one railway bridge and one small highway bridge. About 15 kilometers east of Haiphong, there is an important combined railway and highway bridge. Entering Hanoi there is an important railway and highway bridge which is 1.7 kilometers long. South of Hanoi there is a small but important railway and highway bridge 6 kilometers

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

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

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

ALBERT STOFFEL
Vice Consul
Saigon (1946-1948)

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

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

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

STOFFEL: As you perhaps know, Saigon had been known as the Paris of the East, before World

War II. It still had elements of that atmosphere after World War II. The living was good, the social life was active, the French were in reasonable control. It was fairly typical, I think, of certain Foreign Service posts at that time.

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

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

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

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

STOFFEL: Yes.

Q: Did you have links with them?

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

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

STOFFEL: They were. For example, later, when I'd been transferred to Paris in 1955 I discovered that two Americans, myself and Laurie Gordon, an oil company director in Saigon, who had earlier served with the OSS in Southern China and Northern Vietnam, had been named in, I believe it was, the National Assembly as spies. The suspicious work that I was doing, according to this allegation, was preparing World Trade Directory Reports for the Department of Commerce.

Q: Very suspicious work I would say.

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

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

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

suppress the revolt?

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

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

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

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

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

At that time the consulate didn't have any funds for this purpose, so I had to pay for the diver and for the removal of the airplane. Sometime later, a U.S. Navy grave registration team arrived. They laid out the bones on the floor of my office and showed me that I, in effect, had 3 skeletons. They also reimbursed me for these funds. Letters from two of the families thanked me for personal items and especially for the fact that the relatives now knew that their loved ones had, at least, not suffered capture or a lingering death.

OSCAR VANCE ARMSTRONG
Chinese Language Officer
Saigon (1950)

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

ARMSTRONG: I came back on home leave and then had a temporary assignment to Saigon. They wanted a Chinese language officer and the person who was assigned there wasn't going to

arrive for some months so I had about four months in Saigon. This was back, of course, during the French involvement.

Q: Still French territory. This was a consulate.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Basically an intelligence operation.

ARMSTRONG: Not intelligence in the normal sense. It was one more of trying to figure out the mood of the Chinese population and what their role was in Vietnam, etc. I wasn't there long enough to become very knowledgeable about the situation.

JOHN F. MELBY
City Unspecified, Vietnam (1950)

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

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

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

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

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

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

MELBY: Yes. That's right. After all, if you knew France and French, that was enough. You didn't have to bother knowing anything about Asia. After all, they were the lesser breed without the pale, you know.

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

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

Q: *Equivalent of a colonel.*

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

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

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

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

Q: *But why was the quality poor?*

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

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

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

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

Q: *Saigon? Rather than Hanoi?*

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

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

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

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

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

Q: *What were you doing?*

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

Q: *You were looking at the Thai requirements and sending recommendations? And seeing whether it made sense to continue it or not?*

MELBY: Yes.

Q: *How did the ambassador take this?*

MELBY: He was opposed to it entirely.

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

MELBY: Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: So contingency actually paid off.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: How about General Erskine?

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

Q: What happened when you made this report?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: What was his reaction when you saw him?

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

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

MELBY: Well, one of the little sidelights on the thing was, when I was over with Bedell Smith, Alan Dulles was over there. He was then Deputy Director of the CIA. He just sat in the corner

and didn't say anything or participate in the conversation at all. He was just present.

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

CHARLOTTE LORIS
Clerk
Saigon (1950-1952)

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

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

Q: Had been murdered? In Saigon?

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

Anyway, I arrived in Saigon -- .

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

LORIS: No, I wanted adventure.

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

LORIS: Let me backtrack just a brief bit.

Q: Okay.

LORIS: I was assigned to Saigon. In those days you had a choice; I could have gone to Munich or to Rio or Saigon. Having always wanted to go to the Orient, to China, I picked Saigon. And they grabbed me with their arms, aha, we have one. So I went through the preparation and then went over to get my medical shots for old Saigon, which was still a French colony. While sitting in the Naval Department barracks waiting to get my shots, they asked me where I was going and

I said Saigon. Well, this man came up to me and said, "Did I hear you say you were going to Saigon?" I said, "Yes." And this man said, "Well, I'm going to be the new American consul in Hanoi." Well, in those days, American consul, what's that? Hanoi? Where's that?

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

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

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

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

Q: And that was Wendall Blanke.

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

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

Q: What?

LORIS: Flies.

Q: No, what did you drink?

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

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

LORIS: Greatest plane ever made.

Q: I know.

LORIS: They're still flying.

Q: I know.

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

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

Q: And that was approximately what date?

LORIS: About April 2nd, 1950.

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

LORIS: And I'm at the consulate general. We go up these little stairs and we arrive in this small office and go into this bigger office where Ed Gullion was charge. And there sits my friend, Wendall Blanke. So Ed Gullion says, "Oh, Wendall, I would like you to meet our new clerk-typist, Charlotte." He said, "Meet her? I've slept with her on a plane for three nights." Great hilarity. Anyway, Wendall and Ed and I were friends from then on.

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

I arrived and was swept through the palace gates by the gendarmes, Mademoiselle Loris? Yes. On I went, up and pattered down this marble hallway in my sandals, which were clipping-

clapping, and my legs were running sweat. They escort me down to big double doors, I open the doors, and there sit 40 men.

Q: Palace?

F: This was the High Commissioner's Palace.

Q: French High Commissioner's Palace in Saigon?

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

Q: Who were the other participants in this meeting?

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

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

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

Q: I bet.

LORIS: I felt like Mata Hari.

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

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

Q: The communiques about the war?

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

Q: And the Korean war?

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

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

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

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

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

LORIS: Right.

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

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

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

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

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

F: Fire me.

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

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

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

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

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

LORIS: Yes.

Q: I'll have to read it.

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

Q: We are now talking about what year?

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

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

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

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

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

Consul
Hanoi (1954-1955)

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

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

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

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

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

Q: That was Hue?

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

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

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

The original sort of modus vivendi which the French worked out there began to break down in 1946. Jean Sainteny, who had been in the French colonial service, and who was the son-in-law of

Albert Sarraut, who had been the governor general of Indochina and a French cabinet minister, went back in and tried to deal with Ho Chi Minh and re-establish the French presence in the north. For a variety of reasons, that broke down in 1946, and that's when the war really started.

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

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

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

Q: When were you in Hanoi?

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

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

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

They did, in effect, deal with us through the municipal Military and Administrative Council of Hanoi, which was, in effect, a municipal government with both military and civilian functions.

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

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

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

Q: Mendes France was the prime minister.

CORCORAN: Yes, who had forced the Geneva Conference in 1953. There was also the French military mission, actually a liaison mission with the International Control Commission, headed by General Groot de Beaufort. There was the Indian chairman of the international commission, Mr. Desai, who later became number two in the Indian foreign office. And there was the Canadian delegate, Brigadier Sherwood Lett, who was a war hero, who took part in the famous Canadian landing at Dieppe, was a lawyer, and who later ended up and died as Chief Justice of British Columbia. He was the Canadian representative on the commission. Then there was a Polish delegation headed by a man named Ogrodinszki. He was a complete Communist doing the bidding of the North Vietnamese. At that time I don't think you could expect anything else.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Most of the other trials were held out in the countryside, and you'd get reports on them in the

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

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

Q: How did you leave?

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

Q: Pointing to a large map.

CORCORAN: Filling in all your personal history and whatnot. We could see this was the initial step of closing in on us. Then they wanted to come and interview us, each individual American. I said yes, but I would sit in on all the interrogations as though they were my own, and they agreed to that. They were asking sort of nuisance questions, and I would intervene after a while. They said, "You said you didn't speak Vietnamese." Well, I didn't speak Vietnamese, but I could just see the way they were going, just wasting time and harassing people. We filled out these forms, and they inspected the place and saw we had a lot of radio equipment, which they obviously knew we had. We had been broadcasting every day for the last year as our only means of communication. We couldn't use the mail. So I could sense by the tone of this, something was going to happen.

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

What we did was make a plan, which we just sent in by telegram saying, "if this happens, we

will do thus and so," and try to destroy classified material, of which we had very little. We would try to communicate by other means, a very simple code.

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

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

"Right now."

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

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

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

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

Then, strangely, when I was in Burundi, I was asked by somebody in the department for information about property. This is when Jimmy Carter was thinking of reopening there. I said,

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

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

Q: Space.

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

PAUL M. KATTENBURG
Intelligence Analyst, Indochinese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1950-1955)

Country Officer, East Asia Bureau
Washington, DC (1963-1964)

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

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

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

On Indochina that is quite a different story.

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

KATTENBURG: I switched with Al Seligmann, who was quite tired of Indochina business, and

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: I see.

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Yes.

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

Somewhere or other it was decided, I think with Jack Lydman and other Bureau people, that I would go to Saigon. Now in the summer of '55 I was involved with the question of how to handle the provision of the Geneva Accords of 1954 which required consultation between the two zones of Vietnam, the Peoples Republic of Vietnam north of the 17th parallel, temporary demarcation line, and the government south of that line, that is the Republic of Vietnam. The

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

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

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

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

Now you have a great change in the Embassy, when Freddy Reinhardt comes in mid-1955. His political counselor was Frank Meloy, who was subsequently assassinated in Beirut. The Office Director in EA changed from Bonsal to Ken Young. Here we have an entirely different cast of characters. These are committed to an independent South Vietnam, to the full support of Ngo Dinh Diem and to try their best "to build a nation". I have written at length on this and some of the errors that we may have made even in the very early period. But when you look at it in retrospect, the period from mid-'55 through '61, which is a fairly long period, more than 6 years, was probably the best period of our Vietnam involvement. The French war was over, the French departed, not right away but in due course -- by mid 1955 they were out and we were taking their place in terms of economic and military assistance. We started with minor military assistance,

since the Geneva Accords barred any kind of direct military assistance. We were very cautious about the number of military advisers we had there. I became the Desk Officer in the fall of 1955. The most important thing I was involved in was the increase in the number of U.S. military advisers. They were doubled from the 385 or so that we had in place at the time of the Accords, which is what the Accords said could not be increased. In negotiations in 1956 by Dulles with Nehru, who was the Chairman of the International Control Commission, we were allowed to double the number. Part of the reason that Nehru was persuaded by Secretary Dulles to double the number was that there was a considerable fear in Congress that if our American equipment was left rotting in rice paddies, as it was, without the ability of Diem's side to gather it and use it effectively, the French would transport it during their evacuation to Algeria. This was considered undesirable in Congress and the Administration. We therefore figured out various ways to increase the number of our military advisers to keep this from happening.

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

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

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

KATTENBURG: Up until the time I left INR, even after that in my case, we were certainly more willing to consider cracks and to look, perhaps we were more open to another view of Ho Chi Minh, but it was remote given the firm hand the Secretary had on Vietnam and what was to be done and not to be done. Here you must remember that the Secretary [Dulles] created the SEATO Pact in the Fall of 1954 as a way, really, of putting a better face on what had been in sheer power terms an American defeat along with the French at Dienbienphu and at the Geneva Accords, since we had been forced into some sort of negotiated agreement. Half of Vietnam was considered to be salvageable and the Secretary's policy on this was very firm. So the question of cracks and flexibility of this policy was really rather remote. I got my cue on it at the time that Gullion and I presented our long paper on what could be the consultations between the two zones. Dulles dismissed that, and decided he would do what Diem wanted -- there would be no consultations and no elections. That was, it seemed to me, a clear marching order and I have to put this in the context of the McCarthy period, of course. It undoubtedly had an impact. Those of us who were then working on East Asia matters were very conscious indeed of what had happened to some of our predecessors and...

KATTENBURG: The East Asia Bureau was headed by Averell Harriman when I entered the Seminar, but during the year he moved up to Under Secretary and was succeeded by Roger Hilsman. Roger Hilsman and I had gone to graduate school together and knew each other very

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

Q: Oh sure, sure.

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

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

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

July 1, 1963 was when my short leave ended, or June 25, something like that. In any event, I would like to call attention to a section in my book called, "The Vietnam Trauma In American Foreign Policy," published by Transaction, 1980 and reprinted in paperback in 1982 -- there will be a new edition sooner or later as it is out of print at this point. In it I have something called, "A Personal Note," in which I describe this particular difficult period leading up to the Diem coup. I came back, not only with an entirely new cast of characters, but not fresh on Vietnam having been away about 10 years -- from '56 to '63, not quite 10 years. The other thing that made it especially difficult was a new ambassador. Nolting was being pulled out and Henry Cabot Lodge had been appointed by President Kennedy as our new ambassador. We arrived on the desk, in effect, the same day. Koren had made clear to me that he did not have direct authority because it was still a task force. He had authority over me as a member of the Office of the Southeast Asian

Affairs, or whatever it was called, in the Bureau but the Assistant Secretary really ran the Task Force. It was a matter of Hilsman, Forrestal in the White House, Mike Forrestal that is, myself and Lodge. I went through all the briefings in the White House and elsewhere with Lodge, which lasted until about the Fourth of July [I went on duty on June 25] and it was a very difficult time because the Buddhist situation was getting worse and worse. Then Wood briefed us, and the Pentagon. These briefings were with Lodge and his two henchmen, Fred Flott and Mike Dunn [Mike was essentially a military aide and bodyguard and Flott, a tough character, was a former Agency type who was also capable of wielding a pistol). We had established pretty good relations.

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

Anyway, Mendenhall really should have taken this job because he had, even though he couldn't get along with Koren, he had a much tougher and gung ho attitude on the whole Vietnam involvement than I did at this point. Looking at it from the briefings and thinking about it a little bit, even without going to Vietnam, I was not very optimistic as to the future prospects of President Diem and very weary of any further direct American involvement than we already had. But I made Roger promise me that I could go as soon as possible to see the place. He did promise. On July 20 there was a meeting in Honolulu that Lodge, Roger and I attended, after which Lodge was going to take a very long, slow trip through the Far East to show his displeasure with Diem and arrive as late as possible to present credentials.

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

KATTENBURG: Correct.

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

KATTENBURG: And his brother. Exactly. It was decided at this meeting in Honolulu that Kattenburg, having known Diem and been in part responsible for his being in office earlier, would go to talk to him -- "hold his hand" it was put to me by Roger. When I arrived in Saigon, Nolting, of course, was long gone on home leave, and Bill Trueheart, a wonderful guy with whom I had the best of relations always, had taken over as Chargé. Trueheart was just as

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

Q: This was the Department of Defense?

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

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

Q: This was October, 1963?

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

Q: Regional Affairs in...

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

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

KATTENBURG: It was agreed that I wanted out.

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

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

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

KATTENBURG: That's right.

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

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

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

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

and get the U.S. to support him for fear that otherwise he might run to the communists. I don't think the communists would ever have responded, given their basically favorable position, despite their enormous sufferings and the demands put on them. They were basically in a favorable position until we entered with full ground forces. I don't think the communists would ever have deigned to even speak with Ngo Dinh Nhu or Diem, not to speak about making any kind of deal.

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

Q: Bonzes being Buddhist priests.

KATTENBURG: Correct.

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

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

KATTENBURG: I think it was. Certainly anathema to ISA which was becoming more important under Bill Bundy at that time. That is why when Bill Bundy came to State to take Roger Hilsman's place in March of 1964, I was immediately "exiled" out of the Bureau to Policy Planning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: You went to Policy Planning.

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

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

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

Q: Was this Lodge?

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

Roger wanted to see me immediately after my return from Saigon August 30. I went to see him and at that point the question was whether the coup would take place immediately at the end of August, what we now call the abortive coup at the end of August 1963 had become red hot, and he said, "You had better be ready to go to an EXCOM meeting of the National Security Council." It was on August 31, 1963. It was at that meeting that I blurted out my dissent with the

policy. I don't know if you recall this, but it has been written up ad nauseam. It is even in the Pentagon Papers, although I didn't know at the time that it would be recorded.

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

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

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

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

KATTENBURG: Oh, it was before the tour. Before he and Mendenhall went out. The President came back and said are you two guys certain you went to the same country. Krulak was certainly very gung ho. In '63 we probably weren't doing that much better than earlier. It seems to me that the macho factor that prevailed in 1961 was extenuated somewhat because by this time in '63 Kennedy had already made his American University speech which as I look upon it now in retrospect strikes me as a very important policy statement. That is, I think Bobby and John Kennedy had decided after the Cuban Missile Crisis, this was in October 1962, to get closer to the Soviets and engage in some pre-detente diplomacy if possible. And that was what was implied in the American University speech in April, 1963. I think as we look at the history of the 20th century that speech will rise in significance. We kept up a very strong stand against Fidel, of course. We didn't change the Cuban policy. I don't want to ramble on. The point is that despite this in '63 we weren't ready to review the stakes in Vietnam, just as we weren't ready when I came back in '64.

I want to say here for the history of the State Department that we, as I put in my book and mentioned names there, that there were a number of very good people in State [I mean by good, not just able people but respectable people with credibility, more credibility than I probably had] who felt the same way -- that we were barking up the wrong tree. And of course as everybody knows the chief of those was George Ball who was the Deputy to Secretary Rusk. But I should mention some of those in that group so that they may become better known. George Springsteen,

who was Ball's chief assistant in his office [sort of an in-box guy], was also of the same mind, probably because Ball felt that way. But Springsteen, I think, was extremely helpful in facilitating what I would call the State Department dissenter club's work. We essentially staffed-up many of the memos that Ball wrote. I don't want to take anything away from what Ball did, but we produced many papers and pieces of junk and memos and I know one paragraph in the July 15 memorandum to Johnson by Ball is verbatim something I wrote in a memo to George. So George convened this group that included Bill Trueheart, in particular. And Bob Johnson, and myself, and Carl Salans who was Deputy Legal Advisor [who later became a lawyer in Paris, but I don't know where he is now]. And I am now probably leaving out a number of important names...

Q: Well, you can add them.

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

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

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

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

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

Another study on the same subject took place under Bill Sullivan. Now Bill at that time was sitting in Harriman's office. When he came on board sometime early in '64, maybe even in '63 -- well, he had been at the Laos conference of '62 and I guess he had been with Harriman and stayed in his circle and became extremely important and influential in policy making on

Indochina. I have the greatest admiration and respect for him and always have had. I like him personally, we have always been friends, although never very close friends -- I would say more acquaintances. I would go to see Bill whenever I felt I would not be imposing on him and talk about Vietnam. He would always say "You are premature," or "You are too soon, just wait, hold on." I will never forget that. Just hold it, it is going to go the way you think it should go. I wanted an agreement. But I could see that as time went on we would get less and less out of an agreement. Eventually we lose, in effect. Bill served Harriman as loyally as possible. He chaired another study on the consequences of bombing which was more acceptable.

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

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

L. Michael Rives was born in New York City in 1921 and raised in New Jersey. After one year at Princeton, he joined the Marines and served until 1945. He graduated from Princeton in 1947 with a degree in French. He took the Foreign Service Exam on a whim and passed. He has also served in Germany, France, the Congo, Burundi, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Canada. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 25, 1995.

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

RIVES: Yes, in Hanoi.

Q: You were in Hanoi from 1952 until when?

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

Q: Would you describe Hanoi at that period?

RIVES: It was a city that was beginning to be under siege. There was actually no shelling as such. You could hear it all day and all night, and the French were gradually being beaten back. There, again, I was a junior officer, a junior Vice Consul. I was in charge of visas and that kind of thing. I also did reporting on the Chinese in North Vietnam. It was an attractive city, basically,

like so many of the cities developed by the French. It had broad boulevards. The Consulate, I must say, was perfectly beautiful. We had one of the best houses in Hanoi, the ground floor being the Consulate itself, and myself and another vice consul occupied the top floor. It was really very pleasant.

Q: Who was the Consul?

RIVES: Paul Sturm.

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

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

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

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

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

RIVES: Yes, it was.

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

RIVES: Yes and no. I don't know if the French really worried about that much. I was fortunate enough, once, to take a trip to the last French outpost on the Chinese border. It really was fascinating, to sort of sneak up there at night, and then spend a day there. It was commanded by a Vietnamese colonel in the French army who was famous, because he was a real character. On Sunday morning, we woke up to band music. We looked out and saw the regimental band playing light music, like waltzes and such, as they would have played in the nineteenth century in France. When he went out on patrol (he would always go out), he would fly his flag, and as he approached each Chinese post on the other side of the frontier, they would lower their flags in salute, because they knew who it was. In the end, they were beaten, but he was a real character.

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

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

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

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

proof of that.

Q: Were any Americans targets of the Viet Minh?

RIVES: No, not while I was there.

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

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

Q: Did you travel out in the countryside?

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

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

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

Q: Where did you go to get out?

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

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

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

Q: What was your impression of the French military?

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

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

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

Q: Did you go down there at all?

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

Q: Sounds like they really kept you trapped!

RIVES: Yes, pretty much.

Q: What were the visa matters.

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

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

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

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

Scott Cohen was born in Boston. He joined the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS) in 1949 and served in Saigon (1951-1953). He then became an assistant to Senator Charles Percy and served as a foreign affairs advisor to the senator when he was on the Foreign Relations Committee. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

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

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

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

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

million Chinese who maintained their own culture and seemed less interested in French culture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Special Technical and Economic Mission

Hue (1953-1956)

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

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

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

Q: *Was that Ambassador Heath, sir?*

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

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

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

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

But to make a long story short, I took the written examination at the embassy in 1955, and passed

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

Q: And nervously sat there outside.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: This was 1952 or 1953?

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

Q: Again as a cultural officer?

POTTS: Yes.

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

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

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

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

Q: These were Vietnamese refugees from the north?

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

Q: Did they think you were French?

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

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

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

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

Q: How long were you there?

CUNNINGHAM: I was assigned there until November of 1954.

Q: How long were you actually there?

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

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

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

The embassy in Cambodia on the first of July or the 30th of June, 1954 consisted of a chargé d'affaires, Joseph Montllor, a code clerk, another guy who was ostensibly an embassy staffer but was actually the CIA station chief though a very junior one, an AID representative, and a USIS officer. There were five Americans in the American country team in Cambodia at that time. All of this was going to change and a full embassy was going to be instituted there.

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

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

That was a real adventure.

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

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

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

There was a lot of AID counterpart money around at that point. I can't remember all the particulars now but I became deeply involved with negotiations with the Sino-Cambodian businessman, the architect, and the AID comptroller to figure out some way whereby we could front money for the construction of the building and then credit that against the eventual lease payments that we would make to this businessman. We worked out a deal, and work began on the building with a total of four floors, configured to requirements of the Embassy. I managed to get this worked out about September or October.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was not safe to travel in the countryside. In fact shortly before I arrived in Saigon two American women on the staff of the Embassy had been shot on the golf course, which was just on the outskirts of Saigon, by the guerillas. Whenever you went into a movie theater in Saigon in those days you were shaken down because it used to be a habit of the Viet Minh to go into the movies, carry a bomb in, and roll it down under the seats so that it would go off in the front of the movie theater. That had happened a few times. On rue Catinat (later Tu Do), here was a little hill that went down towards the Saigon River with open-air French style cafes on both sides. Viet Minh sympathizers or agents would sometimes ride by in cyclopousses and throw a bomb into the cafes as they went through. There were no incidents of this kind as I recall during the time that I was in Saigon but there had been earlier on and there were precautions of various kinds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

characterize it at the time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Those two explosions by the way broke windows in the ambassador's residence and I had to get busy the next morning. As a matter of fact what made McClintock pick me out a few weeks later to be his Administrative Officer in Phnom Penh was that I got the windows in his residence fixed very quickly. That's how I got my job in Cambodia. It was truly an extraordinary opportunity. I was an FSS-11 or maybe an FSS-10 at the time. I had a minor supervisory position. I had no training in fiscal or personnel management, which are major responsibilities of an administrative officer. I did like managing things and getting difficult jobs done. And I was still single, mobile, young, and adventurous.

Q: Such are Foreign Service careers made.

CUNNINGHAM: That's right.

Q: Coming back to Phnom Penh...

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

There were three things that I remember very clearly about this period. One was the speed with

which the French pulled out. They pulled out so fast that we actually began to protest that they were leaving too quickly and they were going to cause the collapse of Vietnam particularly by departing so quickly. I think all the French troops were out within 60 days rather than 90. They were not interested in staying any longer at all.

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

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

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

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

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

Information Officer

Saigon (1964-1965)

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

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

Q: *This was in '51?*

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

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

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

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

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

Q: *Oh yes.*

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

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

SIMPSON: That's right.

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

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

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

SIMPSON: Well I think that, looking back on it, I think it operated pretty well considering that it was a comparatively small Embassy to cover such a big spread of territory. Heath was a professional with a wry sense of humor and a great temper that didn't usually show itself unless he was provoked. He also wore a broad brimmed fedora all the time which was sort of his mark and we, the young Turks of the Embassy, sometimes accused him of being too conservative and following the French line. But I don't think we were aware at that time, one of our big objectives was to keep France active in NATO and on-the-line in Europe and that any slight problem in Indochina would reflect there too. The French were just beginning to tire of that whole war out there and they had lost a lot of people. And we were moving in to pay for a lot of it. So the Embassy was busy in a reporting mode in the field as well as in Saigon, politicians and all that and the attachés, military attachés were busy all the time and the military aid mission -- MAAG - - Military Aid and Advisory Group, was running what they'd call end-use missions out in the field. They would go check on American equipment to see how it was being used and the French would have these tactics where they would be using the new equipment brought in for Vietnamese units and they'd hear that an end-use mission was coming. So they'd rush this equipment back to the Vietnamese. So the Americans when they visited would see it and then the French would take it back again. I used to accompany these end-use missions from the information side, you know to show American aid was reaching the Vietnamese, etc. And often the French jeep that was suppose to arrive at 10 in the morning didn't arrive until 1 in the afternoon. The best ploy that the French had to keep us away from any real source of material was the big lunch, the big noontime lunch. Where you'd start with pastis, whatever, and then you'd go through a couple of wines under the hot tropical sun and then you'd have some cognac or Armagnac and by the time you come from that you'd be practically prolapsed and it'd be too late. It'd be time to close the road so you'd have to rush back to wherever you were going.

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

SIMPSON: We had decided that the French were fighting the good fight in Indochina. This was

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

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

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

Q: What was the situation around Hanoi?

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

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

that?

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

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

SIMPSON: Well it didn't. In a way, it's the tragedy of the whole thing. As I mentioned, this parachute officer, this Joint Psychological Warfare Board. One of the first things I saw, the French idea of propaganda leaflet was a photo of a French soldier with a submachine gun, standing over about 4 Viet Minh dead. And the words in French and Vietnamese were: If you don't surrender, this will happen to you. It doesn't take a Ph.D. in psychology to figure out that #1 it'll infuriate whoever picks it up or #2 it'll make them laugh and say what idiots these people are. I went to one of the first air drops that went on over so-called enemy lines, in an old Junkers just packed with these leaflets being dropped in the jungle, which was a waste of time. And we often would try to, okay we were naive, we were newcomers, we really didn't know Indochina, we didn't know the people and the French of course resented our presence anyway, particularly military. But we would try to make our little contribution and try to straighten things that we thought were going wrong. And there were inevitable clashes. Particularly with journalists because as USIS officers we were there to help what we could as far as visiting journalist went, not just Americans, British, French and the rest. And there was censorship at the time and all outgoing dispatches would have to be censored so at times the French censor would lay it out with a heavy hand and block stuff that there were no reasons to have blocked. So there were those little irritations. On a higher level, the American military would often come in with what I could see were crazy ideas about what should be done. General Iron Mike O'Daniel was the head

of MAAG at one point and before he became head of MAAG he used to fly in. And this was at the time of Dienbienphu. He used to fly in to talk to General Navarre, the French commander and at one point he suggested we should just enclose the whole of North Vietnam in barbed wire, the whole secure area. And that way the "Viet Minh can't get in and they can't get out." Well #1 this is a physical impossibility. Then he wanted to build pillboxes behind this barbed wire, a major cement contract, plus the fact he wanted to man these with Vietnamese troops. Well #2 you didn't have the Vietnamese troops to do it and the French were pulling their hair out every time he arrived because he was always coming up with such ideas.

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

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

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

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

plane, waiting, with a pilot with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. And I said, are you so-and-so and he said "Yes. We're flying to Laos?"

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

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

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

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

SIMPSON: He was very interested in it. I must admit, people asked me what I thought of The Quiet American when it came out. I still think it's one of the best novels to come out of Vietnam, of that period particularly. Because he said a lot without too much effort. He caught the feel of Saigon and the period but I never got that close to him.

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

SIMPSON: Saigon itself, the street in those days, was called "Rue Catinat" the main street stretching down to the river. And you had these hotels, the Majestic and the Continental, with their big open terraces and their tables out on the sidewalk. Because of the grenade attacks, the restaurants and many of the bars had anti-grenade netting on the doors. And the American crowd, the unquiet Americans, would go out, there'd be a number of cocktail parties, there'd be special dinners but mostly, for a lot of us, it was just getting to know the city. Eating in excellent restaurants. I found a little Corsican restaurant where I use to go all the time. And I used to get, it was sort of like putting your finger on the pulse of Saigon. Because the Corsicans ran everything. They operated the customs, they operated the smuggling, which was a very cozy arrangement. The Corsicans were predominant in the police department. And many of them were in intelligence. There were some in the army in various jobs and some of them were the old

Corsicans, the settlers that had been there for years. They were hard drinking, loved good food and all that. And then there were the women, well. There were the Chinese, there were the Vietnamese, there were Laotians, Cambodians, there were a mix of all kinds and let's face it there were some unbelievable places in that town. There was a place called Buffalo Park where a whole block was an army bordello and it had a big sign outside. All weapons and grenades checked here and you'd have all these jeeps parked outside. It was one great big palace packed with all these girls and there was Mama's which was the officer's section and it was attached to this main complex and they were suppose to be a little more select. But when Mama's was busy, she was very busy, she'd run girls from the other section. And in my last book that came out in 1992, I mentioned an incident.

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

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

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

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

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

at that time?

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

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

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

Q: But when you returned...

SIMPSON: When I returned?

Q: *When did you return?*

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

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

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

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

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

Q: *Ord Wingate.*

SIMPSON: Yeah. Hellyer was an ex, was an ex-tea planter and he spoke perfect French. And he

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

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

SIMPSON: Well I'll never forget, it was a very strange situation. I went into the palace, was ushered in, the palace was sort of a mess because all the French advisors and officers had disappeared and Diem was being protected by a catholic militia from up in the north and they all had muddy boots and the marble was all...it was usually so brilliantly polished and the rugs had been removed. And there were rifles stacked in the corner, expecting trouble from all sides. And I was ushered in, told to wait, and suddenly a man came in without being announced, all by himself and it was Diem and he had, he was chubby you know, lacquered hair somewhat long sort of like an American Indian appearance. And we shook hands and we sat down and started talking French and I explained who I was and why I was there and the importance of the international press. And that what he says, at anytime would be in the New York Times, the London Times, and you know, the Figaro the next day. I knew that he was aware of this but that there're so many pitfalls, on and on, and that we were willing to help. And he sat there chain smoking cigarettes with his head sort of down, you know, listening to this, and I finally paused and waited and he looked at me and started to talk. He gave me a lecture about the evils of communism, what he was going to do for the people in Vietnam, etc., etc. To the point where I began to wonder if he didn't realize that I wasn't a journalist out to get a story. That I was there to help him in any assistance he needed as an official. And after 20 minutes of this, I noticed some of his assistants pacing back and forth and waiting and they dared not come and break it up. And finally he stopped and the interview ended. And he went off with the cigarette smoke trailing behind him. This was an early symptom that he developed later. Number one that he didn't listen and he tended to lecture. He tended to lecture like a professor to important people who were not Catholics, the Buddhists and Cao Dai, all those sects, as if they were little children. And this went over like a lead balloon. I think at the very beginning he was a sincere enough man. But his brother you could see was already moving in, hanging on the edges of everything.

Q: This was his brother who was later assassinated.

SIMPSON: That's right.

Q: Was Madame Nhu...

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

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

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

Q: *The what?*

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

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

SIMPSON: Well, we saw this as possibly the end of any hope in Vietnam. Because if this revolt had succeeded it would have been the splintering of the South. And under pressure, despite the agreement, it divided temporarily the country in two. With the success of any revolt in the South, it would have meant splintering, the whole chance of having any viable government down there. And so we were doing our best to try to discourage any of these sects. Lansdale was very active in this. It's all on record that money played a big part in persuading certain units and leaders of these sects to come over to the government and not take part in things and yet a number did fight. Diem had a very difficult 24 hours there where it was a question of one or two parachute battalions...whether they would stay loyal to the government. Fortunately they did and they fought well without any advisors. Without any French or American help. But one little side light on this -- in the past we were always getting these calls from these mysterious little men in white suits who wanted to talk to you about something important and one of these turned out to be the political advisor to the Binh Xuyen who knew me and he knew I'd been there since 1952 and I'd been with the French quite a bit. So he asked me to come to General Bay Vien's headquarters which was across the river, the Arroyo Chinois, and to talk. What it came down to, General Bay Vien was the river pirate chief and here again he had his own private zoo with its boa constrictor and a tiger and the rumor was that when his officers went bad he would feed them to the tiger. And so I went over, we drove over, myself and Bob Gildea who was Assistant press officer, and we went through these road blocks. There'd been a sort of temporary truce between both sides,

we drove down into the headquarters with a big tall aerial, radio aerials there, and we walked in and sat down and started talking and I was looking toward the door where obviously this aerial was at the end of that building. And as I watched this door, out comes this French captain with some papers and he's making marks and he looks up and sees me sitting there and he swings around quick and slams the door and disappears. And a little bit later, in charges this French dispatcher rider. Jumps off his motorcycle, rushes into that back room with the radio. And so I came out and said to Gildea, the French are running this whole operation. He said I saw, there've been 2 dispatch riders since I've been parked out here so we went back to the Embassy. I won't go into details as to who, what, when, where. So I went back to the Embassy and reported what had happened and created quite a flap. The Embassy checked with the highest French source and were told that those were members of the Good Offices mission working with the Binh Xuyen to stop the fighting. Well that just doesn't wash as far as I'm concerned because these officers were obviously in a tactical situation and not working to stop the fighting. They were right there in the Binh Xuyen headquarters. But that just shows you the differences in attitudes and reporting. But anyway the revolt was crushed and Diem became Prime Minister for good, and after that, not too long after that, I left Saigon. He gave me an autographed picture when I left in August. So that was the end of that period.

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

SIMPSON: Shortly after Dienbienphu, when I returned, I was ordered to go up to Hanoi and start preparations for evacuation of the USIS staff. And to find out how many dependents would be involved and all that sort of thing. The consulate was undergoing the same thing as was the American aid mission up there. And here again you have the problem where some of the staff wanted to take an extended family down south. On one extreme you had an old man who was a cleaner of the building who had timidly suggested that he and his wife might be included in a flight to the south and even offered a gift that cost him money to the American in charge which was sort of heart rending. The other extreme was a sharp operator who spoke both English and French who had several mistresses whom he tried to list as cousins or nieces or whatever. Needless to say, he managed to fly down on his own steam. And I made sure that this cleaner got out too. It was just a question of cleaning everything up, and getting ready to go. At the same time I was told to stay there and to cover the arrival of Giap's divisions in Hanoi. There were a whole group of newspapermen who had come from all over and were staying in the Metropole hotel to cover the big day. It was Oct. '54 and it was a rainy day and it was a strange thing because it was a great victorious parade for the Viet Minh but because they were all wearing sneakers there was a sort of shush-shush-shush sound. It was one of those silent victory marches. It was very impressive and it was interesting because the French withdrew street by street as the Viet Minh marched in. And as the Viet Minh marched in all the windows would open and out would come all these red flags, yellow starred red flags that had been under preparation for weeks behind closed doors. So I was there taking photos with a velleflex and I must say I got some pretty good photos which USIA used quite a bit, I put some in my book on Dien Bien Phu that's coming out this year. And I was supposedly -- for the purpose it wasn't a question of cover so I wouldn't have any problems -- but I was supposedly a Polish press officer and the only problem there was the truce commission also had some Poles on it so I had to stay clear of the Poles, not speaking the language at all. And finally, John Mecklen of Time-Life, who later joined

USIA and served in Saigon years later, tipped me off. The French had passed the word that the Viet Minh military police were looking for an American official posing as a journalist. And so it was time for me to leave. But I might mention during that period I shared a jeep with Lou Conein, who was Lansdale's man in North Vietnam, and Lou Conein, quite a character, he was a Colonel, quite a colorful character, he was known by various names-Black Luigi, 3 Finger Lou. He'd been in Vietnam before the Franco-Vietnam war, he'd been with OSS, he'd been parachuted into north Vietnam, he had saved a lot of prisoners. He'd received a Legion of Honor from the French for saving their men in prison camps. And he was later to surface during the Diem assassination as Cabot Lodge's liaison man with the generals of Saigon. This is much later. But in any case, I left Hanoi that evening in a truck of Senegalese troops for Haiphong where this big refuge movement was being set up. The French at first thought that they could handle the refugees but they just didn't have enough ships so the American Navy had come in and the American flagship was lying off shore, Admiral Sabin was in charge. We were preparing to sail all these refugees south. Most were Catholics from the Catholic delta regions and they were moving along with their priest, with their militia, etc., etc., to the south. And being Diem was a Catholic, you had the situation where it wasn't going to do him any harm to have that many voters from the same religion in the south. And Lansdale and his people were very much involved in this moving people. And it was a very difficult job. It was done well but a tragedy because these people had been living in these villages for hundreds of years and they had to leave their ancestors graves behind and even if they were Catholics there was still that sort of thing. I traveled down from Haiphong on the flag ship to Saigon. And one little vignette, in Saigon, when we pulled in, it was a hot sunny, very hot day and we pulled in and all these refugees had put on a little weight because they'd been well fed by the Navy on the way down but a lot of them were sick and a lot of them had different diseases and they needed care. So as we pulled in there where all these trucks were drawn up to take them to refugee camps and I noted that at the end of the gang plank there's this little gathering of American women. I looked closer and sure enough it was the American Women's Club of Saigon and they were there to greet the refugees. And I must say, I don't want to appear anti-women's club but it wasn't their place to be there in that squalor and in that situation. Here they were in their bright summer dresses, some of them with hats on in the old diplomatic mode. I won't say some had gloves on though I wouldn't doubt it and they were there to hand out a hunk of plastic wrapped American cheese that had been donated by an American cheese company. A hunk of American cheese and some bananas to each refugee as they came down off the gangplank. And of course I looked real hard and saw that one of our best photographers had been mustered to shoot them handing these things to the refugees. And I was furious about it but couldn't do much to stop it as it was under way. But the sidelight on that was that a couple days later word came from the refugee camp that all the refugees were complaining about the American soap because no matter how hard they scrubbed they wouldn't get much lather -- it was the American cheese. So when they found out it was cheese they sold it on the black market to street vendors who in turn sold it to the servants of the American diplomatic community and for months thereafter, your hor d'oeuvres at cocktail parties were melted American cheese.

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

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

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

SIMPSON: That takes us back to Cannes in a way. I was on the beach in front of the Carlton Hotel with George Stevens Jr. (director of USIA film programs), Arthur Schlesinger (historian) and Gore Vidal (writer), at about 10 in the morning and it was after a film had been shown the night before and we were discussing this film. Suddenly the beach boy that handles the beach and the chairs came down and waves to me and he says, they want you on the phone. So I pick up the phone in the beach hut and it was my wife calling from the hotel and she says you better

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

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

SIMPSON: It was very tenuous. There had been, before Diem had been assassinated, the generals had taken over, the military were running the country. Suddenly General Nguyen Khanh, who was a great manipulator and a behind the scenes operator, found himself or put himself in the cat bird seat. And Khanh had a good war record as a young officer with the French, he'd gone through French military schools and all that. But he was a type of person who thrived on intrigue and playing different sides against the other. He was facing a big problem, the Buddhists were strong, he had to take care of them. The Catholics were strong, he had to butter them up. He was worried about the Sects...who still had the fragments of their original armies. The Viet Cong were getting stronger and we had this weird situation where although Cabot

Lodge was still there he was getting ready to leave and Maxwell Taylor was coming out to take over along with Alexis Johnson as the two ambassadors. And Khanh had to walk lightly or try to walk lightly with the Americans because we were supplying everything, keeping him in power. At the same time he resented the Americans telling him what he had to do. It was a very strange situation. In fact, Cabot Lodge took me when I arrived...he took me over and introduced me to the Prime Minister in his armored checkered cab and we walked into the palace and we sat down. And Khanh came in...a chubby fellow in sharply creased military trousers and polished boots. And he went through this routine; how glad he was that I was there to help him on this important thing and all this. Lodge was preparing to return to politics and his mind was back in Washington, and suddenly the Prime Minister said well I want you to meet the man you'll be working with in my office. And the light was sort of in my eyes against the window there and I could see a Vietnamese walking in like that and as he came around the corner, he said, ah Simpson! And I looked at him and it turned out to be a fellow whom I had worked with on the French Psychological Warfare Board. Who had been in government jobs through every regime -- managed to stay on top. And who I knew had worked with French intelligence. And here he was the right hand man in the press office of the Prime Minister! And so I was to work with him which was a great twist. But in the long run what it turned out was that Khanh had no more idea of using me for anything. He considered me a plant in his office to watch him and he quickly moved me as far away as possible into another building. And this whole idea of a brain trust to help the Vietnamese get their government moving fell apart completely. You know, people lost interest in it or something changed. And it just so happened that I was the only one who arrived out there. So I was sort of stranded in this office trying to do a job. Succeeding on certain things, getting him to go out of the country. Lodge was pushing this quite a bit and I continued it. Until he almost got caught in a mortar barrage and he didn't speak to me for some time. And then gradually whatever effective curves I had went rapidly down and I became more involved in JUSPAO things and field trips and all that. And my Prime Minister counseling or advising just tailed off. And then there was one coup after another. And the man I was working with at one point was colonel Pham Ngoc Thao who was famous for his participation or setting up of coups. And he became a very good friend of mine and he was a very funny type. He and I got along fine. We had adjoining offices and we went through these coups together. He always disappeared. I knew a coup was coming when he disappeared. And I did a lot of reporting via phone back to the embassy because I was in the Prime Minister's office surrounded by hostile tanks. And to cap off the story on Thao was that in '91 I think...no '90 Stan Karnow was back in Vietnam. (He wrote a very good book on Vietnam history.) So anyway he went back and he established without a doubt that Colonel Thao was a top, North Vietnamese agent operating inside South Vietnam. So much for our counterintelligence operation! When I went back to Vietnam in '91 I found his grave. Because the Vietnamese were claiming his body was moved north and then when I was up north, no no no we don't know where it is. And finally an ex-officer in the Viet Cong came up to me and asked, do you want to see Thao's grave and I said yes, and he said he'd pick me up Sunday morning and he picked me up in his little car and took me out there. It was one of those strange things. Okay he was "the enemy" and yet he was a good friend at the time. And I wanted to see that grave because I wanted to confirm in my own mind that this was true and it's true enough he's in the Patriot's Cemetery with a big red star on his tomb.

Q: Well how was our embassy doing? I mean you were in the Prime Minister's office area and

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

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

But from my view point over there, one day I walked into my office and I saw a lot of tanks outside and I thought, good they're here to protect the government. Only when I walked into my office I thought, wait a minute, those turrets are pointed the wrong way, they're all facing the presidential palace. And I walked into my office and there are a bunch of Vietnamese Rangers. Those were real cowboys with dark glasses and tattoos on their arms. They'd just taken everything off my desk, thrown them on the floor and broken everything. They'd urinated in the corner of the room. The captain had his booted foot on the desk, he had a swagger stick. And there's this moment of silence and I didn't know how it was going to turn out, you could never tell with them. And I looked at the situation, I looked at the desk and automatically I said, "Oh merde!" He spoke enough French to realize what I said and he laughed and that broke the tension. And so he asked me what are you doing here, and when I told him that I was an advisor to the Prime Minister they thought that was the funniest thing they'd ever heard. They all started laughing, laughing. Then I asked him what are you doing here? We're here to protect the Prime Minister. Why? Because his office has been taken over by the communists. I said no, that's ridiculous. Oh yes, we've been told. Just about then an American Ranger officer walked in, tanned and fit. I said, "Do you realize what's going on here?" and "We were told to come into town because there's a communist revolt or something and we're suppose to protect the palace." I

said, if you look closely you'll see these Rangers are getting ready to assault the palace with all these tanks out here. He thought about that for a while and he raised some people on the radio. And I said, I don't know about you but I'm leaving here because, just about then, Barry Zorthian was on the phone. I'd called him at the office. And General Ky had threatened to start bombing these coup forces, there's a certain time limit. So I told this American Ranger, look I'm leaving, I don't know what you want to do but it'd be silly to die here with a bunch of characters that are trying to overthrow the government. So I took off, and I saw him as I drove off, I saw him walking fast in the other direction. But that was the kind of thing that was going on at that time. Very weird.

Q: Did you work with Barry Zorthian that much?

SIMPSON: Yes.

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

SIMPSON: Well Barry was a very unusual and he hadn't had experience in the Far East before, and he was suddenly put into this job. But he was a real pro as far as public information or whatever you want to call it. He had a gift of seeing a situation and realizing what the government's interests were and yet putting it in succinct enough phraseology that it would come across clear to whomever he was briefing. And he realized that the 5 o'clock follies, the briefings that went on downstairs everyday for the general press, were fine in their way but, in reality, those newsmen in the know didn't pay any attention to them. And so therefore he had special briefings, you know one on one or three or four regulars that he knew and all this sort of thing, depending on what the situation was. And we worked. I was tasked out of his office to work with the Vietnamese Information Service as liaison on certain projects. And time after time, Barry Zorthian and I would walk up and down these stairs in the Ministry of Information because every coup that came along you'd get a new Minister of Information and we'd go through this same routine about the polite chatter, the tea, and the table and a cigarette or whatever. And then talking about what we planned to do or what we hoped we could cooperate on. And you could see this veil of disinterest fall over their faces as we talked. And Barry would sit there trying to explain what should be done. But he fit that particular job and I think in general...okay, there were clashes, as there always are, between somebody like that and the press. In a situation like that but I think on the whole most of the pressmen and the professionals appreciated Zorthian. Because he gave it to them straight, what he could. And he didn't hesitate to let them go where they wanted to go. And he got a lot of flack from various generals and some of the ambassadors about, you know, why are you encouraging them to go to such and such a place; I mean two of them are there already and they're going to come back and give a briefing that shoots down whatever the Army wants to say.

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

SIMPSON: Well it hadn't developed into the real press corps that it had later on. This was a period where people like Neil Sheehan and, well I can't think of the other names. There's a whole new breed of pressmen out there, there's still some of the old hangers-on from the French war

that would come and go where they were trying to get. One of the problems we faced was that they were only interested in the American participation. Really most of them, not exactly hometowners but still: Is it true that the American Rangers were attached to such and such and as advisors were actually in the combat area. You know this sort of thing. And is it true that American Air Force pilots have done such and such? We hadn't really gotten into the war officially but they were well aware that we were close to it and they're following all this closely. And they had little interest unless there was a major defeat or major victory. As far as the Vietnamese national role in the fighting, I think they were doing a pretty good job of reporting and that's what made them so unpopular with the officials there.

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

And some of the correspondents, the American press there, I must admit there were some funny instances. General Westmoreland was a very straight arrow, serious type, and he'd give these briefings occasionally. He'd come over and give these special briefings. And there was a correspondent, Joe Freid of the New York Daily News, and Joe was the old school, very perceptive, acerbic correspondent, and one day, Westmoreland gave this whole story, I forget what it was but it was something very positive. And everybody sort of you know, yes, yes. And then Joe said, are you finished General? And Westmoreland said, yes Joe, I am. And Joe said good, now let's get serious. And he started asking his questions.

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

SIMPSON: Oh, one little sidelight to show you how the two periods sort of blended. One day I got back to the office and on my desk was a telephone message. A Mr. Anh or somebody was calling me, to get in touch with the Hoa Hao. So I got in touch with them and he was a representative of the Hoa Hao, one of the military sects that had revolted against Diem, and asking me if I would come to dinner etc. I didn't particularly want to do this. I was in a very difficult situation there. It was ridiculous in a way. My assignment had been classified. Well, how the hell can you be an information and press advisor if your very presence is classified in the palace? They'd done that I think, primarily to preserve, I mean the Vietnamese didn't want people to think that they needed advice and all this sort of thing. Or that we were, or they didn't

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

SAMUEL CLIFFORD ADAMS, JR.
Education Advisor
Saigon (1952-1955)

Ambassador Samuel Clifford Adams, Jr. was born in Houston, Texas in 1920. He received his Bachelor's Degree from Fisk University in 1945, his Master's in 1947, and his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1952. He served in the US Army from 1944 to 1946. His postings include Saigon, Phnom Penh, London, Lagos, Bamako, and Rabat, with an Ambassadorship to Niger. He was interviewed by William J. Cunningham on February 2, 2000.

Q: You were sent to Saigon, weren't you?

ADAMS: Yes. It was not a full experience but it was something because there was a young white fellow likewise who was making the trip. His experiences were so grossly different from mine. He represented real class, so everywhere that we went, like when we got to Paris, our experiences were different.

Q: You traveled together, the two of you?

ADAMS: Yes, we did.

Q: Were you on official orders of the Department of State as government officers?

ADAMS: We were not officers. I don't know what we were called but anyhow, we traveled together. It was a catalytic experience. I got to stay in a hotel in Paris. Can you imagine?

Q: Yes, and you were in the same hotel as the other fellow.

ADAMS: Yes, I was. Anyhow, we got to Saigon and nobody could imagine that I had been sent there to do anything. That was a long story going back and forth, back and forth. The thing that was really interesting was that I resolved that finally by getting myself adopted by a Vietnamese family.

Q: You were adopted by a Vietnamese family?

ADAMS: Yes, I was.

Q: I see here in the biography that you were sent out there in 1952 as an education advisor to the U.S. Special Technical and Economic Mission to Indochina.

ADAMS: Yes, something like that.

Q: Donald Heath was the American ambassador in Saigon at that time.

ADAMS: All I am trying to say is that nobody knew exactly what to do with me.

Q: I was in Saigon at the AID [United States Agency for International Development] mission. I reported for duty there in September of 1952.

ADAMS: Then we were there at the same time.

Q: We were there at the same time, and I was a general services assistant, a very low level FSS-10 in the American embassy. The point is that the AID mission was very sizeable in those days. It had a separate building. In fact, it had a building that was more impressive than the building that the embassy was in.

ADAMS: It was because they were the ones who were supposed to be linked to the French army.

Q: That's right. So, you got yourself adopted by a Vietnamese family. What do you mean by that?

ADAMS: Literally, every spare moment I had, I spent with them. I learned the language.

Q: How did you pick them out?

ADAMS: There was this man who was kind.

Q: Yes, but how did you meet him? Was he an employee of the mission?

ADAMS: He was an employee.

Q: He was a Vietnamese employee of the USAID mission in Saigon who took you under his wing.

ADAMS: I just literally got myself adopted by him. When he took his family and they went to, say, the temple for praying and they bowed down and hit the floor, I did the same thing. Do you follow?

Q: Yes. They were Buddhist.

ADAMS: Yes, but the thing about it, the whole routine of my life was about them.

Q: Oh, you lived with them as a member of the family?

ADAMS: No, they would come pick me up.

Q: I see, so you had your own government quarters.

ADAMS: Yes, it was something like a hotel room. That was my whole routine but it meant that I knew more about what the Vietnamese people did than the officials.

Q: Many of the people in the mission in those days spoke French. Had you mastered French by then?

ADAMS: Yes, I had.

Q: And you said you learned Vietnamese in addition?

ADAMS: Yes, I did.

Q: Now, that was very rare. Very few people spoke Vietnamese.

ADAMS: Nobody could get around like I could get around. For example, things like this would occur. I'd get to go to Hanoi. I remember being a guide in Hanoi because I could talk with the people. Do you follow?

Q: Sure, of course, I know what you are talking about.

ADAMS: Well, I was not worried at all, even when Dien Bien Phu fell.

Q: Why were you not worried?

ADAMS: I was up there in North Vietnam.

Q: Do you mean in Hanoi?

ADAMS: I watched the French general go through an act, which was also his last portrayal of his dominance. He was running around on the streets of Hanoi in his car with the horn blowing, the siren blowing, and things of that sort.

Q: I see, he was making the grand gesture.

ADAMS: Yes. I was the one who knew the Vietnamese personally. I knew not only the one at the hotel but the one who ran the restaurant or did whatever. I knew a whole round of things, but can you imagine somebody having complete freedom to go?

Q: I was there at the time, and I remember the atmosphere very well, but how did your colleagues in the mission regard that? Did they welcome this, did they make use of it, or were you, in effect, somewhat suspect of being too close to the Vietnamese?

ADAMS: I was and am suspect even now.

Q: Really.

ADAMS: It is because they couldn't see how I could travel all over the place on my own.

Q: They could not do it themselves.

ADAMS: No. They even gave me a Jeep.

Q: The mission did.

ADAMS: Yes. I didn't have a chauffeur, and it was nothing for me to drive myself from Saigon to, say, Phnom Penh.

Q: Really? That was not always safe in those days.

ADAMS: Yes, but it was safe for me.

Q: Did you have someone from the Vietnamese community with you when you were going out?

ADAMS: Sometimes I did but the first five Americans to see Angkor Wat were with me. They'd never seen it before.

Q: Did you have a Vietnamese escort?

ADAMS: No. I was by myself.

Q: You went by yourself. In other words, you talked your way through whatever situation you ran into.

ADAMS: Also, the people knew me. Also, too, after a certain time I got to the point where I was arranging for a Vietnamese to go to the Philippines, to go here, or to go there.

Q: Was it for advanced education or practical training?

ADAMS: I ran teacher training activities and things to offset, what do you call this when you are taking advantage of people?

Q: Well, colonialism or the colonial experience?

ADAMS: Yes. All I am saying is, I had access to not only the Philippines but to all of Indochina, Singapore, Hong Kong, and all that. Can you imagine?

Q: Well, I can imagine it. Yes.

ADAMS: This is what life was about.

Q: Were you debriefed frequently by officers in the embassy or in the mission as to what knowledge you had of things going on in the Vietnamese community at that time?

ADAMS: Sometimes, yes, but not all the time. For example, the first time I went to Angkor Wat, there wasn't any curiosity at all even though I took six people.

Q: You took six people from the mission?

ADAMS: Yes. They were not persons way up there. They were all white but we sat on the steps of Angkor Wat, the first Americans who got to go through it.

Q: Really.

ADAMS: They didn't know what Angkor Wat was about. You see what I am talking about?

Q: Yes. It was just emerging from the jungles in those days.

ADAMS: You also had the possibility of the Viet Minh attacking, or different things of that sort.

Q: You had no fear of that at all?

ADAMS: No. I had no fear.

Q: What is your opinion of the U.S. policy toward Vietnam in the final days of the French empire there?

ADAMS: The whole thing was a big tragedy.

RANDOLPH A. KIDDER
Political Officer
Saigon (1953-1955)

Chargé d'Affaires
Saigon (1955)

Randolph Kidder was born in Boston and educated at Harvard. His career included posts in Canberra, Sydney, Belem, Rio de Janeiro and Saigon. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: To move ahead, you went to the National War College from 1952 to 1953. Then you were given one of these peculiar assignments where you were assigned to three countries at the same time. The names then meant little to anybody, but became household words later. You were assigned to Saigon, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane. How did that come about?

KIDDER: Well, for one thing, I spoke French. I didn't expect anything in particular, but with my background I thought it might be Latin America...

Q: But this was a ..what did the assignment entail? What was your job?

KIDDER: Political...political reporting, political relations...

Q: It was political reporting for Indochina?

KIDDER: Right, in those days we had a Chargé d'affaires in Vientiane and in Phnom Penh. Mike Reeves was in the former.

Q: That would be about equivalent to a Colonel?

KIDDER: That is right. So they had their own offices. Our Ambassador in Saigon was minister to those two other countries. I had a chance to visit them several times.

Q: Well, it was a period of time when the French were going through their death agony in Vietnam.

KIDDER: They certainly were...

Q: And how were we reacting at that point?

KIDDER: I think a lot related to the use of the military. When I got there, there were practically no American military there, except an attaché or two. Of course it grew up and up till a Brigadier General was our attaché. He had no political sense what so ever.

Q: So it was a routine assignment? The military sent somebody there without thinking this was really a hot spot?

KIDDER: I don't know how they were assigned. The senior American military officer was a two star General up in Hanoi. In those days, our military attaché in Saigon was a Brigadier General. He was a nice fellow, but he had no political sense whatsoever. His reporting was generally what he thought Washington wanted to hear.

Q: What was the situation, you had the French involved in the Dien Bien Phu incident; they were up in Hanoi. What down in Saigon? Was this considered a separate country at that point ?

KIDDER: No, when Vietnam was split in two, we had to close our office in Hanoi, where we had had a consul and a vice-consul...

Q: That was Toby Swank?.. no, Tom Corcoran?

KIDDER: Yes, I can't remember who preceded Tom. But we worked together, I went up several times, and we got along very well with the French. I never found the Vietnamese people easy to get along with, as opposed to the Lao and the Cambodians, who were...

Q: Did we feel at that point that there were Vietnamese to deal with?

KIDDER: Oh yes, increasingly so. Ngo Dinh Diem, always worked late at night. I remember being called at 12 o'clock at night to see him.

Q: What was his position at that time?

KIDDER: He was Prime Minister.

Q: What was your impression of him?

KIDDER: I think he was a very able man. He was not popular with the French. He had a very rough job really, because he was neither one thing nor the other, while the French were really in command. We talked a lot in late evenings. He liked to talk a great deal. We got along very well with him, and his principal officers.

Q: What were the major things that you were trying to accomplish, what was your major focus?

KIDDER: Our major focus was the war. The way which we would operate together and a number of problems kept arising, none of them very serious. By and large, I think our relations were good.

Q: I was in the Air Force, and I recall this vividly. As an enlisted man, and I was going to be discharged in 1954; yet there was a lot of talk after Dien Bien Phu which was what, early '54 or late '53?

KIDDER: I think it was May of '54.

Q: The French were trying to have us go in, and there was a debate about whether we would get involved or not. And so many of us were concerned about being kept on in the military but what were we advising or saying we should do, what was the thinking about what we should do at our legation?

KIDDER: It became an embassy about that time. The work with the French who were under the Governor General - I can't even remember his exact title - he was military while I was there. But Jean Daridan, a career diplomat, was high up in there, and I had known him before. By and large we got on extremely well with the Foreign Office people. They were very helpful to us. I think they understood our problems; their problems were serious, but they knew they were on the way out. The question was were we on the way in or what was going to happen? So I saw a great deal of the French and also of the Vietnamese military.

Q: What were we trying to do at that time? Speaking from the embassy, there was Donald Heath who was our Ambassador...

KIDDER: He was Ambassador for a long time. He was a wonderful fellow to work with...

Q: He was my Ambassador when I was in Saudi Arabia. What was his thinking and what was the thinking of his staff about the situation and what we should do?

KIDDER: He played a very quiet role. By then relations were a three pronged affair - French relations and Vietnamese... Laos and Cambodia didn't account for much then. Basically it was in Saigon...where Donald Heath who was a very able man, but very understated; he wasn't loquacious, or a man who sort of took the center stage. He was wonderful to work for. Basically it was a question of continuing our relations with the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese armed forces and also the French. Because that was certainly very important. The French were still ruling the roost.

Q: How did you see this thing playing out at the time? Did you have any feeling about what we should do? Other than just what our instructions were?

KIDDER: I felt very strongly that the United States should not get too deeply involved in Southeast Asia. Because I figured it was a losing game. At that time I think the total American military in Vietnam was around 300 to 400. We didn't want a vast American presence and of course there wasn't until after I had left. We felt very strongly that Americans should not get deeply involved in Southeast Asia. We figured it would be a losing game.

Q: Before you went out, what was your impression of Sihanouk?

KIDDER: I don't think he was taken very seriously, as seriously as we should have. He was regarded as something of a playboy. I think he was underrated.

Q: Was this from within the Department, too?

KIDDER: Yes.

Q: Were you given any sort of instructions before you went to Saigon?

KIDDER: I must have been but I don't remember them.

Q: It was a hurry-up affair?

KIDDER: It was a hurry up affair. I'd been out of touch with that part of the world for quite some time. We had a very competent fellow who had been in charge of the embassy who was transferred. I knew some of the French in Saigon who were in close contact with the Vietnamese and always talked very frankly with them. I never had a problem with the French.

Q: What was the feeling when you went out, did you see Cambodia as purely a front for the North Vietnamese? Did you think there was something we could do to prevent the North from using it as a staging area?

KIDDER: I don't think there was much optimism with regard to that. I think what they wanted me to do, and it was being done very well by the officer in Hanoi, were personal estimates of the Prince's views. How much power he had or didn't have, and during the time I was there I talked to the British and the French, and the Canadians, and others, the Australians, and I think the impression was he was a much more competent man than they thought he was. That was the reaction I got. But I never saw him while I was there.

Q: This is a later addition to the interview, you mention that you had an experience in Saigon?

KIDDER: Yes, I was chargé d'affaires, in a rather weird position because the personal representative of the President with the rank of Ambassador was my boss. But he never presented credentials, so I remained technically the chargé d'affaires, and signed all his telegrams, which surprised his aides considerably. He was a very fine man to work with, but he and I didn't quite agree on some things. He said he wanted me to say exactly what I thought, which I did, much to the alarm of the two Colonels who worked for him. But anyway, he was called to Washington for several weeks. The problems of what was going to happen to Vietnam was very much a toss-up and the personality of Ngo Dinh Diem... should we or should we not help him out, should we support him? I believed we should support him and when my boss, the general, was back in Washington talking to all the higher-ups, I was called one day to see the French General in command. I'd been to see Ngo Dinh Diem twice that day, and the French Commander-in-Chief who was the principal French representative in Saigon, I saw twice that day. It was a very, very busy day, and the thing that the French had decided was they would no longer support Ngo Dinh Diem, would try to get him replaced. In the meantime, Ngo Dinh Diem had I thought done a remarkably good job. And I took the liberty without any instructions from Washington - I had none - I decided that we would not support the French in trying to get rid of Diem; on the contrary, we would support him. And I reported that to the Department in a carefully worded telegram by Frank Meloy who was an expert, and for three days I got no results. Nothing. The third day I got a very brief telegram of congratulations. It was very moving

for me. I had had no instructions, and I knew that the general, my boss, did not agree with me. I had pointed that out in the telegram, but under the circumstances we had to support Diem and not have him thrown out by the French.

Q: This was 1955?

KIDDER: Well, it was not long before I left. That was the only time I had to make a decision for the government without any instructions.

Q: This came up after the interview because we were discussing the feeling in Washington that with the telephone, they don't need anyone out in the field. They are calling the shots. But again and again when things are moving fast, that's not the case. It gets lost sight of.

KIDDER: When I saw the French Commander-in-Chief in Saigon, he was very, very surprised. He knew what my boss thought, so he was very surprised when I told him what our position was.

GEORGE LAMBRAKIS
Trainee, USIS
Saigon (1954-1955)

George Lambrakis was born in Illinois in 1931. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Princeton University in 1952, he went on to earn both his master's degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1953 and his law degree from Tufts University in 1969. His career has included positions in Saigon, Pakse, Conakry, Munich, Tel Aviv, and Teheran. Mr. Lambrakis was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in June 2002.

Q: This would be in '54.

LAMBRAKIS: This would be '54. I also taught by correspondence personnel relations to business people at a school called the Holmes Institute. I was teaching Greek and selling encyclopedias. Then I passed the Foreign Service oral exam in Asia, in Saigon, where three ambassadors examined me. One of them, Mac Godley in Cambodia, much later took me on as his DCM in Beirut, Lebanon.

Q: Well, when you arrived in Saigon, what did they do?

LAMBRAKIS: It was pretty good. USIS had about 12 people. I was the first, and then we got a second junior officer trainee, Tom Grunwald, so there were two of us. I was assigned to the press section to begin with. Howie Simpson who used to make wonderful cartoons for the Foreign Service Journal was the press officer. He knew a lot about everybody. This was shortly after Dien Bien Phu. I went there in September; Dien Bien Phu, the great defeat of the French, had happened, I think in June. Simpson knew several of the French colonels who had either served there or knew people who had served there. I was rotated from section to section over one year,

publications, field work. I traveled around the country with mobile units passing out literature. When my year was up, the word came in that I was going to be transferred to Laos.

Q: Before we go to Laos, what was the situation in Vietnam at the time?

LAMBRAKIS: When I arrived in Vietnam, Ngo Dien Diem had just taken office. I was told as I arrived there that South Vietnam would last at the most six more months, and Ngo Dien Diem no more than three months. This was the beginning of my experience with people telling you what will happen, and of course, eventually many people are right, but the problem is what is their timing. In this case, as we know, Ngo Dien Diem went on for many years, South Vietnam went on for many years. But everybody was very pessimistic. It was a dicey situation, but frankly USIS was trying its best to fix it. I had interesting experiences. One of my assignments was with the radio section. What we were doing was monitoring the news around the world in the evening and then we would tape them and they would be rebroadcast by the Vietnamese to their own field posts, so they would be put out as news bulletins all around the country next morning. Somebody had to get that tape from where we were recording it to the broadcasting studio at night, around midnight. One of the problems was that the police and the military were fighting at that point, because the military were under Ngo Dien Diem, the police were still quite corrupt, and with a lot of French influence. The French had left very unhappily at the time. Also there were at least three other armed groups that were anti-government. One of my jobs was on my motor scooter carrying this tape. I had to go up this main street between the police on one side and the military on the other, who would occasionally shoot at each other. This was always kind of fun as I zoomed through in the middle of the night and got to the Saigon radio station where people would turn their Tommy guns on you. That was one of my various experiences here. The situation in Vietnam was quite good when I was there from '54 to '55. It got much worse later.

Q: Well, had the exodus from the north started?

LAMBRAKIS: I am glad you mentioned that. Yes, and I had a part in that too. First of all that was the height of the exodus. I was sent to Haiphong because Hanoi and Haiphong were the last places to be evacuated. Haiphong harbor was the last place from which they were leaving. I went up there and did interviews on the ship on the way back with people as to what their experiences were as refugees, most of whom of course were Catholics fleeing to the south. Ngo Dien Diem was a Catholic, which eventually was part of his downfall in a Buddhist country. The other part of it was that the North Vietnamese got kind of preferential treatment. People thought that this was because they were Catholics but it was also because northerners tend to be a lot more energetic in Vietnam than the southerners. They were ready to work. But I did come back on their boat with them. I was also sent up there for six weeks to sit in for the USIS representative in Haiphong, "Red" Austin, the last one we had, while he went on leave. That was one of my temporary assignments.

Q: Was the plan early on to stay in North Vietnam?

LAMBRAKIS: I don't think so. We had to leave. The last thing we did, one of the many futile gestures, was passing out radios to people. That was one of my last jobs in North Vietnam, which of went to all of the villagers when we had to leave. As soon as we left, the local Viet Minh came

by and collected them all. They were all supposed to be tuned to our frequency. I would just drive around and distribute them with a Vietnamese team. Mind you, it was quite clear at the time that there wasn't going to be another election in the south, because by then people knew all about elections in communist countries. We figured if there was going to be one total election for the country, there would be 99% vote for the communist party in the north, there would be a large percent in the south. The communists would win, and we had already seen what happened in places like Czechoslovakia when even 40% of the vote goes to the communists. So reinterpretation of this later on had it that the Americans broke the Geneva agreement, but at the time there was no talk about the issue. In fact even as late as when I was in Israel, I was making speeches in favor of the American position in Vietnam.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you were in Saigon?

LAMBRAKIS: Well we had several. I can't remember the name of the Foreign Service officer. Was it Reinhardt?

Q: It was Donald Heath at one time.

LAMBRAKIS: Actually I got there while Heath was still ambassador. Then he was replaced by someone else, I think Reinhardt. A military man, I think General Collins, came out there as presidential special emissary because I also did a run up country following President Diem with Collins when Diem went around introducing him and showing him the country. I even had an amusing time one day when I got to a theater late. I told the usher "I am from the American embassy." He ushered me to the second row where there was an empty seat right in the middle. The guy in front of me turned around to see who I was. It was Ngo Dien Diem, the President! The usher must have thought I was an American ambassador just arrived!...Not very sophisticated.

Q: Then you were moved. Is this part of a regular rotation thing?

LAMBRAKIS: There is one last thing I should say about Saigon since I have a French wife. That is that French junior officers were very unhappy about the Americans appearing to take Vietnam from them. They started setting off bombs. The first bomb was set off in front of the USIS library which happened to be just below where I was living at the time. I was in my apartment when the explosion occurred right in front of it. Then they were leaving bombs all over until finally they were caught. The Vietnamese police officer I was sitting next to in a theater one time turned to me and proudly said, "I was the one who caught those Frenchmen."

Q: But it was French who were doing that?

LAMBRAKIS: They were French officers, junior officers, but there was a lot of bitterness among the French. If you think back on it, Eisenhower had refused any meaningful assistance at Dien Bien Phu. They resented the Americans because they felt we were supporting Ngo Dien Diem, and Ngo Dien Diem was taking the country away from them. There was somebody named Bao Dai, the former emperor there, who was on the French Riviera and never came back.

ROBERT F. FRANKLIN
Radio Officer, USIS
Hanoi and Saigon (1954-1956)

Press Officer
Saigon (1962)

Robert F. Franklin was born in California in 1920. He joined USIA in 1951 and served as a radio officer in Tangier, Vietnam, Germany, the Philippines, and Africa. He was interviewed by Earl Wilson in 1988.

Q: Then the French you had when you went to your next post which I understand was Saigon?

FRANKLIN: That's right. I was French speaking and had a radio-broadcasting background which is the reason they asked me to replace the radio officer. I must tell you about this.

A fellow named Frank Mullen was the previous radio officer who managed to render the daughter of the Chief of Police in Saigon pregnant.

Q: I have to interpose right there one minute. I want to get a time frame. It's around early 1954 we're talking about.

FRANKLIN: That's correct. I think I arrived in April of '54 in Saigon.

Q: Okay, now back to the police chief.

FRANKLIN: Well, it was gently suggested that he might do better to resign, which he did. But, of course, they were left without a radio officer, and things at that time were really getting hot in Indochina. It was the period of Dien Bien Phu. The Viet Minh were winning. The French pretty much had their backs against the wall. And we didn't know quite where we were going.

So anyway, I was sent over and asked to sort of restart a radio program which I did. I got involved with the aid program there, too. We did audio tracks for A.I.D. motion pictures and that sort of thing. So it was an active period. Very shortly after I arrived, I don't suppose it was more than a month, I was sent up to Hanoi where Martin Ackerman at that time was the branch PAO. You remember Martin I'm sure. Howie Thomas was up there, also.

Q: That was a rather pleasant town, wasn't it?

FRANKLIN: Well, now that was a wild town. Because this was all French troops. The French to support the moral had sent in entertainment from Paris, the best entertainment they could get, the nightclubs and all that. So it was a very interesting time. However, Dien Bien Phu finally collapsed.

The agreement was that the French would render all of North Vietnam to the Viet Minh on a certain date. It was sometime in the middle of the year. And I went up with my chief local whose name I cannot recall but who shortly thereafter went to work for the Voice. You can probably look him up in the Vietnamese section, at least in the record.

He and I went up to see what we could see on this turnover. And he made a report in Vietnamese; I made a report in English -- these were all on rather primitive portable tape recorders at that time, battery operated -- which we sent back by pouch to Saigon. I recall that we recorded the Viet Minh, who were very militant singers. We had really quite a singing concert there where they had taken over one area. They didn't bother us.

We were hitching a ride with a fellow named John McGowan. This was not your John McGowan. He was an Army Major, an assistant military attaché. We found a hill in Hanoi where we could get a good view of a large area. There were plenty of people in the streets (this was a popular rebellion) and everywhere you could see more and more Viet Minh flags, the red field with the gold star centered. And, as I wrote into the little piece that I sent back, the major said, "you know, something is very familiar about this." He thought a moment, then he snapped his fingers and said, "I know! It looks just like the takeover of East Berlin. All the red flags popping out here and there."

Right. One little interesting incident: My local employee, my assistant, had a sister who lived not far from the Red River Bridge, and he wanted to drop off briefly and see his sister. I said, all right, five minutes, ten minutes, don't be very long. So we parked in this large square near where his sister lived. She was half a block away. The significance of the Red River Bridge or the Red River was that it marked the border between the area that was to be immediately occupied at that time by the Viet Minh and the sort of reserved area around Haiphong, the adjacent port city, that was not to be turned over for several months.

As we learned later, the Hanoi regiment of the Viet Minh was due to come in to that square and have a celebration. We had had no idea. And in the ten minutes that we were there, parked in that square, the square became packed with people awaiting the arrival of this home-town Viet Minh regiment. This was from our point of view sort of the enemy, you know, although nothing was declared at that time. Here I was sitting with an American major in uniform driving an American car -- I think it was a little Jeep carryall -- and surrounded by these people, absolutely surrounded by them. They didn't really pay much attention to us, thank God.

I was saying mentally to my assistant, "come on, come on. Say goodbye to your sister and get up here." Well, to make a long story short he did, but we could not see how we could get out. The place was absolutely jam packed with people. It was a sizeable square that ordinarily would take up about a square block in the United States. Fortunately, the last French tank column to leave Hanoi came through at that point and started crossing the Red River bridge down to Haiphong. We just pulled in behind the French and got across the bridge. So that was a little incident worthy of remembering.

From Haiphong, incidentally, MSTs, that is Military Sea Transport Service ships, American ships, came up and transported refugees from the north, 5,000 at a time, down to the southern

part of Vietnam, Saigon and that area.

My wife got involved in that. She was working at that time. The Binh Xuyen rebellion, which I will explain shortly, had resulted in the death of the chief of the AID photo laboratory, Dixie Reese. As I said, everything was heating up during this time, and AID was desperate for somebody to take that over. My wife had some photographic experience, not very profound, but enough to count, and they asked her to take over and run the lab. In connection with that, she ran up to Hanoi and did a photo story on the refugees coming down, among other things.

Interesting historical note: That was the time of Dr. Tom Dooley, who later became rather famous in setting up the clinic in Laos. When we went up to Haiphong on two or three occasions pending its turnover, we stayed in the same hotel as Tom and ate a number of meals with him. We had to admire this energetic young Navy doctor going out and working in the refugee camps where they were staging pending getting on the American ships. That's just a little sidelight.

One other incident that occurred. Well, it wasn't really an incident -- a situation: Just before the takeover of Hanoi, the consulate up there was a residential place, a house, set well back from the road, behind a lawn of 50 feet in depth perhaps. And they had a Viet Minh guard out in front of the consulate. The consul, by the way, stayed there, oh, six months or more after the occupation by Viet Minh. But it was very nerve-wracking, because when you'd go into the consulate or come out of the consulate, the Viet Minh guard had a burp gun, a small machine gun, that he pointed right at your belly button, all the time from the time you got out of the car, walked up the lawn, the 50 odd feet, and got in the door. Then he'd pick you up coming out of the door, machine gun pointed at you all the way, with his finger on the trigger. And you couldn't help but think, "Gosh, what would happen if this fellow sneezed?"

In Saigon we had another rebellion that I didn't see much of in the American press later on. It was the Binh Xuyen, nominally a religious sect but not really: a little bit closer to the Mafia than anything else. Emperor Bao Dai had given them control of the police force in Saigon. But Bao Dai had gone back to France in exile. Ngo Dinh Diem had been elected president, and he wanted the Binh Xuyen out. They rebelled. We had a rather violent civil war in Saigon when this occurred. I don't remember the exact date. But it was not too long after the Hanoi takeover, probably the fall of '54.

And there was a murder right in front of our house. I happened to live directly opposite the ambassador in a duplex along with Jim Carrigan and his wife -- that is, they had the other half. And there was a shooting from one vespa (motor scooter) to another right in front of the house, connected to that local rebellion.

So my boy -- how old is he now? I guess about 10 or 11 at this time -- grew up knowing the size of mortars from the sound and the caliber of ammunition. Was that a 30 caliber or 50 caliber machine gun, etcetera? It was an interesting period. The rebellion failed after two or three weeks.

We stayed two years. I didn't like Saigon. Not for the lack of interest in it, but I tolerate the tropics poorly. The heat bothers me a great deal. I didn't like it, so I was happy to leave in the Spring of '56.

Q: Your broadcasting, were you feeding stories to VOA?

FRANKLIN: No, we were doing mostly local work. Occasionally we'd send a piece to VOA, but really not very often. Nearly all was local production for placement on the local radio station. At that time there were two stations operating in Saigon, "Radio France Asie," French Asian Radio which, of course, was owned and operated by the French government, and comparable perhaps to RIAS, you know, that sort of thing. Then Radio Saigon and, to the north, Radio Hue. We were putting things on tape, reel to reel tape in those days, and giving them to Vietnamese radio stations. And we curried their favor by giving them our equipment which they used for various programs. We got along very well with them.

Q: Well, I suppose, some of this was covering AID type of activities.

FRANKLIN: Part of it was that, yes. Part of it was blatant propaganda. Now we were getting very militant about opposition to the Viet Minh. And I remember, I got a book of Vietnamese proverbs and had it translated. (Of course, we had translators in the office.) I picked out anything that might be turned to apply to the anti-Viet Minh posture.

Q: So this was unattributed material.

FRANKLIN: Well, it was nominally attributed to the South Vietnamese government.

Q: Right.

FRANKLIN: But we prepared the spots. And we prepared them in typical American fashion with fanfares and music background and two and three voices. A lot of one minute spots. The stations played them to death. They really played them to death. I think they had quite an impact.

We also produced a cultural program. One of our officers, Mim Johnstone, had been reared in part in France and really spoke quite good French. So we asked her to do -- I think it was a weekly program on American culture, all sorts of things. Cultural news from the United States, music -- no heavy hand at all. she did, and that was very popular. These were all, I think. We recorded the spots on disks in those days, the old 16-inch acetates. And her program was on tape, of course, then provided to the radio station. Very, very popular.

Q: Two things. One is that progressively as the cold war developed, especially in Vietnam and Thailand, the USIA was moving more and more into unattributed type of propaganda activities in support of the local government.

FRANKLIN: Exactly right.

Q: I suppose during your period in Saigon that the Viet Minh controlled vast areas of the country. And therefore radio would have been a particularly effective means of trying to reach them.

FRANKLIN: Exactly correct. And the Voice of America itself was very important with their daily Vietnamese program. It was run very efficiently by a fellow whose name I've forgotten, but he was a former missionary in Vietnam and spoke fluent Vietnamese -- an American -- and he did a very good job with that.

When I arrived there the post was "Indochina," and Saigon was the capital of Indochina. Later, of course, we split up and had separate operations in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, or Kampuchea they call it now, Vientiane for Laos.

Q: I remember a fellow by the name of Olsen who was a political officer in Manila had been in Saigon. And he would go up to Phnom Penh to play bridge with French civilians and come back to report on conditions. That was his cover.

FRANKLIN: Well, we all did this. I was responsible for providing radio programs the three countries, what are now three countries. And I made frequent trips to Phnom Penh. Later Martin Ackerman became PAO there. And who was it? Ted Tanen was PAO in Laos, where I also had to visit. We had far more than we could do for all this big area, really. We had to rely heavily on radio, because a great deal of the country is rural, as you know. How else are you going to reach these people?

One officer, Fred Rein, who was a former Broadway stage manager, had a good idea: He got together a cast of actors who went around giving little skits. All propaganda, if you will. But he had a regular tour going in our area around Saigon. Quite effective.

Q: Well, you said that you didn't do well in the tropics. Were you sick there?

FRANKLIN: I just tolerated the heat ill, I think. In those days we didn't have enough electricity to run two air conditioners. Jim Carrigan, who had moved in a few weeks before me, had an air conditioner, and I couldn't ask him to stop his so I could put one on, so I had no air conditioner.

Q: My recollection is Jim Carrigan got sick and left.

FRANKLIN: No, you're thinking of Jack Andrew, who died of a liver infection. Annette Andrew later married Stan Karnow. (Author of Vietnam, A History. Stanley Karnow was at that time, and for many years thereafter, a correspondent in Southeast Asia.) Several years obviously.

Q: I'll be darned. I just finished reading Karnow's history.

FRANKLIN: And I knew Stan later on.

You recall my mentioning the election of Ngo Dinh Diem who was, at least initially, "our man." The one that we supported for president of the country. USIA played a very big hand in that, with radio spots, and I remember Jim Carrigan my neighbor who was running the press section at that time, turned out I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of little paper Vietnamese flags. The Viet Minh had their own flag. And the Vietnamese flag was a yellow background with horizontal red stripes on it. But the whole idea was to instill patriotism and support Ngo Dinh

Diem.

Ngo did very well when he first came in. He was an ascetic, you could say almost a recluse. And a very moral man. He got into trouble later on and got assassinated. That's all in the history books, and you don't need that from me.

Q: Well, in any event, according to your biography you went from there to Berlin.

When I was serving in Manila, the fellow who was slated to be press attaché in Saigon had a family problem, I think his wife had glaucoma as I remember, and was delayed in arriving. The departing press attaché had frantically to get to someplace else -- I don't know why that was -- so because I was nearby and was familiar with the area they asked me to come over and wear the press attachés hat for a little while.

A couple of things there stick in my memory. I was there, I don't know, maybe a month, maybe even slightly less. But while I was there I had the embarrassing little incident of having an Indian, that is from India, publisher from the Madras area, owner of a newspaper and a publisher. Acting as his own correspondent, he had come in to see me, the American press attaché to ask about this and that. And I swear his accent was so thick that I got embarrassed asking him, "What did you say?" Shows to go you English ain't always English. It depends a lot on how well it's understood.

Another rather annoying incident that came up that I would like to relate for the record. About that time the very first baby flat top was coming over from the United States bringing the very first batch of helicopters to Vietnam for these American troops. And we got notice of it by telegram. But it was secret. The telegram was marked secret for a couple of obvious reasons.

And some damn fool politician, one of the Congressman or a Senator, I've forgotten which, opened his yap and gave it to the press long before the ship arrived. I think the ship had just departed Seattle as I recall. And I was put in the very embarrassing position being the press attaché and dealing with all these news hungry American correspondents asking about this ship which had a certain significance at the time, since it was the first one to come.

And I finally wound up going down to the dock which in Saigon was at the end of the main streets. We used to call it Rue Catinat -- I've forgotten the new name of it. But anyway, there was the ship, this great big ship, blocking the sun. And helicopters all aboard. And one of the correspondents came up to me and said, well, what have you got to say now? And I said, "Ship? What ship?" What else could I say?

JOHN A. LACEY
Intelligence Analyst, Vietnamese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1954-1956)

**Country Officer, Burma/Cambodia Desk
Washington, DC (1965-1966)**

John A. Lacey was born in Illinois in 1917. He joined the Department of State in 1950 and the Foreign Service in 1955. He served in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, and Rangoon. He was interviewed by Henry Precht in 1989.

Q: So, John, you then made the decision, over your wife's reservations, to enter the Foreign Service, but you continued in intelligence research. And I see from your CV you were an analyst of Vietnam, of Indochina, in that period.

LACEY: That illustrates another continuing point of my gripes against the American public and Uncle Sam's operations in terms of the American's ignorance of foreign affairs. I was called in by my boss, my senior boss, in INR and told that I was now being assigned to Indochina. Why? Well, the battle of Dien Bien Phu, you remember had occurred -- well, I think it started in March and ended in May of '54. In any case, whenever it started, it became a turning point in history, the end of colonial rule and the beginning of America's involvement in Asia.

Uncle Sam suddenly realized that we knew nothing about Indochina. Now, why did we know so little? Because up to that point in time, Uncle Sam was quite content -- and I use Uncle Sam in the sense of Washington leadership -- to leave the administration and problems of Indochina to the French, just as we looked to older colonial powers to administer other Asian countries. Suddenly, we were left with a vacuum.

Of our several people in the Department of State, only Paul Kattenburg -- whose name may ring a bell with you -- had any claim at all of being knowledgeable about Indochina. Now, we did have a couple other people. Conrad Becker was an authority on Burma, Dick Stuart on Indonesia. But that was more of a personal pastime than it was a matter of State. Certainly, when I said to my boss, "I don't know anything about Indochina."

"Well, you know something about China, don't you?"

"Yes."

He said, "That's half the battle."

Well, you chuckle rightly because anyone halfway familiar with the world knows that it is not half the battle at all.

Anyway, I was assigned to the Indochina desk in 1954, about the summer thereof. I remained there until '56. Because of my NIS, National Intelligence Survey, experience I was put in charge of the NIS program for Indochina. That was illuminating, but primarily for me. I am not certain that the product represented anything spectacular.

Q: How did you know you were in trouble with Mr. Bundy? I mean, how did that drama play out?

LACEY: I took over the Burma-Cambodian desk from a very able officer, Dick Ewing, in July or August -- I have forgotten the precise date -- of '67. At the time, it was felt by everyone including myself that Burma and Cambodia were sleepy little outfits and that Lacey despite his health would be up to it. But, as it turned out, no one had reckoned with the desire of the Pentagon leaders, especially those concerned with Asia and Vietnam, to step up the ante. The ante being a desire on the part of senior Pentagon mostly Army types to intervene in Cambodia to stop the movement of the Viet Cong down the Ho Chi Minh trail. Remember that?

Q: Right.

LACEY: And the Ho Chi Minh trail went along the border that ended in the southern part of Cambodia. The Pentagon wanted to intercept that trail in the worst kind of way.

Well, John Lacey and a superior person by the name of Evelyn Colbert, who still was intelligence INR/DRF, felt to the contrary. Our argument was, "Look, you fellows, you can't even control the northern part of Vietnam, south of the dividing line. Why do you want to extend the war? I mean, the conflict?" Incidentally, I still refuse to refer to it as a war because we never declared war. In any case, that was our position and EAP's energies focused on that.

Every morning there was a scheduled meeting on Vietnam/Cambodia. The Pentagon tribe would come over the river to the Department of State. We would have prepared our last position in response to their last proposal only to be confronted with a newly-developed position, a new rationale for why American troops should be allowed to enter Cambodia. They wore us down.

I fought that to the point where the word got passed to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State.

Q: Sullivan?

LACEY: No, not Sullivan, he was much earlier. This fellow was a carpet by the name of Habib, Phil Habib. He called me into his office and said, "John, Mr. Bundy wants you out by noon today."

Q: Had you done something in the morning meeting that had offended him?

LACEY: I have no idea what the circumstances were, but I think the provocation for Bundy's decision was that I had been consistently opposing --

Q: A thorn in the Pentagon's side.

LACEY: Well, in the Department of State's side, too, as far as Bill Bundy was concerned. So I had no choice but to pack up my few papers. I remember going to Harald Jacobson's office who was then chief of the China desk of EAP. I cried like a baby. The second time I have cried.

Harald Jacobson was a good family friend and still is. I was mortified, but in retrospect, that was probably the best thing that ever happened to me, Henry, because Roy Wald -- whose name I have mentioned before -- was now working in the Office of Science and Technological Affairs. He and I had been long-time friends.

RUFUS C. PHILLIPS, III
U.S. Army and Central Intelligence Agency
Saigon (1954-1955)

Assistant Director, Rural Affairs,
Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Vientiane, Laos (1957-1959)

Rufus C. Phillips, III was born in Ohio in 1929. He graduated from Yale University in 1951 and served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1954 to 1955. After serving for several years with the Central Intelligence Agency, he served as Assistant Director of the CORDS program in Vietnam. He was interviewed July 19, 1995 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: You said you were assigned to Ed Lansdale's operation. Could you explain who he was and what you did?

PHILLIPS: He had been sent to Vietnam. When he was in the Philippines acting as an advisor to Magsaysay, he had been asked to go over and take a look at Vietnam. Of course, all of this is in his autobiography. He went around with the French and looked at the guerrilla situation there. When the Geneva Conference took place in 1954, he was called back to Washington and asked if he would be willing to go to Vietnam. So he did as Chief of what was called the Saigon Military Mission. The Agency had two local stations. One station was a normal station inside the embassy, and the other was a special group in MAAG. General O'Daniel was commander of MAAG. He had just been assigned out there. Lansdale had requested some help and the Agency scoured the Far East for anybody who was in uniform. Some reservists were put back in uniform. He got a whole group of people there, none of whom were particularly suited for what he wanted them for, except for the then Major Lucien Conein, who had been in the OSS, had been in Vietnam, had both a paramilitary background and Vietnam experience. The rest of us, by and large, were people who had some paramilitary training, which wasn't really what he needed at that point because there wasn't going to be a war. He put some of us into an entirely different role. I was assigned to begin to work with a Vietnamese Army psychological routine unit, which was a combination psy-war company and troop information unit. That is what I began to do. Just about everything I did out there was an overt rather than covert activity.

Q: You must have been sitting down and reading the book trying to keep one chapter ahead of the book?

PHILLIPS: Well, I remember when he told me that he wanted me to work with the Vietnamese

psychological warfare unit, I said, "I don't know anything about psychological warfare." He reached into his bookcase and threw me this book by Paul Linebarger, which was THE book written on psychological warfare after World War II and said, "Here, read this."

Q: Before we move on, how did you see Lansdale's operation and how did it fit into the mission there?

PHILLIPS: He had a very broad charter. It was literally, "Ed, do what you can to save South Vietnam." In my opinion, he was a real political genius in terms of conceptualizing what might pull South Vietnam together. It is hard now, I think, to realize what South Vietnam was like then. The French had just lost the war and were completely discouraged. The South Vietnamese had been excluded from the negotiations. Diem had just been appointed by Emperor Bao Dai as Prime Minister. He had come to Saigon and found that he didn't even control his own palace guard who belonged to the Binh Xuyen who were a gangster sect in Saigon. They had actually bought control of the police force from Bao Dai. So you had the Binh Xuyen who were riding around in uniforms patrolling the streets of Saigon, who were the police, but who also controlled all of the gambling, vice and the opium trade. The army was commanded by a General Hinh who held the rank of brigadier general in the French Air Force. He was Vietnamese, but very susceptible to French influence. The French establishment resented Diem because he had always refused to cooperate with the French and was known to be anti-French. They wanted to maintain their control over the way things were being run. They tried to do this through the Binh Xuyen. Initially they tried through the army, where they had some real influence with General Hinh.

The other thing that was really complicating things was that there were so many refugees coming out of North Vietnam who had to be resettled. The government was completely disorganized. The French had never given it much responsibility. It was a facade of a government. The French controlled all the gasoline supplies for the Vietnamese Army, for example. Most of the logistics for the Army had been provided by the French. All of a sudden after Geneva, the Vietnamese were nominally in control but had little or no means and certainly no experience in actually accomplishing the tasks of government.

Ed tried to help the Vietnamese attack their problems on a number of fronts. One was to help them organize and set up some kind of a special commission to handle the refugee problem. Through MAAG, we were able to get special CAT (Civil Air Transport) flights and the Navy participated in moving these refugees. We were able to get supplies in and to help the Vietnamese build refugee camps. MAAG was very effectively involved in that. There was a volunteer medical operation called Operation Brotherhood which provided a lot of Filipino doctors who came in and took care of many of the refugees. Operation Brotherhood was a combined brain child of Lansdale and of a group of Filipinos.

Another problem was that the Viet Minh were scheduled to evacuate areas in the South that they controlled and move at least their regular troops back up north. The question was, "Is there anything to fill this vacuum?" Lansdale saw that a plan was needed on the Vietnamese side which the Americans could support both with tangible economic aid and military assistance to reoccupy these areas and to reestablish government. So that became what we called the National Security Program. We helped draft and Diem promulgated a National Security Act whereby the

Vietnamese Army was put in charge of these areas for a certain period of time. Eventually they would become civilian areas.

So, these operations, using elements of the nascent Vietnamese Army, had to be mobilized, organized, trained and then deployed to reoccupy various areas. One of the real problems was a psychological one with the Vietnamese. They didn't think they could do anything, because they had never been allowed to do anything on their own. They had very little self-confidence. They had never really organized anything themselves, being used to the French telling them what to do or doing things for them.

One of the ideas that Ed came up with was to use the Philippines as a way of generating self-confidence in the Vietnamese and giving them ideas about what they could do or how they could address some of their problems. In September 1954, we got a group of younger Vietnamese together who came from a couple of ministries, from General Hinh's staff and from the presidential palace to go over in a group to the Philippines to see what Magsaysay was doing, and how they had dealt with the Communist Huk problem, not only militarily but mainly in a civilian way. And also how they were resettling the Hukbalahaps, the communists, who had surrendered.

I took this group over as their escort. This was rather a unique experience because I didn't know anything really about what had been happening in the Philippines. It was very exciting for me personally, and I think very exciting for the Vietnamese, because we saw, contrary to communist propaganda, that in fact the Filipinos were running their own affairs. They were responsible for all of these operations, not the Americans. I think the Vietnamese picked up both ideas and a lot of confidence out of that. We were able to bring some Filipino advisors to Vietnam later to help them. The head of the presidential guard battalion, Colonel Valeriong, came over to help Diem organize his own security force and get rid of his Binh Xuyen guards.

In addition, of course, there was the whole political situation. All of the political parties in Vietnam were basically underground parties. They had never been out in the open, never worked with each other. They had lived a clandestine existence because the French had tried to eliminate them and, of course, in the post-war struggles the Viet Minh had tried to eliminate them and in fact did eliminate a number of them. So, everybody relied on secrecy and nobody was used to dealing with each other out in the open. It was very difficult for them to do. The standard feeling they had about each other, unless they knew someone almost from childhood, was automatic distrust. Yet they had to begin to work together. Lansdale got involved in trying to get Diem together with a number of local leaders and personalities. Most successful was his helping Diem to achieve a relationship with Trinh Minh Tho who was a dissident Cao Dai leader who was widely respected because he had fought both the French and the Viet Minh. His troops were brought into the Vietnamese army as sort of an auxiliary. This helped tip the balance between various quasi-religious and religious sects of which there were the Binh Xuyen, who weren't religious at all, the Cao Dai, who were but who were divided into factions, and the Hoa Hao who were another Buddhist offshoot, further down in the Delta, who also had two dissident factions. The French had paid and subsidized a number of troops which came from the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao and had some control over various factions. So, it was a struggle between Diem trying to line up some of the cleaner elements and the French maneuvering other elements and the

whole natural scene of mutual suspicion. It was very, very difficult to try to keep some semblance of government going in South Vietnam during this period.

Also, I should mention that General Hinh was himself involved in trying to pull off a coup against Diem. It eventually aborted, and he left the country going into exile in France, because the Americans wouldn't support him.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the United States had come in to be the big brother at that point?

PHILLIPS: No, not really. We had come in, but you have to remember that we came in very small numbers. I guess you could say that we wielded an influence which was disproportionate to our numbers, but most of the Vietnamese, regardless whether they supported Diem or not, wanted the French out of power. This was the real struggle that went on between nationalist Vietnamese all of whom supported Diem in that part of what he was trying to do, and those elements who still felt, either because they were directly on the payroll or were influenced by the French colonialist element which was still in defacto control in this French establishment in Vietnam. When Diem succeeded in overcoming the Binh Xuyen in the spring of 1955, he became immensely popular in South Vietnam because he inherited the nationalist mantle as the person who succeeded in getting the French all the way out of Vietnam. Well, this of course put the Americans in a rather difficult position. We were working at the time in a joint military mission called TRIM which was headed by General O'Daniel, but had a French deputy commander. The idea was to combine the French and the American military missions. In this way the Americans would have some ability to get at the training of the Vietnamese. Before that the American military advisory group was the military advisory group to the French, not to the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese were a subsidiary element of the French army. Once Diem came, of course, the situation changed. General O'Daniel and the US as a whole wanted to have some direct influence and contact with the Vietnamese. The way, at least initially, was through a joint military mission. The problem was, of course, that there was a lot of dissension inside of the military mission. It was funny in a way. What was called the National Security Division of TRIM, was set up to assist Vietnamese national security operations, which were basically reoccupations of territory by the Vietnamese army. Lansdale was the head of it. He had a deputy called Roman Des Fosses, who was a very nice person, very decent, who had been in Vietnam 17 years. Under Roman Des Fosses, there was a group of French intelligence officers whose job was to do nothing but to watch us. So it was really a bit strange. I didn't spend too much time at headquarters because by October, November, 1954, I was already down in Soc Trang, with some elements of the Vietnamese army, who were then forming to go in and reoccupy the Ca Mau peninsula, the far south of South Vietnam. So, I spent most of my time out in the field.

Q: One person you haven't mentioned is the ambassador. Who was our ambassador at that time?

PHILLIPS: It was Donald Heath, who was replaced in 1955 by Reinhardt.

Q: These were both Europeanists.

PHILLIPS: Well, Heath was but he had a lot of sensitivity and feeling for the Vietnamese. He

had very good relations with the French, but he, I think, was very perceptive and actually quite sympathetic to what Lansdale was trying to do. It was a very, very difficult period because the French were our allies in Europe. It started out being a European driven policy basically and I think that is why we came, as much as anything, to the aid of the French in the early years of the Indochina war. Then all of a sudden we found ourselves at loggerheads with them during the 1954-55 period. It was rather painful.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about your impression of the group of South Vietnamese you were working with?

PHILLIPS: I worked with a variety of people. I worked with a number of the military, some of whom had been Viet Minh earlier and then had come into the Vietnamese army having abandoned the Viet Minh cause. Some of them had been trained by the French from the very beginning as officers. So they were a mixed group. I found a number of very intelligent, very, very dedicated people. Probably the most capable officer I worked with was Le Van Kim, who was then a colonel. He was in fact the Army Chief of Staff. He had actually grown up in France, although he was completely Vietnamese, and had been trained by the French. At the beginning of World War II, after France fell he was interned and then was eventually repatriated to South Vietnam. There later he joined the nascent Vietnamese army when the French decided to put Bao Dai back on the throne and create a government in South Vietnam. He was an intellectual, extremely bright and a very, very able army officer.

I spent a lot of time with Kim and became the liaison between TRIM and a two division operation which he was in charge of to reoccupy Interzone V in Central Vietnam. Interzone V stretched from the southern part of Quang Ngai almost down to Qui Nhon, or just south of Qui Nhon. So it was all of Binh Dinh Province and about half of Quang Ngai Province. This was a zone that the Viet Minh had controlled for about nine years. The French at one point had invaded the area in something called Operation Atlante for about six months. They had brought some Vietnamese unit with them and made some inroads but then left. So, really the area had enjoyed almost uninterrupted Viet Minh rule for nine years. It was kind of a sanctuary. The Viet Minh had agreed, as a result of Geneva, to pull their regular troops out of this, and other zones, and to leave sections of Interzone V beginning in the north and going south in successive stages. So the Vietnamese, under their national security directive, organized a force to go in and reoccupy that area, using some lessons learned from the reoccupation of Ca Mau for which the troops had not been very well prepared. In the case of this operation, Kim set up education and indoctrination classes for all of the troops in terms of how to deal with the civilian population and what to do, which actually resulted in a very successful reoccupation. There were two divisions of troops who went in. It took about six weeks to progressively occupy the entire area from north to south. During that time there was not one single incident between a civilian and Vietnamese soldiers. The Army's morale was extremely high. It was interesting, the attitude of the civilian population. They had been told by the Viet Minh that the Vietnamese army troops were going to come in and rape and pillage. But when it became apparent that they were not going to do that, that they weren't stealing anything, and that in fact they were helping people by rebuilding bridges and so on, the attitude of the population changed. The operation started to generate a lot of enthusiasm. Part of that was because frankly a lot of the people were tired; the Viet Minh occupation had been very, very hard on them. They had been deprived of medical supplies and the Viet Minh

way of running things was pretty heavy-handed. So, we got a tremendous psychological boost out of this operation. About a week or ten days after it was finished, President Diem came up to Qui Nhon, and I have photographs of this, and had a tremendous reception. A really enthusiastic crowd of people greeted him there. Part of it was because the word by that time was spreading throughout South Vietnam, that he was defying the French and defeating the Binh Xuyen.

One of the things back then was that the American presence was very, very minimal. When I went out in the field I went out in civilian clothes. I did not go in military uniform. If I was asked, I was just there as an observer. I was not an advisor. It was all very low key. I think those of us who really knew the Vietnamese understood how important that was. This was something we didn't understand later on, certainly not at the top, that it had to be the Vietnamese doing things for themselves. Otherwise our side was not a viable alternative to the Viet Minh, who had played on Vietnamese nationalism.

Q: What was the feeling when you were there in 1954? Was it that the Viet Minh or communists were out of South Vietnam and just a matter of reestablishing the government or were they getting ready for another round?

PHILLIPS: We knew that they had left a stay-behind cadre. We knew, in the case of Binh Dinh, that they actually forcibly evacuated about 14,000 young men between the ages of about 10-14 -- just took them right out of their families and that they had given orders to their soldiers to try to marry as much of the female population as they could and possibly conceive a child before they left. These were the instructions. We knew that there was a network left behind, that there was going to be a coming struggle at that level as to who was going to control the rural areas and basically the rural population of Vietnam. I don't think any of us had any illusions about that. I don't think this was universally perceived or adequately appreciated. Certainly the aid mission policy became focused on development in the cities, on trying to industrialize South Vietnam so they could start import substitutions.

One of the persons I worked with a little later in 1955-56 was a guy named Kieu Cong Cung who was a very interesting person. He had become a Brigadier General in the Viet Minh army, was one of two or three leaders who led the early resistance in the south against the French and the British, when the Viet Minh broke out of Saigon and went into armed rebellion. But he never joined the communist party. About 1953, he was in North Vietnam and because he refused to join the party the Viet Minh were about to arrest him. So he and his wife and an infant child fled, walking all the way from practically on the Chinese border of North Vietnam to South Vietnam, evading the Viet Minh all the way. Evading the French, too, of course. Then, he had settled on a farm in South Vietnam and did nothing for the remaining period of the war against the French until Diem came. At that point he surfaced and volunteered to go to work for Diem. Diem wanted him to develop a group of younger people to go out and work in the villages. The idea was a village self-help program. We called it civil action, the Vietnamese had a different name for it. So he was given some support and a fairly free hand to start recruiting people.

We asked the aid mission if they would provide support and not only that, Diem asked them for community development advisors. The aid (ICA) program didn't want to have anything to do with this operation. Ed argued with Ambassador Reinhardt about it pointing out that there was a

vacuum in the rural areas which needed to be filled and that this was critical to the future of South Vietnam. The Vietnamese had to carry their program largely on their own, unfortunately without much tangible assistance. Civic Action became more of a propaganda operation than one of tangible assistance to people. A type of communist denouncement operation. If it had some real economic assistance attached to it, I think it would have helped to stem the communist insurgency which started up again.

Q: *What was your role in this?*

PHILLIPS: I was gradually given more and more responsibility because I was able to work with the Vietnamese. I became in effect, first as a second lieutenant and eventually as a first lieutenant, the only contact between the Military Assistance Advisory Group and two divisions of the Vietnamese army. I held an advisory role which later would have been occupied by a US brigadier general. After that I was given a series of responsibilities. One of them was to assist in the reorganization of the Vietnamese army and to set up what was called a G-5 bureau in the army, both at the general staff level and on down. The other was to help Cung organize Civic Action.

Q: *G-5 in military parlance would be what?*

PHILLIPS: Psychological warfare and troop education. I worked on that, setting up training courses in psychological warfare having learned, I suppose, a fair amount about it. I also acted as an informal advisor from Ed's shop to Civic Action in terms of how it was being set up. Initially we were able to get some Agency funds to help get it started. We wanted to turn the thing over to the economic aid program as I said previously, but they weren't having any of it. I continued to do things like that. I was very close to Nguyen Dinh Thong who was in the secretariat at the presidency, and eventually became the Secretary of Defense in 1961. I did a lot of odd jobs which were almost all overt. The only really covert activity I got engaged in -- this has been pretty well written up -- was a psy-war effort against the Viet Minh. One of our people had been working with a UNQDD writer. The UNQDD was the oldest nationalist political paper in Vietnam. They had been decimated by the communists when the communists assassinated a lot of political leaders in the North. The writer was an interesting guy. He was what you might call a "bomb thrower." His idea was, "give me a gun and I will go shoot some Viet Minh and failing that maybe I can go shoot some French." He was a good writer too. Lansdale had the idea that if we could find a good Vietnamese writer, maybe we could write something like Tom Paine's "Common Sense," but for the Vietnamese. This was to try to give them an idea of a political cause they could rally around. What was the South's political cause? What kind of rally cry could they, would they respond to? He (the UNQDD writer) did turn out a piece which had some success in this regard.

Later I learned from him that he had a lot of friends who were astrologers in South Vietnam, and of course astrology is very, very influential there. I suppose this was the most unique thing that I did in South Vietnam. I started working with him to put out an astrological magazine for the 1955 Vietnamese New Year in which we would give some predictions from Vietnamese astrologers that would be in Diem's favor and against the Communists. He did a heck of a job on this thing. It was sold out in two printings and got back more money than we put into it. So, I

worked with him on that, but it was a sideline.

Q: Did you find yourself as you were getting this on-the-job-training that the Vietnamese did not want to do things the French way no matter what?

PHILLIPS: I think our attempt was to try to elicit from the Vietnamese what was their way. In other words, let's say we knew that one of the big problems was that government had to be restored to an area. We looked at what the French experience had been, what the Vietnamese experience had been and then we had a dialogue with the Vietnamese to try to get them talking about their own ideas. I suppose what came out was sort of a melange of ideas which we helped to organize. In other words how do you organize an activity and staff it with Vietnamese ideas of what to do practically on the ground, what do you say to people, how do you get popular support, etc. We couldn't supply these answers, they had to supply them. I think the process was a common one but it was one in which the Vietnamese felt that results were their ideas and not our ideas. We weren't there trying to sell American ideas.

Q: When you were up in what we called II Corps did you get involved in the working with the Montagnards?

PHILLIPS: No, I didn't have much to do with the Montagnards in those days because inner zone V was all along the coast. Later in 1962-63 I had some contact with the Montagnards. The Montagnards were basically not very sympathetic to the Viet Minh. The French had been fairly effective in working with them, mainly because the French liked to play the Montagnards off against the Vietnamese and vice versa. So, the situation with the Montagnards was that there really was not a lot of Montagnard support for the Vietnamese on either side. They were more of a passive group.

Q: How did our MAAG mission under General O'Daniel operate and did you have any contact with him?

PHILLIPS: First of all there was this joint military mission, TRIM. That was an uneasy relationship with the French. O'Daniel wanted to try to help the Vietnamese army with logistical support in terms of these reoccupation operations, in terms of help in settling the refugees. He was able, I think, to do that and he wanted to begin to do some training with the army. He was able to start some training programs. Then he left in 1956 while the Vietnamese army was still a territorial force. The decision was made when General Williams came, the beginning of 1956, that the Vietnamese army was to be converted to a conventional army to oppose an invasion from the North. Lansdale didn't think, and I don't think any of us who had been out on the ground thought, that this was the right idea. I think this policy was driven from the point of view that the US didn't want to have our forces being a blocking force in case there was an invasion from the North. So, therefore, we had to train the Vietnamese army to fulfill this function. Unfortunately it took them away from their territorial role in which they had been placed as a result of the pacification program and as a result of successful operations against the Hoa Hao, some of the Cao Dai and the Binh Xuyen. We were not happy about it. However, that became US policy.

What happened then was that we left a vacuum out in the countryside. The civil guard was

supposed to fill this vacuum but it didn't. At least we had the army dispersed and it was pretty local and had more discipline than anybody else did. It could, I think, have been converted into an effective local defense force -- not purely local, but one with which you could insure both local and general security against larger forces. Instead, they were pulled out and formed into divisions and positioned (to a considerable extent towards) the 17th Parallel. That was another error in my opinion and our opinion at the time, the way we tackled that problem. The US just didn't see the security problem in South Vietnam clearly. I think that distorted some of what we wound up doing. Other considerations were driving what we were doing.

Q: You stayed there this first time until when?

PHILLIPS: I was there until November, 1955. I got out of the Army and went back as a civilian with the CIA in 1956.

Q: Was this again dealing with Vietnam?

PHILLIPS: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you find when you got back home that there was too much theory and not enough practical experience? When you came back you must have been one of the few people who had field experience.

PHILLIPS: There were still a lot of things that were going on. Vietnam was adopting a constitution, they were going to have elections, Operation Brotherhood was still there out in the countryside, the Vietnamese army did need some reorganization but not the one it got. So, I went back to be a part of that. One of my jobs was to try to get Civic Action turned over to our regular aid agency, because the basic idea behind Saigon Military Mission was that it was something temporary to deal with an emergency and that the regular US establishment ought to take over. But I don't think, with all due respect, that the regular US establishment was very attuned to the situation. Everybody was coming with their own particular program and point of view and you were dealing still with a pretty revolutionary situation there. You had a national government which still didn't have any effective government out in the countryside. Diem was criticized for abolishing the system of elected village chiefs. His idea was that these would be replaced by future elected village chiefs, but in the meantime there would be a reorganization and some civic action at the village level to try to push the communists aside and encourage popular support.

Q: Had things by the time you left in 1956 been more or less turned over to the civilian agency at that time equivalent to AID?

PHILLIPS: There were a number of developments which were not very heartening and I think which reflected a kind of made-in-Washington conceptual approach. It wasn't just that we were reorganizing the army with very little thought, except in theory about how to provide security in the countryside. I mean, if the Civil Guard had been trained and ready and had taken over this function, and then the army had been withdrawn and retrained in units, it might have made some sense. But there was no transition. So the Civil Guard never got on its feet and became the subject of a lot of wrangling, which you probably have heard about from other people, between

USAID (the Michigan State people) and General Williams as to who was going to train them, etc. Well, the fact is they never really got put on their feet and never got trained and therefore there was a vacuum out in the countryside. So far as any real community development effort at the village level this was another vacuum which was not filled. I think that the US had an opportunity, and Diem had invited us in, to participate in this thing, to have community development advisers involved in this thing, but we didn't take him up on it. Gradually Civic Action became more purely political in nature. The mistake that was made was really a political one. The decision was made: "Okay Diem is in power and let's just support him in whatever he wants us to do." There was a decision made to fund through the CIA the Can Lao party which was a secret political party put together by Diem's brother Nhu to provide support for Diem. The feeling was that you couldn't trust all these other Vietnamese so the way to go about this was to set up your own secret political party, recruit members into it and think that this was going to provide the basis of support for Diem. Everybody had to swear loyalty to Diem. Lansdale fought this. We fought it in regard to the army. I got involved when we found out that Nhu wanted to put the Can Lao into G-5. We brought it to General Williams and he talked to Diem about it. Nhu hadn't said anything to Diem about it and it became quite an argument and they didn't do it, not at least while we were there. So what happened? Well, a lot of the other political parties, the Army and other religious groups were alienated by this process. Lansdale argued with Diem about it, but the US was giving the money so this was what happened.

What happened was that instead of a unifying political process, you had a divisive process which was very ill-suited to the situation in South Vietnam. It was a lousy decision. Then, when the decision got called into question later on, the Agency withdrew its support which created a problem of confidence between Diem and the Americans.

Q: When you were in Washington did anybody really talk to you about it?

PHILLIPS: I remember talking about Civic Action to the coordinating body of the National Security Council about Vietnamese army and Civic Action in South Vietnam for about an hour. But that is the only time I had any real contact with who, you might say, were policy makers. Of course, I was a pretty junior guy. I know that Lansdale had plenty of discussions at a very high level. I think he personally argued with both Dulles brothers about the Can Lao decision. Basically the policy became one of a very conventional approach on the aid and military front, and was to build up a personal political party for Diem on the political front. I think these efforts went awry. If you look at some of the decisions that were made, for example, on the constitution. Lansdale got involved and got a constitutional expert from the Philippines to come over to help the Vietnamese write their constitution. He wanted to have some checks and balances in the way the government was set up. There were two arguments used against this. One was that it would make Diem less effective and make it very difficult for him to run the government. The other was that it was just transferring an American idea to Vietnam. I remember a lot of discussion about this but it wasn't just transferring an American idea. I know from some discussions with Lansdale personally that he felt that the Vietnamese would never learn how to run a modern government in even a semi-democratic way unless they had to deal with people, unless they had to deal with a supreme court, unless they had to deal with a legislature. Then they would learn how to compromise and how to talk to each other and how to negotiate. But if left to their own devices, it didn't make any difference if it was Diem or some other Vietnamese, the only

tradition they had ever had was autocratic, secret, and revolutionary and this was the way they were likely to behave. They would fall back on what was familiar to them.

I think again we missed the boat. We became obsessed with, "Let's get on with it. Diem is our man and everything is stable. We just have to back him and get the economic aid program going, get the army ready to confront the North Vietnamese at the 17th Parallel and we have the problem solved." But the problems were a lot more complex than that. It seems to me, and I don't want to speak just from the benefit of hindsight, that if you looked at the history of Ho Chi Minh and the whole Vietnamese communist movement one should have known that this was going to be a never ending struggle, that they were going to be back and nothing in the same way they worked before which was to start from a rural base. So, it seems to me that what was going to happen there was fairly predictable in terms of what you were going to be facing.

Q: In these oral histories I want to stick to you. So you were back in Washington dealing in Vietnamese affairs?

PHILLIPS: Yes, but very limited. I would talk to some people in the Agency and got some exposure to the staff elements of the National Security Council. But then I went right back out again.

Q: When did you go out again?

PHILLIPS: I went out in January, 1956 having returned to Washington in November, 1955.

Q: And you were there for how long?

PHILLIPS: I was there until November, 1956.

Q: What were you doing there?

PHILLIPS: I was in a variety of roles. I was helping Civic Action get organized and recruiting people and trying to see if I couldn't get the economic aid mission involved in Civic Action. I was involved in the reorganization of the Vietnamese Army, and the formation of the G-5 organization. I wrote the staff plan for that. I arranged for some training for the South Vietnamese. I helped a Vietnamese friend of mine who subsequently became Vietnamese Ambassador to the US, Bui Diem, who was a Dai Viets, get some money to make a motion picture. I acted as sort of a catalyst in that process. Bui Diem had come up with the idea of making South Vietnam's first premiere movie, which was going to be about a Viet Minh captain who defected because his parents were caught in the land reform of 1953-55 (which actually occurred) in North Vietnam. Some of the story was pieced out of actual events and some of it was made up. Somebody had written a book about this and he wanted to make it into a movie script. I prevailed on Charlie Mertz, who was head of USIS's film unit, to provide some film raw stock. I talked to the Acting Secretary of Defense, Thuan, and persuaded him to put up some Vietnamese money for the movie. I helped Bui Diem assemble the necessary support and he produced the movie. The sad part of it was that after the movie was produced and it was all set for the premiere, Nhu found out that the guys who were mainly responsible for producing it were

Dai Viets and he canceled the money that they were going to be paid by the Ministry of Defense and forbade the Acting Secretary from going to the reception. There was quite an uproar. We finally got the money out of Defense to help pay part of the cost, but this was a little example of the realism of Vietnamese politics at the time, and also the effect of Nhu's increasing influence. Although, I don't think we saw that completely clearly at that time.

Then I spent about two months in the hospital with hepatitis at Clark Field. I think those were mainly the things that I did.

Q: Let's go to this 1962-64 period. In the first place how did they get you back?

PHILLIPS: Well, what happened was that counterinsurgency became the doctrine. MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) had its counterinsurgency program and there still was a Military Assistance Advisory Group there. MACV was originally set up to command the air units and other American units that were directly involved, but it rather quickly took over the strategic planning function, although all the advisors on the military side remained directly dependent on MAAG. MACV was trying to train and organize the Vietnamese army. Within Vietnam the Vietnamese had started carrying out a pacification program. There had been something called Operation Sunrise, but it hadn't been very successful. It involved a lot of resettlement. Subsequently with the assistance, as a matter of fact, very key assistance of Lou Conein who was working for the CIA station, a better approach was started. He had been there before in the 1954-55 period and he went back and dug up the old records of what we called pacification back then. He helped the Vietnamese draw up a pacification plan for one province, Phu Yen, which would combine military with civilian elements and would involve not resettlement but a gradual extension of security and some rural assistance to the population.

Q: Where was this province?

PHILLIPS: Phu Yen is in central Vietnam south of Qui Nhon. What happened was that AID had no rural assistance program. The previous director had left. A guy named Bill Fippin was there as acting director. He was very frustrated because there was no AID organization out in the countryside that was equipped to support anything that the Vietnamese were doing, any kind of rural development effort. AID was asked, and I think probably Mr. Bell, who was the director, probably got asked by Kennedy, "What are you doing out there?" And they weren't doing anything or much of anything they could talk about. So the search went out for somebody to go out and look at the way the AID mission was structured, and to come up with some kind of program for AID. They got ahold of my name. I think that Ed Lansdale was probably the source of my name but I am not sure. Anyway, I got a call from a guy named Rod Poats who was the Deputy Director for the Far East at AID. He asked if I would come in and talk with him. So I did. He said I had been suggested to them as a possible candidate to go out to Vietnam and do a study on how to organize the AID mission. I asked what were they doing now and they asked me about my background, etc. He came to the conclusion that I was a candidate for doing this. I said that I needed at least one other person to go with me and would like Bert Fraleigh who was in Taiwan working for AID. I told them that he was the best pure AID guy I knew, that he knew more about

development in Asia than any single person that I knew. I said that I thought together we could really survey what they were doing and what the Vietnamese were doing and come up with something. So in June 1962, I went out for about a month and met Bert out there. I went out to the provinces, talked to high level officials in the government including Diem, because of my previous experience. Even though I was relatively young, I was a recognized friend and had entree into almost any level of government. I discovered that the Vietnamese had something going called the Strategic Hamlet Program that the US side didn't understand very well. It had some interesting elements in it, although it also had some things wrong with it. There was a lot of forcible resettlement in some areas without compensation. Some of the security things they were doing and the idea of having hamlet elections made good sense, and the idea of trying to focus on a hamlet by hamlet approach, and an hamlet development. But they had no resources. None of the popular government programs were reaching the countryside. Moreover, they had a financial system which imposed a pre-audit requirement on the province chiefs. In other words, if you wanted to go out and buy ten sacks of cement to help somebody build a bridge or a dam, you had to get prices from three suppliers, send the prices to Saigon, get the purchase approved and only then could you spend the money even though you had the funds available. Well, it usually took over a month to do this. By the time authorization came back, the price had changed so you couldn't buy what you needed. It was an unbelievable system. The government simply wasn't functioning properly. Most of the agricultural programs were focused on research stations, but nothing was reaching the farmer.

So, out of talking with the Vietnamese and looking at the resources available, we developed a program which supported the strategic hamlet concept. We decided to do this on a province by province basis because the provinces in many instances were so different and their needs were so different. We determined that it was necessary to put an AID provincial representative out into each province. We created a separate office within AID with plenty of independent authority to support rural development in each province in South Vietnam. There was an opportunity to establish a piaster fund into US funds (ten million dollars), which could be used to kick off rural development in support of the strategic hamlet program. We decided the way to make that fund function was for a plan to be developed for each province. There would be a tripartite committee in each province which would decide and approve all expenditures of these funds. The funds would be programmed against certain activities, but there would be a miscellaneous activity account so in case you had a natural disaster of some kind or a plane dropped a bomb and destroyed a school you could rebuild the school and not have to go back to Saigon for approval.

We set up these provincial committees, which were composed of the province chief, the USAID provincial rep and the military advisor. In some cases we were not able to get provincial reps out into the provinces very fast so the military advisor wore both hats. In effect the US had control over these funds and the Vietnamese agreed to it. I went to Diem personally with this program. I said, "This is the way that I think we can really get some effective assistance out there." He agreed with it. The ten million dollar piaster fund was established and used effectively.

Q: What was your impression of Diem at that time?

PHILLIPS: That is a long story. Let me tell you how I came back. I developed this program and presented it to the Vietnamese informally as well as to the Americans and everybody liked it.

The Vietnamese said, "This is wonderful, but you have to come back." I said, "I am not promising to come back." The same thing happened on the American side, they wanted me to come back to run the rural affairs office. The position in AID/Saigon was called Assistant Director for Rural Affairs. I came back to Washington. My father didn't want me to leave because he was getting older. I really got asked to go back in a way that I couldn't refuse. The request came right through Mike Forrestal at the White House. So, I said, "Okay, I will go back and run this program." I went back in September with my wife Barbara, and our two infant children, and we started staffing up. We started sending people out into the countryside.

You asked about Diem. Diem was a very complex person. He was shy, diffident and self-confident at the same time. He had a tremendous intellect, an encyclopedic knowledge of every province in Vietnam and practically every Vietnamese family. If you mentioned somebody and said, "I met this province chief and he seemed to be doing a pretty good job, Mr. President," he would say, "Oh, yes, his grandfather was so-and-so, his father was so-and-so," and he would give you a half hour history of the man's family. So he was something of an academic. He was a passionate Vietnamese patriot, he detested the French and, of course, had resisted the French. He tended to see their hand in things where they probably weren't involved at all. You could accurately describe him as sort of a Vietnamese mandarin type. He had a tremendous amount of energy. You had to have tremendous patience in talking with him because if you brought up, say, the Montagnards and were talking about a certain Montagnard problem you would get a chance to present your idea but then he would say, "That's good but I think that we need to do this because of this," and then you would get maybe a two hour history of the Montagnards in that particular province. It used to be mind numbing for some of the diplomatic reps who had to go over and talk to him because he felt, probably rightly so, that most Americans didn't understand much of anything about Vietnam and therefore he felt obliged to explain it at tremendous lengths. I think for a lot of Americans it became very mind numbing. I was younger, knew a fair amount about Vietnam and something about his personality so I just let him go on until we got through whatever was on his mind, and if there was something I wanted to bring up I would do so.

I think he, despite the influence of his brother Nhu who was afflicted with terminal paranoia, trusted us and what we were trying to do because, even close to the end he seemed to retain these feelings. This was in 1963 after it was reported that I had been critical of what the Diem government was doing back in Washington. Diem still seemed to have confidence in what we were trying to do with the Strategic Hamlet Program. One example of that is that we started producing reports on the program beginning in May 1963. We called it a summary report of the situation in the provinces. It was a status report of the Strategic Hamlet Program. We did this report in English and in French in order to give Diem a copy he could read. We didn't pull many punches and he took it. The general American idea was that you couldn't go in and tell Diem anything critical. Well, that was not true, it depended on how you told him something. Whether it was constructive criticism or not.

There was an incident that occurred in the spring of 1963. I had gone to look at this one province because our provincial rep had reported to me that the province chief was doing some things that he thought were wrong. The province chief had developed a theory that the way to protect his province and his hamlets was to get everybody out to build these huge mud walls stretching from

hamlet to hamlet. There was no way that you could patrol these walls. Furthermore it involved a tremendous amount of "voluntary" labor on the part of the local population. So I went to inspect these things. Hell, I had been in Vietnam long enough to know that the people were not happy with this. I could detect disgruntlement among some of the local officials as well. Nobody would say anything overtly but you could tell that this was not a happy situation. So, I came back and wrote up a report about it. I sent a copy of the report to AID Mission Director, Joe Brent and a copy to Colonel Hoangtun Lac, who was chief of staff of the hamlet program. Apparently it produced a hell of an explosion on the Vietnamese government side, I heard afterwards. My report went down to the province chief. The province chief claimed that I had come down there and was interfering with his program and telling him what to do. He tried to make Vietnamese nationalism an issue. He denied that he was building the walls. Well, they had a big meeting and they called him up to this meeting. Lac was very clever. He had gotten a Vietnamese Air Force to take some aerial photographs of the province. When the province chief denied he was building these long walls, Lac just pulled out the aerial photographs and that guy was ordered to stop the walls that day. Subsequently he was removed. And he had been a favorite of Nhu and Diem. I don't know what this tells you about Diem, but the notion that he was impervious to advice or impervious to ideas, is not true.

You have to understand that we were working in a very constructive context. We were able to get things started that the Vietnamese, themselves, didn't believe could be done. When we started a pilot program in central Vietnam of teaching Vietnamese families how to raise a new breed of pig that grew about three times as fast we were changing about ten centuries of practice in raising pigs. We had them building pig pens. We had them inoculating the pigs. We had Vietnamese farmers doing all kinds of things that they had never done before. The guy who was in charge of this -- we had one Chinese guy from Taiwan and a young IVS (International Volunteer Service) guy named Harvey Neese working in it. They started out working with poor families. They didn't go out and pick a capable farmer, they picked the poorest families they could find. Once everybody else saw this was successful, the demand went sky high. So, we started out with the idea that we were going to have 500 families raising pigs but it was so wildly successful that Diem said, "We have to increase this to 15,000 families." Everybody said it was impossible except Bert (Fraleigh), Harvey (Neese) and one guy in the agriculture ministry and the people in central Vietnam who said, "If you can get us the pigs, we can do it." And we did it. In about three or four months we reached 15,000 families. All of a sudden people who never had any cash in their pockets for generations were going to market with pigs and starting to build better houses for themselves. This was the kind of stuff that we were doing. That put what we were doing in a very, very positive context. So I think the relationships that we enjoyed and our ability to work and our ability to have some influence over what the Vietnamese were doing, and coincidentally to try to get rid of dishonest province chiefs and get better province chiefs, was becoming successful. But the whole thing came a cropper because of the political difficulties stemming from the Buddhist crisis which spiraled out of control, and you know the rest of the history.

Q: Were you trying to get Diem and Nhu out into the field?

PHILLIPS: Early on (in 1954-56) with some personal persuasion by Ed Lansdale, Diem got out into the countryside a lot more. One of the things that put a crimp into that was that when he

went up to the highlands in about 1959, some guy tried to assassinate him. This incident generated concern for his security and restricted his movements. He didn't like it. And then the visits were openly formal. The Vietnamese, like Chinese, are much more formal people than say Filipinos, so they don't go easily into a democratic political mode that we find more natural. I went with Diem on a couple of trips, but the whole thing was too organized, too cut and dried, much too formal. There wasn't enough outreach, in part because the province chiefs were scared of making a mistake and would get everything over organized so that no mistakes would be made.

Q: What about the American representatives out on the provincial level? You are trying to push something that is not something that would come naturally to either the civilian or military type of program. Where did you get your people?

PHILLIPS: The people came from a variety of backgrounds. Some of them were in the AID mission and volunteered. Some heard about what we were doing and were doing other things. There was a guy by the name of Dave Hudson who was a news stringer for NBC. He came in and volunteered saying he wanted to work. I asked what he wanted to do and he said, "I want to go to the toughest province you got." I said, "Okay, great. You are going to Ca Mau." We took people like that. We produced Provincial Representative's Guide, a compendium of the programs we had, some inspirational pieces about what counterinsurgency was all about, what we were trying to do in Vietnam. It had a brief piece that Diem had written earlier in his career about democracy in the villages in Vietnam and this sort of stuff to try to orient our people in terms of what was the purpose of our being there, what were we trying to achieve in helping the Vietnamese. And then we said, "Look, you just go out there and listen to the province chief and this is the program and these are his problems, and we will help you." I had four more senior guys as regional representatives who circulated around their regions acting as backstops and problem solvers. Then I would go out to the provinces, or Bert would go out. There was a constant back and forth in terms of how do you deal with this situation and that situation. Of course, it was great where you had good province chiefs and not too good where you didn't. We tried to move some people around where they could function more effectively. We put some good people in where the province chiefs were not too good to try to help them. It was a mix and match situation. I recruited three guys who had worked for Tom Dooley in Laos. I had one young guy who had been in the army, was part Hawaiian, had worked in the cane fields in Hawaii and knew how to get along with Asians. We wanted people who could understand Asians and would feel at home in Asia. I picked up about eight IVS guys, young college graduates who were already in Vietnam. They had learned Vietnamese and were all agricultural graduates mainly from the mid-west, who had come out and had started working with the Vietnamese helping to improve agricultural techniques. They were on contract to AID. I talked to them, Bert talked to them and about seven or eight volunteered to come over and work for us. I sent them to the provinces. I had guys out in the provinces who were 22, 23 years old and had never run anything in their lives before. Most of them were absolutely splendid because they would listen, they would respond to problems and the province chiefs understood that they were conduits through which they could get support and assistance. They developed good working relationships with most of the province chiefs. And they understood the agricultural programs we were trying to carry out, so they were very good.

Q: Did you have any Foreign Service officers?

PHILLIPS: Yes, I had two Foreign Service officers who had been trained in Vietnamese and this was part of their training, to come and work for us. One of them was Dick Holbrooke and the other was Vlad Lehovich.

Q: Holbrooke is now Assistant Secretary for European Affairs.

PHILLIPS: Yes, that is right. He was also Assistant Secretary for Asian Affairs. As I said, we had a very wide variety of people.

Q: What about the American military? How did you find them?

PHILLIPS: I found a lot of understanding at the provincial level. These were captains and majors who were relatively young guys. They were listening to the Vietnamese and very quickly acquiring the perspective of what were the real problems from the province chief's point of view. So, to them we were a godsend because it was obvious that this was not just a military situation. To begin with, if you were sitting there as advisor to the province chief, you commanded very scant military resources. You depended on regular Vietnamese Army forces or the Corp's level which was supposed to protect you.

Q: We are talking about a period when American forces weren't many.

PHILLIPS: We had no American forces, we had advisors. We had advisors at battalion, regiment and Corps level.

Q: Of the Vietnamese army?

PHILLIPS: To the Vietnamese army. And then we had advisors to the province chiefs and most of the province chiefs at that point were military officers because you had an insurgency problem in practically every province.

Of course there were some military who didn't get it. Who were just so rigid in their thinking that they couldn't really cope with the role. We had problems at the Corps and Division level getting understanding. There were two parts to the military structure, there was MACV, which was the military advisory command which had J2, J3, J4 staffs -- this was kind of a super level. Underneath, there was the Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG). The structure stayed that way until eventually MAAG was combined into MACV. But then, the advisors who were out with the CORDS and provinces came under MAAG. But, within MAAG there was a separation of structure too. There was a structure that supported the guys out in the provinces and that was the one that we worked with most intimately. There was a guy named Colonel Carl Schaad who was responsible to MAAG aspect of the Strategic Hamlet program. He is here (at McLean) and you might want to interview him and get the other side of this thing. They were very responsive. They were involved in the day-to-day stuff that we were involved in. There was a coordinating group headed up by Bill Trueheart, the deputy chief of mission, and that included Schaad, myself and a couple of other agency representatives. We met regularly and discussed

programs...what was the military doing; what were we doing...and tried to coordinate our efforts. There were a lot of things that the military were doing which involved US Air Force bombing and some of the advice given to the regular Vietnamese army which never fitted in with what was called the pacification program.

Q: *Were you involved in the Phoenix program?*

PHILLIPS: No.

Q: *Did you have a problem being an alumnus of the CIA with the station or other people?*

PHILLIPS: What we were doing was so open that I don't think there was much of an undertow of suspicion on the part of other Americans. At one point, because I had been in the Agency, when word got back that I had been in this National Security Council meeting and that I had said we were not winning the war in the Delta and had in effect taken on the US defense establishment, word got back on the Vietnamese side and I guess reached Nhu that somehow I was attacking the Vietnamese government and what they were doing. I don't know how all that leaked back. I had spoken in this meeting about the fact that Nhu was a real liability and somehow should be gotten out of the country. This was after the raid on the pagodas. When I got back, he (Nhu) started having articles published in the newspaper he controlled (Saigon Times) that I was going to replace John Richardson as the head of the CIA station. But that was his paranoia. I don't know what he thought he was doing. I wrote Diem a letter about the articles and said that they were not true and that I would like to come talk to him about them. He gave me an interview and I went and complained about them. I said that they were wrong and explained what I had said and what had happened. He took it, and apologized for his brother.

Q: *When was this NSC meeting?*

PHILLIPS: This was in 1963 when the Buddhists crisis really got bad. This was when Lodge came out and replaced Nolting. Lodge came right after the raids on the pagodas. The US was really shocked by this. There was this famous cable that came out and gave Lodge direction, as Lodge interpreted it, that we sponsor a coup against Diem. A coup cranked up, but then it died because the Vietnamese generals were not ready to move. Then Kennedy sent Joe Mendenhall from State and General Brut Krulak from the Marine Corps, who was on McNamara's personal staff, to do a survey of what was going on. They came back and I came back at the same time, not because of this meeting, but because my father was very ill, in fact he was dying. I came back to see him and talk to my mother about what to do. Coincidentally, I was corralled by Mike Foresthal and Roger Hilsman into going to this NSC meeting. I didn't know all the internecine struggles that were going on in Washington. I had some inkling that there was a whole dispute about what to do about Diem, etc. I understood from the Vietnamese end of the thing that the government and Diem's regime was in very, very deep trouble, that there was going to be a political change or a coup one way or another, that Nhu had some ambitions about pulling a coup of his own, that even the most loyal supporters of Diem were getting very skittish about what was happening. The whole thing was coming unglued. So I was pushed front and center after Krulak gave his report and after Mendenhall gave his.

Kennedy said, "Did you two guys go to the same country?" It wasn't just that Krulak had gone to the Delta and Mendenhall had gone to Central Vietnam. Mendenhall was talking about the politics. He had been anti-Diem for a long, long time. He had talked to a lot of dissidents. So all that came out. Krulak went down to the Delta and got a bunch of military briefings. I had gone to one of those damn briefings up in Bien Hoa just north of Saigon where they carried out an operation in the Iron Triangle in which the Vietnamese Army had run a bunch of tanks over the place and hadn't encountered anything. Nothing came out of this operation. I happened to go to this meeting at which the division advisor, Colonel Miller, gave this incredible briefing to Krulak about how it was a great victory. Afterwards I went up to Miller, because I knew him, and said, "How the hell can you tell a guy like Krulak what you just told him? You know that is not true." He said, "Well, that is the way they wanted it presented."

The other thing that happened to me just before I came back was I got a call from our provincial advisor down in Long An, a province just south of Saigon, that strategic hamlets were being destroyed. The Viet Cong were coming into a lot of the hamlets at night, getting the people to take down all of the barbed wire security fences, take the roofs off their houses and the Vietnamese Army wasn't providing any security at all. So, I went there to find out what was going on. I sat down with the advisor, and Earl Long, who was our rep. They briefed me. More than a hundred hamlets had been invaded by the VC. I asked what was the problem. They said, "Well, the troops are in the barracks because everybody is afraid of a coup so nobody is providing any security. As a result, the hamlet program is being destroyed here."

I had just come out of that context, and here I was in this NSC meeting and Mendenhall is talking about the problems in Central Vietnam and about the political side and Krulak is saying, "I don't know about that, but we are winning handily, particularly in the Delta." And I had just been in the Delta.

So, I was presented by Mike Forrestal. Kennedy knew who I was. I started to talk about what I thought was going on in Vietnam. I thought to myself just before the meeting that if I had a chance to speak I would tell the President everything I knew as honestly as I could about what was going on. So I talked about the political situation, about Nhu, about the problems with the government. I felt we had to get Nhu out of Vietnam and had to disassociate ourselves from Nhu. If we could, we should isolate Nhu, I said, and I offered some ideas about that. But first, I took on Krulak. I said at the beginning, "I'm sorry to tell you Mr. President, but we are not winning the war, particularly in the Delta." And then I talked about Long An.

Well, this created an uproar. The whole time I was talking McNamara was sitting there beside the President shaking his head. Then I got into a verbal match with Krulak for a while and argued about the situation. He said, "You don't know anything about the military. This is a war." I said, "This is a political war and we are losing it." This was the kind of argument that went on. At the end Kennedy asked me if I had any recommendations. I said that I would recommend that he send General Lansdale back to Vietnam as soon as possible. I said, "I don't know if he could salvage the situation or not. If there were a coup he could at least help pull things together. I talked to Ambassador Lodge about it and I think he would favor it. We need somebody who can talk to Diem. That is my recommendation." Kennedy took notes the whole time I was talking. At the end he said, "I want to thank you for what you had to say, particularly for your

recommendation about General Lansdale."

Of course, nothing happened. I saw the thing as a looming disaster. Lodge started using me as one of his eyes and ears because I knew so many Vietnamese. I would go talk to Thoun, who was secretary of defense, he was an old friend. He would confide in me all of his fears and I would write a memorandum and send it to Lodge. Little did I know that a lot of these memorandums were being transmitted back to Washington and people were reading these things and saying, "Look at this. We have to do something about this." I didn't understand the politics of Washington in terms of this contest that was going on between Harriman and elements in State on the one hand and McNamara and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Taylor, on the other. I didn't know the background of that telegram (the "Hilsman telegram"). The situation remained unresolved through a series of NSC meetings. One of the interesting things that occurred was, of course, eventually President Kennedy sent McNamara and Taylor out there again to look into the situation. Taylor confirmed everything that I had said about Long An. In the meantime, the Long An MAAG sector advisor got removed in disgrace because apparently he wasn't suppose to tell me what he did. McNamara was saying, "How come I didn't know all of this?" Then somebody showed him our provincial reports, that I alluded to earlier, and he said, "This is amazing." Apparently as a result of his reading our report he turned to somebody and said, "We have to have a reporting program that tells us these things." This resulted in the development of a system designed to fulfill McNamara's predilection for statistics.

Q: Hamlet evacuation.

PHILLIPS: Yes, exactly. That was an outgrowth. Our reports were about one paragraph long (per province), although some provinces might merit half a page because they were particularly complicated. But they were an evaluation and an assessment, not a statistical anything. We didn't believe that statistics meant anything. Of course, McNamara's focus was entirely on statistics. He thought these reports were really interesting apparently and he apparently didn't realize these reports existed. He wanted to know how come he wasn't getting them. Well, of course, they were just disseminated within the Mission out there to try to keep people informed of what was going on. But they were so different from anything he had seen that I guess he became fascinated with the idea that was where the real information was.

Q: I have had those briefings when I was in Vietnam too. These briefings are rehearsed so you never get a spontaneous briefing. The military is trained to put forth the positive view. This is what we are doing and this is what we are accomplishing. It almost goes against the grain to come up and say we are losing here, we are doing this, we can't get this. You have to see these things in positive terms. It is almost built into the system.

PHILLIPS: Only really good or great military commanders understand that the system is biased this way, and start asking questions. They go out and actually talk to the grunts on the ground. Then they understand. This is like what happened when General Abrams took over from McNamara and TET occurred and mini-TET occurred. He went out and got these still optimistic briefings, told the American commander that it was not a goddamn victory, we got our ass kicked and don't give me this bull shit. If we had Abrams there from the beginning, instead of Westmoreland, I think we would have had Vietnamization a lot earlier.

Q: When you came back to Vietnam after the NSC meeting, how was what you were saying received by the embassy?

PHILLIPS: Well, I think Lodge felt what I said was factual. MACV was in a state of shock because they had been filing all these optimistic reports and then somebody had gone back to say that was not the way it was. They were angry and I was persona non grata with them for a while. In fact, when McNamara and Taylor came out I didn't participate in any of the meetings. I just let all our guys go and speak for themselves. So it certainly affected my relationship with the top military level like Harkine, etc. Harkine came to a party given by Phoebe Trueheart, William Trueheart's wife and a lovely person, and said, "I am going to get that goddamn Rufus Phillips," and she said, "But General, he doesn't work for you."

Q: This National Security meeting took place when?

PHILLIPS: It was August, 1963.

Q: So the clock is ticking. Can you tell your perspective on the events that came in the fall?

PHILLIPS: Yes, I think it was probably one of the most depressing periods of my life. On the one hand it was obvious that the situation could not continue the way it was. In effect the Diem government and Diem and Nhu, which I blame mainly on Nhu, had really lost confidence with their own military and a coup seemed inevitable. The question was, was Nhu going to organize his own coup and kill some of the military or was the military going to organize a coup against Diem. Because I had some friends like Lou Conein, who were very much involved in the coup, I could sort of follow what was going on. It was really distressing because you could see the Vietnamese government falling apart. I knew a number of the military pretty well. One was a key staff person both in the coup and afterwards, General Le Nan Kim, an old personal friend. I knew he was very competent but I didn't think the General knew anything about politics or had any ideas of how to run a government. They knew what they didn't like and there were a lot of things that Nhu had done that they didn't like. Many thought that the strategic hamlet program was really bad. They were against the irregular forces that the CIA had helped finance in Central Vietnam, which were controlled politically by Diem's brother, but in fact were providing very effective security for the hamlets. I saw us heading for a train wreck. It seemed to be out of control. I saw Diem the day before McNamara saw him and it was really to talk about Nhu and about this newspaper business as much as anything. We talked about that and then we talked about the strategic hamlet program. We were still making some progress in the countryside in terms of development effort. But, obviously it was being hurt because the army was paralyzed. Where there were effective local security forces they were able to maintain security, but where there were not, the Viet Cong were beginning to invade a number of hamlets.

Diem looked at me quizzically and said, "Is there going to be a coup against me?" I looked at him and just wanted to cry, and said, "I am afraid so, Mr. President." That was all he said. To this day I am affected by memories of that because after the coup occurred, which was three or four days later, I went to the palace and the two seats that we had been sitting on in this waiting room were riddled with bullet holes. And I had just been there three or four days before.

Q: For the record this was early November when Diem and Nhu were both taken out of the palace and killed.

PHILLIPS: Well, actually they went out by an underground route, took refuge in a church and informed the coup leaders that they were there. The idea was that they were supposed to be taken to the airport and flown out of the country. For some reason, the plane was delayed, we couldn't get a plane there. I don't know why because supposedly that had been all set up. What actually happened apparently was that General Minh (Big Minh) decided to have them killed. This was not a decision of the revolutionary committee. He sent his own man in this armored personnel carrier with personal instructions to kill them. That guy was then subsequently arrested about four months later and assassinated in prison. But, I have talked to General Don (?) and Kim about it. Both of them came to the conclusion that Big Minh was the guy who decided to do this. It was not a decision that he shared with anybody.

Q: Where were you when this happened?

PHILLIPS: I should tell you that in the meantime I had decided to come back home. My father had died in October. So I made a short trip for the funeral and arranged for my family to come back because I had to take over the family business, at least temporarily. I then went back to wind things up and that was when the coup occurred. I returned to Vietnam in late October and the coup occurred in early November and I stayed for about two weeks after that.

So far as the coup itself, I was having lunch with General Stilwell when he got a telephone call that the coup had started. Since my family had left, Lou Conein had asked me to go over and stay with his family because he was concerned about what might happen if there was a coup. So I did. He had gotten a couple of Filipino friends to guard the house. So there were about three or four of us with AR-15 rifles there in case the house got assaulted, because Lou's wife and two small children were there.

Q: You were actually only a couple more weeks in Vietnam, did you see a noticeable affect on the program you had been administering during that time?

PHILLIPS: Oh, yes. There was the new revolutionary committee. I went to talk to them and spent time with Kim and with Bui Diem who was an unofficial advisor to them. I went to see General Big Minh. I was very intent on salvaging what we were doing, and on saving the committee structure. I explained that there were a lot of things wrong with the strategic hamlet program, but they shouldn't disband it. I went to see Vice President Thio and I talked to him about it. I wrote a series of memoranda to these guys. Their initial impulse was to demolish anything that Diem might have been associated with. I said, "I don't care what you call it, call it by another name, but you are going to have to be doing the same thing because the basic program and approach is right." I also talked about the security issue. I said, "You guys have got to come up with a way of providing effective security for these hamlets." Well, they were so preoccupied with the political problems, with establishing their control, with chasing down and throwing in jail former elements of the Diem regime that I could tell the attention span was not all that great. I could get through to Kim, he understood what I was talking about, but everybody

else was preoccupied.

And Lodge, himself, was sort of fascinated by the fact that there was this big revolution which he didn't really understand. I went to see him the day after the coup, after it was known that Diem and Nhu had not only been assassinated but were buried in unmarked graves. I asked him to go talk to the junta to give Diem a decent funeral. I said, "Look, this guy is the first president of Vietnam under the first constitution of Vietnam. They are not just killing a man, they are killing a symbol. He did a lot of good and the Vietnamese people know it and even though he was killed he ought to be given a decent funeral. Otherwise the Catholics are going to be terribly unhappy and we are going to hear from them sooner or later. This is going to be real trouble." Lodge didn't understand any of it. He said, "Well, he is gone, dead and forgotten. You know, the same thing happened to me when I ran against Kennedy and lost the election in Massachusetts, the next day nobody knew who I was." I said, "I am sorry, Mr. Ambassador, this is not Massachusetts, this is Vietnam, this is different." I felt exhausted, sad and not very optimistic because I could see that the military who had taken over really didn't understand politics, and didn't understand how to get out and establish a sense of confidence. I knew that Minh had a charismatic personality but he was not very smart. He really needed somebody to tell him what to do. Lodge decided it was his role to tell Minh what to do, but he had no concept of how to do this in a Vietnamese context. So, they frittered away what psychological opportunity they had and then, of course, they were replaced by General Donh in about six months.

Q: Well, you left pretty much right after that, didn't you?

PHILLIPS: Yes, I left on November 21, 1963. I was en route when Kennedy was assassinated.

Q: Did anyone tap you for your knowledge or insights when you came back?

PHILLIPS: Oh, yes. I continued as an AID consultant without pay for quite a while and then I was a consultant to State. I helped Ambassador Unger when he set up the Coordinating Committee. I participated in all kinds of meetings. Lodge wanted me to come back to Vietnam and run the Rural Affairs program and I engaged in an extended indirect negotiation with him through Mike Dunn, who was his chief assistant. The conditions for my coming back were that I would do so only if Lansdale came too. The reason was, I didn't want to go through another political disaster. I didn't want to go through the situation again where we were developing a really good economic development program, that was tied in with the security effort, was focused on giving the Vietnamese people a stake in something that they might think was worth fighting for, when the whole political core in Saigon was rotten and there was nothing there to inspire anybody to fight for anything. Having gone through it once, I didn't want to go through it again. I said, "We have to help generate a political cause that holds up hope for the Vietnamese people, and there is only one guy that I know that understands this in the Vietnamese context and could help the Vietnamese to bring this about, and that was Lansdale. If he goes out there, I will go, if he doesn't, I won't." After a while those negotiations broke down.

Q: What was Lansdale doing?

PHILLIPS: He had retired at that point. His official retirement day was the day Diem was

assassinated.

Q: Had he been playing any role up to then?

PHILLIPS: Marginal. McNamara had really marginalized him.

Q: They were two different types of people, two different approaches?

PHILLIPS: Yes. You can see that in his book where he gives Ed one line and says that there was nobody who knew anything about Vietnam except Lansdale, but he was a relatively junior officer who was not a "geopolitical expert." That was it. That was McNamara talking about the fact that there were no experts to tell him anything about Vietnam. Ed was a senior officer. He was in charge of special operations in the Pentagon. McNamara gave him 12 minutes when he came in. That was it. That is as much of a comment on McNamara as anything I know of.

Q: During this period when you were advising did you find yourself marginalized too?

PHILLIPS: There were several things that occurred. One was that I was helping a guy named Stoneman, who was the AID guy in charge of backstopping Vietnam, recruiting people for rural affairs, which continued. But Rural Affairs ran into trouble when a guy named Killen was sent out as AID Mission Director. He was one of these people who felt that if he didn't invent it must not be any good. He tried to destroy it, the program, but it survived him. What happened there is another whole chapter. I helped recruit people, participated in meetings and did that sort of thing. I spent time informally with Senator Hubert Humphrey and his staff and after he became vice president he became the sponsor of the idea of getting Lansdale back to Vietnam. I was involved in the planning for that. Even though I was still running my engineering business, I took a month off in 1965 and went out with the Lansdale team and helped them get set up and informally tried to backstop some of what they were doing back here. In 1966 and 1967 I went out to Vietnam every year to try informally to help the Lansdale team, in addition to running the engineering business.

Q: On these trips that you were making back, what were you seeing, and how was the program going?

PHILLIPS: Before I went back in 1965, I had been receiving a lot of correspondence from Bert Fraleigh, who kept me informed as to what the Rural Affairs was doing. Also Colonel Bohannon was keeping me informed. He had been Ed's assistant in the Philippines in the Magsaysay era, and had been in Vietnam helping Ed in the 1954-55 period, but I had hired him on contract to help set up Chieu Hoi, which was a surrender program. The idea was we would model it on the program that Magsaysay had used against the Huks in the Philippines. So, Bo came over in the fall of 1962 and stayed on through 1965. I helped to recruit another guy who had worked for Ed in the Philippines, Mark Huss, who went out to Vietnam at the end of 1964. He became the principal liaison between Komer and the Vietnamese (the same Huang Van Lac that I had worked with earlier), Mark also kept me informed. Lac was the one continuity on the Vietnamese side throughout all the government changes and everything else. So I gained through correspondence a pretty good notion of what was going on. Very quickly in 1964, I began to get

impressions that things were going to hell in the provinces. Security was deteriorating. Then Oanh came in and it didn't get any better. Things were just not going anywhere at all. And, of course, the situation deteriorated militarily, the North Vietnamese were putting in regular units and we started to intervene with regular US forces. By the time I got back in 1965, we had 150,000 troops on the ground and it was becoming an American war.

I had thought somehow the thing could be turned around, but not with the emphasis that was being given to fighting the war as an American war. Vietnamization came too late. It should have been started at the beginning.

Q: *Vietnamization began about 1969, I think.*

PHILLIPS: Yes.

ROBERT J. MACALISTER
International Rescue Committee
City Unspecified, Vietnam (1955)

Robert J. MacAlister was born and raised in the New York City area. He studied history at Bard College. It was at Bard that he became interested in foreign affairs while working at the State Department. In addition, he served in the Peace Corps. He worked in the Ivory Coast, Zaire, Chad, and Senegal. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on August 14, 1995.

MACALISTER: My next job stemmed from a contact I had made in India. Another part of my activity in India involved scheduling American visitors who came under the USIS program. The young ones, who were American youth leaders, would travel around with me in South India. One of these leaders was a fellow named Ernie Howell with whom I am still in touch. In 1955 Ernie was asked by the International Rescue Committee- a refugee assistance agency- to go to Vietnam. This was right after the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and the first refugees were coming down from North Vietnam. This was the end of the Indochina War between the French and the Viet Minh. As a result of the Geneva treaty, you had the seventeenth parallel demarcated between North and South Vietnam.

The International Rescue Committee, among other American PVOs, had decided to go in there and try to do something to help the refugees. So Ernie Howell gave them my name and my wife and I decided to go. The International Rescue Committee is a very interesting refugee assistance agency because it was started by Albert Einstein for refugees, particularly from the Nazis. And we worked with refugees like Willy Brandt, Thomas Mann, the man who wrote the "Song of Bernadette", and Marc Chagall. Traditionally, it specialized in intellectual and political refugees. And so we worked with students and professors and other intellectuals who had come down from the north.

While I was in Vietnam, we had an opportunity to work with a group of young Vietnamese who

had no respect for Bao Dai, who had been the principal Vietnamese leader under the French. However, they did have respect for the Presidency of Ngo Dinh Diem, who was made President of South Vietnam after the Geneva Agreement. These young people had formed an association in providing services for students and intellectuals who had come down from the North. They called it the Popular Culture Association. They offered night courses to people. I guess we'd call it "continuing education".

Q: The reason they left the North was because of the communists?

MACALISTER: Yes. They were anticommunist and had not come back to South Vietnam while the French were still there because they were anti-colonialist. So that was another exposure.

Q: How long were you there?

MACALISTER: We were there about a year and a half which gave me an opportunity to work with some very interesting people including Andrew Biddle Duke, who recently died. He was President of the International Rescue Committee and I got to know him fairly well. Toward the end of our stay in Vietnam, I decided that I wanted to get some graduate work.

Q: Before we go to that., what kind of impressions did you have of the Vietnamese people that you worked with? How would you characterize them?

MACALISTER: Very hard working people. People who had a great respect for education. It was my first direct exposure to refugees. Most of them were Catholic. Whole villages came down. They saw this as an opportunity to escape the Viet Cong, Viet Minh. It was my first opportunity to see first hand a people uprooted from their livelihood and what that means. Of course, I had dealt with it second hand by having college professors who were refugees, mostly from the Nazis.

I was intellectually of the persuasions that Asia and later Africa should have their freedom from colonialism. As noted previously, I had the opportunity to live and work in India right after they had gained freedom, and the opportunity to live and work in South Vietnam right after they had obtained independence. I was struck by the different approach that the French and the British used. I came away much more of an Anglophile in terms of the British approach to colonialism. The British had left a civil service. They had left a court system. There were Indians with training and experience. I remember, when I first came through Saigon on the way back from India, there were Frenchmen at the airport checking the customs. Obviously that wasn't the comparison with India.

In Vietnam I also had the opportunity to work very closely with a Filipino group called Operation Brotherhood. Working with them gave me an opportunity to compare first hand the effect of American colonialism in the Philippines with the French approach. Another important part of my Vietnam experience was the opportunity to be associated with newly independent countries. I was extremely disappointed by the road that Diem took in South Vietnam and the ultimate collapse of a democratic alternative to the Viet Cong.

Q: The road he took was what?

MACALISTER: The road he took was a very authoritarian one. Initially, I dealt quite a bit with Diem because the person who actually went out to open our office in Vietnam, a man named Joseph Buttinger was a member of the board of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). He was a socialist in Austria. A refugee from the Nazis, who had been very active in Austrian politics. One of the great things about the IRC board was that it spanned from very conservative republicans to people like Joseph Buttinger who were democratic-socialists. And they all worked together for something they believed in. But in any event, Buttinger went out first and established a very close rapport with Diem and I had many opportunities to talk with him.

Q: What was your impression of the man?

MACALISTER: In the beginning, it was favorable. The fact that he was a decent man. For a short time Diem had been in exile here in the U.S. He was a very devout Catholic. One of his brothers was a Catholic priest. I thought he really wanted to make a positive difference to his country. In contrast to Nehru, he did not have the human resources, infrastructure, or the tradition that India had even in terms of provincial legislators, free press and an educated core group with which to start. He did not have the tradition of British parliamentary democracy.

You had the whole Mandarin tradition in Vietnam. Diem became more of a recluse, adopted more and more authoritarian methods, and ended up with his brother Ngo Din Nhu. Ngo Din Nhu and his wife became more and more the architects of intrigue and repressions which I think ultimately played into the hands of the Viet Cong. As a result, I saw the great tragedy of people as refugees a second time. People, with whom I had worked in Vietnam and who had already been refugees from the French, who had come back to try and build a democratic country free from French colonialism, had to become refugees again.

JOHN A. MCKESSON, III
Political Officer
Saigon (1955-1957)

John A. McKesson, III was born in New York in 1922. He joined the Foreign Service in 1947 and served in Iceland, Germany, Vietnam, Paris, Senegal, and was ambassador to Gabon. He was interviewed by Arthur Day in 1990.

Q: And then from there you went all the way around the world to Saigon in 1955. You were there for how long?

MCKESSON: For two years. From March '55 to April '57.

Q: The initial period you were there must have still been affected by the French defeat and the effects that that had throughout Indochina. How did that look to you at the time?

MCKESSON: As far as the French were concerned, it was perfectly clear that all during that

period and even after that when I went to Africa, the French still had a concern that somehow we Americans were out to replace them, to take advantage of their having lost the war in Vietnam. This, of course, was something you sensed; they did not openly accuse you of it. I saw a fair amount of my French colleagues in Saigon and they were all very pleasant as far as that went.

The striking thing about my tour there, as far as I was concerned, was the fact that it was practically the only period for many decades that that poor country was in a state of peace as far as the Viet Cong, or Viet Minh as they were then called, was concerned. My wife and I traveled all over, not only in the Saigon area, but we went up to Dalat, Hue, and Cambodia. We went several times to Phnom Penh and saw Angkor Wat, and had no problems at all. The only fighting that was still going on was between the government and several of the sects, the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao, the Binh Xuyen being the main ones.

Q: That took place right in Saigon?

MCKESSON: The only one that took place in Saigon was the Binh Xuyen. The Hoa Hao and Cao Dai were mostly active outside Saigon, not too far away, but outside Saigon itself. The Binh Xuyen, who practically controlled Cholon, which was the neighbor city to Saigon, did put up resistance and when the government moved in at a certain point to try to put an end to it, there was an out and out battle that lasted several days right in Saigon and I remember there was fighting going on right outside my own house. My wife and I shared a house with Frank Meloy, who was head of the political section and who had the other half. The government had set up soldiers with machine guns just outside our front door. We, of course, stayed inside and during that two or three day period we could hear the guns going off. Actually nobody ever came into the house, but the war was brought fairly close to us. The Binh Xuyen were defeated.

Q: I think off and on during those years there was some terrorist activity?

MCKESSON: There were quite a few terrorist activities, several of the sect leaders themselves were arrested and decapitated and others were assassinated, and they themselves assassinated some people. The house where I lived had an interesting history. I remember several years later when I was back in the states reading in Life magazine an account of Vietnam and there was a picture of that house. That is where the Viet Cong, during the Tet offensive, had moved in and actually gotten into the house, and an American colonel who was standing on the stairs had shot a Viet Cong who was attempting to come up. That was the old house I lived in at 5 Rue de Massige, as it was then called and subsequently named Mac Din Chi.

Q: I was interested in your traveling around the country. It had changed so much by the time we all became familiar with it by the press accounts. Did you also go up into North Vietnam?

MCKESSON: Unfortunately not. It was practically impossible, of course, because after the Geneva accords, which were signed shortly after Dien Bien Phu, the North and South were separated. It was supposed to be just a short separation, but it became permanent and the French continued for some time to have an envoy up there in contact with the Vietnamese, but we Americans never did. I think Tom Corcoran made a trip up there once during that period, but it was normally out of bounds for us.

Q: What was your role in the embassy?

MCKESSON: I was assigned to the political section, and was number two in the section, which was relatively small. We had about five or six officers, and when Frank Meloy left, which was about half way through my tour, I became acting chief of the section until I left. When Freddie Reinhardt came as the ambassador, he decided that he wanted to keep me as head of the section. Although I was relatively junior, he did not want a replacement until I left.

Q: That was the period in internal politics when Diem was becoming a major figure.

MCKESSON: Diem was completely running the government. I did have a few chances to meet Diem, but of course at my level I did not have any negotiations with him. I was always impressed by several things. One, he was a man of great strength of character, very strong willed, too strong willed to suit many people, certainly a man of great integrity. I think his brother Nu and his brother's wife, Madam Nu, were notorious for having been involved in shady deals, but Diem himself was a man of strong integrity. He also had such strong views that when he had a chance to expound them to an American, he would carry on at great length. I remember that once when Secretary Dulles was coming to Saigon, he had a meeting with Diem. Diem talked the whole time in a monologue. As Dulles was coming back to the embassy, he was muttering under his breath, "You would think that he would be interested in knowing what I thought."

Q: That was an odd situation for Dulles to be in.

MCKESSON: Yes. Dulles was used to telling everyone what the word was from on high.

Q: Did you deal, in your capacity as political officer, with Vietnamese officials?

MCKESSON: I dealt with officials at all different levels including Ministers, but Diem was the only one that I did not have business contacts with. Contacts with him were pretty much confined to the ambassador, our AID mission director and CIA representative.

Q: What impression did you have of these Vietnamese officials. Were they generally effective?

MCKESSON: Well, they were friendly, well-educated, well-informed, and I thought quite effective. I got to know the mayor of Saigon quite well, Tran Van Lam, and also the number two in the Foreign Office, who was the person I had the most contact with. He was very soft spoken and was effective. They all seemed quite dedicated. You had the impression, which I did not always have later in Africa, that the officials were well-trained for their work and really seriously attempting to do a good job.

Q: What did your work consist of in the main during this rather odd period?

MCKESSON: Mainly keeping informed of what was going on in the political field -- both on the official side, what the government was doing -- and what the sects were up to, what different elements outside the government might be feeling. Even in those days when Diem was in power

and there was more or less a strong, one-man rule, you did have critics and opponents and they would want to come to the embassy and try to convince the embassy that they should be brought in to replace Diem. Actually I would see more of that when I was in Paris.

Q: We had an American general there at that time?

MCKESSON: Yes, General Collins was our senior representative in Saigon when I arrived. He headed the embassy and Randy Kidder was the deputy chief of mission; there was no ambassador. General Collins was in effect the ambassador, but without the title. It was when Collins left that he was replaced by a diplomat and Freddy Reinhardt became our ambassador. Which reminds me, if I may make a correction here, that I mentioned that I took over the political section when Frank Meloy left. That is not correct. Frank Meloy had a replacement, Dick Gatewood, who was briefly in Saigon as chief of the political section, and it was when Gatewood left that I was moved up and stayed on in the job.

Q: I wonder if you had any role in the little incident in the attack on the hotel where the International Truce Commission lived?

MCKESSON: It was very amusing. We got a cable that Perle Mesta was coming with an entourage and it just so happened that both Ambassador Reinhardt and the DCM, Randy Kidder were out of town. Frank Meloy was in charge, and suddenly we got a phone call that people had invaded the hotel and that Perle Mesta was being held prisoner in her room. Frank Meloy decided that something had to be done to rescue her, so he dashed out of the embassy and told me "John, you are in charge of the embassy", and off he went. So I had nothing to do with the rescue, but Frank did get her out of the hotel and to safety. Her main concern seemed to be that somehow we had not taken care of her typewriter. She lost some effects, but we felt that we had nobly saved her life. It was all rather amusing.

ROBERT E. BARBOUR
Language Training
Saigon (1955-1956)

Political Officer
Saigon (1956-1957)

Prinipal Officer
Hue (1957-1958)

Robert E. Barbour was born in Ohio in 1927 and educated at the University of Tennessee and George Washington University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1949. His career included posts in Basra, Tokyo, Saigon, Hue, Paris, Rome and Madrid and in 1984 he was named ambassador to Surinam. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: You were the first Vietnamese language officer?

BARBOUR: Yes.

Q: *I don't imagine at the time that you thought you might be the beginning of a whole wave of people.*

BARBOUR: No. It was fun; I had about six months here and then another three months on my own in Saigon. The way the language students had done it in Japan.

Q: *You said two languages. What was the other one?*

BARBOUR: The other one that was offered later on and declined on my behalf before I knew it, was Thai.

Q: *How did you find the language?*

BARBOUR: Extremely difficult. We spent our first thirty days or six weeks doing nothing but singing tones, there were three of us in the class. And we sang tones with our southern instructors, that is all, the first month before we put anything together. The vowels are as difficult as the tones. You have to develop a totally different way of thinking.

Q: *I took just about two weeks of Vietnamese as an introduction and I found it absolutely impossible. I couldn't tell the difference between words with different tones.*

BARBOUR: We transmit emotions by tones, they transmit meanings.

Q: *Could we talk a little about your activities as a trainee and the situation in Saigon when you arrived there as a trainee?*

BARBOUR: My wife and I arrived in Saigon on double ten, 1955, after a twenty-three day ship trip from the United States. This was after the Geneva Conference. In any case, South Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam, was a new country and I was in a new field. As for the language study aspects, I tried to follow the pattern I had seen in Japan for the language students there. There was an organized school and an organized program. We had neither in Saigon, but I had no duties in the Embassy. It was understood that I would not work in the Embassy. I had money for tutors; the USIS people helped me find some, I interviewed them and established a regular regime of classes with tutors and then spent a number of hours each week on my own, wandering around in Saigon and, whenever I chose, outside. It was a quiet period, probably the beginning of the best period in Vietnam's life. Someone once referred to it as the golden age; anyway you could do anything you wanted, go anyplace by any means. They had public transportation, trains down to the south. I took a train once down to Can Tho, found a place to stay, wandered around town, struck up a conversation with some army officers. This was the sort of thing I thought one was to do, wander around Saigon. It was fun and added to that was the regular course of studies with my tutors, both spoken and written. That lasted about two months and then the Ambassador asked if we would like to take up residence in his house in Da Lat, which was up in the

highlands.

Q: *Sort of the Switzerland of Vietnam.*

BARBOUR: Exactly. And during the period of Bao Dai, the Emperor, that was his summer capital. The United States owned up there a large, Charles Adams type, Victorian mansion on a hillside.

Q: *Who was the ambassador?*

BARBOUR: Frederick Reinhardt, Fritz Reinhardt. Since he and his family wanted to go up for Christmas, they wanted someone to go up and get the house not so much cleaned as organized. There was a permanent staff of servants and there were all kinds of problems. Needless to say we said we would do that service and off we went. The missionaries helped me find some tutors and I reembarked on a program of regular study, in very pleasant circumstances. All that time in Saigon my wife and I had been living in Room 333 at the Majestic Hotel. At the end of that three months of formal study, we applied for and were authorized to take a regional study tour. So we went off, the two of us, to Singapore, up through Singapore to Malacca, Bangkok and back. Shortly after we arrived back the Department sent me off to be an observer to a university sponsored regional studies program in Rangoon. That was the extent of my studies program. I started to work in the Embassy in January, 1956.

The situation in Vietnam: it was the dawn of a new era for us; there was real enthusiasm of various kinds. The country was in the process of creating its new institutions; it was writing a constitution, it was creating a parliament, it was preparing to elect a chief of state. We were optimistic, enthusiastic. We were convinced the country had economic potential if we could develop the rice export industry. Needless to say, underlying it all, was the fact that we were the non-colonialists. The French had tried to deal with the country as a colony and had harvested the inevitable fruits--failure, disgrace. We were democrats, we were going to show this country; we were going to teach this country democracy, one way or another we were going to teach it democracy; it was going to be democratic and it was going to be a success. It was a period of that kind of attitude. It was genuine; we really thought we had a chance of turning this little country into a prosperous democracy.

Q: *What were you doing at the Embassy?*

BARBOUR: I moved into the Embassy as the junior officer in the political section, the only one who could speak or read or write Vietnamese. I was sort of given political grunt work. We got a copy of the constitution and I translated it. I read the newspapers and did a little press summary for the Ambassador every morning. I would get out and talk to people. One of the first things I wrote was a series of dispatches on the developing election campaign. That sort of thing--basic political reporting.

Q: *How much interest was there back in Washington?*

BARBOUR: I personally never got any feedback, but I got a lot of encouragement from my

bosses. The Ambassador, a professional, his deputy and the head of the political section and his deputy were all very supportive and encouraging.

Q: *Who were they?*

BARBOUR: Fritz Reinhardt was the Ambassador, Dan Anderson was the Deputy Chief of Mission, Frank Malloy was the head of the political section and his deputy was John McKesson. Anything I wanted to do they thought was fine, they would be glad to have. They would steer me, give me guidance which I badly needed. John McKesson, in particular, was an outstanding writer; he had a very graceful flowing style, could accomplish a lot with few words; he was a profound and beneficial influence.

Q: *What was our view of the government? Diem was...*

BARBOUR: Diem was to be the hero. I am sure the Ambassador had no illusions about problems and attitudes, things like that, but we were optimistic. I remember in particular, because it was published the other day, writing a dispatch about the electoral setup, how I was convinced that it was heavily rigged, heavily loaded in every way, institutionally, legally, etc., in favor of the chosen parties and individuals, and said so. I remember having to be careful about how I said it. The Ambassador, all the people I mentioned, did not impose any kind of censorship, but on the other hand they had their instructions and they didn't want to sow discouragement. So I had to be careful about how I wrote this particular dispatch.

Q: *What about the timing? Was Magsaysay of the Philippines going strong or had he recently died? I was wondering if there was a correlation between these events?*

BARBOUR: I think he was dead by then but there was a correlation in more ways than you realize. We had with us General Lansdale who considered that he had made Magsaysay. General Lansdale was very present and had his own little operation, I guess. Even to this day I am not sure what it was; had with him a number of scholars and academicians and people like that. I remember one Sunday my wife and I invited to go with us on a picnic that the Vietnamese-American Association had organized a Filipino jurist who was living in the hotel. He was working on the constitution and we had become friendly with him, so we invited him to go and off we went. The following week, I don't remember the details, I was told that General Lansdale didn't like the fact that I had invited Judge So-and-so to go off with us and would I please not pursue that relationship. My attitude toward that was that General Lansdale can do his thing and what I do socially is my business. That is the way it was left.

Q: *Was there any other feeling about Lansdale's operation by the political section?*

BARBOUR: In retrospect I suppose he was trying to make Diem like Magsaysay, make him honest and develop him and get him all kinds of apparatus to extend his authority in the right kind of way. I guess, I am not sure. Yes, General Lansdale's operation was viewed with something close to distaste because he wanted to be alone, he wanted his autonomy to do whatever he wanted to do--I suppose the way he operated in the Philippines. They were plugged into the station, but how we were not quite sure. I didn't really care.

Q: *By station you mean the CIA?*

BARBOUR: Yes, the CIA station.

Q: *Was there the feeling at the time, that there were wheels within wheels; that we were encouraged by the way Vietnam was going but at the same time we were developing a client state?*

BARBOUR: That came a little bit later; certainly if there was sensitivity to it it was not viewed as a concern. It might even go so far as to say that a client state would insure its success. You had General Lansdale's operation; you had Michigan State University which was there under contract to AID and also helping them to write a constitution, civil institutions, under a man named Dr. Fishel. They had their own way of doing things, they were less--I don't want to use the word estranged--distant from the Embassy, but they had their separate operation. So you had Lansdale's operation, this particular operation and a large and growing USOM operations mission, and a small military assistance advisory group--it was small, limited by the terms of the Geneva accords.

Q: *Fifty-five observers, or something. I guess I don't know how many.*

BARBOUR: I forget the number, could it have been three hundred? Under General O'Daniel.

Q: *Was there any insurgency going on?*

BARBOUR: At that time, no. The central authority in Saigon was principally concerned with establishing its writ throughout South Vietnam, and in the first instance that meant against Bao Dai, the Emperor, resident in France but wanting to come back. There was a plebiscite shortly after we arrived as a result of which he ceased to be a factor. It was obviously heavily rigged, but be that as it may. Then you had some insurgencies, local South Vietnamese warlords who had probably been encouraged and tolerated by the French, who wanted to maintain their fiefdoms, including armed fiefdoms--the right to stop traffic on the road and collect tolls and things like that. There were, I think, two of those which had to be put down, and were. Everybody thought putting them down was a good thing; we talked about our Shay's Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion. Then came the extension of civil institutions and authority.

Q: *How about the French? Did they play dog in the manger?*

BARBOUR: No, the French moved out, probably happily. The last troops, the Foreign Legion, departed in April of 1956, departed proudly. I do not recall any of that on the part of the French. There was a French Embassy and a French Ambassador and I am sure that there must have been a good deal more than I saw, but I do not recall any French interference from then on. They were probably delighted to be out of the place, this was the Fourth Republic in France and it was well shed of Indochina. But nonetheless, as I mentioned, you had the signs of authoritarianism in the electoral laws, you saw it in the constitution, which I remember because I told you I translated the first version we got. Everything was hedged by "in accordance with the law." "There shall be

complete freedom of the press, in accordance with the law." Everything had that qualification with it. We wrestled a lot of the time with the concept of "personalism," which was a mystical, Catholic origin, Buddhist influenced philosophy of the President's brother. No one was quite sure what it meant but it became the official ideology. Then there was the President's sister who was a pain.

Q: *Madame Nhu. She was the wife of the President's brother.*

BARBOUR: I beg your pardon, the President's sister-in-law. A pain, but not a major factor.

Q: *How about the President's brother?*

BARBOUR: That was Nhu; another brother lived up in Hue, was a mandarin, a regional autocrat.

Q: *The real problem later was the President's brother and sister-in-law. How did we see them at that time?*

BARBOUR: As pests. Troublesome, interfering. We didn't realize at first the enormity of the problem that they were to become. Both of them were seen as unhelpful influences. Diem himself was very difficult to deal with, for one thing he was so garrulous. He would talk and talk and talk; every American visitor who went there got a lecture of some kind. I know the Ambassador would go for long meetings with him and come back and try to piece out what it was that he had actually accomplished. I went to take notes once with a Senatorial delegation. I wrote pages and pages and pages of notes and when it came time to do the memcon I had to completely rearrange the meeting to make any sense out of it. I think everyone had that problem with him. Secondly, he was not honest with us. Whether he would lie, I don't know, but certainly he would conceal, not deliver, have his ministries hold back information. People in the government told us many things that were simply not true, knowing they were not true; it was much easier to tell us something good that was not true than something bad that was. And they didn't like us prying, trying to find out what was going on.

Q: *What about corruption?*

BARBOUR: Corruption certainly was endemic. We were perhaps less sensitive to it at the very beginning than we became later on. There were many, many rumors of corruption and so we were all convinced it was there, but it was more, at first at least, intellectual corruption, philosophical corruption. The Nhuses were obviously getting money though I don't think we were able to identify how. By philosophical and intellectual corruption I mean *l'état, c'est moi*; whatever is good for the country me is good for me, whatever is good for me is good for the country; whatever I do is *ipso facto* beneficial. That is, of course, what led to awful corruption later on in all forms because it spread down to all levels of government. But that came later on.

Q: *How about our view of events in North Vietnam?*

BARBOUR: I think you could say that we had no illusions as to what was going on in North

Vietnam, the only illusion we had was that they would respect the Geneva agreement. Illusion and hope; they said they would, they said they were. Of course we know they never had any intention of doing so. As far as what they were doing in Hanoi it was obvious. There was also the institution of the ICC, the International Control Commission, which was the treaty supervision body established by the Geneva accords with an Indian chairman, a Polish component and a Canadian component. They became my reporting responsibility later on so I spent a lot of time with them as well as with the Vietnamese who were in liaison with them. The Canadians would tell us, and some of the Indians, about what was happening in North Vietnam. There was no question of what they were doing.

Q: *We may then move on to your next assignment.*

BARBOUR: Well, technically my next assignment was in Hue. My wife and I drove up there in the summer of 1957 and opened a consulate. Birth pains at the end of the line in the truest sense. We opened a little consulate; I had one administrative assistant, there was also a USIS cultural center with an American and his wife, sixteen MAAG officers, Military Assistance and Advisory Group, and an American nurse supplied by the Economic Assistance Program. It was a very interesting year.

Q: *Where were you? On the Perfume River?*

BARBOUR: Oh yes. Again, at that time there were no restrictions on what you could do or where you could go. There was a French consul in what was still called Tourainne whom we knew quite well and we used to drive down and have dinner with them, or take the train down, have dinner with them and drive back at night. We could go hunting, which we did from time to time, at night--walk all night through the hills. Then I went on a trip with a couple of MAAG officers up into the plateau, on foot and dugout; up the river, almost to the Lao border and back through the valleys and down again. I was gone almost a week. Life in Hue was very different from life in Saigon and I did a lot more writing of basic things about what was going on up there.

Q: *Was there a difference? Here was Hue, the former capital of united Vietnam; was there a different political atmosphere? Also, how was Diem's presence in Saigon impacting on this part of the country?*

BARBOUR: A different psychological and cultural atmosphere. Diem was from Hue, his mother lived there when we arrived. His brother lived there; his brother was the local mandarin, and mandarin in the very classic Chinese sense almost; unmarried, shy, retiring, said to be an intellectual, who ran that part of the country, which was central Vietnam, absolutely. It was his fief, it really was. He controlled the entire government authority up there. There is a contradiction in being shy and reclusive and hard to see and running everything, but he did. His power was unseen but very present; of course it was derived from his brother. Hue was referred to as the ancient capital of Vietnam; ancient means the beginning of the nineteenth century. The oldest building up there isn't as old as the White House. But it was the traditional capital for about a hundred years. It is modeled on Peking, they even have the inner part called the "Great Within" as in Peking; the royal palace, the forbidden part, etc. It still saw itself as the repository of Vietnamese culture. The accent is different, the food is different, the attitudes are much more

intellectual and detached, there are more monasteries around Hue, the royal tombs are up there. We were closer to Hanoi than we were to Saigon.

Q: What was the relation of the Vietnamese there with the Montagnards? Later we recruited the Montagnards in large numbers but there always seemed to be this problem between them and the plains dwellers.

BARBOUR: The Vietnamese certainly, I don't know if oppressed them is the right term, exploited them. As the highlands became targets of development and exploitation and the Vietnamese moved up there voluntarily they began to conflict with the Montagnards whose lands they were. The Montagnards were much happier with us, I think, than with the Vietnamese who were very aggressive. Sihanouk used to say that if there had been no French in the middle of the nineteenth century there would be no Cambodia. Yes, there were conflicts and the Vietnamese in their cultural arrogance looked down on them and exploited them and ordered them around. I remember once we were spending the night in a Montagnard village and as we were sitting around I noticed a picture of Diem up on the wall. I asked our host, "Who is that man?" He said, "I don't know." There was a Vietnamese with us who got very exercised and said, "Yes you do know who that is."

Q: Did you ever get to see Diem's brother?

BARBOUR: Yes, I had one meeting with him shortly before I left, unfortunately; I hadn't wanted to press him but use it as a social occasion to build upon later. I think I was the only American who ever saw him. We had a nice social chat about general problems up there and about American aid, he had some pet projects he hoped we would help him with. He had some criticisms of American aid which, as I recall, were factually incorrect and improperly premised. Just a few days before we were leaving we were being inspected and I had the inspector in my office and there came some messengers from the "councilor," as he was called. In they came with a pole over their head with an enormous gaur head. A gaur is a wild cow, I think, a jungle cow, an enormous beast. Here was the stuffed head of this gaur slung on the pole. That was my farewell present from the councilor.

Q: How did the Embassy use you? You already had your ties there.

BARBOUR: We were a listening post to extend the reportorial reach of the Embassy, which we did. I remember one day sitting in my office wondering what I would do with my time that day. I said to myself, "I know." I got in my car and drove down to the lagoon, it was a kind of estuary, hired a boat and went across to the other side and spent the day walking around through a couple of villages there. Then went back and wrote what I thought was a wonderful report on what life was like over there, what people were talking about and how the economy was functioning or not functioning.

Q: Did you get up to the town right on the DMZ?

BARBOUR: Yes. That was Quang Tri province; in fact we ended our hike, our walking tour, right along the DMZ in Quang Tri. Went up there several times but could never go in; I used to

go up and see the province chief from time to time, went up to see some maneuvers a couple of times, paid visits. It was routinely covered from the consulate. We would go up and have dinner with the ICC from time to time.

Q: There were no cross-border problems at that time?

BARBOUR: There was no cross-border movement to speak of, except for the ICC. It was virtually impossible, except for a small number of farmers, to move back and forth.

ROBERT LOCHNER
Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Saigon (1955-1958)

Robert Lochner was born in New York in 1918 and educated at the University of Chicago. His career with USIA included posts in Frankfurt, Saigon, Berlin and Bern. He was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1991.

Q: Can you speak a little bit about the Saigon period? The French were still in control weren't they or had Dien Bien Phu come just before that?

LOCHNER: I got to Saigon in September, 1955. The division of the country, of course, had happened at Geneva in 1954. But the place had just simmered down very shortly before I got there. President Diem had defeated the river pirates, the Binh Xuyen, and the army of the Cao Dai. So outwardly things seemed pretty quiet in Vietnam. I will say first, that in my two years there, because it was a hardship post--I confess that while it was a fascinating experience I was happy to leave after two years--I, of course, never felt remotely as useful as I felt in Germany with my being bilingual and with my background. I am to this day a strong believer in regional specialization. I felt totally out of place. At best, shall we say, the last half year I felt halfway useful. What added to this feeling was that there was so abominably little language talent in the USIS operation. It was a gigantic operation. I had 32 other Americans and 200 Vietnamese. We, in effect, were the information ministry for the new Diem government. As everyone knows, the French left behind no trained personnel in almost any field. The few, so-called information specialists the new government had were former communists who had defected for whatever reason and joined the new Diem government. So they were utterly helpless. We prepared the weekly newsreel for the movie theaters. We did most of their radio broadcasting. We did all the pamphlets. We had mobile theater groups moving around the country with some kind of political message. So, in essence, we were the Vietnamese information ministry.

Now among the 31 other Americans on my staff, there was one who spoke Vietnamese. Typically, he had grown up in China as a son of a missionary with fluent Chinese. He had two years in Hanoi before the division of the country, during which, being a good linguist he had picked up Vietnamese which is apparently sufficiently related to Chinese so that if you speak one you can learn the other. John Donnell was his name. I once said only half in jest to my ambassador, "You know you could really send me and the 30 other Americans home because

this one guy speaking Vietnamese is so much more effective than all of us put together." If we wanted anything from the Vietnamese Information Ministry, we would send John Donnell and they would roll all over themselves with delight to have an American come and speak fluent Vietnamese to them. And here is the sad end of the story of John Donnell. He'd had two years in Hanoi. After the two years in Saigon he was assigned another two years in Saigon--and it was a hardship post where everybody else, including myself, served two years only. At the end of six years, he asked for a nice post like Paris, because he spoke fluent French, too. What happened? They assigned him to Vientiane which was the end of the line. People would come for rest and recreation to Saigon from Vientiane. So what happened? He resigned from the Foreign Service. That is how we treated the one Vietnamese specialist after six years. It still outrages me today to lose such a good man.

So, among the other USIS Americans, there were only two besides myself who spoke French. The others, of course, spoke neither French nor Vietnamese. At that time all educated Vietnamese had gone to French schools and universities, so at least with my French I could certainly communicate with the Information Minister and people like that. But the others didn't have any language capacity at all. I thought that was one of the reasons we were not more effective than we could have been. To deviate for a moment, in my opinion much of the later catastrophe of our involvement in Vietnam was in part due to language difficulty. When you saw the unqualified Vietnamese who acted as translators you could tear your hair out. You could just see how many misunderstandings arose simply due to language difficulties.

Q: You partly answered the question I was going to ask you. If nobody on the American side spoke adequate Vietnamese, how in the world did you get your stuff translated? If you did get it translated how did you know it was done correctly?

LOCHNER: Precisely. We did have some Vietnamese staffers whose English appeared very good. But, of course, outside of John Donnell, there was nobody ever to control the final product. He didn't have time to read every pamphlet.

I would say this much for the whole two years, that we were all quite optimistic in the sense we thought with Ngo Dinh Diem there was a viable alternative to Ho Chi Minh, after all Diem was not tainted with colonialism, he had been in the US in exile. We felt that South Vietnam had a chance to make it on its own. It was not over populated. It had wonderful natural resources, rice, rubber--the French created all these superb rubber plantations--and with our help and, particularly economic help, South Vietnam could make a go of it. So in my two years, I would say I would never have foreshadowed how in the end catastrophe would envelop us there.

Q: The so-called dragon lady, Madame Nu, had she come into prominence yet?

LOCHNER: Oh yes, indeed. In fact, I had the pleasure on many official occasions to sit next to Madame Nu. She was one of the most brilliant and attractive ladies I have ever encountered. You see, Ngo Dinh Diem, among his many weaknesses, when he went around the country he would drag the whole diplomatic corps with him. After a while our ambassador got sick of doing it. I was one of the cabinet rank people as PAO so he sent me along. Through some rule of their protocol I wound up often at the ceremonial dinners next to Madame Nu. I must say I got to

admire her very much. I had a very good personal impression of Ngo Dinh Diem, himself, too. He was quite sympathique, except he couldn't delegate. He worked 18 hours a day and he tried to do it all himself. And here I come to a specific frustration of my USIA work. Among other things, of course, we had an exchange program. So we selected a considerable number of Vietnamese students to go to the US through all the normal procedure. That particular year, the fall was approaching and they didn't get their exit permits. So the ambassador sent me over to the Chef de Cabinet, who under the French system was the number two man under Diem, to goose him so that they should let these students out. So I went over and told him that this was terrible, college was opening and everything else was done except for the exit permit and couldn't he issue them. The man threw up his hand in horror and said, "The President reserves that unto himself." So Diem would personally handle any exit permit of any Vietnamese leaving the country. He personally stamped every passport of every foreign diplomat who came to Saigon. So if you want an explanation of why his government did not succeed you can find it right there. The Chef de Cabinet was absolutely adamant that he could not do anything about it and we lost several slots because they just wouldn't come through with this technicality. These people had been screened up and down. It was inexcusable that they would not issue the permits. But that was among the more frustrating aspects. As I said, otherwise it was in a sense fun doing their weekly news reel, doing all these pamphlets, so I won't say that we at all foreshadowed, so to speak, that all this would go down the drain in the end.

During those two years from 1955 to '57 things really looked up in Saigon.

Q: Well, since you weren't there this might be an impossible question for you to answer, but what finally got Madame Nu into the kind of position where she was apparently usurping the government and mostly running things behind the scenes? Do you have any guesses on that?

LOCHNER: I don't agree with that thesis and I don't think there is unanimity among historians by now on that. Of course, it was really, at least during my time, much more her husband, Ngo Dinh Nu, who was the power behind the throne. But yet in all the encounters that I saw when the two were with Diem, they always seemed to defer to him. I never had the feeling that either her husband nor she were running Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem relied on both of them, maybe to excess, but that is different from saying that they were the power behind the throne.

SAMUEL T. WILLIAMS
Military Assistance Advisory Group
Saigon (1955-1960)

Samuel T. Williams was a member of the US Army. He served in Japan, Korea and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Ted Gittinger in 1981.

Q: What was your first impression of your MAAG people and Saigon when you first arrived?

WILLIAMS: Well, I would say the whole thing looked like it was an enormous mess. It wasn't anyone's fault particularly; we didn't have very many people out there. That was one trouble with

MAAG, they never had enough people to do what they were told to do. And there were very few U.S. military there - Mike O'Daniel didn't have a great deal of help. He had one brigadier that was not the strongest general officer I've ever known, and his headquarters was in a dilapidated, or gutted Chinese building in Cholon. The noise there was terrific from the street noises and things of that nature. Mike hadn't been able to set up any workable administrative system in his headquarters. Frankly I would say that Mike, I had known him since 1925 and we were intimate friends, was not an administrator. He was an aggressive fighter in peace and war but he knew no more about running an office than the man in the moon, and he didn't have anyone to run it for him. So he had no files nor reliable records nor anything of that nature. He was out all the time from daylight till dark, as hard as he could go, trying to get things done out in the field. That was the impression I had of MAAG when I got there. One man driving hard to get things done and with little help.

Q: What exactly was General ODaniel trying to accomplish?

WILLIAMS: He was trying to get some kind of organization in the Vietnamese army and air force and navy, but his primary work had been at that time to help receive almost a million refugees from up around the Hanoi area. They were moving down into South Vietnam to escape the to escape the communist government of North Vietnam. Now, you seldom hear or read about that, but right after the Geneva accords, Ho Chi Minh said he'd let those people go south that wanted to go south. Well, they didn't let all go but they let a hell of a lot of them go south, and there was no organization to receive them, feed them or do anything else, so Mike O'Daniel at least got tents shipped in there and pitched camps for refugees. I have no idea what the figure was, but I've heard the figure ran anywhere from five hundred thousand to almost a million refugees that came south. That's what Mike was doing mostly, and he was doing it mostly by himself with his bare hands as the South Vietnamese he had to work with were not used to doing things like that.

Q: How many people were in MAAG at about this time?

WILLIAMS: Oh, I think we had around two hundred maybe.

Q: A large company?

WILLIAMS: Yes, that's right. They were about equally divided among non-commissioned officers and officers. Now that's a rough guess, I don't remember. After I got going there I tried valiantly to raise that figure. I wanted a minimum of two thousand, but the people stateside could not agree on that strength. Now here was the reason.

The Geneva accords, which we never signed, but Bedell Smith said in his infinite wisdom that we would adhere to, stipulated that any U.S. military that came in would be replacements for the people who were on hand at the time the accords were signed. Or in other words, we would not increase. Well, when that happened there was anywhere from two or maybe I'd say on the outside four hundred officers and men in South Vietnam that were Americans. There was an International Control Commission made up of some army officers from India, from Canada and Poland. The Indians were violently against us from the day that I got there until the day I left.

They were against Mike, too. The Canadians were very much for westerners, and the Poles, they held a swing, one way or the other. Now that commission would monitor very closely every U.S. military person or piece of equipment that came in or out of Vietnam. If I got some replacements out there I had to show by name, rank, organization who they were, how many they were, and exactly who they were replacing. Those Indians worked on that to a degree.

So Mike didn't have enough Americans to work with, and for a long time I was terribly handicapped before I could get any additional people. Finally we were able to get what we called "training teams," a few technicians for this, a few technicians for that, to come out, a team of three or four, something like that, and stay for a certain number of days or weeks and then go back. That's the way we were doing it because it took the bureaucracy of the Control Commission so long to operate, the teams would be in and out before the hell they could do anything about it. That's the way we got any additional help at all.

Q: Was the situation ever resolved?

WILLIAMS: No. No, it was not resolved, and it went further than that, because each piece of equipment--and we're fixing to get into that again I'm afraid--shipped in there had to be a replacement for a piece of equipment that was there at the time of the Geneva accords.

Q: How could you know what was there at the time?

WILLIAMS: You couldn't, you couldn't. But anytime that we got anything shipped in I had to show the commission that some number of items were being destroyed. Regardless if it was vehicles or anything else, we had to show item for item. Say we're getting in ten jeeps. All right, we had to show them ten jeeps that were going on the salvage pile right then to be cut up. So then we could bring in ten more jeeps. They made things as rough as possible. Pure harassment. I remember that one time one of my sergeants was absolutely browned off. American soldiers will only put up with so much. He came to me because he was cutting up some old one-pounder cannons. Very likely you are not familiar with those, but in World War II we had a one-pounder gun that was our original anti-tank gun. You'd shoot that against any tank and its shell would bounce off, but nevertheless that was what we had. Well, we were going to destroy some of those to get them off our invoice. And we were cutting those barrels in about two or two-and-a-half-foot lengths and throwing them in the scrap heap. The commission came along and said, "You can't do that. You've got to go back and cut these barrels again, and each one of those two-foot barrels you have to cut them into one-foot lengths." Well, that's just harassment.

Blowing ammunition. There was ammunition all over Vietnam at that time, and large piles of it. I asked my counterpart there, a Frenchman, [Pierre] Jacquot, General Jacquot, "What the hell were the French doing with so much ammunition? Here, there, yonder, there's piles of it all over Vietnam." He said, "It's simple. We were getting ammunition from you, from the States, and if we wanted some ammunition at Hue, it would be better to have it unloaded at Hue than it would be to unload it in Saigon and we then tried to ship it up there. So anyplace where we needed the ammunition, that's where we asked the ammunition be placed." Then they ran off and left lots of it, and there it was. It had deteriorated and had to be destroyed before we could ship in some decent replacement ammunition.

I remember one time I notified the commission that we were going to blow a certain number of tons of ammunition at a certain place and time and we'd dug an enormous pit and put that old ammo in there. They hadn't shown up, our people went ahead and had that pit about half full on the way to blow it and the commission came and they said, "What's in there?" The U.S. sergeant said so and so, and they said, "We don't know it. Dig it out of there, let us see it and then put it back." That's when the sergeant blew his top and came to me and said, "General, we're just not going to do it." I said, "I know you're not going to do it. Just tell them to go to hell and go ahead and blow it." Hell, the commission didn't do anything about it, but it's that harassment--oh, they'd make reports about it, they'd make a report to Hanoi, they'd make reports of it to the Vietnamese and so forth, and to Washington: "the Americans are not doing this, that and the other. They are bullheaded." But that was the kind of stuff we were running into all the time. It was just like molasses in January. Did that answer your question?

Q: Yes, Sir. I was just going to ask you about certain people. Now I think at one place General Lansdale says that he spent his first interview with you getting royally chewed out. Do you remember that incident?

WILLIAMS: Yes, I remember it quite well. Because he hasn't let me forget it. First of all, I didn't see Lansdale until after I moved that headquarters out of Cholon, where I had found it, and taken over another building in a better part of town. It was a larger building and better located. The chief of staff or headquarters commandant, or whoever was handling that kind of work at that time, had divided it up and assigned the offices here, there and yonder. Then it suddenly dawned on me--Lansdale was there and I think he had eleven people with him, but they had not come to my attention prior to that, and if they had, it just went over my head. But one morning, one day, I was coming up the front steps of the MAAG headquarters and an American, or at least a Caucasian, unshaven, dirty as hell, in a very dilapidated automobile drove up and got out and left his automobile standing there where he shouldn't have, and went up the steps into the headquarters. The first officer I saw I asked, "Who is that character?" I didn't know if he had any business being in the MAAG headquarters. At that time we didn't have guards on our headquarters. He said, "He's one of Lansdale's people." So I sent for Lansdale and I told him about this incident, and I told him I wanted him to get his people spruced up a little bit.

Well, he didn't make it clear to me, which he should have, or maybe I was a little slow on the uptake, but he had his people looking that way on purpose. They were CIA operators and they were working all over the country and he didn't want them dressed up looking like good, prosperous Americans.

Q: Were these military personnel in civilian clothes?

WILLIAMS: I don't know, I don't know if they were military or civilian. I never inquired into his business that much. Lansdale, I was talking to him in my office and he was sitting there--do you know Lansdale?

Q: No, Sir.

WILLIAMS: Well, he's a very fine-looking officer. But he also has a dreamy look. He can lounge back on a divan or a chair and kind of look at the ceiling, look at the walls with a kind of a dreamy look, and you just think that you're spitting against the wind, that he's not hearing a damn thing you say. So I had to wake him up. He wrote in his book [In the Midst of War: An American Mission to Southeast Asia], which he sent and asked me what I thought about it, that I jumped on him and did it in such a voice that I could be heard all over Vietnam. Maybe I did.

But he also wrote in that book that I reminded him of either his father or his grandfather. Anyway, he said he took a liking to me right then and actually invited me to supper that night, and we had a very pleasant time. Well, I don't remember that part of it. Lansdale and I never did have any major differences. I didn't know much about his business, and I don't think he knew a hell of a lot about mine. There was mutual respect. I liked him.

He was working at that time with a group of people that he had brought over from the Philippines, and he never told me, or no one else told me, but it was my assumption that he had brought these people over, and actually they were men and women nurses, maybe Red Cross people, and they worked all over Vietnam and I think those were his informers. I'm sure they were.

Q: I think he called that Operation Brotherhood.

WILLIAMS: That's right.

Q: What was his official capacity exactly?

WILLIAMS: He was a member of MAAG, and his rank at that time was lieutenant colonel.

Q: But you more or less held him on a loose rein?

WILLIAMS: Absolutely. I had nothing to do with his business at all, never gave him any orders, because I believed he was working directly for the CIA and I didn't want to get my fingers into that business at all, especially after the army told me that if I found a CIA man in my headquarters to report it immediately. I thought, if that's the way they're running things back there, if they don't know what's going on, well, I'm not going to enter into it at all.

Q: Did you ever notify Washington that Lansdale was working for the CIA and not for--?

WILLIAMS: I don't ever remember mentioning Lansdale in any official letters or dispatches. I gave him a free rein.

Q: Did he report to you on what he was doing or directly to Washington?

WILLIAMS: As I recall he would come in every once in a while and give me briefings and discuss conditions and so forth, and I judged that he told me what he was damn willing for me to know, and that was all. Any reports he was making, official reports, I'm positive he was making direct to his people back in Washington. I had too many problems of my own to think

about CIA affairs.

Lansdale is a very unusual man. He's had a lot of experience in Asia with Asiatics and with the Filipinos. He got this notoriety of being the man that they modeled The Ugly American after, which I don't think is true. I don't think they modeled him on Lansdale at all. Lansdale is intelligent. I mean by that that he knew his way around. I think he's smart as hell. I like him.

Q: What was his relationship to President Diem?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. I know that Diem knew him, and I imagine that Diem very likely mentioned his name occasionally to me. I remember one time a year or so later when some Americans were going to come out, a committee was going to come out to Vietnam and the Vietnamese were in conference with the embassy on this subject. The embassy saw Lansdale's name on the list of visitors and vetoed him, said he couldn't come. President Diem told me that and said, "What do you think about it?" I said, "Hell, you know Lansdale as well as I do. I think he's done a wonderful thing for your country in the work he's done here, and if you want him to visit, okay, bring him out." And he came out. I imagine that if they knew about it, my comment to Diem very likely irritated the American Ambassador. I don't know. But anyway, Lansdale I would say on occasion was not getting along too well with the embassy. Whether he was or not, I don't know.

Or it might be that the CIA man at the embassy at that time and Lansdale were at cross-purposes. I don't know.

Q: Lansdale came back about two years before you did. Isn't that about right? Something on that order.

WILLIAMS: I don't remember.

Q: Do you know what he did after he came back to the States? I've heard that he continued to work on Vietnam problems, and I was wondering if you had any contact with him after he left Vietnam?

WILLIAMS: I think we exchanged personal letters.

Q: Not official contact?

WILLIAMS: Oh, no. I presume he came back and was working with the CIA here in the States. That's the best of my knowledge. In years past I've had a terrific amount of correspondence with the people, officers and soldiers. I get letters now from soldiers that I haven't seen in twenty or thirty years. Sometimes they come see me. The same with the officers. Sometimes an officer will call me long distance on the telephone and I'll have to get out of it as well as I can by saying, "Well, by George, when was the last time we served together?" If he tells me that, then I can chop these periods of time off into compartments and often be able to place a person. Sometimes I can, sometimes I can't. But I mention that because it would not be unusual for me not to remember any specific correspondence between myself and Lansdale at this minute.

Q: Right. I don't mean to dwell on Lansdale. It's only that he has a lot of notoriety, and you're obviously a primary source about Lansdale. So I don't want to let that get away untouched. What was the atmosphere in Saigon in the countryside when you arrived? How would you describe the-

WILLIAMS: Very pleasant, very pleasant. We had no problems there except the problem of dealing with Vietnamese who were inefficient. Now, when I say inefficient, I'm--well, let me take specific cases. The French were there and they controlled everything. Most of the merchants either thought a great deal of the French or they might have been French merchants. I testified before Mike Mansfield's Senate committee in Washington one time that the French objected to our being there and resented it very much. Our State Department took exception to that and Ambassador Durbrow tried to get me to withdraw that statement. I declined to withdraw it, and I told him, "How in the hell can I withdraw it? You know at one of these committee meetings how many stenographers there are typing as the witness talks. Here are all these senators up here listening to me. You want me to come out tomorrow and say I didn't say so and so? How goddamned stupid would that be?" Threats were made but I refused to change my statements.

But the French objected to us. They always said that I was trying to do a job that couldn't be done. They said, "You can't organize a Vietnamese army. The Vietnamese will never fight. They're not worth a damn." My answer to that was, on one occasion to a senior French officer out there, "Hell, they just got through whipping your ass and driving you out of this country. What do you mean they won't fight?" "Well," he said, "that's the Vietnamese up north." I said, "Well, they're bound to be cousins to these down here. I think they'll fight if they're given proper training and have any leadership."

But it must be remembered that the senior officers in the Vietnamese army had been lieutenants and captains in the French colonial army. The chief of staff, the senior officer in the Vietnamese army, was a man by the name of Lieutenant General Ty, spelled T-Y. Ty had been a noncommissioned officer in the French colonial forces in World War I, in a transportation company, a truck transport company and had served in France. In World War II he was a company commander and a battalion commander. The Japanese came in and the French were cooperating with them at that time, and suddenly when the Vietnamese found out that the Japanese were going to take over--Ty told me this himself- he said, "I told my soldiers what was happening." He said, "I'm going to the jungle. You fellows go where you like." He said, "We disintegrated overnight (snaps fingers), just like that." Now, he was very outspoken in telling me that. I think the same thing happened to a hell of a lot of these Vietnamese officers that I had to work with because when the French came back, by grace of the Americans and the British after World War II, they arrested some of these officers and court martialed them. But they didn't sentence them as far as I know, but they threw the fear of God in them.

Now we'll take this man Big [Duong Van] Minh as an example. Big Minh was a very close friend of a man by the name of T-H-O, who became vice president of Vietnam. Big Minh and I were very close. I asked him one time, "What was your relation with Vice President [Nguyen Ngoc] Tho?" He said, "We were in prison together." I said, "Where?" He said, "Right here. The French had us in prison. It was terrible. They had us confined, many of us, in very small rooms. It was more horrible than you could think of. There was no place to relieve ourselves and we'd

defecate on the floor, we'd urinate on the floor, and sometimes we'd be ankle deep. Tho got released." Why the French let him out I don't know, and that's beside the point. But he said, "After Tho got out, he got me released." Big Minh had been a first lieutenant in the French colonial army at the time the Japanese came in and he took off. So the French were holding him for desertion. But they never did try him, to the best of my knowledge. I think he feared them.

So these people that we were working with had held jobs as lieutenants or captains, at the most, in the French colonial army, but in which they were never allowed to do anything of any importance.

Now we'll take another incident, that of Tran Van Don, who was Ty's chief of staff when I was there, and was also an intimate friend of Big Minh. Don served in the French army, not the colonial army, but the French army in World War II, as he was a Frenchman. His father was a doctor and had gone from Vietnam to France and the family was there when Don was born. So Don was a Frenchman by nationality. World War II came on. Don went into the army. He was commissioned in the French regular army, not the colonial. I said, "Well, Don, did any of these race problems ever come up at different times?" He said, "Well, no, not exactly. But this would happen if my company commander, who would be a Frenchman, happened to go someplace and I would be the senior lieutenant, something would happen, and a French lieutenant would come and take command and I would be sent somewhere else until the regular company commander came back." So that's the way they were treating these people.

You've asked questions in here about Diem and his officers. Now, we'll take the man by the name of [Mai Huu] Xuan, X-U-A-N. Diem told me on one occasion he didn't trust him. He was either brigadier or major general at that time. I said, "Why?" He said, "Because he was once in the French army intelligence. Any man who was ever once in the French army intelligence is always in the French army intelligence up until the day he dies. And so that man is still under obligation to the French army intelligence. That's why I don't trust him as a general in the Vietnamese army." Much later this was the man in charge of Diem and his brother when Diem was murdered.

Q: Was this a common problem, this divided allegiance of officers?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Most of those people had dual citizenship and had dual passports.

Now we'll take an occasion when the French were turning over to us their excess property that they didn't want, we'd find that in each one of these warehouses or depots, there would be a Vietnamese officer as second-in-command. The French would turn over this material and we'd go in there to look at it, see what they had turned in and try to invoice it as we didn't know what was there. We'd find property in the most terrible condition. Boxes of spare parts broken open, and the paperwork inside the box listing contents, spare parts for an M-16 or spare parts for an M-1 or whatnot, they'd be gone. I'd say to this Vietnamese, second in command, "Well, you've been working here, you've been assigned to this depot for how long?" Such and such. "Well, why does this mess occur? Where are the records? And those officers would invariably say, and I believed them, because I heard it so many times, "I had nothing to do. I was not allowed to do anything. Sure, I was carried here as a deputy for this depot. I don't know what's in this depot,

what comes in or what goes out, because I was never allowed to do anything or see anything. But the French could always say, "I have a Vietnamese deputy here."

Now it comes back to advisors again, which we worked out by getting these U.S. training teams out. If I went into a storehouse or warehouse that covers hundreds of square feet of storage I find there's crate after crate of spare parts, for weapons, rifles, machine guns, automatic rifles, mortars or anything else. The boxes have been torn open, the stuff not necessarily spilled out on the floor, but sometimes out on the floor. I'd look at that, and well, hell, ninety-nine times out of a hundred I could look at it and I'd say, "I don't know whether this comes out of a Browning automatic rifle or whether it came out of an M-1 rifle." Because I didn't know enough about spare parts. The Vietnamese didn't know anything about spare parts. I was trying to get trained ordnance people from the States to come over there and try to sort this stuff out. Otherwise it was just going to waste as junk. I couldn't get it done. Now the Secretary of the Army, Mr. [Wilber M.] Brucker, was with me a hundred per cent, but he couldn't get it done.

Now we had a place there we called the Acre of Diamonds. The French had come in and dumped equipment there. The first time I heard about the Acre of Diamonds I immediately went there and looked. The French were bringing in surplus material and dumping it. I saw Cadillac engines that never had an ounce of gasoline burned through them, sitting in the mud, halfway sunk in the mud. Things of that nature, artillery pieces, anything you could possibly imagine, bulldozers, trucks, just driven into this, what we called the Acre of Diamonds, and left there in the mud and the weather. Well, I tell you what it eventually came to, eventually we just had to salvage the whole damn business. When we finally got some technical people in there, ordnance and engineers and so forth, they said, "Well, it's hopeless, you might as well just bury the whole damn lot and let it go." But we didn't bury it. We let it sit there so that when congressmen and senators would come over on visits we'd say, "All right, here is what we found. Here is what the situation was. That's what we've got."

So there was one problem. Vietnamese officer and the noncommissioned officers had seldom been allowed to do anything. They had never been given command. The French had gone so far as to organize what they called light infantry Vietnamese battalions to fight the North Vietnamese, and their comment was, "We formed these light battalions to throw them in against the North Vietnamese. We let the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese get out there and wallow in the mud with each other. What happens, we don't give a damn." Now a smart Vietnamese officer, one that's really been through the French schools in France could see what was happening to them. Now for instance, along about the time of Dien Bien Phu in that time period--one of them told me this one time when I was watching a division maneuver exercise. I saw these people, the regimental commanders and battalions commanders, seemed apprehensive and were always looking over their shoulder, and so I had conversations with a senior officer through my interpreter. The last fight that several of those officers had been into was like this.

They had been on a campaign up north with the French and the French were of course quite strong, they had a division or so, or several regiments. They took this one Vietnamese regiment, and said, "We're going to attack. You're going to lead out. You're going to lead the attack. We're right behind you with a French regiment here and a French regiment there and when we get going right, we're coming in here and going in there to support you." And the senior officer said,

"We'd started the attack and got going good and looked around to wait for the French to come up on our right and left, but they started a withdrawal action at the same time they ordered us to attack. That left us alone and we were defeated badly." Now they'd tell me stories like that. So they didn't trust anyone, and it took a great deal of living with and association with the Vietnamese to get them to change over and have some semblance of confidence with the Americans that they were working with. At first they just didn't trust anyone at all. Finally the military began to accept MAAG as good friends and cooperated. Well, I could talk about that for ages, but I don't think that's what you want.

Q: Well, what were you getting the Vietnamese army ready for? What was the prime threat as you analyzed it in those early days?

WILLIAMS: When I had my last conversation in the Pentagon with the Chief of Staff of the army, or his staff, they told me that there was an agreement, presumed agreement, that general free elections would be held in Vietnam, North and South Vietnam, one year after the signing of the Geneva accords, and I believe without going back, but somewhere in my mind the Geneva accords were signed in June or July. If the elections were not held, then North Vietnam was going to attack and conquer South Vietnam. They said, "Now, we don't believe that President Diem is going to agree to general elections." Well, they were right, he wouldn't agree. So, the thing uppermost in my mind when I got there in October was that I had until next July to get something up on the [17th] Parallel to withstand an attack in July of 1956.

That was my primary purpose, to get something up there and get them in some kind of shape, and I believed that so strongly that--although I didn't have the authority to command, I just went up there. I think the 1st Vietnamese Division was in that area at that time. I went up there and lived with that division commander for about a week before I thought the attack was going to be made and stayed up there for about an extra week, so that I could be there and be of any assistance I could with those people in case the attack came. So that's what I had in mind when I went in there in 1955, that we were going to fight a North Korean type of invasion in July of 1956. As a matter of fact, I thought that for at least two years. I thought each year that this was going to be next thing to come.

Q: Were the sects still much of a problem when you arrived in South Vietnam?

WILLIAMS: Yes. To a degree.

Q: The Bao Dai--

WILLIAMS: They were.

Q: --or the Hoa Hao, I mean.

WILLIAMS: Yes, they were, but not both at the same time. When one sect would be up in arms, the others would seem to be taking it easy. In other words, as I remember it, they never did fight all at one time. Incidentally this man Big Minh I spoke of a while ago, had gotten a semblance of fame and notoriety there, before I arrived. He had taken some Vietnamese troops and cleaned out

some of those sects from around Saigon. Not only did Lansdale tell me this, but Mike O'Daniel told me that when Big Minh almost had the sects where he was going to destroy them completely, the French moved some troops in between the Vietnamese and the sects. The Vietnamese decided they were going to call the battle off because if they didn't call it off they'd have to fight through the French troops to get to the sects.

Q: Was that the Binh Xuyen, or do you remember that?

WILLIAMS: I don't remember. It was down in the south, below Saigon. You see, the French had us, in many ways, because among other troops that they had, they had some Foreign Legionnaires, some of the best-looking soldiers you ever saw in your life. Any time I went to French headquarters there would always be one of those Legionnaires or two of them on guard at the door. I used to talk to them. I couldn't speak German, but I made a pass at it.

Q: Were they mostly Germans?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Almost 90 percent. With those French Legionnaires, the French could do anything they wanted to. I never had any close contact with any French soldiers in Vietnam, only French officers. The only French soldiers I ever came in contact with were Foreign Legionnaires. They had a Moroccan band with them. One time I said to General Jacquot, the commander-in-chief of Indochina, Indochine they called it, "I want to give your bandmaster some cigars." He said, "That's fine." So the next time I went to his headquarters, I took a box of cigars and I gave them to the bandmaster and I told him to pass them around among those bandmen and he did. Jacquot was over on the veranda watching me. He said, I thought you wanted to give the bandmaster a cigar." I said, "Well, you know damn well I wouldn't be cheap enough to come over here with one cigar." Without a doubt Jacquot didn't like it because I gave his bandmen cigars.

But, as a result of that, I send an aide-de-camp, an officer by the name of Jack [John M.] Shultz that now lives in Austin, over there with my tape recorder and got the bandmaster to record some of their Moroccan music. That tape right there on my shelf, "Foreign Legion Bands, 1956," about one half a reel, ends about graduation number thirty.

Well, I don't know how we got on the subject of the Foreign Legion, but anyhow, for example, [G. Frederick] Reinhardt--Ambassador Reinhardt. Ambassador Reinhardt, who was ambassador when I got there. He phoned me up one morning, he said, "There are tanks rolling down behind my house going down to the river and being loaded on ships. Why don't you stop them?" I said, "Jacquot has got the bayonets, I haven't any troops." Well, it suddenly dawned on him that the man with the bayonets, by God, was the one who controlled. A lot of people don't realize that, that you get into a situation that way, any diplomacy goes to hell. The man who's got the soldiers and the bayonets is going to do what he wants to until he gets tired or until the bureaucracy can get around to making protests. But that quite surprised him. I told him, "You can't keep those people from loading on anything here that they want to take to France."

Mr. [John Foster] Dulles came to Saigon. He was coming up from Australia I remember and he sent me a wire, or sent me a cable before he got there, "Give me an invoice of American property

issued to the French during such-and-such a period." Well, that was for three or four years, since 1954 certainly. I had no such records. Mike O'Daniel had no such records. I immediately went to Washington with a TWX and said, "Mr. Dulles is coming here, going to be here at such-and-such a time and he wants an invoice of the property the U.S. furnished the French. Will you send it immediately?" I got a reply back that said, "There's no such record in Washington. All we can do is give you the dollar amounts."

Anyway, when Mr. Dulles came in, I reported to him: "You asked for an invoice of property that we had furnished the French. We have no such invoice as that. Neither do your friends back in Washington have such a thing as that. Further, I can tell you right now that the French are stealing us blind here in this place. They're taking out equipment that they have no authority to take out, and I have no means to stop them." He said, "What did you expect? Of course, they're going to steal you blind. They're going to take anything they can get their hands on. They have ships to haul it with. They're going to do it."

I sent a message back to Washington that the French were taking out more than they were supposed to. In other words, a decision had been made, between Washington and Paris that when the French forces evacuated South Vietnam that they would take out a certain amount of equipment and no more. In other words, they would take out a full TO & E [table of organization and equipment] for all the troops they had in Vietnam. I reported, "They're taking out much, much more than they have TO in troops here." They came back from Washington to me and said, "That's impossible. The French wouldn't break an agreement in that manner."

Several months later, after they had completely evacuated, the chief of MAAG in France sent a message to me as the chief of MAAG in Vietnam, "The warehouses here are full of equipment, military equipment from South Vietnam. Where are the records and how do I pick the equipment up on the French records here?" I send him back a message--I knew this officer although I don't remember now who it was--I replied, "That's impossible, because Washington told me the French wouldn't do a thing like that." But I also sent both messages back to Washington and said, "Here are the warehouses"--Jacquot had boasted in the French newspapers that his warehouses were bulging with equipment that he had brought from South Vietnam--"Here is property theft that I told you about some time ago that you said was not happening at all." I heard not another word from anyone about it. Well, there's nothing anyone could have done about it at that date. It was an accomplished fact.

Q: Let me ask you what your first impressions of President Diem were?

WILLIAMS: I don't remember my very first impressions. I don't remember. He was a very small man in stature. I say very small, I imagine Diem might have been five foot, one or two [inches], maybe not that tall, and inclined to be stout, portly. Always well dressed. That is, to this extent, he had an affinity for white sharkskin suits, he always wore a collar and tie, and his shoes were polished, his hands, nails and teeth were clean. His hair always well combed, his face hairless. He was a great talker. It was not unusual for him to have me sit down beside of him, and talk to me for one or two hours without ever stopping for a breath. His office was spartan as was his bedroom. An army cot, table and two chairs. Our conferences presented a problem that I was able to solve to a degree. I was able to get, at various times, different American officers who

could speak French and at the same time someone who had enough military knowledge to know what we talked about and enough economic and political knowledge so what was said wasn't foreign to them. They would sit there, and every once in a while--initially I'd say, "Mr. President, stop just a minute," and then I'd tell this man to tell me what the President was saying.

Then after I got to know him better, or he got to know me better, I suggested, "This is not going as well as it should because my memory is not as good as yours and I can't remember everything that you tell me here and all the problems we discuss. I've got a good interpreter, and I have him interrupt us occasionally, Why not just let him take notes and there will be no interruption, and then when we get back to my office we'll put his notes into a draft that I can read, so that I can know exactly all that was said." And he bought that.

Consequently, thereafter that was the method of operation. When I would get back to my headquarters and before the interpreter was able to get something on his mind that would divert his thought to something else, I had him sit down in my office and with the notes he had write out in longhand his concept of what had been said during the last two or three hours. I'm not exaggerating when I say two or three hours, because that was not uncommon. The same time he was doing that I was sitting there at my desk writing my version. In those days I had an excellent memory. We'd get through, he'd hand me his version and I'd take it and thank him and he'd go his way, and I'd take his draft and compare it to mine and I'd come up with what I thought was a reliable record of what had transpired. I became a great admirer of President Diem. I thought he was doing a wonderful job. He was simply outstanding and well informed. But I was in the minority as far as some local Americans were concerned.

Q: I want to come to that a little later down the line, because I think you can speak to that point very well, and I have some questions I wanted to introduce along that line just a little further. Do you remember any of the other young officers who became so prominent later on? Do you ever encounter people like [Nguyen] Khanh, for example, who took over I think sometime around December of 1963 after the coup in which Diem was assassinated.

WILLIAMS: I read part of something right here. We've been cleaning up my office here the last few days and I unearthed something here. Now you take a look at those papers and talk about Vietnamese officers. Now I don't have the file at my fingertips now, but before I left Vietnam I had compiled a roster of the Vietnamese military officers, the senior officers or officers that had key positions, and either written a brief about those officers, each one of them individually, or had the American officer that was most closely associated with him write a detailed brief of him. So I had a dossier on every officer that I thought outstanding in the Vietnamese forces, and as I recall I furnished a copy of that file to CINCPAC, and I kept a copy myself. I don't know where my copy is. I'm almost positive that I gave it to the U.S. Army Historical Section. But at that time, which was twenty-one years ago, I knew practically all these people and knew very closely where they came from and what they did, what their idiosyncracies were and how good they were or how bad they were.

I remember that when [Nguyen Van] Thieu became president that I referred back to that file--at that time it was on the shelf right over there in that corner--and the notation I made on Thieu, who I knew as a lieutenant colonel or colonel on the Headquarters Army Staff there in Saigon, I

had stated, "This is the most efficient Vietnamese officer that I have met in Vietnam, and one that will probably go the highest." And by God, he did, he became president.

Q: So you were not surprised?

WILLIAMS: I was not surprised, no. I didn't think Big Minh would ever become president, although later I think he wanted to be. I didn't think he would, because he was too lazy and he wouldn't take responsibility. I thought possibly Don would go high, Tran Van Don, but I wasn't too sure. But Thieu, when I knew him was a staff officer on the Vietnamese general staff. I thought [he] was the smartest and most intelligent man I had ever come in contact with in Vietnam, Diem excepted of course.

Now there was one man that was pushing him very closely and his name was [Le Van] Kim. Kim was a French citizen and was married to General Don's sister and had been an officer in the French regular army. When I wanted to get the [Vietnamese] military academy on its feet and going, Kim was the man I picked to do that job. At that time he was a colonel or a brigadier, I forget which. Did that answer your question?

Q: Yes, Sir, that's exactly the kind of thing I was looking for. Do you remember [Nguyen Cao] Ky, or was he still a youngster?

WILLIAMS: I knew Ky, but not too well. He was a captain and an aviator. I'm not too sure that I ever had any conversations with Ky, but I saw him frequently because on occasions I went out to the headquarters of the paratroop brigade, the outfit that tried to pull a coup in November I think-

Q: Of 1960.

WILLIAMS: -of late in 1960, yes. Ky invariably would be going here to there or passing some place near, and I always recognized him because he had very dark hair and his moustache. At that time he didn't have the flamboyant dress that he later affected, but I asked who he was and I remember being told his name. But if I ever had any detailed conversation with him, I don't recall. He had aroused my interest.

Q: Now everybody, even Diem's enemies, credit him with being a scrupulously honest man. But were there problems with the corruption further down the line in the Vietnamese administration? Did you encounter problems this way?

WILLIAMS: I couldn't say that there was not. First of all, however I'll say that I would agree that Diem was scrupulously honest and had not only an honest, but I think a high moral character. How much corruption there was down the line I don't know, but I do know this, that on several occasions without any warning of any kind or anything of that nature, I would require American officers to appear at this pay table or that pay table when the Vietnamese were paying the troops. Or, with their interpreters, check records, and I never once found a Vietnamese officer who was padding his roster to draw additional pay. Now they were always after more pay, no doubt about that, and I had several hard conversations with Diem about the army being top heavy with noncoms. They were not noncoms, they were people carrying noncom ratings and drawing that

extra pay. But I never found any corruption as far as the Vietnamese military were concerned although I was looking for it all the time. That's normal precaution.

Q: Did this apply to aid, their handling of American aid in those years as well?

WILLIAMS: To the best of my knowledge, yes.

Q: Were you satisfied that we were able to keep track of how they administered the aid that we were giving?

WILLIAMS: The military aid, yes. Other aid that went through USOM [United States Operation Mission] no, I have no idea.

Q: You have no acquaintance with that end of it?

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: The military aid, that was okay?

WILLIAMS: Yes, absolutely.

Q: What struck you as the problems that were bothering Diem the most at this time? What seemed to be on his mind?

WILLIAMS: He was just trying to build a country. Some thought he was working on a foundation of sand, and I think he knew it. He had a terrible time, I think, deciding who he could trust and who he could not trust. He placed great trust in me. Probably more than any other foreigner. Being a Vietnamese, of course, he was a very strong family man, and that's the reason he relied so much on his brothers, because they were family and he thought he could trust them. But I'm sure that he was never sure whether he could trust anyone else or not. I'm not talking about his military so much now, I'm talking about the different things he would try to do in the legislature with his land reforms and his taxes and things of that nature.

Q: Did you have much familiarity with those programs?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: They've come in for a lot of criticism after the fact. What was the problem with land reform as you could see it?

WILLIAMS: There was no problem, no problem at least to my mind there should have been no problem. First of all, a lot of those people over there--not a lot of them, but several of them owned large acreage, thousands of acres. We mentioned Tran Van Don here. His father was a doctor and had been an ambassador here, there and yonder, highly respected, a highly educated man. He owned thousands of acres down in the Delta. One of Diem's reforms was that no person could own more than a certain number of hectares, and I think it averaged down to no one could

own more than two hundred or maybe two hundred and fifty acres of land. So that immediately threw the big landowners against him. Now the government didn't confiscate that land, but they decided what the fair value was and that's what the owner was paid and that was it. Then the government turned around and sold this land or gave it to the peasants. Thus many were no longer sharecroppers but small landowners. Well, you know, if you tried that right here in the United States you see what you would run into. Say someone is going to decide to break up Lyndon B. Johnson's or other ranch holdings over here, and then say one can have two hundred acres and no more. Well, you know what that would raise. Well, that same thing happened over there. The land barons were being divided [?].

He tried and did move people from unsettled and poor areas into more prosperous areas and built small towns. I thought he was doing a wonderful job. I thought if a man owned land he would fight to defend it. As a sharecropper he probably wouldn't.

Q: Was this what they called the relocation program?

WILLIAMS: That's right, yes. That was one name to it. Another one they called something with a ville on the end of it.

Q: Oh, agrovilles.

WILLIAMS: Agrovilles, yes. I thought that was wonderful, because not only were these people brought into small villages, but then they could go out from there to farm their nearby holdings, but the villages were arranged so that there was a certain amount of ground behind each house, maybe fifty feet wide. I'm guessing now, it makes no difference. Say it's fifty feet wide and a hundred feet long. Each house had a little garden right there. The American embassy objected to that. Why, I don't know. They never explained to me why they objected to it. They fought it tooth and nail.

I know that we had a discussion, Diem and I had a discussion on this one time, on people doing various work for the state. He said, "We're supposed to pay for this work with taxes. Some of the people can't pay taxes. What's your solution in the United States?" I said, "I don't know what the solution is in the United States now but when I was a boy in Denton, Texas, in Denton County in North Texas, when some taxes came due if a man couldn't pay his taxes, he took his team of mules or his team of horses and his wagon and he worked on county roads and he paid out his taxes that way. There was no discredit to the rancher or the farmer who did that. It was normal and hundreds of people did it, that's the way they paid their taxes." "Well," he said, "I think that's all right," so he started doing that over there. Well, Jesus Christ, you would be surprised at the uproar that went on in the American embassy.

Because Diem was allowing some of these people to work and therefore get credit for the tax, they were being made peons and slaves. Well, there was no slavery about it. And in those country team meetings I'd say, "Well, goodness gracious, they did that in Denton County, Texas when I was a boy and no one said anything about slavery then. I don't see anything wrong with it. It's honest work for an honest debt." Well, they said, "You don't do things like that anymore." And so that was it. Actually they were advocating welfare that the U.S. would pay for.

Well, I don't know what their solution was, that is Diem's solution, except that if the people couldn't pay taxes, then they had no one to pay for this labor and so the labor wasn't performed and so the agroville slowed to a halt. A Diem program was blocked again. Maybe the embassy wanted the U.S. to foot the bill. Maybe they were put out because they hadn't proposed the project themselves.

Now there were all kinds of arguments like that coming up and it really got to be very bad, very bad.

Q: You mentioned the relocation program, and I'm a little puzzled. Was that supposed to be a social reform or were there military implications to that? Exactly what was Diem trying to do?

WILLIAMS: It was largely social.

Q: It was?

WILLIAMS: Agricultural.

Q: Now I'm speaking of the Highlands. Didn't he move some people into the Highlands?

WILLIAMS: Yes, he put some people up there, but I don't say that was necessarily military. I was quite in favor of it, because in that country there you had a series of tribes that are generally called Montagnards [tribes] or Moi. That's the [Vietnamese] word for savage. They weren't savage. They were not--oh, they might have been on the same life standards as American blanket Indian back in say 1800s or something like that, but I visited among them time and time again. They were very primitive. The women, oddly enough, wore skirts, but from the waist up they were completely naked. But the men wore jackets, but from the waist down, except for a jock strap, they were naked, reversed that way. No one seemed to think anything of it. They were migratory. They would go into an area and cut down the brush and the trees and plant their crop. Some of them were very industrious, and near some of their villages there would be any number of what back here in Texas you'd call a corn crib. They had their produce stored up in those cribs. Now when they got ready to move they'd go to another place and first of all, after they cleared off as much brush as they wanted to, they burned the rest. I asked them why, and they said, "That's the way we get our fertilizer." I could communicate that much with them to find out what the hell they were burning this brush for. Well, to make the ground more fertile. Simple.

I was very strong for Diem putting as many people up on the borders as possible, because what I really wanted was a string of listening posts. I wanted a string of listening posts all up the Cambodia border and all the way up to Laos and on up to North Vietnam. I remember one time that I had that plan fixed up on a map for benefit of one of our officers that came down from CINCPAC, one of our admirals. When he looked at that he said, "Hell, you're building a Maginot Line." I said, "Look at the scale of that map. Those outposts are thirty miles apart." Too few Americans knew anything about Vietnam, the country or its people.

Q: Were there any problems with that relocation program?

WILLIAMS: Yes, they had a lot of problems. Just exactly what the magnitude of the difficulties were [I don't know], but very few of those plans worked out completely because first of all, he had to fight the landlords. Then he had to fight the Americans and God knows what other political people that might be involved.

Q: What Americans were against it?

WILLIAMS: The American embassy, representing the United States State Department as far as I could guess.

Q: What was their objection?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. They never did explain to me. Why not let a man work out his taxes with his [labor] in one of those agrovilles? What's their objection? I don't know. You'll have to ask some liberal, bureaucratic character who thought welfare better than work.

Q: Sounds like someone is not communicating.

WILLIAMS: That's right. There's no doubt about it. Or they suddenly say, that's slavery. I've heard people here in the U.S.--years ago--say when a person went down to one of those labor halls, they'd speak of going down to the slave centers. Why teach a people that welfare is better than honest work?

Q: In line with what we've said about the relocation program, did Diem ever express to you any concern about the long frontier that he had with Cambodia and Laos?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. He was quite aware of that, and I was, too. That bothered him. I might bring in at this time--although it might be touched on later--but I brought up the question of hot pursuit. We were having so much trouble--I keep saying we, because it was as much MAAG's problem as it was a Vietnamese problem--with Cambodia. They would come over the border and raid these Vietnamese villages. I know they did because I could go and visit the villages after the attacks.

Q: These were Cambodian troops?

WILLIAMS: Yes, or as far as I know just outlaws, because by the time I could get there they were gone. There would be a fight, a short little fire fight. They'd attack these villages, burn up what they could, shoot up this and that and the other and then jump back across the border real fast. I suggested to Diem that he have an arrangement with Prince [Norodom] Sihanouk of Cambodia for the privilege of hot pursuit. Well, Diem didn't know what the term hot pursuit was, and I used as an example the agreements between the United States and Mexico, which led eventually to General Jack Pershing going across the border looking for Pancho Villa. I said, "We would never have accomplished that if Mexico hadn't given us the privilege of going in there when we were hot on a bandit's trail. Of course if the Mexicans were hot on a bandit's trail they could come into New Mexico, Texas or wherever they wanted to. But usually it was the other way around, and it ended up with Jack Pershing going into Mexico." He said, "We can't do

that with the Cambodians because I've discussed a plan of that nature with Sihanouk, and he won't have anything to do with it."

He said, "You know, there's a great rivalry between the Cambodians--hostility, too--and the Vietnamese," and he told me something about history that I didn't know. Later I read and studied it. But in years gone by--and I'm talking about plenty of years gone by--the Vietnamese conquered Cambodia and exacted tribute from them. They kept an occupation force in Phnom Penh for years, maybe fifty, a hundred years, something like that. And the Cambodians became so used to it--this was Diem's statement--that eventually the only Vietnamese that stayed there were not troops, but merely the Vietnamese agent, this day and time you'd call him ambassador. The Cambodians paid him tribute each year and he sent it over to Vietnam. He said, "That's the hostile relationship between Vietnam and Cambodia. I haven't been able to improve that relationship although I have tried."

Now with Laos it was something else. I found here the other day a paper that is a proposed agreement with Laos for hot pursuit, and I think I wrote it, but I'm not sure. By anyway, it was one of the things that Diem and I discussed. He was very much in favor of one member of the royalty in Laos. They had a royal family in Laos, and there were arguments between members of that family. He favored a certain part of that family, a certain branch of that family. And actually, a prince came down to Saigon one time and I was invited to the Palace to meet him. I was amazed when I met him because I'll bet you that man stood six-six if he stood an inch, and weighed about two hundred and fifty or two hundred and seventy-five pounds. When you remember that most Vietnamese and Laotians are people that stretch it to weigh a hundred to a hundred and ten pounds, you can see. But anyway, Diem was very knowledgeable of that border and worked with me in many ways in trying to secure it. I thought so much about it that one time I got in the group with Reinhardt and a couple more people and made necessary hunting arrangements. Got on elephants and went up and rode that Cambodian and Laotian border an awful long ways under the guise of hunting. Reinhardt wasn't under the guise, he was actually hunting. I was under the guise of hunting. I went up there to see what the terrain, trails and streams were like. I had a good plan prepared that comes into road building. I wanted a road that would go from the east coast across Vietnam, across Laos, into Thailand and on down to Bangkok. I wanted a good highway through there so that if and when we started fighting that we would have this lateral behind us for supply purposes. But I was blocked on that. Diem was blocked on that. Laos agreed.

Q: What was the objection to that?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. Diem was for it, the Vietnamese were for it, MAAG was for it. USOM and the embassy were against it. Some of the roads that--well, they wouldn't come out and say, "We're not going to do this." But they'd volunteer to take over certain sections of the roads to build. They were going to do that with USOM funds. They'd never get their sections done. They'd never do it. Finally I'd go in there in desperation and try to finish the job myself with army engineers, that is, Vietnamese army engineers. From the day I went out there until the day I left, I thought we might have to fight, and I thought we could fight and win but I didn't think we would need American infantry to do it. Some U.S. Air Force and some U.S. Navy, maybe.

Q: In connection with this security problem down along the border, did the Vietnamese attempt to enlist the Montagnards who were already sparsely up in that area?

WILLIAMS: Yes. But the Vietnamese military told me they couldn't rely on the Montagnards, and I could understand that because the Montagnards couldn't rely on the Vietnamese. I remember General Ty, the chief of staff, told me, "They can't stand artillery fire." "Well," I said, "you know, I think that's particularly unusual because you've got one company in the Vietnamese army that's made up entirely of Montagnards and that's a trench mortar company." They call them trench mortar, I'd call them 4.2's or 81's. I don't think General Ty ever knew that he had such a company.

The French considered those people savages and that's where they got their name. Diem said that the French priests, Catholic priests, were preaching sedition among them and he issued an edict there at one time that no French Catholic priest nor American minister of any kind could go into the Montagnard area without specific passports from the secretary of defense. The Americans were sending over large amounts at different times of material for destitute people, mostly clothing and things of that nature. That project was handled by church people, not by MAAG. We had a few American protestant ministers over there, missionaries. And there were Catholic priests there. And they may have had some French Protestant preachers, I don't know. But the charity was under agreement. Church organizations assembled all the clothing, blankets, et cetera in warehouses in Saigon, and then because the French priests had penetrated the Highlands better than anyone else, they turned the disposition of it over to the French priests. Diem complained bitterly to me about that arrangement. He said, "The American people think that's going to the Montagnards and so forth as presents from American people. It's not. These priests are taking it in there and either saying so directly maybe, but the implication is that all this aid is coming from France. If you ask any Montagnard that's got on an American sweater or a coat, 'Where did you get this?' he'll say, 'From France.'" Diem said, "That's wrong. You ought to get that changed." I could not.

I took the matter up with the embassy but they weren't interested in it, and I had bigger problems and so I never did anything else about that other than to discuss it with a couple of American missionaries. The system did not change.

Q: Was there an ethnic problem between the Vietnamese people and the Montagnards? Was that part of it?

WILLIAMS: Yes, definitely. That whole country over there as I knew it was divided into classes. Some examples: One night at a lawn party at the French embassy, a hundred people present, men and women, Vietnamese and French and some Americans, I was standing off by myself when I saw a Vietnamese army officer nearby that I knew and knew he could speak a certain amount of English, and so I engaged him in conversation. I said, "You know it seems odd to me that everyone here is speaking French. I don't hear any Vietnamese spoken at all, and certainly a third of these people here are Vietnamese." "Well," he said, "you can't expect anyone here to speak Vietnamese. If one of these Frenchmen speaks Vietnamese, he loses face immediately in the eyes of other Frenchmen because he knows how to speak our language." I

said, "You couldn't be serious." He said, "I'm very serious. It would not be popular for a Frenchman to be known as to be able to converse in Vietnamese."

One time I was talking to a Vietnamese general. I asked what some Vietnamese soldier had said in our presence. He took me to one side, he said, "General Williams, you know, I don't understand Vietnamese." I said, "You don't speak Vietnamese?" He said, "No, Sir. I was born and raised in France, and I was educated in France. I can't speak this language." I said, "Well, goddamn it, you're wearing stars in the Vietnamese army! Why don't you learn?" He said, "Yes, Sir." I doubt if he did.

I was driving with a Vietnamese general one time going to his corps headquarters. I was always trying to find some way to improve their mobility. We were accused by certain American writers of trying to make the Vietnamese army over into an American type army, where everything was done in trucks. Well, that charge was not true at all. They had a method of carrying food, water, soil, any load, in baskets. You very likely saw it yourself in your time over there. They'd put a loaded basket on one end of a pole and a loaded basket on the other end of the pole, put the pole on their shoulder and they'd go down the road with their load. Those little old women and men would go along there at almost a trot and they'd go like everything. They could cover distance. So I said to this general beside of me, "Is it easier to carry the same number of pounds of whatever you're carrying with two baskets on a pole, or to carry it some other way." He said, "I don't know." I said, "Surely you must have some idea." He looked at me and said, "General, I never had one of those poles on my shoulder in my life." In other words, "what the hell, do you think I'm a black goddamn nigger or something like that?" That was that officer's attitude.

Now, Diem decided that he wanted to get the Vietnamese of Saigon to know something about the Montagnards other than what they had known before so he decided to have a big reception and party. He invited any number of Montagnards down from the hills to an open outdoor banquet on the Palace grounds or what they called the Palace grounds. The Palace really was just a big building; it wasn't no more a palace than this house is a palace, but it was known as the Presidential Palace.

They had the food and drink all laid out on tables and he had a lot of guests present: French, Americans and so on and so forth, American military, French military, American civilians, French civilians, the diplomatic corps. Then the Montagnards arrived. They came through the big front gate of the Palace grounds. They dismounted from whatever vehicles that had been used to bring them down from the hills and they walked down past the Palace, down to where the banquet tables were laid out. What we'd call a big picnic where people would go up to tables and help themselves. They walked down through the party guests. They were dressed up, they thought, the best they could possibly be dressed up, and some of their costumes were rather picturesque. Of that whole damn group, French, American officers, American civilians, French civilians, Vietnamese civilians, there were only two men who stepped out and met those people or shook hands with them and said hello, and one of them was Ngo Dinh Diem and the other was Sam Williams. The local people stood around and stared at those mountain people like they were animals out of a zoo. I had visited most of the chiefs in their villages. Common courtesy required me to speak to them and I did.

The Montagnards were not that bad, I can assure you. I've gone up into their villages, I've also gone up in their villages with President Diem. I preferred to go with him more than anyone else, because he didn't mind going into the villages and talking with these people. If with a Vietnamese officer, he was liable to, hell, cuff one of them or something like that, arrogant as hell, because the mountain people were in their opinion much lower.

Now you ask about the ethnic divisions, there they were. Now here's one officer that says "I can't speak the Vietnamese language." Another officer says "I never had one of those carrying poles on my shoulder in my life." Then you see this at the reception for the whole group to Montagnards. Sure, it went straight through.

Q: The great distance between officer corps and everybody else.

WILLIAMS: Yes. European style. Now, here's where they started having trouble, almost having trouble. They had one division they called the Nung, N-U-N-G, Division, it was the 3rd. That division was recruited by the French several years before on the borders between North Vietnam and China. They were mountaineers and some of the best soldiers I ever saw. They moved them down to South Vietnam and the French positioned them, and they were in position when I got there. Going out of Saigon as though you were going north to Hanoi, shortly before you came to Cam Ranh Bay, that's where the Dung 1 position was.

A colonel, a Nung colonel, commanded that division and he had French-Vietnamese dual citizenship. Diem wanted him to take Vietnamese citizenship only but he wouldn't. I visited him frequently. I liked him, I liked his wife. They served an awful good table and the food hotter than you can buy in Austin or San Antonio. Oh, it would burn you up, but it was good. I said, "Why don't you take Vietnamese citizenship? What would it hurt?" He said, "The French have told me I would lose my pension. I'm almost ready to retire." There was his official reason. Renounce French citizenship and you lose your pension.

Diem and his people became nervous because of these Nungs. They wanted to infiltrate them. They decided that they would do it through the division signal company. So they sent in some enlisted men, Vietnamese enlisted men. Radio and telephone men, and assigned them to this Dung division signal company. Then they also sent in some Vietnamese officers who were top notch, as well as they had, signal officers, to run telephones, radio and so on and so forth.

Now one day in an inspection of some kind, one of these Vietnamese officers was going through this signal company, which was predominately Nung, and he slapped a Nung soldier for some reason which to him was perfectly all right, because officers had done it in the Vietnamese army, they had seen the French do it to their soldiers and their own. But boy, they had an awakening right there. The soldiers grabbed the Vietnamese lieutenant and those people know rough ways to treat a prisoner. They had out in those divisions cages. If you looked close enough you'd see these wire cages, just about the size of a good dog house. A man can't stand up, he can't lie down, he can't sit down, nothing. They're made out of barbed wire. So when I got wind of this thing, they already had this Vietnamese lieutenant in one of these barbed wire cages and then had turned the whole thing over to the commanding colonel of the Nung division.

Diem said, "They haven't had discipline." I said, "Wait just a minute. They've got plenty of discipline. Your officers have got to stop, your officers have got to stop slapping people. You can't do that at all." He said, "I agree." I said, "All right. That Vietnamese officer slapped a Nung soldier standing in ranks. In the American army an officer cannot hit a soldier. Nor can a soldier hit an officer, because if either one of them should do that, the other one is going to be in an awful jam. That's the only way you can work this military business and you've got to teach your people, and make your people believe that." Well, Diem didn't argue with that, he agreed, but what could he do? You can't change customs like that in one generation; it's going to take some time to change things of that nature. However he did stop use of rickshaws overnight. It was degrading for a human to pull a rickshaw. Yes, they had ethnic problems

Q: How did that relocation program finally work out, or was it still going on when you left?

WILLIAMS: It was going on when I left.

Q: Continuing problems with it?

WILLIAMS: Same thing. I don't think they ever found a solution. They weren't getting adequate support. The Vietnamese were going to have to have some financial support from USOM, even if it was no more than--well, I don't know enough about that to talk to--maybe--no more than seed rice for planting their crops or something of that nature.

Q: But you attribute the problem to lack of support primarily?

WILLIAMS: Yes. American economic support.

Q: Let's deal with what was primarily your bailiwick over there, the Vietnamese military organizations. I presume you had a good deal to do with their training and so on. Did Diem distinguish between an external and an internal threat to security at that time? Or did you?

WILLIAMS: I don't know whether he did or not. Now if I understand, when you say internal threat, you mean an uprising of Viet Cong, for example?

Q: I don't mean to look at it through the glasses that we're wearing now, because we know what happened later on. But there was organizations formed early to keep security internally. Like the Civil Guard, for example. What was the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps supposed to do? What was their role?

WILLIAMS: The Civil Guard in theory roughly could be compared to the National Guard in the United States. The Self-Defense Force was maybe what you'd call state militia. There's a difference. Neither of them were functional because they didn't have the leadership nor the means to function. They didn't have the training, they didn't have anyone to direct their training. They were not a MAAG problem because MAAG was told repeatedly by the embassy to keep hands off completely in the Defense Corps and the Civil Guard organizations' equipment and training.

Q: Well, whose problem were they?

WILLIAMS: USOM. USOM sent back to the States and had police people, University of Michigan I believe, but I'm not sure, come over and they were supposed to train them.

Q: Michigan State in fact.

WILLIAMS: I remember distinctly that--well, as an individual and as chief of MAAG I had quite a bit of argument repeatedly about the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, very serious. Because--well, primarily: the Civil Guard was untrained, Self-Defense Corps was untrained. Their weapons were no good. Some of them were carrying old French rifles that the Vietnamese called fishing poles. I've picked them up and had them fall apart in my hands, actually physically had rifles fall apart in my hands when I'd take them from a man, take them up like that to inspect them. They'd put a detachment, say a platoon, what we'd call a platoon, out to guard a bridge or something of that nature.

Q: Let me interrupt you just a second, General. Who were they guarding it from?

WILLIAMS: Any outlaws or anyone--actually, what they were doing mostly was giving them jobs, I thought. But there was a certain amount of outlaws there and what they call Viet Cong gangs and so forth that would try to disturb things. Of course the Vietnamese guards would move in around this bridge with their wives and children and they'd set up their little hooches and things like that. Now, we'll say that twenty, thirty of them were there, of the Civil Guard or the Self-Defense Corps. This would happen for instance. Maybe half a dozen hard-core Viet Cong would come to a nearby Village and demand, "All right, everybody out." They'd get them out, they'd form up. "Now we're going to march up such-and-such a place and you're going to holler and yell." So they would, Viet Cong in front. Now these poor bastards guarding this bridge for instance, we'll just take that as a hypothetical situation, here is this multitude in the dark. The leading Viet Cong comes up and demands: "We're here. We've got so many fighters. We can surround you in a minute. It's either life or death. Surrender immediately or you've had it." And they had all this shouting and so forth. These poor people in these hooches at this bridge, they hear maybe two hundred people back here shouting and yelling. They have no discipline, they have no weapons that's worth fighting with and so forth, they see themselves as heavily outnumbered and they give up.

Okay. Now where does MAAG enter into that? I say when that happens, it causes the people to lose confidence in the government, because the government had put the people there to guard a bridge and they can't guard that bridge from a half a dozen Viet Cong, although the government had maybe forty or fifty men there. So any time that happens it weakens the government that much. I don't want the government to be weakened. I want these Civil Guards and Self-Defense Corps to be so strong and so well trained that they can fight and resist anything like that. And if they fight the half a dozen Viet Cong are going to fade back into the brush. That briefly was my interest in the problem. Now, those discussions became serious and heated.

Q: At what point was this beginning to become a problem? Was this a problem right from the earliest days?

WILLIAMS: I'd say by 1957.

Q: That early?

WILLIAMS: When did Mr. [Elbridge] Durbrow come over? He came over in April of 1957. Well, it was during his regime that most of this started and became progressively worse.

USOM brought a man over to Saigon and he appeared at a country team meeting one time. You're familiar with the country team? That's a group made up of the heads of the various sections: the head of the USOM, the head of USIA, and the head of MAAG and the ambassador and so forth. I was introduced to this man as Chief so-and-so and he said his job was or was introduced to me as the man who was training the Civil Guard and police, a dual job, in South Vietnam. He seemed like a nice sort of fellow, maybe in his fifties, and friendly. I said, "You've been in police work a long time?" He said, "Yes, I have," and I think he told me he'd been in the police business ten or fifteen years. I said, "They call you chief. Were you chief of police?" He said, "Yes, Sir." I said, "Where?" He said, "Detroit." Well, that made quite an impression on me because the ex-chief of police of Detroit must be a pretty reliable man. Now it wasn't till a long time after I found out there's more than one Detroit in the United States, and he wasn't from the Detroit, Michigan that I knew about. Now that man was flying under false colors with me.

I wanted USOM to arm the Civil Guard with decent weapons. This Chief said, "They don't need any more arms. The only thing we need is one revolver per man. These people will be taught marksmanship to such an extent that every time a shot is fired an outlaw drops dead." Now this was a serious discussion, just like we're having here now. I asked, "Were you in any gunfights when you were chief of police of Detroit?" He said, "No, Sir, I never had to draw my gun." I should have wised up right then. I said, "Have you been in any gunfights since you've been in South Vietnam?" He said, "Why, no." I said, "Have you ever been out in the boondocks here, out in the countryside when the Vietnamese and the outlaws were shooting at each other?" "No, Sir." I said, "Well, if you're going down a road in your jeep and a half a dozen men from either side of the road start shooting at you with rifles or throwing grenades, are you going to be able to handle that situation with a six-shooter?" "My every shot will be a dead man." (Laughter) And you know, everyone on the country team believed that man. Everyone believed that man!

Q: Well, his concept of the Civil Guard was a police force.

WILLIAMS: Exactly. A city or village policeman.

Q: And your concept was more of a military.

WILLIAMS: That's right, that's right.

Q: Was that the heart of the--

WILLIAMS: That was the heart of the whole business. Now, these differences were no secret. The chief of staff of the American army knew of them. Mr. Brucker, who was secretary of the

army, they knew about the problems. His deputy had come out there repeatedly, they all knew about this thing going on. One day someone told me, "There's two thousand Tommy guns in Japan--or Okinawa, it makes no difference--that have been declared surplus. You can get them free. Do you want them." They said, "All right, you've got them." And so eventually they shipped me two thousand Tommy guns, 45 caliber, the whole thing. Spare parts, magazines and a certain number of rounds, two or three thousand rounds per gun. Shipped those to me at Saigon. CINCPAC knew about this. I told CINCPAC I was going to issue these to the Civil Guard, and he directed: "Don't do it all at one time. Issue them in small groups and see that the people are trained to handle them before you turn them loose."

Q: Wouldn't USOM object to this?

WILLIAMS: Up until now they hadn't objected. When I asked the USOM director to request these weapons before I did, I said, "They're there. All you have to do is ask for them. They're your babies. You ask for them." He said, "I'm not sure we want the Civil Guard to have those weapons." Now that was his answer, and that's the last answer I ever got from him. So I said to myself, to hell with that, I haven't got time to play with that kind of a ball game. So I immediately asked for them myself and got them for free.

All right. Then I said to USOM, "We've got these weapons. Will you order in two hundred Civil Guard people at one time for one week's instruction under MAAG officers, to be instructed in the use of these Tommy guns?" He agreed, and he did. Now, as a precaution, I had a list made of the serial number of every one of those guns, because if something was going to come up about it or some captured they'd say, "All right, it was your fault." I'd say, "What's the number on that captured weapon?" Whether that would have done any good or not, I don't know.

So that way we distributed two thousand Tommy guns to the Civil Guard. Now after it was over, Mr. Durbrow, who at that time was the ambassador, took me to task. He said, "Why in the world did you issue those weapons to the Vietnamese?" Well, I said, "For a simple reason and you know why I did it. We've talked about this at the country team meetings, about these weapons being available. USOM was going to get them, they didn't get them, so I went and got them." He said, "Yes, but if we'd held it off, I could have held these up as a carrot to Diem, and then got some favor in return." Well, I said, "That's too late now. What we get in return is some efficiency out of the Civil Guard, maybe. Certainly not some personal favor."

Q: Did he ever say what he wanted out of Diem?

WILLIAMS: No, no, didn't. And I doubt if he had any particular thing in his mind. But I had interest in the Civil Guard, but up until the day I left there I never was able to get any decent training done in the Civil Guard nor any adequate training done in the Defense Corps. Now, some people have said much later, well, the Vietnamese didn't want good training or equipment because they were afraid for all these people to have decent weapons. That was not true. It certainly was not true as far as the secretary of defense was concerned, the Vietnamese secretary of defense, the secretary to the presidency, or Diem, or Mr. [Ngo Dinh] Nhu. None of those people offered any objection at all to the Civil Guard or the Defense Corps having individual weapons. In fact they wanted them. Also they wanted them under MAAG for training.

Q: Did any of the ARVN officers express an opinion on that?

WILLIAMS: No. Not on the Tommy guns. They expressed no adverse opinion on it. Of course, a lot of them said--not a lot of them, but it was hinted later, "Well, General, why didn't you give us those Tommy guns?" "Well," I said, "your TO & E doesn't call for them."

Q: The reason I ask is that one former USOM official has advanced the claim that Diem was creating a counterweight to disloyal army units with the Civil Guard.

WILLIAMS: I've heard that. I've heard that.

Q: Would you put any credence in that?

WILLIAMS: No. None whatsoever. Because the Civil Guard was in such a pitiful condition that even though the army was not at that time an A-1 army by any manner or means, the Civil Guard couldn't have offered any competition to them at all. By 1957 the army was making good progress.

Q: You have hinted several times that relations between Diem and USOM, or Diem and the Ambassador, were not everything they should have been. Is that correct?

WILLIAMS: That's my positive opinion, yes.

Q: Was that a constant or did that situation build?

WILLIAMS: I'd say it built.

Q: What was behind that?

WILLIAMS: I'm not too sure. When Mr. Reinhardt was ambassador, relationships all around were excellent, and within the country team they were excellent. But after Mr. Durbrow came, maybe we were all at fault to some extent. Friction developed. I was trying very hard and I thought it was in the United States' interest to get South Vietnam built up into a strong nation as fast as possible. I used to tell any Vietnamese who had any questions about it, "If you've been told by the French or others that we're just swapping hats, that the French left and Americans come in? That's not so. The quicker we can get this job done, the quicker we are going to get out." I made that remark before a Senate committee one time. One of those senators said, "Well, General, what you're trying to do is work yourself out of a job?" I said, "That's exactly what I'm trying to do."

Q: Were those the hearings in the summer of 1959, the [Albert] Colegrove business?

WILLIAMS: I think that was the Mansfield Committee. I'm sure it was.

Q: Some people have accused I guess the Self-Defense Corps, that was the Dan Ve, wasn't it,

wasn't that called the Dan Ve?

WILLIAMS: I don't remember.

Q: I don't speak Vietnamese, so I'm on shaky ground--that they were often guilty of misbehaving in the villages, stealing~ducks or chickens or arrogant behavior or so forth. Was that a common thing or did it happen at all in your tenure, or did you hear of it at all?

WILLIAMS: I'm sure it must have happened, but right now I can't remember a single incident of that kind ever being brought to my attention.

Q: So it wasn't a problem so far as you knew?

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: Where was Diem getting leaders for all of these organizations?

WILLIAMS: I'd say he was having an awful hard time. He was scratching.

Q: Where did he get officers for the Civil Guard, for example?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. I know that the leaders of the Civil Guard, the commanding general of the Civil Guard, was normally an army officer.

Q: Did army officers take lesser slots in that as well?

WILLIAMS: Probably.

Q: The reason I'm asking is that once again, a former USOM official has said one of the problems with the army was that Diem was using army officers for lots of other things besides being in the army.

WILLIAMS: Oh, he did, there's no doubt about that. He used them for many things: overseeing construction work, overseeing the building of villages and overseeing the building of roads and things like that. We do it here in the United States to a degree. Most of it is done by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as you know.

Which brings up another thing that I just happened to think about. We had to have an airfield at Tan Son Nhut. The airfield we had there was not big enough to even take care of the planes we were then using. We had a wonderful chance there to get a field, and I wanted a field that's not less than two thousand feet long.

Q: What was significant about two thousand yards?

WILLIAMS: I wanted it big enough for a four-engine bomber to come in and land on it. No one objected to that particularly. I don't think anyone thought about it. They didn't think, "what does

General Williams want two thousand feet for, anyway?" But they argued about who they'd give the contract to. Okay, now I spoke about the army engineers a while ago. The American Navy takes on jobs like that, which I didn't know prior to that. So the American Navy sent out a couple of captains in civilian clothes, I guess they were naval engineers. They looked over the thing. And the United States Navy put in a bid for that job.

Q: How can they do that?

WILLIAMS: I don't know what the authority is; just like the Corps of Engineers can go down here and put in a bid, I guess for building a dam. But nevertheless, it was done. Now, that was a very good bid and I was very much in favor of it because I thought we could trust the American Navy to do the job we wanted done. Incidentally, along about that time I couldn't get any air force officer of any stature to back me up on my desire for a long landing strip.

Q: Why was that?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. Whether they didn't have the foresight to see that they were going to use bombers in there one day that would require that kind of runway or not, I don't know.

Q: Were they saying that what you had was adequate? Was that their position?

WILLIAMS: No, but they wanted me to agree to take something less. Well, anyway, when the discussion [arose] at the country team about that, the USOM director said, "Well, we can't have a bunch of sailors running around out there with their sailor suits and so forth. Why, the communists will know immediately that that is going to be for military purposes." I said, "Didn't these naval officers explain what they did?" "Well, I don't remember." I said, "If the Navy Engineers got the job, you're not going to see anyone in navy uniform around that place. Those officers you talked to were here in civilian clothes. The people that they employ, whether they're Americans or local labor, and they'll employ both, will be in civilian clothes. You can't tell that from any civilian project except it will be done better and you can depend on it." I don't know whether there was any hanky-panky in there or not, but the company that got the contract for that was not the United States Navy and it cost a hell of a lot more than the United States Navy bid on it. But those are the problems that I ran into.

Now for instance, we were building a highway from Saigon, going up north, and there were places on that highway that were going to be straight as an arrow. Now USOM was building this highway. It was not a military highway presumably. I said, "Now from this place here, certain kilometer, up to a certain kilometer, you've got a straight stretch. Let's make this highway four lanes from Saigon at least out that far or a little further, and let's put a little bit heavier base on that section." "What for? What do you want to do that for?" I said, "I want airplanes to be able to land on that. Did you ever hear about German planes landing on the autobahns in Germany during World War II?" "Ho. They did that?" You have an awful time convincing people if they're not informed about things. But that suggestion didn't work either. There was a good chance. I wasn't there after the war started, but all those airfields they had to build and those big things they did with the air force out there, lots of that could have been done beforehand, well beforehand, and certainly at much less cost than it was later. But you've got to work with people

who have a little foresight to do things like that and to get things done.

Q: Did the South Vietnamese army suffer from losing too many officers to all these various and sundry projects that Diem had going on? Was the leadership diluted more than it should have been?

WILLIAMS: I doubt it.

Q: Speaking of officers, how did Diem select the top officers?

WILLIAMS: I don't know for sure. I think he took them more or less in order of the rank they had held in the French colonial army. He told me he selected Lieutenant General Ty as commander because he was the senior Vietnamese officer, a major I believe.

Q: There are allegations that he placed too much reliance on personal loyalty and not enough on efficiency. Did you ever make a recommendation for promotion and run into that problem?

WILLIAMS: Well, I can't deny that he put a great deal of faith in the personal loyalty, but I can't say that I could ever cite an instance in which he put a less efficient officer into assignment because he thought that officer was loyal to him and some other officer wasn't.

Q: So if this happened at all, it didn't happen during your time?

WILLIAMS: It could have happened in my time, but I don't believe it did. But you know, you can't tell, you can't tell what goes on in a man's mind.

Q: Did he consult you about high appointments in the ARVN?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: Was your advice pretty well heeded, do you think?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Except in one instance I brought up here a while ago, in the case of General Xuan, X-U-A-N, I don't think I'm pronouncing that right. I suggested Xuan for such and such assignment and he said, "I haven't got complete trust." And you know he was right in that lack of trust because it turned out that he was the officer that Big Minh sent to Cholon to pick up President Diem and his brother and bring them back to his headquarters. They were executed en route. Xuan was head of that convoy. So Diem had been right all that time.

Q: They never have decided who pulled that trigger, have they? Did you know?

WILLIAMS: Oh, I think so, I think so. [Tram Van] Don says so in his book [Our Endless War Inside Vietnam]. There's no doubt in my mind who did it. However, I think that all of them were equally responsible regardless of who pulled the trigger. I think Big Minh ordered it, Don insists that he didn't know anything about it. There were about twelve of those officers in that coup and we know, they were being monitored by a CIA man by the name of [Lou] Conein. Conein has

stated publicly in the United States that he was in constant communication with Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge while the coup was going on, and advising Lodge what they were doing and what they were going to do, and so on and so forth.

Well, anyway, when Diem phoned in from Cholon into the headquarters and told them that he was ready to surrender, they promised him they'd send him out of the country. Big Minh sent Xuan, in command of the detail, to go get them and send an armored personnel carrier to bring them back. I don't know where the word came out, but Diem and his brother were suspicious when they came for them and locked them in the back of a personnel carrier instead of an automobile. Then initially the escort claimed they came to a railroad track and had to stop, and then that sometime while they were stopped some persons unbeknown got out of the convoy and went in there and killed President Diem and Mr. Nhu.

But that's not the true story at all in my mind. Xuan knew about the murder because Don states that when Xuan came back he was in the room with Big Minh when Xuan came in and reported: "The job is done," period. Don, thinking that they had the prisoners there, went out and over to another part of the compound where they were to fix up quarters for Diem and his brother, and when he came back he learned they were dead. The brother had been shot and cut up terribly, Diem had been shot and stabbed a couple of times, they were dead. There's no doubt in my mind about it but that Xuan knew of the murders and had honchoed the crime. I, from a personal point of view, held all of the generals that were present or members of the coup responsible for it.

Q: Well, they undoubtedly had agreed on what was going to happen.

WILLIAMS: I don't know if they did or not. Maybe Big Minh might have taken the murders on himself, but I doubt it, but whether he did or not, I say the others are responsible just as much as he is. Of course, his aide charged with the murders then committed suicide. Now whether he committed suicide or Big Minh had him killed, I don't know. They found him hanging in his cell. Of course, they had first locked him up and then they found him hanging in the cell. I would say it's highly probable that Big Minh had that done, maybe did it personally, as he was such a big, powerful man physically, maybe he wanted to be damn sure that this aide de camp didn't talk. I wouldn't put it past him at all. But anyway, as a result of that, I broke off all correspondence with the Vietnamese.

Q: We hear a lot of criticism after the fact that we were training the Vietnamese for the wrong war. I would like to ask you, was there any criticism at the time of the way we were training the South Vietnamese army?

WILLIAMS: While I was there, there was none except occasionally there would be an article by some newspaper reporter or stringer that would write that we were building a Vietnamese army in the image of the American army and that was the wrong way to do it. Those people didn't know what they were talking about. Now I'll tell you exactly what we did as far as organizing the Vietnamese army. First of all, over a period of time, the Americans had been putting in for supplies, rifles, machine guns, whatnot and so on and so forth, and the requisitions were being honored back in the United States. The word came to me, orders came to me, that we had to have

an approved table of organization and equipment and we would therefore requisition against that, nothing else. So that meant that immediately the Vietnamese had to have a table of organization and equipment, which up until that time, believe it or not, they had never had.

They had so many light divisions, so many heavy divisions, so-called, and units like that. So, it was decided that we would build a type [of] Vietnamese division. I had long conferences with Diem and with the Vietnamese senior officers. I said, "Now what we want to do is to get a Vietnamese division. You don't want a Japanese division nor an American division nor a German division nor a French division. You need a division that is built to work in this country, in swamps, mountains, jungles, that's the kind of division you need." All agreed.

So we started working on it. They appointed a board and we worked with that board for an awful long time and we finally came to a consensus, and it wasn't easy and there was draft after draft. We started in from the rifle squad right on up, or the artillery crew right on up, see, the mortar crews, building right up from the bottom. And all to take advantage of the characteristics of the Vietnamese people and the terrain on which this army would be used. Finally after we got an agreement between the Vietnamese and MAAG on a table of operations we turned it in, as approved by the Vietnamese government. We sent it to Washington through CINCPAC. Washington then approved the TO & E's and that's what thereafter we requisitioned against. That's what we paid the troops on. I spoke a while ago about Diem being perturbed because we had reduced the number of noncoms. Instead of having, say, umpty-ump numbers of corporals, we had a lesser number, according to how many squads they were going to command and things of that nature. There was no padding.

Now where these stringers got their ideas was this: Any time the Vietnamese had a parade or anything like that in the streets of Saigon, they had an idea that the more vehicles, the more armor or the more heavy material they could show in that parade, the better it would look to the world. Okay, you see a man come in there and he's a reporter from the Philippines or Japan or someplace and he sees one of their parades, he says, "Mother of God, look at all that equipment coming down the street. Everyone is riding in a two-and-a-half ton truck or a jeep. Look at all that stuff. MAAG must be crazy. Those people can't work that in the jungle."

These photographs here, which I'll show you and describe them, these are some of the things that we tried to do. Now the Vietnamese are crazy about bicycles, and they use them all the time. So this vehicle you see here is a bicycle wheel under a frame that would normally look like an ordinary stretcher. All right, now there's their packs and their equipment on that frame. A man in front, a man behind that frame, but the weight's on this bicycle, and there they go. All right, that's one thing we used.

Pontoon bridges. We didn't have use for American-type pontoon bridges nor did we have them. Those people are used to using the normal growth there, so here we're showing how to build local pontoon bridges. You don't have to carry those or very little of them in any wagon train, because you haven't got one. You can actually build pontoon bridges on the spot. Here's where we take shelter halves and put them together and make rafts and use those for boats. There's another example of it right here.

Here's some more of these pictures showing how sometimes we would use two wheels instead of one wheel under one of those stretcher frames. Here's where we tried pack animals--we had some horses over there, but not military, but we tried to use some horses as pack animals to see how it would work, but it didn't work at all.

Q: What was wrong with the horses?

WILLIAMS: Climate. You see there a raft made out of inverted helmet liners. Another type of raft--we were doing all kind of experimenting like that. Here's people stripped down to their shorts because they're going to do some work out there in the river with their rafts.

Q: The point of all this of course is that you were using indigenous materials?

WILLIAMS: And materials that the people had been used to working with. Here rafts are made out of shelter halves. Soldiers crossing rivers on ropes and so forth. This is the stuff that the anti-Vietnamese and pro-communists who were writing about the parades in Saigon never saw or heard of. They said, "Well, goodness gracious, MAAG is building an armored force in Vietnam." We weren't doing anything of the kind. People read that trash and believed it.

Q: Were there other representatives of Western allies, military representatives of Western allies, in Saigon at this time? Did they have any input into all of this training exercise?

WILLIAMS: There were other military people there, from Korea, Australia, Great Britain, but those were military attaches, and in their embassy attache office. They had nothing to do with the Vietnamese training except to observe.

Q: And they never entered into the advisory capacity?

WILLIAMS: No. Oh, I used to talk to them. They used to come over and see me and ask me about this, that and the other, because they had to get a certain amount of material to report to their home government.

They'd come over and ask questions, and I was always very frank with them, I'd lay it right on the line, tell them what we were doing or trying to do.

There's a lot of Americans that wanted to find fault with what went on in Vietnam, and one claim was that we were training the Vietnamese military improperly. But my orders were to organize, train and equip the Vietnamese army, navy and air force. I had a certain number of navy personnel there, not many. A captain was their senior officer, comparable to an army colonel, of course. We had a major of the Marine Corps there, a good one, too. I think the senior air force adviser would have been a lieutenant colonel, maybe a colonel. The rest of them were army. We were always so short-handed. Of course, you say what we can see today and we couldn't see then, but I thought I saw a whole lot then that I'm not convinced that I didn't see. After say 1958 or 1959, I did not see a North Korean type invasion from North Vietnam, which I had seen in 1956 and 1957. I said to myself, "They're not going to do it."

Q: How did you know? What changed your mind?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. I think it's because the Vietnamese were getting progressively stronger. We were making very good progress. I thought if the North Vietnamese came down they'd have a fight on their hands that they didn't want to take on. I believe that if they had come down in 1955 or 1956 they could walk in standing up. By 1958 or 1959 I thought it would be a terrible fight from start to finish. And I wasn't sure that the North Vietnamese could handle it or wanted to handle it.

Later I was under the impression that if we and the coup had let Diem alone that there would never have been a war. I think that Diem would have been able to negotiate in such a way with Ho Chi Minh that they could settle differences. You see, Ho Chi Minh and Diem knew each other quite well, and Ho Chi Minh had offered Diem a job in his government when Ho Chi Minh first took over from the French, but Diem had turned it down. So they were not strangers. Diem knew that country up north very well and had lived there, had traveled there. He was not a North Vietnamese, his home was around Hue, which as you know is in Central. But he knew the North Vietnamese and spoke several of their dialects. He was a smart man, and I believe if they had not had a coup d'etat and killed him there would not have been a war. In Diem's time, at least.

I think more so, that if they would have gone ahead and given me an adequate number of advisors--see, when we got down to the fighting troops I had advisors at division headquarters only. None at artillery, none at the regiments, nor in separate battalions and units like that, and then advisors with supply and logistics, I was woefully short. When it came to the navy, hell, I couldn't move, ! didn't have near enough. I tried to put a couple of officers in the naval academy in 1955-56, and the French admiral in command of the French navy in Vietnam at that time, told me and told me in all seriousness, "General Williams, if you will take command of the Vietnamese forces, I'll back you up with anything that I possibly can with the French navy. But as long as you insist on the Vietnamese being in command and Americans merely being advisors, I'm going to fight you every step of the way until I'm shipped out of Vietnam. If you try to put one single advisor in the naval academy, I'll pull every French officer out of that academy within the hour after you do it." Well, he had me, because at the time the utmost that I could have put in that naval academy was two U.S. officers.

Q: How did you explain his attitude?

WILLIAMS: Well, that's the way he thought; he just thought, by George--and I don't think he was too damn stupid either. He just thought we should take command as the French had done and not try to let the Vietnamese command their own navy--in other words, I think he thought we were just spinning our wheels, that we couldn't teach the Vietnamese. Just like a senior French army officer said, "These people won't fight." And foolishly I said, "They just whipped you." Well, that was a stupid thing to say. The French weren't whipped necessarily there. They were whipped in Paris, just like we were whipped in the United States. We weren't whipped in Vietnam. That is my humble opinion of it.

Q: You gave me your reasons why you thought there was no longer a serious threat of invasion, say after 1958. Did you have a good intelligence about that sort of thing in those days?

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: How good was our intelligence over there?

WILLIAMS: I could only say as far as MAAG was concerned it was nonexistent. I had no intelligence personnel. I had no way of getting any military intelligence about the North Vietnamese and little about the sects, other than Bao Dai or the Hoa Hao that I got from the Vietnamese themselves. I think the Vietnamese officers, their headquarters, gave me all the information they could get, but I had no means. And I got none from the United States; I got no reports from G-2 of the Army or G-2 of the Department of the Army or Defense Department, saying such-and-such a thing is happening in North Vietnam. I got nothing of that nature that I can recall. Once I suggested to Diem that he get spies into North Vietnam. He said they had tried but with poor success.

Q: So you depended more or less on Vietnamese sources for lack of anything else?

WILLIAMS: Yes, that's right.

Q: When what we now call the insurgency in South Vietnam got started--and there is some argument about when you can date that exactly, but the late fifties seems to be a pretty general consensus--how good was your information on that, on the early beginnings of that?

WILLIAMS: The only information I got of that was when the Vietnamese military would report, "We had an attack at such-and-such a place." The embassy often said these reports were false. MAAG advisors said the reports were true.

Q: Did you see these as communist-inspired or bandit-inspired or what?

WILLIAMS: I thought it was simply local, but I always figured that the hard-core was communist and directed from Hanoi?

Q: You always thought that?

WILLIAMS: Yes. I never at any time thought it was local uprisings. I thought they were sending those people down, these hard-core people down, and they would go into these villages and intimidate the people. They could do that. They would take a man and string him up on a pole, cut off his head and lay it down at his feet, take his wife out and gut her and lay her down there by his head and let the pigs get on them, things like that. I know those things happened. If you want to intimidate a village, that's an awful good way to do it, and two or three men can come in the night and do it. They know where the chief or the top man in that village lives. They come in, they go into his hootch at night and pull him and his wife out, and in the morning they're there laying out there in the middle of the street.

Q: Could you ever get hard evidence that people were infiltrated from the north?

WILLIAMS: Well, you say hard evidence, no. I never had anything that you could pull a man up and try him for, but I know one of the first times we had casualties there, it was out at Bien Hoa if I remember correctly. It was after supper and the Americans were in their dining room and they put up a little motion picture machine and looking at motion pictures. Suddenly some people appeared at the windows, local Vietnamese were already at the windows looking in, kids and people there at that post looking through the windows at the picture show. Some of these outlaws appeared and sprayed inside the room with automatic weapons. One of them appeared to throw a bomb or a grenade of some kind through a kitchen door. He was countered in that, because there were two screen doors about ten feet apart. He apparently didn't know about the second screen door, and so the thing bounced back on him and they found his remains outside the next morning.

I happened to be in Bangkok that particular day that happened, but I got a message of this attack. I got over there as fast as an airplane could take me. I told Diem, "This is no good." I don't know what our casualties are. There's three or four people wounded and I think one or two dead, but I'm not positive and it makes no difference now at this late date. Lord take care of their souls. But I said, "This won't work. This case must be solved." Later Lansdale told me, "The Vietnamese thought so much about this that they broke some of their security finding out who did this." So those people, the best I could find up until now, came three days marches from the north. In other words, they left someplace in the north, and I never did know the details and I didn't particularly care to, if I had known I couldn't have remembered it anyway. They left a particular place in the north and they walked all night. Then they went into hiding during the day. Another guide picked them up. They were strangers, they didn't know the country. Another guide would pick them up, walked them all night.

So for three nights they walked. They got to this place and then they botched their job, because the windows were too high so they couldn't shoot down at the seats. The people that were hurt were trying to get upstairs to get their weapons. By that time I'd told our people to always keep a weapon handy. Now, we weren't supposed to be armed. But I never went anyplace that I didn't have a .45. I said, "You can carry weapons without advertising it to the world, not even your Vietnamese compadre needs to know that you're carrying a .45. But for Christ's sakes, carry something!" These advisors weren't carrying them because they were sitting in their own dining room, they'd left their damn weapons upstairs. That's stupid. The reason some people don't survive is because they do things like that. But anyway, the people that were shot were going up the staircase.

The raiders killed a Vietnamese girl that lived there. She happened to be standing outside on a box or something watching the movie. They killed her. They didn't give a damn who they killed. [They found] the remains of one of them there. He had been killed by his own grenade. But that was the only hard evidence that I recall that someone had come down from the north. But of course I knew, or at least I believed, that these people were coming down and they would go to these places and they would intimidate these villagers and they would make certain recruits.

Q: Was that the purpose of these terroristic acts in your own mind?

WILLIAMS: Yes. It was merely to disturb the people so that they would have no confidence in

their government.

Q: With a view toward--

WILLIAMS: Someday to overthrowing it maybe.

Q: I see. Okay.

WILLIAMS: But in my mind it never was anything except communists. I didn't believe any of these local agricultural people wanting to rise up and overthrow the government. To me from the very first it was definitely communist inspired. I still think it was. And I think some of the things that came out to us from the United States was by people who had a very charitable view toward communism. I wouldn't say they were communists, but I would say that a lot of the things that came down to us or came to me I thought was instigated by someone who was pro-communist. I'm very serious about that; even after twenty-some odd years I still believe that with all my soul.

Q: You said that our intelligence was no better than it should have been, I suppose. How good was the other side's intelligence as you discovered as time went on?

WILLIAMS: The Viet Cong?

Q: Yes.

WILLIAMS: I think it must have been very good. I think it must have been very good, because they could pass themselves off as villagers. They could go anyplace in the country they wanted to anytime as there was free movement. I remember one U.S. Army War College class came out there on a visit and one of the students said to me later, "Hell, you're living in a police state." I said, "Why do you say we're in a police state?" He said, "Well, from the airfield in to your headquarters there were two policemen on every block." Police walking. I said, "Sure, they're watching traffic. They know you're coming in. They want you to move and move without any congestion or anything else where you're going. Now for your information, I've talked to police officials in the United States and told them what the police strength was in this city and asked about the ratio of police to population. I've been told that there's no city in the United States that could work on a ratio of as few policemen per thousand people as they do right here in Saigon. This is not a police state." People could go anyplace. There wasn't any hold on them. This student had been given false information before he ever got to Vietnam.

Q: A very free and easy atmosphere?

WILLIAMS: That's right, yes.

Q: Did you ever have any indication that the Viet Cong had infiltrated higher headquarters, not necessarily yours, but others?

WILLIAMS: No. I never suspected it.

Q: Well, I have to ask you to explain something then. I read an interview that you gave to the U.S. News & World Report--at least that is the credentials that they presented--and as I recall the interview was in 1964.

WILLIAMS: Well, I tell you, I sure wish I had a copy of that interview because several people have asked me for it and I have said, "I can't find that damn magazine. I used to have it around here."

Q: Well, I'll give you my copy. I can get another one. The reason I ask you that is because they've got a quote there that says, and I'm quoting--well, I will in a minute--the VC infiltrated both ARVN and MAAG headquarters and then they quote you, "I knew that and I fought it," unquote.

WILLIAMS: Let me see if I can find that.

Q: I don't have the page [number].

(Interruption)

You've just said that you may have said it in 1964 but you can't remember now why you would have said it.

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: Okay. Well--

WILLIAMS: I know that they used to come in and insist on going over my walls and telephone and things like that with their electrical machines to see if there were any bugs in there or if the phones had been tapped. But, I didn't put a great deal of faith in that either. You know, it's just like anything like that can happen. They can do that and say your place is absolutely clean, tomorrow morning might not be clean at all.

Q: Did they ever find anything?

WILLIAMS: No. If they did they never told me. Correction. A Vietnamese clerk in MAAG finance office was arrested. Vietnamese police told us he was a Viet Cong agent.

Q: Was there some point in the fifties when you became aware that what was going on in the countryside was not just isolated terror anymore, but a campaign of sorts had started against the government? In other words, these were not unrelated incidents but there was a pattern and it was being centrally directed.

WILLIAMS: I thought--well, now, against the government. Well now, we're talking about the Viet Cong raids?

Q: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Well, I thought all the time that was directed from Hanoi.

Q: Okay. Did Washington ever give you any indication of what their estimate of the situation was at all? Any advice on what new measures should be taken to cope with the worsening situation, anything like that?

WILLIAMS: At this moment I can't remember of any. In any case I had no means, no troops, no police.

Q: The reason I'm asking is that there was a national intelligence estimate that was done in the spring of 1959, which I came across, which predicted that the security forces--the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Forces--were not going to be able to cope with the terror in the countryside, that the ARVN would have to be used, and the Diem was losing his popularity. I'm wondering if you ever got such a report from Washington.

WILLIAMS: If I did I can't remember it.

Q: Okay.

WILLIAMS: But a report like that would not be surprising to me at all, because I think every Tom, Dick and Harry that had ever crossed the Pacific Ocean suddenly became an expert on Asian affairs and was liable to get anything in print back in the United States about that part of the world.

Q: Of course, this was a national intelligence estimate, it wasn't a State Department estimate or even just a CIA, it was the combined intelligence thinking of the whole Washington community. When I saw that I thought, well, this is serious. Obviously somebody in Washington thinks the situation is getting serious. I was wondering if they ever communicated it to you.

WILLIAMS: If they did I don't remember it. The embassy may have received it, however.

Q: Okay. Despite the increase in terrorism, did you think still in 1959 and 1960 there was still sufficient cause for optimism about how it could possibly all turn out?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Yes. I was optimistic up until the day I left there in 1960. Since 1955 we had made great progress with the Vietnamese armed forces. Our advisors were good. They were doing top work.

Q: That was the impression that I had garnered and I wanted to make sure it was the correct impression. But you also said in another place, I think it's in this other interview, that when you left in September that the situation had worsened in one respect, and that was the relations between the embassy and President Diem. Is that an accurate statement?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. I would say that.

Q: What was going on? What was the trouble there?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. I know that there was this friction--what I called friction-- between the President and Mr. Durbrow. It didn't surprise me too much because there was always so many derogatory things being said at country team meetings about the President.

Q: Such as what?

WILLIAMS: Oh, vulgar things in country team meetings where not only the country team members were present but maybe some staff officials from their various headquarters would be in there for different kinds of briefings and so forth. If derogatory things were said, I had the fear, and I believed very strongly, that those things could be repeated on the outside. Say that USOM might have a man at the meeting that's going to say something about fisheries or something like that. Maybe the Ambassador or one of the high-ranking individuals there would say, "Well, now, what do you think that little son-of-a-bitch is going to do about that?" Or someone might ask how can we embarrass the little bastard today.

Q: What would prompt--

WILLIAMS: What would prompt that? I don't know. I don't know. Because I thought it was terrible and I objected to it and I objected to it strongly. I said to these individuals, maybe not at that instance, "You've got people in here that go outside and this man here has something to do with fisheries and he goes back to his office and says, 'I heard the Ambassador or so and so, maybe the USOM chief, refer to President Diem as that little sawed-off son-of-a-bitch or a dirty little bastard.' He says that because that gives him prestige; he thinks because he's telling someone that he was in on such a conference. Who he tells it to, whether it's his secretary, whether it's another American or whether it's a French secretary or what, they're going to repeat it. First thing you know, it's all over town that so-and-so referred to the President as a son-of-a-bitch. Now what good does that do anybody? It can do nothing but harm, nothing but harm. It's nasty, it's shortsighted, it's non-professional."

Q: You were out of sympathy with people who felt that way?

WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

Q: Well, did this affect your relations with the country team or with USOM?

WILLIAMS: It affected my relations with the country team no end.

Q: How so?

WILLIAMS: Well, because most all sooner or later became hostile to me. Example: when MAAG submitted a yearly budget, I would never get up and submit the budget. I would always get one of my officers, in particular a man that's dead now, General Lambert, to present the budget. Lambert could get up and present the budget and [snaps fingers] they'd approve it like that. I'd get up and present that budget and have to argue and answer questions for three hours, just nit-picking. They knew that President Diem put a good deal of faith in me and that he had a

very high regard for my opinions and took me in his confidence and he didn't take these other people in his confidence. There must have been jealousy there. I assume it was jealousy. I would certainly say it was stupidity, because it didn't do the United States government any good to have friction like that going on. I thought it was very bad, very bad.

Q: Did you report on this development through channels?

WILLIAMS: I made no official report of it that I can remember of, by sitting down and saying, "I want to report this, that and the other." But the Secretary of the Army, Mr. Brucker, was thoroughly cognizant of it. I'm sure General Taylor was aware of it. Admiral [Felix] Stump certainly knew it, who was CINCPAC. Admiral [Harry D.] Felt certainly knew it. It wasn't any secret in Southeast Asia. As a matter of fact, one time I was bemoaning the fact to some U.S. army officer visitor, and he said, "Why, you shouldn't worry at all. You should know about the friction that's going on between MAAG and the Ambassador up in Japan. What you've got down here amounts to nothing. If you want to get into it, just think about the Chief of MAAG over in the Philippines and the Ambassador over there. They're almost at fisticuffs. Hell, everyone does that." So, that causes a person to think, well, maybe it's not so bad, but to me it was very bad.

Q: Now, I have looked at some Senate hearings that were done in the summer of 1959, and then again there were some that were taken, some testimony was taken in Saigon in December of 1959, and I think this has to do with Colegrove, who was a reporter and reported some very sensational findings and there were hearings and so on. The testimony from Ambassador Durbrow and Mr. [Arthur Z.] Gardiner, I believe it was, is all very positive about the whole program, about President Diem and so on and so on. Not a harsh word.

WILLIAMS: Very positive, you say?

Q: Very, yes. They praised the Vietnamese government and so on. It reads one way and what you're telling me reads another way. Can you reconcile that?

WILLIAMS: They couldn't afford to downgrade Diem and the Vietnamese in an open investigation. I was reading a draft that they had prepared up at the Military History Division, they sent down here a book that they're writing to get my opinion. They spoke about the friction between the American Ambassador and the Chief of MAAG and said both freely admitted that this friction and that Mr. [Leland] Barrows, who had been USOM chief before Mr. Gardiner, said yes, that it was simply terrible, that the friction that went on between those two men was just out of this world. That same history, that was a draft of a history they're writing, quotes General [John F.] Ruggles as remarking on it, so on and so forth. So there was no secret about it.

Q: But it doesn't come out in the testimony before a Senate committee?

WILLIAMS: Probably the Senate had no knowledge of it and certainly Durbrow and Gardiner wouldn't bring it up. But I'll tell you what did come out there, which was very bad. The Senate sent for the Ambassador and Mr. Gardiner to come back to the United States to appear before the Mansfield Committee. Suddenly I got orders from the Department of the Army that I would come also, that same time. So I did. When we got to Hawaii I think it was, Durbrow said--maybe

it was Guam--to Gardiner and me, "Now we've got to get our stories lined up so it won't appear that there are any differences of opinion." Well, Gardiner didn't say anything, I didn't say anything. When we went in before the Mansfield Committee, the Ambassador sat down at the center of a table. I was over on the righthand side and Gardiner on his lefthand side, and the Ambassador and Gardiner had stacks and stacks of papers and books in front of them. I had a pocket notebook and a pencil, nothing else.

Well, as this committee hearing went on and went on, I kept moving further away because it was a massacre. Finally it got so that those senators would ask either the Ambassador or Gardiner something, and before they could answer they would ask them another question. And you know when they start seesawing a witness that way the witness is whipped. So I kept taking distance. Now, at last when they did question me, Mr. Mansfield started out by saying, "Now, General Williams, we didn't ask that you appear before this committee, but the Army decided, or the Pentagon decided that you should be present. So since you are here we'd like to ask you some questions." So he asked me some questions. Now I must say that maybe this was not very diplomatic, but several times during this couple of days these hearings had been going on, when they'd ask the Ambassador something or Gardiner something and they'd start fumbling with the papers to answer it, I would say, "I'll answer that question. It was such-and-such." And that was the answer, because hell, I knew it from general knowledge and memory without having to--in other words, if I had to shuffle through a batch of papers to get an answer, I would be lost.

Q: Was one of those questions whether they had ever canceled one of your programs?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. I don't remember. But anyway, Mansfield said, "We didn't ask you to be here, but since you are we'd like to ask you some questions." And they did ask questions. When they got through, Mansfield and some of these other senators were very laudatory in their remarks to me. I was surprised. There's where I got the expression that I used later with the Vietnamese, I'm working myself out of the job, because Mansfield said to me, "You're trying to work yourself out of a job." I said, "Exactly. Just as soon as I get done what I was told to do out there, I want to come back to the United States, as I've been out there some time." Neither Durbrow nor Gardiner could have been too happy with their experience before Mansfield.

Well, anyway, now we're back in Vietnam. One day Mr. Thuan, the secretary to the presidency, said to me, "What did you think about the Mansfield Report?" I said, "I haven't seen it," and I hadn't. He said, "Well, the embassy tells us to take it all with a grain of salt. Said your treatment wasn't as good as it sounds."

Q: All right, General Williams, despite the increase in terrorist activities in 1959 and 1960, did you see cause for optimism in the South Vietnamese situation in your last two years on your tour?

WILLIAMS: I was not necessarily optimistic, but I certainly was not pessimistic. I thought that the situation was under control and that it could be kept under control, because I had a great deal of faith in the people that I was working with, especially U.S. military advisors, both officers and NCO's being furnished me. I had a great deal of faith in the Vietnamese leadership in the form of President [Ngo Dinh] Diem and his secretary of defense, his various secretaries of state and so

forth. And I thought that they would come out of it, that they would come out of it in time.

Q: I think, in fact, you said in a letter to Senator [Mike] Mansfield that you thought after 1960 South Vietnam might even be able to reduce its defense budget. But in 1964--and I'm referring again to the interview that you gave to the U. S. News and World Report-- you said that when you left Vietnam in September of 1960, that the situation bordered on the critical due to a loss of good relations between USOM [United States Operations Mission], the embassy, on one hand and Diem on the other hand. In what sense was the situation critical when you left?

WILLIAMS: Well, I don't know exactly how to explain that to you. To me, it was critical because there was not good relationship between the presidency and the Americans in general in Vietnam with MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] excepted. The President was making complaints about the Ambassador personally; he was making complaints about the CIA; he was making complaints about USOM. On the other hand, the people at the embassy, the people in USOM--I'm talking about the leaders of those people, not the Indians doing the work, but the leaders--were making complaints about the presidency and about any other government official whose name happened to come up, and in my opinion, the situation was such that if there was not some change made, that it could become severely critical. And I was right in that, because it did become--

Q: Can we take those a little in detail? Now you saw that Diem was complaining about the mission and about the CIA, for example. What sort of complaints was he making?

WILLIAMS: Well, he was complaining because USOM would not do anything about helping them with a Civil Guard. That's one thing. Any project that he wanted to carry out, such as resettling people and things of that nature, they would buck him on it. For instance, he wanted to take people out of the Delta where they were packed in as tight as they could be, and put those people up in the Highlands on farms.

Farming was what they were doing down in the Delta. And personally, I thought it was right. I thought if he could settle that Highland area with good substantial Vietnamese and each man own his own land, that it would be a good bulwark against communist inroads. His idea was that every man, every head of family, that went up there was going to have two or three hundred acres, and the government was going to sell him that land and give him either six or seven years to pay for it. I couldn't think of anything better. USOM said no. If they moved anyone up there they had to move them up and put them on the outskirts of any cities that were there, in other words, merely enlarge the cities. Well, Diem's reply to counter that was, that's just making larger cities up there; it's not cultivating the countryside nor it's not sowing a good yeomanry through the country. Those kind of things.

Some of the villages he started to build in the Delta area. There was a tax on those people to help build the villages. He asked me one time what I thought about people down there that couldn't pay their tax. I asked, could they work? And he said yes, and I said all right, will you consider this: why can't a man work out his tax? I said, as a child in Denton, Texas in the United States of America, they had road taxes, and I presume they still do. But in my day and time, if people didn't have cash money handy, and the county had some roads to build, a man and his team of

horses or mules and scraper or wagon would come, and they would work under county supervision and build roads. I said there was nothing degrading about that; a man was working out his taxes. I said, hell, everybody did it. All right, now he started to apply that to the Delta area. Immediately he was accused by embassy and USOM of using slave labor.

Q: Were these the agrovilles?

WILLIAMS: That's right, the agrovilles, I think that was the name. They said, look, Diem's trying to do this with slave labor. I said what the hell's slavery about it? A man's working out his taxes. If he has money, he doesn't have to do that if he doesn't want to. He can work or he can pay his taxes with money. He can do either one he wants to do. Diem put out an ordinance ruling or dictating, or whatever the proper term is, that no person could own over two hundred and fifty acres of land. There were some people, some Vietnamese, that owned large estates--two and three thousand acres--and they used Vietnamese farmers to farm that land as sharecroppers. But the farmer's share was very small. American sharecroppers wouldn't put up with that. I'd seen sharecroppers in the United States as a child, and had observed them, and after I got grown realized they were getting the short end of the stick.

Well, immediately the large landowners--a man owning two or three thousand acres of land--looked with a dim view on the government taking all of his land except two hundred and fifty acres, although he was reimbursed for what the government took. He looked with a dim view on that, because then he would shortly in years to come, or his family, would fail to be millionaires or multi-millionaires, and be ordinary, moderate citizens.

Q: Were these larger estates primarily Delta estates?

WILLIAMS: They were, yes. Now, Diem would be opposed in anything like that that he brought up. It didn't make any difference what it was, someone would up and say, "Well, that little son of a bitch can't do this."

Q: Is that the term that they used?

WILLIAMS: That was the term they often use. And I objected to that very strongly. I said, "Don't you know"--speaking to these senior U.S. people in the country team meeting--"that using language like that is going to leak and get back to the President of this country and to his various and sundry people, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State and so on and so forth." "Oh, no, no one's going to repeat anything like that." And I said, "The hell they won't. You can believe it, and on top of that, what good does it do to always be abusing a person? It's going to cost you money, it's going to cost you prestige. It's going to cost you the ability to work."

I was totally disregarded; they kept on doing that. That irritated me terribly because first of all, I thought a great deal of President Diem; I thought that he was doing a good job, as good as he could possibly do. And I thought that our purpose was to give him as much help as possible, and if we thought he was going wrong in this or that to nudge him politely to get him to change ideas instead of saying flatly "you can't do this" or "you can't do that."

Q: Who, primarily, would you say were the chief offenders in this way, in the USOM?

WILLIAMS: I'd say it'd have to be the chief, because I think most take their line of conduct from their chief. All Indians in USOM were not anti-Diem.

Q: So you think Ambassador [Elbridge] Durbrow, for example.

WILLIAMS: Well, as far as the embassy was concerned, certainly it was the Ambassador as he is responsible for the embassy and his staff.

Q: I'll ask a question about him a little later, but we can get into that. So you felt that relationships were what was critical?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: In 1960. Not the security situation, necessarily?

WILLIAMS: No, I thought that mainly the critical situation revolved around the relationship between the American civilian officialdom in Vietnam and the Vietnamese officials.

You see, another thing that convinced me of that--I was having no trouble, my officers were having no trouble with our Vietnamese counterparts in army, navy or air force. We had our differences, we had our arguments, but nothing to cause a person to be mad about it five minutes after the conversation ended.

Q: That reminds me of something you mentioned last time, which was that your relationship with the senior officers was so good, they were so open with you, that when talk of a coup would come up, they had no hesitation about discussing this in front of you, and you were able to influence them to go along this line.

WILLIAMS: That is correct.

Q: But it occurs to me that we didn't mention what was behind such talk. Why would they be discussing a coup at all, what was their reason?

WILLIAMS: I was never too sure about that, but some times there was talk of coup, around campfires and there was a lot of it on the radio, international radio. They would say, "Well, Hanoi Radio says such and such. French Radio says such and such." I don't know whether they ever quoted American radio, Voice of America or anything like that. I don't remember that. I think those broadcasts instigated, and on top of that, you want to remember that the officer corps was primarily French oriented--they were Vietnamese second. The senior officers had served in the French army, either in the Colonial army or in the Regular army. They were educated by the French, if they had any education. And the French didn't like Diem. He had literally thrown them out of the country. Just a lot of French-oriented people were talking against the Vietnamese government.

On top of that, they were rather young and what else did they have to do if they couldn't do other things but sit around the campfire and bitch about something. I've seen the same thing in the American army, except I haven't heard anyone in the American army sit around and bitch about having a coup d'etat. But they bitched about the CG, they bitched about the commissary, they bitched about supply, they bitched about the Adjutant General, and you name it, and the American army officers will sit around and bitch about it. Nothing serious, you understand. Well, they were doing the same thing, except these generals and colonels were mostly younger--they were younger than the average colonel in the American army at that time.

Q: And these were the top-ranking Vietnamese officers.

WILLIAMS: They were the top-ranking, yes. For instance, Big [Duong Van] Minh who later became the instigator of the coup d'etat--the man who had Diem murdered--he'd been a first lieutenant in the French army, colonial army. Don, who was next to Minh--

Q: Is this Tran Van Don?

WILLIAMS: Yes. He'd been lieutenant or captain in the French army. Tran Van Don had been aide-de-camp to Emperor Bao Dai. You could go right down the line. Some of them had been born in France, some of them had been educated in France. Some of them had merely been with the French army. General Ty, who was the oldest and a senior, and very likely the least efficient of all, had been a sergeant in the Colonial army and had even gone to World War I in a truck transportation corps. I ran into them in World War I on one occasion. We called them at that time, solder vernacular, I don't know what the correct name is, we called them Annamite. I remember one time that I was sent to find one of the battalions in my regiment that had failed to get where they were to go, and I ran into one of these truck companies, and there was one of these what I now know to have been a Vietnamese officer in the leading truck. When I talked to him, he couldn't understand me, but he asked me what kind of insignia was painted on the door of the trucks of the convoy that our soldiers were riding in. He showed me some dragon or some damn thing like that that was painted on the door of his truck. Well, I didn't know, but if I'd known that, he could have told me where that column of trucks were, presumably.

But old General Ty had been a sergeant in France in that outfit. He came back and was an officer in the Vietnamese army under the French at the time that the Japanese came in. When he found out--he told me he was a battalion commander by that time--that the Japanese were really fixing to take over from the Vichy French and not collaborate with them like they had heretofore, he warned his battalion. He said they were out in a field at- t~he time. He told his troops such and such is going to happen, and said, "I think now it's every man for himself. I'm going to the jungle." He told me he took off, and said his whole damn battalion just disappeared.

When the French got back, after Great Britain and the United States gave Vietnam back to the French after World War II, Ty came out of hiding, Big Minh came out of hiding, the rest of them who had been hiding came out. Big Minh was arrested, put in jail, and the French were going to court-martial him, but they didn't probably because of his association with a man who later became vice president, a man by the name of [Nguyen Ngoc] Tho, T-H-O.

Big Minh told me about being in the French prison, and the way he described it, it was terrible. He said they were packed in there in what later became known in our literature as tiger cages, and he said he couldn't sit down or lie down. It was crowded in there, and [he] said there was no place to defecate. He said there was urine and feces on the floor ankle deep when he was finally gotten out. I said, "How the hell did you get out?" He said, "Mr. Tho got out, and after he got out, he got me out." The French still held desertion over him, though. They threatened to court martial him, but they didn't.

Now that was the type background of some of these people. Each one of them had a different background, and that's the reason they couldn't be taken as a group. You had to know each one as well as you could and figure him out. Now with Major General [Huu] Xuan, X-U-A-N, that led the detail that went down to the church in Cholon to get Diem and his brother and bring them back after they had surrendered by phone. He'd been in the French G-2. And at one time when I commented about this officer and asked Diem why he didn't give him more responsibility, Diem apparently had a gut feeling this man was no good, and it turned out he wasn't. Diem told me, "That man was a G-2, French army." And added, "Once a G-2 in the French army, always a G-2 in the French Army." Well, what he referred to was the Intelligence Section.

So they had all kinds of backgrounds, and you ask, now what would cause them to do this? Maybe boredom? If nothing else, maybe just to see what my reaction would be. I don't know.

Q: Now, some authorities say that one of the sources of disagreement in this area involving the embassy was that the embassy believed generally that Diem's problems, wherever they may have been in the country, resulted from his gradual loss of political clout, of authority, that he was alienating too many people in the country, and they advocated therefore certain reforms which Diem didn't want to carry out, and that the military argued that making Diem act against his will would cause him to lose face and only aggravate the situation. Do you recall an argument along those lines?

WILLIAMS: At the moment I can't say that I do. It doesn't sound mysterious to me because the whole thing began to turn into a can of worms, there's no doubt about that. But what they were referring to as the reforms, I haven't any idea. It sounded like a lot of hindsight talking to me.

Q: Did you have any specific advice to Diem about how to handle the insurgency, for example? What were your ideas on what was behind the growing acts of terror in the countryside?

WILLIAMS: I certainly had advice to him about handling the insurgency. What was behind it was nothing to me except a bunch of people that were reds, communists, that were just attempting to take over the country. That's all there was to it.

Q: But where were they coming from? Were these infiltrated communists, do you think, or had they been left behind from before?

WILLIAMS: I thought and still believe the hard core of them, the leaders, were from the North. When the North and the South divided, we know that almost a million people came down from the North to the South, and General Mike O'Daniel honchoed most of that.

Q: Yes, we talked about that last time. That's right.

WILLIAMS: There were certain numbers of them, but very few, that left the South and went North. Now, one group of those people, several hundred and I don't know exactly how many--I say several hundred because that's the figure I have in my mind--were stopped short of the border and were held by the North Vietnamese for several months. And all the young men in that group then were married to Vietnamese girls that lived in that vicinity. Now, when they went ahead and moved on further north, the husbands went but the girls were not allowed to go. So that put these young men who had been born and raised in the South but had sympathy toward the communists, moving up into the North, but their wives and any children that were coming on were living back down South. Well, now this might seem far-fetched, but to me it wasn't far-fetched at all when that was told to me, because knowing the tremendous loyalty in the Vietnamese family which comes first--the family comes first, the State second, then the Church about third--but the family comes first of all. Those men were going to come back to the South to get their wives and their children. That gave them a perfect bed to come back to and an area to come back to after being thoroughly indoctrinated in the North and then to spread from there out throughout the country.

Q: Now, if I read you right, what you're saying is that these men, and men like them, formed the cadre who organized and directed the insurgency. Am I reading you properly on this?

WILLIAMS: That's right.

Q: Now, most authorities would agree with that, I think. Most of the people that I have read would certainly agree with it. Where they disagree some time is where did the followers come from and what motivated the followers that these cadre organized and got together? What is your opinion about that?

WILLIAMS: I think it's not too big a question. First of all, this thing that I just related here, of course I had no personal knowledge of that, that was merely told me by the Vietnamese how they kept those people there for a while and married and then they took the men on and left their wives and families back. That of course came to me just by hearsay.

Now, where did the followers come from? It's not too hard to understand. Your hard-core Viet Cong came down from the North, and they'd start prying around these villages, and they would try to get help from the villages because they had to have food, they had to have money support, they had to have places to hide and so on and so forth. Now, they would come into a village that was just as innocent, more so, than a little town in Texas or Louisiana and they'd say, "All right, we want help. We want assistance. We want food, we want a place to hide, we want money, we want some piasters" and so on and so forth. People would say, "Nothing doing." And they'd say "Fine." And later they'd come back at night, they'd pick out the head man, what we would call the mayor, his wife and then his children, and when the people got up the next morning, there would be a stake or something of that nature standing up in the main street of the town, and there would be the mayor's head on it, his body down at the bottom of it, and very likely his wife's body also. If she was pregnant, she'd be gutted, her baby out, and by that time maybe the hogs

had started working on them.

Now, just a few things like that, and you've got some innocent farmers that don't know very much, except how to work in a rice field, and the next time some man comes in and he says, "I want some piasters, I want a place to hide, and I want you to do this, that and the other," they're going to hesitate a hell of a long time before they say, "No, no way." I hate to think it could happen here, but I tell you, I believe that a small town in the United States could be intimidated, some town, just as well as you could intimidate some villages in Vietnam. They had no communication, there's few telephone lines, the roads were very poor. If anyone went from one place to another, they walked, or they rode a bicycle. Yes, those things could happen, and in that way a man, an outfit could build up a very good following.

Now, I know that these things, the instances like this did happen. We'll take a Civil Guard detachment that's out here guarding a bridge, or something of that nature. I relate this as positive facts of things that happened. Maybe a half dozen Viet Cong would come, and tell these guards, "we want you to surrender." It'd be always in the night, see. And they'd say, "No, we won't surrender." Remember they are around the bridge or around a little old building that they're guarding or something of that nature, and their wives and their children are living there in little shacks, and I'm talking about really shacks, something you can throw up in fifteen minutes. They're carrying old 1898 French rifles, and the ammunition for it will fire and some of it won't. They said, "No, we won't surrender." Maybe they've got a corporal or a sergeant in charge. Hadn't as much training as a good Boy Scout in the United States.

The V.C. come back the next night, they stop at the nearest village, they round up all the villagers. Say there's a hundred villagers. They put them in a column of two's and march them down the road. They don't march them up close to this little fort. They'll march them up within a hundred yards of it maybe, it's dark. They order, halt, start shouting and hollering. They do. The Viet Cong goes back to this little outpost and says, "You're completely surrounded. I've got two or three hundred troops here. We're going to put you to the sword, we're going to kill you and your women and children if you don't surrender now. Are you going to surrender or not surrender?" And the guards say, "Boy, come on in."

Now, those things happened repeatedly. I used to complain about that and wanting to do something with the Civil Guard and give them some kind of training and equipment. I said, it's beyond this argument about who is going to train the Civil Guard. Someone's got to train them, someone's got to equip them, someone's got to organize them, because incidents like this happen, and I related instances of that nature. I was able to say this happened at such-and-such a place at such-and-such an hour on such-and-such a night. I'd have the information right at my fingertips, and today I'm talking in generalities, and I don't have details of times and places. I'd say, now as soon as that happened, these V.C. can go back to their villages and say, "Look, you think the government of Vietnam is defending you? Look what we just did. We just knocked off this outfit up here on this bridge, we just knocked off this outfit over here on this radio station." And I said the natives will believe it. "They're not knocking them off, they're using their own Vietnamese villagers to do it under the cover of darkness." So that's actually digging the foundation right out from under the Vietnamese government. Our officials couldn't see it, or didn't want to see it. Or simply were afraid to face facts.

Q: What was their explanation?

WILLIAMS: None.

Q: They just didn't accept your explanation.

WILLIAMS: Didn't accept it. Often claimed I'd been misinformed.

Q: So terror was a very effective weapon?

WILLIAMS: Very effective. And not only they didn't accept it, but I had long since started working through the Vietnamese military to have them give me a report, as well as they could, of any time any incident of this type that I have just discussed happened. Say, once a week I'd take a consolidated report like that and I'd take it to a country team meeting, and I'd say "All right, now, here's the information I have as to what terrorist activities have happened during the last seven days, which we're not doing anything about and we're keeping the Vietnamese from doing anything about," and I'd read the report. They wouldn't accept them. They'd say, "Let us have that data, and we'll check it through our sources." They'd come back a week or fourteen days later and they'd say, "Our sources don't jibe with yours."

Q: What were their sources, do you have any idea?

WILLIAMS: No. And I'd say, "Well, why do you think the Vietnamese military gave me reports like this?" They'd say, "They're trying to pull the wool over your eyes. They're doing that to get more military aid." I said, "They're not getting any military aid at all for the Civil Guard or Self-Defense Corps. This has nothing to do with military aid. This is what's going on in the countryside that the army has no control over, and no one else has any control over because the Civil Guard's supposed to be sitting on these places." I was just hitting a stone wall.

Q: Were your people, your American people in the field corroborating some of these stories?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. However, they couldn't corroborate all of them, because maybe there wouldn't be an American within miles of one of these places.

Q: Some people say that in addition to terror, the Viet Cong had another ace in the hole, and that was the business of land reform. You've touched on land reform already, you mentioned Diem's program. Some of Diem's critics say that the problem is that Diem didn't follow through on the land reform program, that is, that there was a program, all right, but that not nearly enough land actually changed hands. Not enough landless peasants wound up with some land. Did you have any insight into that?

WILLIAMS: I wouldn't know about numbers.

Q: It wasn't your business to check on that?

WILLIAMS: No. The only thing I would know about that would be in the conversation with Diem he might casually mention, "Well, we've settled so many people at such-and- such a place or in such-and-such an area." But, you see, so many times when Diem would bring up a thing like that you just spoke about, I'd caution him by saying, "Mr. President, you know I have great sympathy with what you're doing, but I have no control over those things. I have none whatsoever," and I said, "Odd as it may seem to you, that's entirely the civilian, American civilians are handling that business, and anytime I even bring up the subject, they often take offense that I am bold enough to bring it up."

Q: Why would they take offense?

WILLIAMS: Because they'd say it was none of my business.

Q: I see. So why was Diem bringing it up to you, then? He was a smart man, he knew you couldn't do anything, I suspect. Why?

WILLIAMS: I don't know, unless he knew that I was trying to get those things back to report through military channels, which I would, and he very likely knew that I was trying to defend him before the other Americans. Those people were pretty smart; I think they knew what was going on. I'm not so awful sure that there weren't American civilians that would tell Diem, or if not Diem but members of the Vietnamese government, many things that--in other words, I don't believe that all people in USOM were in sympathy with what USOM was doing. I'm not so awful sure that all people in the embassy were in sympathy with what the ambassador wanted to do. I'm not sure of that.

Q: We've mentioned a lot about Diem. Do you have any recollections or any opinions to share with us about his brother, [Ngo Dinh] Nhu? We hear an awful lot about him after 1960, that he was sort of the real bad guy--

WILLIAMS: He was the man that wore the black hat to hear the Americans tell it. My relationship with Nhu was very, very scant. He didn't speak English, and I didn't speak French. Certainly not enough to carry on a conversation with him. I had very, very little contact with him--some, not much. I must say I had more contact with Mrs. Nhu, and that was very limited, than I did with Mr. Nhu. But a certain group of Americans considered Nhu as the black-hatted guy, and they objected to the political party that he organized--

Q: That was the Can Lao, wasn't it?

WILLIAMS: That's right. Can Lao? Yes, as I recall that was the name of it. And I don't know whether that was a labor union, or if it was anti-labor union or exactly what it was, but it was a political party that the President did not belong to because I asked him flat out. I asked, "Are you a member of the Can Lao Party?" He said, "I am not, and I have nothing to do with it." He said, "My brother is with the Can Lao Party." He may have been the dastardly villain that the Americans, some Americans, made him out to be, but I doubt it. Neither do I think Madame Nhu was the dragon lady that she was painted to be, not by any manner or means.

Q: She became rather famous for making certain statements to the press later on, and the one that sticks in my mind at this time for some reason is that after 1963, she went on record as saying that the Americans were to blame for it all. Somehow, it was all our fault. How did that strike you, when she said that?

WILLIAMS: Well, first of all, I wasn't so awful sure she said that, if she was correctly quoted. Was this after Diem and her husband were murdered? I'd like to go back just a little bit.

Q: All right.

WILLIAMS: Madame Nhu spoke English, and she was a very, very attractive woman, and a lot of people were mesmerized by her beauty. I wasn't because I was totally indifferent to her, and why I don't know, but I just was. I engaged her in conversation, she engaged me in conversation, and she used to take me to task for things, occasionally. For instance, I remember one time she invited me to a house party she and Mr. Nhu were having down on the coast, and I declined.

Q: Was this in Saigon?

WILLIAMS: No, the house party was down on the coast someplace. I declined and later the President invited me to the same party, and I accepted. And the first time she saw me, which was at the party, she said, "I invited you to this party and you declined, and the President invited you and you accepted." I said, "Well, what the hell do you expect me to do?" (Laughter) "Of course I accepted when the President invited me. That didn't mean I wanted to come." But nevertheless, we'd have arguments like that.

But now I'm really drawing on my imagination, because there's several things I told the President that he did long after I was gone that may have been good and may not have been. I told him one time that I thought he should send someone to the United States to give the Vietnamese side, his side of the problems that were going on. And I said, "Someone who's thoroughly familiar with them." All right, he sent Madame Nhu. She got over here and the press started tearing her to pieces. I think maybe--now this may be egotism on my part, but I'm not too sure it is--I think maybe Madame Nhu came to the United States because I told the President he should send someone over here to give his side of the problem. Now, Madame Nhu's father was the ambassador to the United States, and they were at cross-purposes.

Q: Do you know why?

WILLIAMS: Well, her father was anti-Diem, and I think he was pro-Bao Dai, but I'm not positive. But I know that they were at cross-purposes, and I know that that worked out to her disadvantage, and actually to serious disadvantage, because when she went to various and sundry places, and the bills at those various and sundry hotels were sent to the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, which is common custom, the way it's done throughout the world, they were not paid. So the American press didn't come back and say the Vietnamese ambassador refused to pay Madame Nhu's bills, they came back and said, Madame Nhu jumped a hotel bill in Los Angeles. I read that in the press myself. Well, hell, that woman's as honest as I am, she wouldn't jump a

hotel bill. Then she was painted as the dragon lady and all that kind of stuff, which was terrible. Among other things she organized women out there, she had a good women's club going there that was getting to be almost nation-wide, and she had a hell of a lot of people in that thing, and I think she was wielding a lot of power, as much power possibly as her husband, maybe more.

But she also had the Americans at a disadvantage either because of her good looks or because of her sharp tongue or something. Very few of the foreigners would contradict or argue with her. I was not one of them. I'd argue with her. Anytime she said something

I thought was wrong, I'd say, "You're just as wrong as you can be." Actually Mrs. Williams would, too, because she and Mrs. Williams were fairly good friends, not very close friends, but pretty good friends. I remember one time that they were up in Dalat. Mrs. Williams was visiting her up in Dalat, which was a summer resort up in the hills. One of Madame Nhu's little boys started whipping a dog with a bicycle chain, and Mrs. Williams told him to stop. He stopped. Mrs. Nhu said, "Why should you stop my boy from whipping that dog with a bicycle chain?" And Mrs. Williams, who was a dog lover and we always had dogs, said, "Because that's not the way a child's supposed to do and you ought not to let your child do things like that." Well, I doubt if there's anyone else in Southeast Asia who would ever talk to Madame Nhu that way. But she liked it. I guess she liked it. She continued to have a pleasant relationship with us. But that's not answering very much your question about Mr. Nhu.

Q: Well, you've told me what you recall, and that's what we're after. Let me get back to the problems created by the growing terrorism or insurgency, whichever name you care to put on it. Did we adopt any new policies by 1960 to deal with the problem of security in the countryside?

WILLIAMS: You mean as a nation? You mean MAAG?

Q: I mean MAAG in Vietnam. Wasn't there a counter-insurgency plan or something of that nature?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: What was the nature of it?

WILLIAMS: I can't remember the details of that.

Q: Were there special counter-guerrilla units formed?

WILLIAMS: No. If so I can't remember them at this late date.

Q: Okay. Speaking of that, do you remember when the Ranger Battalions first made their appearance in Vietnam, the South Vietnamese Ranger Battalions?

WILLIAMS: I'd say along about 1957 or 1958. I'm guessing. I'd like to say something of that nature about these special detachments.

Q: All right.

WILLIAMS: I mentioned that in this U.S. News and World Report business. I was told to organize, train, and equip the Vietnamese army, navy, and air force, and their marines, and their paratroopers. The marines came in as part of the navy and the paratroopers as part of the army. Now to do that, I had to have some kind of organization, because an American army, as you well know from your own army experience, cannot requisition equipment unless you requisition against an approved Table of Organization and Equipment. All right, the Vietnamese had none. So anything that I was getting from the United States I was either begging, borrowing or stealing it, and I was finally told, "All right, you've got to have more formal tables of organization and equipment out there for us to work against. I said, "Fine, that suits me fine. That gives me talking points with the Vietnamese."

So, taking this up with the President and the Secretary of Defense right straight on down, I told them what was necessary and of course they accepted my word for it. I said, "I want to form a Board of army officers who have had experience." Some had had some combat experience at least. Some had administrative experience, and to determine, through this board, through trial and error, tests, and things of that nature a proper Table of Organization and Equipment for their army to start with. So that's what we did.

Q: Is this when you first formed the first Vietnamese division, the eight thousand men--

WILLIAMS: No, Mike O'Daniel had done that without any table of organization or anything else. He'd just taken anything he could find because the French had little detachments here, there, and yon. Nothing bigger than a battalion, and he'd just thrown those people together the best way he could. He was just like marching through mud, he was having a terrible time because that's the way the conditions were. I was a little bit better off because he'd done a certain amount of preliminary work.

Anyway, we formed this Board and we finally came up with what I called a Vietnamese division, and I worked with the Board, not directed them or anything of that nature, but nudged them this way and that when they were going off on tangents. And [I] told them we wanted a division that could work in the jungle, in the swamps, in the mountains, those were the main terrain features, and I didn't want a Japanese division, nor an American division, nor a Korean division nor anything else. I wanted a Vietnamese division that could be theirs. So that's what we got. Now, those divisions were built so they could be broken right on down as far as companies and platoons. Some people that didn't know any better later said, "All right, General Williams and his people organized the Vietnamese division like an American division." Well we didn't do any damn such a thing, and if anyone had taken the trouble to take a Table of Organization of a Vietnamese division and look at, they could see that it didn't resemble an American division as much as it might resemble the Japanese or the Korean division. Actually the supply was based on the Korean labor force type, so what in the world do they call those people up in Korea that the Koreans had with their army up there-

Q: Katusas?

WILLIAMS: Katusas, yes. No, wait a minute. Katusas were the soldiers that were with the Americans. I'm talking about the men that carried those A-frames on their backs, that they had instead of trucks. Korean Labor Corps? Or Korean Service Corps? Well, anyway, they had a corps of those people. We used those people as examples when--those were those photographs I saw with you the other day where we built things that looked like bicycles that had two hundred and fifty pound loads on them. And the motor transportation amounted to nothing. Well, you could break those down to squad, platoon, companies--any size you wanted to, to go after guerrillas or to fight a set-piece battle. There's nothing wrong with that organization, and any military people to this day will admit there's nothing wrong with it, and as a matter of fact, there was no change made in that organization as far as I know as long as American military were in Vietnam, and up until 1970--when did we come out, 1972, wasn't it something like that?

Q: We came out in 1972, I believe.

WILLIAMS: Yes. They made no changes in the Vietnamese Table of Organization all during that time. So there wasn't anything wrong with it, but people that didn't know wanted to do any picking that they possibly could. The reason people were talking about Motor Divisions was because these "stringers" that would come in there and write foolish things, they'd see a parade in the city of Saigon, for instance, and the Vietnamese would pull in every old tank they had, every half-truck, bulldozer, anything else that would run, they'd put that in the parade down the street and people would look at that and say, "My God, here's a motorized division." Well, it wasn't any more a motorized division than I've got a motorized division sitting here in my carport. The stringers just didn't know.

But it's easy to pick, pick. A few days ago we saw a headline here in the San Antonio papers: "Navy Goes to San Salvador." You pick that up and read it. Then you read they'd sent down five goddamned sailors to help the San Salvadoran people learn how to run the motors on those motor boats that they had. But there's a headline two inches high: "U.S. Navy to San Salvador." You might not remember it, but I can tell you that type of reporting was going on back in 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960 and right on through. It was just terrible. What did the U.S. press have to gain?

Q: But you read about it, it sounds like gunboat diplomacy all over again.

WILLIAMS: Absolutely. Now, there's talk about advisors. Someone wrote me a letter the other day and said, "We'd like to have your opinion on the advisors to San Salvador. Isn't that the way we started in Vietnam?" My answer to that was advisors in Vietnam didn't cause the war; they had nothing to do with the war. I stayed there until 1960, the war didn't break out until sometime after Diem was overthrown in 1963. I think it broke out in 1965. Well, American advisors didn't cause that war. It was American policy that caused the war indirectly. American policy in overthrowing Ngo Dinh Diem. And we know that's recorded history now. No question about it. But here an intelligent person writes and said "Isn't this the way we got started in Vietnam, by sending advisors?" Well, memory is short, and historical memory, and you're getting to be a historian, or are a historian, and you know that as well or better than I do.

Q: In this Table of Organization which you developed with much agonizing and soul-searching and so on, where do the Ranger Battalions fit into this organization?

WILLIAMS: I don't remember that detail. But I know that the Vietnamese wanted Ranger Battalions.

Q: This was a Vietnamese idea, then, the Ranger Battalions?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes, as I recall.

Q: I see. What purpose were they supposed to serve?

WILLIAMS: Oh, the Americans had them.

Q: I don't understand.

WILLIAMS: America had Rangers just like we've got right now. So the V.N. want them.

Q: I see, I see. Did you agree with--

WILLIAMS: I didn't argue with them about it. As long as it didn't bother going ahead with the organization of the division. You just can't have everything your way, you know.

Q: I see.

WILLIAMS: The U.S. Green Berets have a great deal of glamor about them.

Q: When were they introduced? When did they start coming in?

WILLIAMS: I don't know, but I tell you the first U.S. batch that came in there almost got us in trouble. This was done almost without my knowledge; in other words, someone had set it up, and it had not been the Vietnamese. But someone wanted one of our Ranger Battalions, or one of our Green Beret Battalions, I'll call them, that was up in Okinawa, they wanted them to have some training in Vietnam.

Q: Was that what they called a C team, do you remember that designation? I think that's the higher headquarters of a special forces detachment, that's the largest detachment. But that may be a later development, I may be getting ahead of things.

WILLIAMS: Could have been. But anyway, this was instigated by someone other than the Vietnamese, because the Vietnamese came to me and said the Americans want to bring a battalion of the Green Berets in.

Q: What Americans now?

WILLIAMS: He didn't say. As far as I know, it was someone in Washington or Hawaii. Not our advisors. They wanted to do this for training, and I said okay. But we must remember that at that time we were under a terrible handicap, because we had only four hundred and forty-two

advisors which we had when the Geneva accords were signed, or adopted--we never did sign them. So this International Control Commission made up of the Poles, the Canadians and the Indians always checked very closely any additions we had to MAAG, and we had to defend every one of them. You bring in one extra typist, you had to defend it as though you were bringing in two combat teams. I said, "How are you going to get by with this business?" They said, "Oh, we're going to bring them in over the beaches." I said, "Okay. Where do we want to put them?" "Oh, in such-and-such a place." Now all this had been arranged, not through MAAG.

Q: What did they mean by over the beaches? Did they mean under cover of night, or...

WILLIAMS: That's right. They were going to land in rowboats or motor boats.

Q: Okay. A tactical landing.

WILLIAMS: That's right. Come in over the beaches. No ships in sight. Okay. Now that was done, and this was going to be kept a great secret. So they brought in this battalion, and they coiled up there in the hills, over on the east coast.

Q: Do you remember about where that was?

WILLIAMS: Oh, I'd say it was up around that enormous big bay up there.

Q: Cam Ranh?

WILLIAMS: Cam Ranh Bay, yes. Close to Cam Ranh Bay. And the Vietnamese were going to work with them, and the Vietnamese detailed some of their troops to work with them, say, a battalion or a couple of companies, something like that. All this was in great secrecy, and I knew that if anything happened and the secrecy was broken that I was going to have a terrible lot of trouble with the Control Commission made up of the Indians and the Canadians and the Poles. And I was having plenty of trouble with those people anyway. So about the first thing that happened after the battalion had landed they took a half a dozen or so of these Green Berets and they put them in an automobile or a truck and moved them by road down towards, and in the general direction of Saigon, but only, oh, say, about ten or twelve miles from where the battalion was coiled in the hills. And turned them loose and said your compass direction is such-and-such, now go through the jungles and get back to your battalion.

Q: Strictly a training exercise?

WILLIAMS: Strictly a training exercise. In a few days, word came to me, "We can't find our people." I said, "What do you mean you can't find them?" They then explained to me what had happened, you see? And I said, "Well, I'll find them for you." So I got some Vietnamese soldiers, or officers, in that vicinity, and I said, "There's some Americans lost in these damn jungles between here and the coast and God knows where they are because they've got compasses, and they're supposed to be able to navigate--all you got to do is march straight east and you will come to the coast anyway." And the Vietnamese went in and found them. The goddamned Green Berets had gotten lost. Ten miles from the coast. So help me! Then I began to get skeptical about

these people.

So the next thing that happened, I got information that there'd been a terrible accident out there, and so I got there as quickly as I could. You see, I was staying away from all this stuff, because I wanted to be--if the Commission had said anything to me about it, I'd have said, "Gentlemen, what the hell are you talking about?" See? And the Vietnamese government theoretically were, too, because all this was under cover. I went out there, and there was a Vietnamese officer dead, there was an American captain dead, of the Green Berets, there was an American warrant officer with one arm gone, and that was just about it.

I said, "What the hell happened?" Well, here's what happened as they explained it to me. We had a convoy moving down the road, and we had certain Vietnamese here and we were teaching them how to handle a convoy, and so a fire fight started, simulated, and they wanted to add a little bit of zest to it, so they had some sticks of dynamite. Now, these people are sitting around an open fire, and they'd light one of these sticks of dynamite with the fuse on, and they'd throw it like that, and exploding it, imitating artillery fire. Now, that's like a state fair in Texas in 1914. Two militia companies having a sham battle. To my mind, that's what it sounded like. What happened, the warrant officer threw one stick of dynamite and it failed to go where he wanted it to, and it killed an American captain. It also knocked off his own arm, and it did this other damage.

Hell, I said, the soup's certainly in the fire. But I didn't know how much so, but how we got out of it I don't know, because a few days later--of course they evacuated these people and then later evacuated the battalion. They pulled out again over the beaches. A little bit later, I saw or was sent, rather, a clipping out of a newspaper that was published in Okinawa that said Captain so-and-so, and gave his name, his organization and so forth, was killed during an exercise in Vietnam on such-and-such a day by a premature explosion of a stick of dynamite. Now, if the Viet Cong or Hanoi had been smart enough to be reading the newspapers, they would have wondered "Now, why was this captain of this Green Beret outfit that's stationed in Okinawa, what the hell is he doing in Vietnam with a stick of dynamite?" You see? It gave away the whole show. Now, if Hanoi picked it up I don't know because I never heard a word about it, I didn't hear anything about it from the International Control Commission, no Vietnamese ever said anything to me about it, and no American ever said anything to me about it to this day.

Q: Now, something occurs to me. You said that these Green Berets were primarily on a training mission.

WILLIAMS: That was my understanding.

Q: Was it their training or the South Vietnamese?

WILLIAMS: Their training.

Q: Their training.

WILLIAMS: As far as I was concerned, or as far as I was told.

Q: Now, you may not know the answer to this, but it occurs to me that this is a legitimate question. Why send them to Vietnam where all the problems which you have mentioned exist? Why not send them to the Philippines where you don't have an International Control Commission?

WILLIAMS: That would be a good question, wouldn't it?

Q: Same terrain, isn't it?

WILLIAMS: Yes. I haven't the slightest, foggiest idea.

Q: All right. Were you there when the Special Forces came in to stay, then? I think this is in 1960. I think this is in the spring and summer of 1960.

WILLIAMS: I can't remember but it must have been after my departure on 1 September 1960.

Q: Okay. Can you think of any other important developments in that last nine months, eight or nine months that you were in country? The reason I'm asking, I have seen reference in the Pentagon Papers, one edition of them, which says that there was something called a counter-insurgency plan, which was developed late 1959, early 1960, and that the Green Berets and the Ranger Battalions were involved in it. But I don't know much more than that.

WILLIAMS: Well, my memory's just not that good.

Q: Okay, okay. Was your successor General [Lionel] McGarr?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: Were you able to brief him before you left?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. He was there, oh, maybe ten or twelve, fifteen days before I left.

Q: What kind of a picture did you paint for him, as you can recall?

WILLIAMS: I laid everything flat out on the table.

Q: How did it look?

WILLIAMS: I didn't think it looked very well. I didn't know General McGarr. He had been the commandant of the Command and General Staff College, I've been told, and I'd also been told he'd been in the 3rd Division during World War II. So since Mike O'Daniel, my predecessor, had commanded the 3rd Division in the latter stages of World War II, I wrote and asked Mike what he could tell me about McGarr--I forgot his first name.

Q: Lionel, I think.

WILLIAMS: Lionel McGarr. His nickname was "Split Head."

Q: Was that because he parted his hair in the middle?

WILLIAMS: That's what I was told. Mike O'Daniel wrote back and he said, "He's the best regimental commander I ever knew in combat." So, the Vietnamese were of course probing me, who's going to take your place and so and so forth, and I said, "I don't know this officer," but I said, "General O'Daniel tells me he's the best regimental commander he ever knew, and so he must be pretty good, because General O'Daniel was a hell of a good division commander." So that was the only thing I could tell them, and I just told McGarr everything that I knew that was going on. That's where I left it with him. I was told later that General McGarr didn't like things the way he found them, and that surprised me, but then I was told that that was not unusual because that was his method of operation. Any outfit he went into he always took it apart and put it back together according to his own ideas, some people do that.

I hadn't put the two things together, but while he was commandant of the Command and General Staff College, I had sent back to the United States to the Command and General Staff College a few Vietnamese general officers. I was told later, much later, much later, several years later, that Diem had possibly developed an idea that some of his officers who had gone to school at the Command and General Staff College when McGarr was there as commandant, had gone in collusion with McGarr as to a coup d'etat. I thought to myself that's ridiculous, because knowing the Vietnamese officers as well as I did, I didn't believe any of them would be bold enough to go to a stranger, an American officer at the Command and General Staff school, and talk about a coup d'etat that was not going to take place until four or five years later. It just didn't make sense. Now of course, whether Diem actually thought that or ever expressed that opinion I don't know because there's any number of things that I was told that Diem expressed an opinion on, later, that I don't believe he did at all.

Q: What was your impression of General McGarr, or did you have a chance, really, to form one?

WILLIAMS: I didn't have a chance to form any definite impression of him at all. I thought he was very impatient to get started, and I could understand that. I tell you, I was so busy there at the last, I didn't have the time to sit down and try to analyze my successor.

Q: Now, he didn't last nearly as long in that.

WILLIAMS: Oh, he didn't last at all.

Q: What was the scuttlebutt on that?

WILLIAMS: Well, of course, the only thing I can tell you is pure gossip, which I don't like to participate in. I was told that he was relieved because of heart trouble. Now, whether he was or not, I don't know. I was also told that things had gotten into very bad condition, and he possibly

was relieved because Washington thought he wasn't getting along very well.

Q: With who? With the Vietnamese?

WILLIAMS: Well, certainly not with Diem. An officer told me that after a while it became infrequent for him to be sent for to come to the Palace to talk with the President, and one time after he hadn't been to the Palace for maybe a month, when the President sent for him, he asked some of his staff, "What in the world will I talk to the President about?" Well, of course, something had happened there, and I have no idea what it was, because it had not been unusual for me to be at the Palace two or three times a week and anywhere from one to four hours at a time, and talk about everything under the sun. So for the President to go for a month without sending for the chief of MAAG, I just can't understand what the hell was going on.

Q: Something obviously was not right, is that your feeling?

WILLIAMS: There must not have been the close association there that Diem had with me. Maybe it'd be a good idea to interview McGarr.

Q: We're going to try. We're going to try. We're going to try to get to General Harkins pretty soon, too.

WILLIAMS: What'd you think about these other people? What about Major General Ruggles and--?

Q: I've written them all letters.

WILLIAMS: What about this man here at 5th Army Headquarters?

Q: I don't remember that name.

(Interruption)

Now, you left country in September of 1960, is that correct?

WILLIAMS: First day of September, yes.

Q: And a couple of months later there was an attempted coup. It failed. What was your reaction when you heard about that?

WILLIAMS: I thought it was ridiculous. The man who attempted to pull that coup was a brigadier general or maybe a colonel at that time by the name of Tri--T-R-I--and he had command of the paratroop brigade. It actually wasn't a brigade; he had about eight hundred paratroopers. But they like to call it a brigade--well, in the American army today we've taken every regiment of three battalions and we call it a brigade. I'm used to thinking about a brigade as being two infantry regiments. But I thought the coup was ridiculous, and I couldn't understand why they let it go as far as it did.

Q: By "they," who do you mean?

WILLIAMS: The Americans and the Vietnamese. I think that Tri--it's known now, or at least a lot of people believe it to be true--that Tri, even if he didn't have any encouragement from the Americans, nevertheless he found no opposition from them. For instance, there's a man by the name of Gene Gregory and his wife who were Americans, and they ran a newspaper in Vietnam.

Q: Was that the Times [of Vietnam]?

WILLIAMS: The Vietnamese Times I think was the name of it. I know that he was out of the country and she was there by herself; and she appealed to the American embassy for help, and she was ignored. Gregory resented that bitterly. But anyway, they asked me, someone asked me at one time--maybe it was you, but I think it was someone much earlier, a long time ago--what I would have done if I had been there, and I have said, I'd have gone up there and gotten hold of Tri and told him to get his damn paratroopers back in barracks or I was going to kick his ass clear across Saigon, and he would have done it. He would have done it just like that (snaps fingers) too. He's a good man, but he's had funny ideas, and one of them was that he thought he could pull a coup d'etat. But he would have obeyed me.

Q: What do you think was behind that? Why pull a coup d'etat?

WILLIAMS: Well, he possibly thought that Big Minh or Don or some of the others or Diem was going to try to pull one--maybe he thought he could beat them to it. Absolutely no understanding what he might think about anything like that. You know, to understand why a Vietnamese or any oriental will do anything, some say you have to think the way they do. Well, it's impossible for me to always think the way they do. I think sometimes I can think the way they do, but not always.

Now, what in the world Tri had in his mind, I don't know. But he certainly didn't intend to succeed, and I'm told that some of the marines, V.N. had a battalion of marines at that time--I don't know really if we had more at the time or not--but when I was there, the V.N. had about a battalion of marines. Some of the marines went down and joined Tri's outfit, and they surrounded the Palace, but one of the naval officers there called in his deputy and told him to take over the Naval Yard, that he was going to the coup. He took a company of marines and went up and told Tri he was going to help him and marched right on down and marched through the gates of the Palace, up into the Palace, and turned around and started shooting at the marines and paratroopers who were on the outside. And he became a favorite of President Diem after that, because there was a naval officer that the President hadn't paid much attention to prior to that time, who had taken a marine force and through guile had come through the lines, as they were, and entered the Palace and came to his help.

Now why did he do that? Did he know, did he have some instinct the coup was going to fall and he wanted to be on the right side? Or if he had that instinct, why didn't he say, "Well, I'm going to stay out of it entirely?" He didn't have to go up there. Why did he decide to go? Was that because of his admiration for Diem? Possibly. Diem certainly was not unpopular with the rank and file of the military.

Now, of course a lot of this that I'm telling you, I got from corresponding with Vietnamese or Americans long after I left Vietnam. Now I don't do that anymore, because there's no one over there, no Americans over there I care to correspond with, and the Vietnamese--I broke off with those people, corresponding with those generals shortly after the coup d'etat that killed Diem.

Q: Speaking of that coup d'etat, the one that ousted Diem, most Americans all during this time were baffled by the coups and the counter-coups, the attempted coups, I think because they couldn't understand what was behind it. Nobody could satisfactorily explain it. Did you ever try to explain it to anyone or could you explain it to anyone?

WILLIAMS: I have my own personal ideas about it, and it comes right back to the city of Washington in the United States. We had a man there that was Assistant Secretary of State for Southeast Asia--I think was his title--and he was anti-Diem, there's no doubt about that, and I think some of the American embassy in Saigon were anti-Diem and possibly part of the U.S. State Department was. So this Assistant Secretary wrote a message one day to Ambassador Lodge and called up John Kennedy on the telephone who was at Hyannis Port at that time and read the message to him, and Kennedy asked, "Does [Maxwell] Taylor"--who was at that time chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff-- "and McNamara"--who was Secretary of Defense--"Does Taylor and McNamara know about this?" The Assistant Secretary said, "Yes." And Kennedy said, "All right, send it."

Now, McNamara didn't know anything about it, and Taylor didn't know anything about it, and both of them said they didn't know anything about it when it finally came to light. This was Saturday about noon--Taylor knew about it Monday morning when he came to his office and the duty officer had a bunch of outgoing messages laid on his desk. He saw that, and from the description to me from a person who saw this happen, Taylor absolutely hit the ceiling and immediately got hold of people over in State and said, "Why did you dispatch this without giving me the courtesy of expressing an opinion?" I was told that McNamara did the same thing but not from an eyewitness account. The State Department people said, "Well, we sent it to your office, so we presumed you saw it." Well, that was too much. This was a message to Lodge to all intents and purposes saying we need a change on V.N. and let the conspirators go ahead. And Lodge did exactly that; he took off from the embassy and went to his quarters, and he stayed there, but he had a man by the name of [Lou] Conein I believe his name was. He was a CIA man. He was at the headquarters of the coup d'etat people, and who has since written and published the fact that he was in constant communication with Ambassador Lodge by both telephone and radio during the entire time and told Lodge exactly what was going on step by step. No one else, apparently, could get hold of Lodge, at least everyone said they couldn't. But anyway, Big Minh went ahead and pulled a coup.

Now I immediately said, "Well, what the hell was [Paul] Harkins doing during that time?" All right, Harkins' people, or Harkins himself--I can't say he did himself, because he didn't tell me personally but I believe it's been published that Harkins heard that this coup was in the mill, and he sent one of his staff officers to General Tran Van Don and asked "What about this coup d'etat that I hear about?" Tran Van Don says, "I don't know what you're talking about." So then Harkins dismissed it from his mind. Well, I could have told Harkins or anyone else that you can't send a staff officer to Tran Van Don or any other Vietnamese general's that worth a damn, and

say, "What about a coup? Tell me about it." They're going to say, "I don't know anything about it." If Harkins himself had gone to Don, and if his relationship with Don was what it should have been, he could have said, "Don"--had him off in a parade ground or someplace like that and say, "Don, what the hell is this about a coup d'etat?" Don would very likely have told him the whole business. But he's not going to tell a third person. You see my point?

Q: Especially a staff officer.

WILLIAMS: Yes. And any third person, no one's going to do that. I don't believe if you're going to pull a coup d'etat in the United States you could do it that way. Well, they pulled a coup d'etat and I had told Diem--and he did it the first time when we had this one in November of 1960--I said "If you ever get in a difficulty and they start anything like this, coil yourself and take as good care of yourself as you possibly can and start talking. And keep in conversation, because as long as you can keep in conversation, they're going to make a mistake and you can take advantage of it. And get in some troops from outside that you can trust." All right, he did that exactly in 1960. He kept talking, and while they, the people, were horsing around there, the marines came through to back him up. He called up people on the radio from outside, and they moved in their troops, loyal officers came in (snaps fingers), Tri and his paratroopers had it. That ended the coup right then.

Well, I think he tried the same thing in 1963, because he was there quite a while before he and his brother left the Palace and went over to Cholon. But now we also want to remember--and none of them deny it; Don doesn't deny it, Big Minh doesn't deny it and no one else in that outfit ever denied it to my knowledge. They told Diem that "All you've got to do is surrender and we're going to accept your surrender, put you on an airplane, then send you out of the country." I think Diem carried out what I told him as well as he could. He talked as long as he could; he saw that he wasn't going to get any further with it, and he got into an automobile and went to Cholon. There was all kinds of things in the paper at the time about having an underground tunnel and all that stuff, which was pure newspaper rhetoric, it wasn't true at all. He merely got in an automobile and drove over there. That's all there is to it. Then he got over there, and he went into this church--he was an extremely devout man. His brother was, too, as far as I know--and then he called coup headquarters and said, "We're ready to surrender." They came over and picked him up; Major General Xuan was in command of the detail.

Q: Can you tell where your--is this from more or less first-hand sources?

WILLIAMS: Where did I get this information?

Q: Where did you get this? Now I know you weren't there personally.

WILLIAMS: That's right.

Q: But I know you have contacts.

WILLIAMS: That's right.

Q: And I want to know who you're citing here.

WILLIAMS: Well, I wouldn't attempt to tell you, because I don't remember. I was corresponding with several Vietnamese officers at that time or shortly thereafter--I said after a while ago I decided to break them off, break off those contacts--but where, I don't know who told me that. Part of it's covered by General Tran Van Don in his book. Don says that when--I've got to go back just a little bit and quote a dead man. There's a Catholic priest by the name of DeJeagher--now dead--

Q: Can you spell that?

WILLIAMS: De-J-E-A-G-H-E-R.

Q: That's good enough.

WILLIAMS: DeJeagher's picture was laying here on--well, here it is right here. See that man shaking hands with Diem? That came out of my files the other day. That's Father Raymond DeJeagher, and here's the way he--

Q: And that's President Chiang Kai-shek, isn't it?

WILLIAMS: That's right.

Q: And is that Minh in the background that I see?

WILLIAMS: That's Big Minh standing back behind there

Q: He was a big man.

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. He was big. He was bigger than either you or I, which was very unusual for a Vietnamese.

Q: And this picture was taken in January, 1960 during his visit to Taiwan. All right, please go ahead, Sir.

WILLIAMS: Well, DeJeagher was a Catholic priest that was teaching school in China when the communists took over China and put him in prison and kept him in prison for a number of years--and when I say a number of years [I mean], what, five, ten, fifteen, something like that--and then released him. He continued on in Southeast Asia, and he was a very close friend of the Nationalist Chinese as contrasted to the Red Chinese, and he was a very close confidante of Ngo Dinh Diem. We got to be friends. And I corresponded with DeJeagher, up until he died which was maybe a year ago. Cancer.

Well, I got a lot of information from DeJeagher, because he knew the Vietnamese inside out, and he had a thorough network with his Chinese friends in that country. So I got a lot of information from him. But anyway, I've got it very firm in my mind, and I'll give it to you the best I can.

Diem and his brother called up the coup headquarters and told them they were ready to surrender, and they said they'd send for them. Some of the people that were in the convoy that went and got them were suspicious when they didn't send an automobile for them but sent an armored personnel carrier. So they put Diem and his brother in the back of this armored personnel carrier, and the convoy started off heading towards Saigon.

Q: Why would they be suspicious on that account? What was the significance of--?

WILLIAMS: Well here's a President of a country that's surrendering and has been promised that he'll be exiled and nothing else and sent out, and he gives himself up, and they send for him. They don't send a car for him but send a closed personnel carrier for him. An armored personnel carrier.

The fact that it's closed makes it--That's right. Because they never came out of it alive. Because when they got out of that thing, or were hauled out of it, Mr. Nhu had been stabbed repeatedly, and the President had been stabbed once or twice, and both of them had been shot repeatedly. And they dumped their bodies out on the ground there at the coup headquarters. Now, Don comes into it this way as I remember his statement in his book. He said that he had come into the headquarters where Big Minh was sitting--or standing, whatnot--and General Xuan walked in and said "The mission is accomplished." Don said, "I understood that to mean that the President and his brother were there at the headquarters, and I went out to arrange quarters for them, where we're going to put them up until the time we shipped them out." He said, "It wasn't until later that I found out that they both had been murdered." And he said, "I had nothing to do with it. I didn't know anything about it." But he says, "Big Minh had something to do with it, and Xuan had something to do with it because Xuan said 'the mission has been accomplished.'" !.Jell, anyway, Big Minh's aide-de-camp, who went out to Cholon to get them, was immediately arrested, and put in prison, then immediately hanged himself or was hung. So there goes your witness. Okay. Now, what was I leading up to? What was your question?

Q: I was asking you--

WILLIAMS: Where I found out all this.

Q: Well, you had answered that. My question I think was mainly, as an old China hand, so to say, weren't you called on by friends and acquaintances and media and so forth to try to explain at various times what is behind this seeming Vietnamese passion for overthrowing the government every couple of months? 1960 was only the first of a long series of coups and attempted coups.

WILLIAMS: I don't remember whether that many people asking me about it or not.

Q: Well, let me ask you.

WILLIAMS: Well, now, will you voice your question once more? Exactly what is your question?

Q: What is behind this apparent Vietnamese passion for coups? Now, I know it's a third world phenomenon, but we were primarily focusing on Vietnam, and I'd like your opinion on that. Americans could never understand it.

WILLIAMS: Well, I can't remember of a coup d'etat--of course I'm not too sure of my history--but I can't remember of a coup d'etat in Vietnam prior to the coup d'etat in 1960 that attempted to overthrow Diem by Tri and the paratroopers.

Q: True. But after that comes a whole series--

WILLIAMS: After that, sure. Every Tom, Dick, and Harry said, "It's my turn. I want to take a whirl at it."

Q: What do you think prompted the first one in 1960? Do you think it was simply officer ambition?

WILLIAMS: I think so. And stupidity.

Q: All right, let me ask one more question about this coup business and then I want to leave and go on.

WILLIAMS: Of course I think they were needed into this by everyone you could possibly think of.

Q: You think they were urged by Americans?

WILLIAMS: Yes, I think they were urged by some Americans. They were very likely urged by some French, they were urged by the North Vietnamese, they were urged by anyone that wanted to see that country go communist. Because in my discussions with these officers prior to my leaving there in 1960, anytime we talked about a coup, we ended up with a consensus that the only people who could ever benefit from a coup would be the communists. And they agreed to it.

Q: And that ended it.

WILLIAMS: That would end the discussion until the next time someone would say, "Hell, let's do such and such."

Q: There were reports that there was widespread celebration in Saigon when the news that the Diem government had been overthrown spread. I don't know what the reports were from the countryside. I don't remember even seeing a report from the countryside. Do you have an explanation for that? Was Diem that unpopular in Saigon?

WILLIAMS: No, couldn't have been. Couldn't have been.

Q: Well, then, why the mass demonstration?

WILLIAMS: Well, I don't know. Didn't we see a demonstration a few days ago where several hundred people appeared outside the White House up there clamoring because we'd sent some four, five or a dozen, fifty advisors down to El Salvador?

Q: Oh, yes, Sir, but I'm not--you can always find a few hundred people to demonstrate for anything. I realize that.

WILLIAMS: Okay.

Q: But these demonstrations were--at least they were reported to be, and reported across the board, every reporter said this, in the thousands and thousands of people. There were mobs of people in the streets of Saigon.

WILLIAMS: It could have been. I don't know; I wasn't there, but I didn't realize anything like that was going on. Of course, there had been the trouble with the Buddhists and coming back to Madame Nhu again, American reporters used the word barbecue, and she repeated it and thereafter no American reporters was ever quoted--it was always Madame Nhu talking about Buddhist barbecuing themselves.

Q: Oh, you think it was an American reporter who used that term first?

WILLIAMS: Why, it was published, it was an American reporter who used the term, said to the President or Madame Nhu, "The Buddhists have barbecued another man down here on the street. What about it?" And so she picked up the expression and immediately it went worldwide: "Madame Nhu's talking about barbecuing the Buddhists."

Q: And she got the credit?

WILLIAMS: She got the credit.

Q: Let me change my tape.

Q: Now, General, you have mentioned, in passing, the press in Vietnam a few times, and I would like to ask you to comment directly on the press. What would you say was the general caliber of the press who were covering Vietnam in the years when you were there?

WILLIAMS: Exceptionally poor. To the best of my knowledge, they had no regular assigned reporters out there, and they were relying on various and sundry people that in the newspaper vernacular I believe they call "stringers."

Q: Now the stringer, if I'm not mistaken, is a person who's paid by the column. He's not on a regular salary.

WILLIAMS: That's right. And he might write for this newspaper today and that one tomorrow

and so on and so forth. Because I asked that question one time of one of these people. I said, "Where are you getting information, and who are your reporters?" and so forth. Now who that was I was asking, I don't remember, but it was someone in a position to know. They said, "Well, we don't have anyone out here. We just rely on stringers." And I said, "Well, why I'm asking is because I read a column here by a young man," and I happen to know that fellow, and I said, "he's barely out of his teens, he's half-French, half- Vietnamese, and I don't think he was too well-educated, and if he's getting coverage like this, it's astounding because, frankly, the man's not, he doesn't know what he's writing about." And they said, "Well, that's the risk we take."

Q: I want to ask you about a couple of individual reporters in particular to see if any of these strike a memory or whatever. The reason I'm mentioning these names is because a couple of people in the military have mentioned them to me as being one kind of reporter or another, and I want to see what your reaction is. Do you remember Till and Peg Durdin of the New York Times? Does that name ring a bell?

WILLIAMS: It does not.

Q: All right. How about Hank Liebermann, also of the New York Times?

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: Homer Bigart of the New York Herald-Tribune?

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: Here's one I think you might remember. John Mecklin of Life-Time.

WILLIAMS: I recognize his name, but I don't remember if I ever met him or not.

Q: Well, I think Mecklin wrote a book called Mission in Torment. Mecklin later became the public affairs officer for the embassy. He was a reporter, in other words, who changed sides, you might say.

WILLIAMS: I didn't know him.

Q: Okay. Did you know John Roderick of the Associated Press?

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: Okay. Were you able to stay abreast of developments in Vietnam after you retired? I know you said you were in correspondence with a number of people over there.

WILLIAMS: I'd like to go back to your last question.

Q: Oh, certainly.

WILLIAMS: I can't understand why I don't recognize those names. Now, even making allowance for poor memory after twenty some-odd years, I can never remember a newspaper correspondent or columnist coming to Vietnam that didn't contact me and ask [for] an interview, if you please, or a conversation, things of that nature. And there was never one turned down, and sometimes those things would last for hours. I'm thinking of people like Jim Lucas and maybe Maggie Higgins and, well, those are the only two names I can think of right at this particular moment.

Q: Well, let me ask you to comment on those two, Lucas and Higgins.

WILLIAMS: Well, I knew Jim Lucas previously, and I remember quite well his coming to Vietnam because the Secretary of the President called me and told me that a reporter by the name of Jim Lucas and some other man were at some place--either in Tokyo or Seoul, or some place else--and wanted a visa to come to South Vietnam, and what did I think about it? I said, "I know Jim Lucas--because I knew him in Korea and I think I knew him in Europe, but I wasn't too sure--"but the other man I don't know, and Jim Lucas is a good reporter and an honest man. I can't help you with the others."

Well, as it turned out, Jim Lucas got a visa to come to Vietnam, and the other man didn't. I didn't put much importance to it until the Ambassador said to me one day right after Jim Lucas got there, "How in the world did Jim Lucas get a visa to South Vietnam?" And I said, "Why, I don't know. Was there any problem?" And I related this instance I've just related to you. He said, "No one gets a visa to South Vietnam unless I say so. I said, "Mr. Ambassador, that's a stupid, goddamn remark to make." I said, "There's thousands of people come to Vietnam that you don't even know anything about."

Q: What was his reaction to that?

WILLIAMS: Well, he just sat there and looked at me. Of course it was true. Did he know every American, every Englishman, every Australian, every Frenchman, or anyone else that got a visa to come to South Vietnam? And the Vietnamese wouldn't dare to issue a visa without handing it to him for approval? Why, that's ridiculous, see? Well, stupid things like that were being said all the time. Well, anyway, that's what caused me to remember Jim Lucas, you see?

Then he went ahead with this conversation. He said, "Is Jim Lucas a friend of yours?" I said, "Not necessarily." I said, "I know him. He interviewed me in Korea when I commanded a Division up there, and I think he interviewed me when I had a Corps there, maybe when I was Deputy Army Commanding in Korea, I'm not sure." And I said, "Maybe I've talked to him in Germany. I don't remember." But I said, "I know Jim Lucas. I'd say, yes, I consider him a friend and at least an acquaintance." He said, "All right, now I want you to keep a diary, and every time you talk to Jim Lucas or he talks to you, I want you to write down exactly what the conversation was about, and I want you to report it to me." And in utter amazement I said, "Well, shall I tell Jim Lucas that I'm spying on him?" He said, "Of course not, goddamn it, don't tell anyone!" Well, I said, "You've just told a room full of people." And I said, "I'm not going to do it. Period." And I didn't do it. Now what he had against Jim Lucas, I haven't the slightest idea, but those were the kind of things that would--people would say, "why, what the hell happened at the

country team meetings?" There's an example of what happened in one country team meeting. Apropos, nothing.

Van Fleet. General [James A.] Van Fleet was Commanding General of the 8th Army, when I first went to Korea. Van Fleet phoned me one time and he said, "I'm coming down to Vietnam"--no, he didn't phone me, he sent me a TWX--he said, "I'm coming to South Vietnam and Saigon, and I sure hope to see you." Well, I'd been a Division Commander under Van Fleet, and I knew him from Europe, too, and I liked him very much and had great admiration for him, and I thought that was fine. So when he came to Saigon, he phoned me, and I immediately invited him out the next day, or sometime soon--we'll say the next day--to come out and have a highball, a cocktail or something and invited some Vietnamese general officers to meet him. And also the V.N. Secretary of State for the Presidency.

We were having little pleasantries there, and I found out that he was representing some U.S. company that was selling some kind of equipment, electrical equipment or something else. What it was I don't know, and it was as immaterial to me at the time as it is now. But he said, "I'd like to talk to the President. Can that be arranged?" And I said, "Well, General, I don't see why it can't. Sitting in that corner right over there is the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. Why don't you tell them and very likely they can arrange it." He walked right over and started talking to them, and the next day he had an appointment with the President, and he went up to see President Diem.

The next time we had an embassy meeting, the Ambassador said to the multitude, and looking at me, "How the hell did Van Fleet get an appointment with the President?" Someone said, "General Williams arranged it." I said, "You're mistaken. I didn't arrange an appointment with the President of South Vietnam with General Van Fleet, but if I'd been asked to, I would have." But I said, "Van Fleet was at my quarters, along with several Vietnamese, and he said that he wanted an appointment with the President, and I said, 'there's the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. Why don't you talk to them?'" And I said, "He got it." Well, again, it's just like "no one gets a visa unless I say so." He says, "No one can have an appointment with President Ngo Dinh Diem without my permission." I just looked at him and laughed. Stupid. Incredible! I'm sure the British ambassador didn't call up Durbrow and ask if he could have an appointment with President Ngo Dinh Diem. You know, that's egotism to the extent that a person may be getting on the verge of incompetence. To me it is. Was it insecurity? Inferiority complex? The case of Van Fleet. The case of Jim Lucas.

Q: That's a good story.

WILLIAMS: These other reporters.

Q: How about Higgins, Maggie Higgins?

WILLIAMS: You know, I don't remember anything about Maggie Higgins, although I'm positive I engaged her in conversation or she engaged me in conversation. But I've read her books, or some of her writings.

Q: What did you think of them?

WILLIAMS: I thought they were excellent. I thought she had a very clear grasp of what the situation was.

Q: Did you read any of the reporters who came a little later, just after you left? Like-- well, I guess the most famous and obvious one was Halberstam--David Halberstam.

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes.

Q: What did you think of David Halberstam?

WILLIAMS: Terrible reporting.

Q: Terrible. What was wrong with him?

WILLIAMS: I didn't think he knew what he was talking about in the first place, and in the second place, I thought he was trying to undermine the Vietnamese government.

Q: He was one of the younger ones who was over his depth or out of his experience, would you say?

WILLIAMS: I thought so. That's a very bold thing for me to say, because he has quite a reputation--I presume he still has a reputation--as a writer, and I don't but if you ask me a layman's opinion, that's it. I considered him pink, if not red.

*Q: I think I missed Robert Shaplen. Do you ever read any of his things? Shaplen wrote one called *The Road from War*, and then he had an earlier book, too.*

WILLIAMS: No, I don't remember.

*Q: *The Lost Revolution*, I believe, is the name of it.*

WILLIAMS: But that thing that you so graciously gave me the other day which was an extract of U.S. News and World Report--I'll tell you how come that thing to be in existence. I had great admiration for the man who was running U.S. News and World Report at that time, long since deceased. And I was reading these reports from Vietnam, which I thought were terribly slanted or some of them were downright false and didn't jibe at all with what American officers were telling me, or writing me from Vietnam or what Vietnamese officers were writing. And I read one of these articles in U.S. News and World Report, and I sat down and wrote this gentleman. I wrote, "I'm a long subscriber to U.S. News and World Report, and I consider it one of the best, most informative magazines in the United States, and I've always relied on it," I said, "but I've just finished reading such-and-such an article--" and I don't remember the name of it or who wrote- "but it's the most astounding thing I ever read in my~.life because it's utterly false from beginning to end. And I think you should know that some of your readers have that kind of impression of it."

Well, by George, that opened the floodgates, and either by telegram, letters or telephone calls and so forth, they asked me if I would submit to an interview about South Vietnam, and I said "I certainly will, if you'll let me read what your people write before you publish it." Well and good. In no time at all, there two of them were right here at my gate, and that thing that you brought in to me the other day was the result of it. Now, who [was] the man that I was criticizing at that time, I don't know. But--

Q: Let me ask you about that interview. Did they in fact publish what you said? Did you approve of--?

WILLIAMS: Yes. You got it, right? You gave me a copy.

Q: Yes, I gave you a copy. I have one. Okay.

WILLIAMS: Yes. And they sent it to me in draft form, and I read it and put a note on there something to the effect, "I'm not going to attempt to correct the English. You people can do it better than I can. This is okay for publication as far as I'm concerned." And by George, they did it. Now, I think I was exceptionally fortunate. That magazine's bound to get a world of letters, and some secretary saw mine and for some reason, said, "Well, here's something that the top honcho should see," and pitched it into him and that was his reaction. It could just as easily have been thrown in the wastebasket.

Q: Well, some knowledgeable person screened the mail, that's all.

WILLIAMS: It could have been. It could have been.

Q: Well, do you want to add anything about the media, anything about the press that you haven't had a chance to stick in?

WILLIAMS: No, but I think that we've got the same thing coming up right now that we had then. We have a two-inch headline coming out in a very good newspaper that says "The Navy Goes to San Salvador" and you read it, you find out they sent five sailors. They raise the question, is this leading to another Vietnam? Well, to me that's someone that's attempting to manipulate the American public to make them scared of what the administration is trying to do. That's my firm conviction. And there's so many people that have no more idea about what the advisors did in South Vietnam or anything else about South Vietnam, that they can say, "Well, is this another South Vietnam?" And everyone immediately screams.

Now, what was wrong with South Vietnam? First of all, I don't think we should have fought there, and I don't think there was any reason for us to have fought there, and I sincerely believe that if Ngo Dinh Diem had stayed alive that we would not have fought there. I think he would have come to accommodation with Ho Chi Minh. President Diem told me that he knew Ho Chi Minh very well, and Ho Chi Minh offered him a place in his government in Hanoi. They were on speaking terms; they could negotiate. I think that-- and I mentioned in that U.S. News and World Report thing if I remember correctly--that every time anyone came to Vietnam--that is, I'm

talking about American officialdom-- they had audiences with the President, and I would say nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, I would be present, and never did I hear any of them say anything except sometime during the conversation, "Mr. President, you're doing exactly right. We're behind you 100 per cent. You keep on pitching, and we're going to back you up to the hilt." From congressmen, senators, vice president of the United States--Nixon came there as vice president of the United States--generals, four-star generals from chief of staff of the army right straight on down to maybe commanding general of the U.S. Army of the Pacific--they'd all say the same thing. President Diem had an idea, I'm afraid that he got an idea, "I can go as far as I want to because the United States is going to back me up."

Q: Some people say that his attitude was, "They're going to back me up because they haven't got any option and they've got to back me no matter what I do."

WILLIAMS: He could have thought that, but I wouldn't say that I thought he thought it, because I couldn't see that far into the man's brain. The option was, of course, just for us to pull out lock, stock and barrel. That could have been done easily, just like that (snaps fingers). And any number of times I thought we were going to do it.

Q: Oh, really? When did you think they were going to do it?

WILLIAMS: Well, when I kept asking for people. As I said before, I had about four hundred and forty-two people I inherited when I took over--were there when the French were there--and we were able to increase that a little by pulling in teams to do this and teams to do that, and they'd come in and stay a few months and then go back out, and that would satisfy the International Control Commission. I wanted at least two thousand advisors there, and I needed them very badly because--I imagine they're running into the same thing down here in El Salvador--you have motors, you have motorboats, you have tanks, you have different kind of weapons and so forth; you have spare parts, and you have to store them properly so that you can fill requisitions on them. You got to know where the spare parts are--you've got to have spare-part bins for this, spare-part bins for that--and you've got to have someone that's cognizant with the weapon or the material that you're using to know how to store those things and to teach someone else how to issue them. You have ammunition to store. It's just as simple as that. The two thousand advisors I wanted--I wanted advisors down a little bit below division level, and I wanted to get down to regimental or battalion level, if possible, and I wanted to get people in it that could deal more with the finance and with the supply and logistics and motors and schools and things of that nature. Not necessarily to get out there and take a carbine or an M-1 rifle and go help run down some damn guerrilla. But they wouldn't give them to me. And I don't know when they broke that, but I think it was after Diem's death in 1963 before they ever broke that. I'm not sure.

Q: Well, I know at the time of President Kennedy's death, which was just a month later, we had sixteen thousand.

WILLIAMS: No, couldn't have?

Q: Yes, Sir.

WILLIAMS: Sixteen thousand? But that was in 1963. They should have been furnished in 1957.

Q: Yes, Sir.

WILLIAMS: Well, they didn't wait until Diem died then before they started pushing them in?

Q: No, they started pushing them.

WILLIAMS: Are these troops or advisors you're talking about?

Q: Total. Total American military.

WILLIAMS: Yes?

Q: Military of all kinds.

WILLIAMS: Well, I imagine then by that time you very likely had some Green Berets in there?

Q: Yes, and they were getting advisors down at regimental level by that time.

WILLIAMS: Yes?

Q: Did any subsequent administration ever call on you for advice, consult with you, contact you in any way? Kennedy or Johnson?

WILLIAMS: Not really. I went up, was invited up to the Military Academy to make an address in May of 1961, I think. Couldn't have been 1971--that was too long later. But on the way back, General [Edward] Lansdale asked me if I would come by Washington and serve there as consultant for a few days, and I said yes.

Q: Now let me clarify this. Was General Lansdale still working for Defense at this time, or was he retired and working for State, or do you recall?

WILLIAMS: As I remember he was in uniform. And in the Pentagon.

Q: Okay.

WILLIAMS: So I'd say he was with Defense. And I did that. While I was there, someone--and I don't know who it was, but anyway, I was sent down into the bowels of the Pentagon where Max Taylor and Burke, Admiral Burke--

Q: Arleigh Burke?

WILLIAMS: Yes. And Bob Kennedy were investigating the debacle of the Bay of Pigs, and I was given a desk in a small room there, and they started throwing large, manila envelopes at me--

-larger than I'd ever seen before, at least two feet by two feet square--and on the upper left-hand corner, they had on there the White House, and down at the bottom it was addressed to--if I remember correctly--General Taylor. These were plans, contingency plans. And I was told to go through those plans and to make comments as to whether or not they were up to date, or if they were workable or whatnot and so forth. So that's what I started doing.

Q: Now what did these contingency plans--what were they for? What contingencies were they for?

WILLIAMS: Fighting anyplace in the damn world that you could think of, as I remember.

Q: Okay. All right. These were not specifically Vietnam?

WILLIAMS: No. But my memory is vague.

Q: General military situation.

WILLIAMS: That's right.

Q: All right.

WILLIAMS: And at first, I was going about it in very careful manner and making detailed comments, and finally it got to the degree I would take one of them, glance at it, scan it, and write across it "Obsolete. Worthless," and throw it back out.

Q: Were they so bad? Were they that far out of date?

WILLIAMS: Yes. To me they were, yes. And while I was doing that, I was called out one day, and Bob Kennedy and Taylor were there--Burke was not--and Kennedy started asking me questions about Vietnam.

Q: Can you recall any detail of these questions?

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: What was he after? What was he trying to--

WILLIAMS: I don't know. When he got through asking questions--Taylor didn't say anything, he just sat there and listened. Kennedy started out by saying, "I've heard a great deal about you, and I want to ask you some questions." I said, "Okay." And, of course, I must admit, I didn't look upon Bob Kennedy with the great reverence that some people did. To me he was just another young man. The fact that his brother was President of the United States and he'd been appointed Attorney General didn't make a damn bit of difference to me. He looked like he might be a very young Major in the army, as far as I was concerned, which was possibly a wrong attitude to take, but it wasn't anything disrespectful. But I didn't look upon him as one of America's great heroes, martyrs, as he turned out to be, unfortunately.

But anyway, he asked me a lot of questions, and when he got through, he said to Taylor, "I've learned more about Vietnam from General Williams than I have from anyone else since I've been in this headquarters, in the Pentagon." And he said, "Don't let that man get away." Then as he went out the door he said to me, "As I've said before, I've heard about you, and you're supposed to be a pretty hard person. How would you like to go to Vietnam as ambassador?" And I said, "I wouldn't like it at all." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Well, I'm not a professional foreign affairs officer, and when political appointees go in jobs like that, the State Department old hands tear them apart." I said, "They'd crucify me before I'd been there six months." And I said, "That's the only reason why I think it would be wrong for me to go out there as an ambassador." Frankly, I doubt seriously he had the slightest intention of me ever going out there as ambassador, but, hell, you can't tell from the people that they have appointed.

Q: Now, let me ask you this. Since you express that opinion, what did you think when Max Taylor went as ambassador? Because clearly the same objections would apply.

WILLIAMS: No, Max was a politician in addition to being a superior army officer. Max is a very astute politician, and his association was so close with the Kennedy family--they named one of the children after him--that the foreign affairs cadre over in the State Department couldn't have touched him. I don't think they could. They may have; I don't know. Well, anyway, I guess I was a little bold when he said, "I've heard about you, and you're supposed to be a pretty tough nut to crack." He said, "How would you like to go out and be ambassador to Vietnam? I said I didn't want to. And I said, "Now, as far as being a tough nut's concerned, you're getting a pretty good reputation yourself." I said, "All I hear is that you're one of the hardest people around Washington, D.C." And I said, "If people are calling and referring to me as an old son of a bitch now," I said, "they're going to be calling you one at the same time, if they're not already doing it." Kennedy looked at me and laughed, and said, "Adios" or something like that and walked out the door. He seemed to be a very pleasant fellow. Now I wouldn't say that that was asking me for advice, but no one else ever did. Now, I will say this, that after [General Creighton] Abrams became the CG in Vietnam-

Q: Now this would be about the summer of 1968, wouldn't it? I believe that's correct, because [General William] Westmoreland came back about June of 1968.

WILLIAMS: Okay. It would be after that. Well, then, maybe it was before he became CG. But we had a mutual friend. An officer that had served with me quite often. He retired--major general, he's dead--and he had served with me in Vietnam, too, and I knew Abrams fairly well. Abrams and I had known each other some time. We weren't intimate friends, but we were pretty close to it, and I'd known him since Germany. I knew he was busy, and I never was presumptuous enough to write him and tell him that he should do this, that and another, but I had a friend that was on his staff that was very close to him, so when I had ideas I'd write this friend of mine and say, "Next time you're talking to Abe, you might suggest this, that and another. And whether you attribute it to me is immaterial, but it might be something for him to think about." And sooner or later I'd get back word, well, Abe bought it or he didn't buy it.

Q: Do any of these stand out in your mind, any of your suggestions or ideas?

WILLIAMS: None that I'd care to talk about now. Both these people are dead, and the war's over. But I didn't think the war was being fought properly, but I also didn't believe that Abrams had much control over it. I didn't believe that CINCPAC had a hell of a lot of control over it, nor the U.S. Army of the Pacific, and I think now historically we know it was controlled almost entirely from the Oval Room at the White House and was terribly bitched up. There's where I cross with you and your friends, or the people that employ you. But--

Q: Well, you won't cross us. That man is dead and gone, too, after all. (Laughter)

WILLIAMS: Yes, but this all goes into his building. Now, not long ago, Roche, who used to be a terrible liberal and has changed considerably--

Q: You're speaking of John Roche, now?

WILLIAMS: Yes--made a remark in one of his columns that he walked into the Oval Room one day, and there was Lyndon Johnson and Bus [Earle G.] Wheeler and McNamara fussing over a damn map on the wall, deciding which one was going to stick a pin in to show where the next bombing target was going to be. Well, that's absolutely ridiculous. You can't fight a war that way, and we found it out. We got ourselves in a terrible jam. If you read--I don't know whether you have time to do it or not--but if you read some of the analysis now of our air force activities during the Vietnamese War, you'll find out that our B-29s that, or 52s, whatever those biggest bombers were, that were flying out of Guam, very, very small per cent of those--less than 5 per cent ever bombed North Vietnam. They were bombing in South Vietnam. On the other hand, we were taking fighter bombers and sending them up to North Vietnam and losing aviators almost every day. That was mismanagement, entirely mismanagement.

Some of these aviators have written, and it's been published in such a thing as the Armed Forces Journal and other military publications--I think I'm quoting the Armed Forces Journal correctly--where that some of the very senior officers in the air force, or at least the field grade officers resigned because of the damn ridiculous orders they were getting as naval aviators flying off of carriers and going over Hanoi. I remember reading one of them not too long ago where he said that on such-a-such a night they went in there and not a plane was allowed to carry a bomb; the only thing that they could carry was flares. And he talked about their losses and so forth. Hell, you can't fight a war like that. We would have won that war easier than I could drive from here to San Antonio--city of San Antonio--if they'd let us alone. Now, if Westmoreland couldn't have done it, they could have jerked him and put someone in there that could have done it. They had plenty of people could have done it. Abrams could have done it.

Stop to think how ridiculous this is. Now an army officer of some experience, Abrams didn't even command the air force in Vietnam. He didn't command the damn marines; he didn't command anything but army. Westmoreland was the same. You had no unified commander. Even President Diem--when I was told in the greatest confidence to find out what President Diem thought about unified command--I asked him--and I was told never to let anyone know I did it. Well, hell, that's so long ago it doesn't make any difference now. But anyway, he didn't know what unified command was, and I started in back in World War I and told him how the

Allies had to finally decide on General Foch to be commander, to coordinate things and how in World War II, why, we had a unified command down in Africa, and finally in France we had unified command with General Eisenhower operating with [Omar] Bradley and [Bernard] Montgomery as subordinates.

I said, "Now, that's unified command. Now, if we have a fight here, and American troops come in, is everyone going to go and have their own show or are we going to have one man in command and let him fight the damn war?" I said, "Now, our concept is that, like Eisenhower's headquarters at least--so I was told--that if you have an American commander, you have a deputy that's opposite. For instance, Eisenhower's deputy was a man named [Arthur] Tedder; he was a British flier." And I said, "Right on down the line. If we have a war over here, if you have a Vietnamese commander, then you ought to have an American deputy commander or vice versa." Diem said, "Who would do that?" I said, "If the fight's tomorrow, it'll be me. How long that'll last, I don't know. He said, "If it starts tomorrow," he said, "you'll be commander." He said, "You'll command Vietnamese forces as far as I'm concerned." Well, hell, we would have sold on that thing. Lord, goodness, here and I've passed that on to people that told me to get the answer to that question, who were military people. But, by George, we ended up--the army commander over there commanded army, the navy commander commanded navy, the air force commander commanded air force--and hell, who in the world organized and coordinated? Nobody. You can't fight a war that way, and we found it out.

Q: And the ARVN went one way and we went another way.

WILLIAMS: Absolutely. Absolutely. There was no [coordination]. You can't saddle that on Ahe. You can't saddle it on Westmoreland, except I think Westmoreland should have objected to it strenuously. And there was so damn much jealousy, I can't think it was anything but jealousy that CINCPAC would not realize that someone on the ground should be commanding there and not back at CINCPAC or back at the U.S. Army Pacific.

My impression is that once the war heated up that CINCPAC virtually got shoved out of the circuit and maybe it was--

Q: My impression is that once the war heated up that CINCPAC virtually got shoved out of the circuit and maybe it was--

WILLIAMS: I'm afraid they did.

Q: --between JCS and Commander, MACV.

WILLIAMS: I'm afraid they did. We have had American aviators publish articles in which they said they'd be on carrier, and a telephone conversation would come through directly from the President of the United States to a carrier telling them what they're going to do on their next flights out. Well now, my Lord, you could say that as much as this nation idolizes George Washington, hell, old George Washington couldn't have done that. It's impossible. So that's where we lost.

Now then, where did Vietnam get its bad name? Okay, they started their draft, or they had their draft going and the draft didn't work properly. If a kid had money enough to go to school or any reason to get excused from the draft, he got excused from the draft. Thousands of them went to Canada; that paid off because later when the administration, another administration came in, that said, "King's X. Everything's free. Come on back." Okay. Now we had a lot of kids going to school and they said, "All right, I'm in school because I'm a student. All right, I'm going to graduate next year. What the hell, the army going to get me?" Well, the best way to stop that is to start bitching about the war. So your students started, and they were ably assisted by all agitators, both pink and red as well as white. All these agitators immediately helped them, and the first thing you know all the students throughout the United States were saying what a horrible thing Vietnam is. First thing you know you have the entire American public mind poisoned about Vietnam. That's why I was very glad to see Mr. Reagan come out the other day and said it wasn't criminal to be a soldier in Vietnam during the war. Well, that's just an old soldier's viewpoint of things.

Q: I want to ask you a wide-open question.

WILLIAMS: Okay.

Q: Will you compare the performance of the country team under Ambassadors [G. Frederick] Reinhardt and Durbrow?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: Would you do that for me?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Under Mr. Reinhardt we had a good, working country team as far as I could tell, and we had no dissension. I never knew of any serious dissension taking place there. It was just the difference between daylight and dark. Now, I don't say that because Reinhardt and I were personal friends, we were not. We were on good speaking terms, but he was the ambassador, he represented the country. I never saw him do anything that would cause me as an American to be embarrassed, and I never saw him get up, for instance, in front of a mixed crowd and strip down to his shorts and put on a belly dance. Vulgar things like that. Reinhardt was a gentleman, and he conducted himself as such. At parties and so forth, if he got up to give a toast, he got up and read a toast off a card that he'd written in French. Everyone accepted it, and he was just what I considered a top-rate American ambassador.

Q: Very professional?

WILLIAMS: Very professional, and I thought very understanding. Now, that doesn't mean to say that Reinhardt and I didn't have differences, but any differences we had were absolutely minor. He phoned me one time, "Tanks are going by my quarters over here, been going by here for an hour--going down to the docks, being loaded up. The French are shipping all these tanks out." He said, "Why don't you stop them?" I said, "Fine. The French have the bayonets; I don't have any," and hung up. That's all there was to it. The French had a regiment of Foreign Legionnaires right there. They could do anything they wanted to, and they did do anything they wanted to. Mr.

[John Foster] Dulles came over there. I told him, "The French are stealing us blind." He says, "Hell, I know it. There's nothing unusual about that," or words to that effect.

Anything that Reinhardt and I ever had differences on amounted to nothing. I had quite a bit of admiration for him. No one would disparagingly refer to him as a "ladies shoe salesman."

Q: How did things change when Ambassador Durbrow came in?

WILLIAMS: Well, I don't think I can elaborate on that any more than I have already. I think they got petty. If Reinhardt had been strongly adverse to President Ngo Dinh Diem, he never indicated it in my presence. I'm sure that none of the American staff there--I'm talking about USIS and the CIA and USOM, certainly not MAAG--if anyone had any idea that he was violently opposed to the Vietnamese or to the regime of President Diem, he gave no indication of it by word or action in my presence at any time. He conducted country team meetings in a professional manner.

Q: Do you think the difference between Reinhardt and Durbrow was a matter of policy or personality?

WILLIAMS: I think, well, I'd start off first by thinking it was personality, or it could be that Durbrow was getting new instructions from stateside or maybe he wasn't. Maybe his messages back stateside were written in such a way that State could take them this way or that way because I, when I got my hands on them, I used to study those things line by line and paragraph by paragraph and often when I'd get through with a couple of pages of a dispatch that had been sent back there, I couldn't tell what the hell--whether he was for or against the subject.

Q: You didn't ordinarily see the dispatches between State and the Ambassador.

WILLIAMS: No.

Q: Did you see them under Reinhardt?

WILLIAMS: Yes, as far as I know.

Q: But that stopped with Durbrow? Was that abrupt?

WILLIAMS: I don't know whether it was abrupt or not. I never had any occasion to question anything that was put out under Reinhardt. There could have been things that I didn't know about, wasn't familiar with, but I became very cognizant under Durbrow because--here's an instance that occurred which I thought was not exactly right. The chief of staff of CINCPAC sent me a message and said, "We want your detailed analysis, comments, et cetera of a message sent by the embassy to State Department, number such- and-such on such-and-such a date. Soonest." I called for it; we didn't have it in MAAG files. I picked up the telephone and called the embassy and I said, "Do you have such-and- such a communication?" "Well, let us check. Yes, we do." I said, "Will you furnish me a copy of it?" "Yes, we'll send you a copy." Now, who I was talking to, I don't know--some clerk up there. So they: sent me a copy of it, and I sat down and read that

thing, page after page, with utter amazement. So I sat down, in longhand myself, and wrote out almost sentence by sentence my objection to the concept that had been advanced in this--

Q: Do you recall what the substance of the matter was?

WILLIAMS: No. It was a policy paper. And when I got through, I had it typed up and proofread it and so forth and signed it and sent it to CINCPAC. The first thing I knew, the Ambassador phoned me and said, "We have a message from State Department saying that they don't entirely agree with my letter of such-and-such a date, and furthermore, you don't either." And I said, "Is that such-and-such?" And he said, "Yes." And he said, "Why did you coherent on it?" I said, "I had a direct order from CINCPAC to comment on it and direct it to them soonest without delay. I asked your office for a copy of it, and they gave me a copy, and I sat down and made my comments and sent them in."

Then he issued an order, a directive. It was really a whopper. He said, "Hereafter, you will send no communication of any importance to CINCPAC or any other headquarters outside of Vietnam without it being proofread and approved by this headquarters, by this embassy. I said, "All right, but you want to remember that I may get instructions to answer a communication by fastest method possible, and that means that I'm going to get an answer out within less than twenty-four hours. If I sent it up here for you to proofread and approve, and you let it lay on your desk for two or three days or a week or so--which has happened in the past on various papers that I've presented," I said, "that's going to get me into a terrible jam." He said, "I'll take care of that." So, after that, anytime that I sent to a high headquarters a comment on anything or any paper of any importance at all, I had to send it to the embassy and get it initialed by the Ambassador before I could dispatch it. And sometimes that would be anywhere from twenty-four hours to ten, fifteen days.

Q: What did CINCPAC think of that?

WILLIAMS: They told me not to pay any attention to the Ambassador's directive.

Q: That kind of puts you between a rock and a hard place.

WILLIAMS: Yes. But you see, CINCPAC was my immediate military superior. And here you see a MAAG chief is put in a delicate position. He has a military superior that's giving him orders, he's got a civilian superior that's giving him orders, and no man--the Bible says it--can serve two masters at one time. And anytime you try it, you're going to get in a jam.

Now, I found out that this was not an isolated case. I had people visit me from Japan and the Philippines and people I could trust and talk to--army officers--and I'd say, "What the hell goes on here?" I said, "This situation here is outlandish." I said, "We're just at each other all the time, and I get some of the craziest orders that a person could conceive of." And any number of times, well, several times, they said, "Why, you don't know half the story." "Why, you're getting along fine down here." "You ought to see what's happening between the Ambassador and the Chief of MAAG up in Tokyo." Or they said, "Do you have any idea what's going on between the Ambassador and the Chief of MAAG over in Manila?" I said, "It couldn't be worse than this."

"It's much worse." So I thought to myself, "Well, that's something the American government's got to work out; that's beyond me."

Q: General, looking back now, do you see any turning points, any crucial decision, any point in time during your tour in Vietnam when you were still there, that you wish had happened differently or that you wish you had done differently? Anything crucial, anything that stands out in your mind at all.

WILLIAMS: No, I can't think of any one thing. I've often said that anytime there's trouble between two people, or two headquarters, probably both are partially responsible. One might be more responsible than the other, but the other's going to be partially responsible. So I thought many times, "What could I have done to have kept better relations between MAAG and the embassy?"

Q: And you're speaking of Durbrow's tenure now?

WILLIAMS: Yes. And I don't know what in the world I could have done and still carried out the orders that I had, the directive I had when I went over there. Then too, I've often wondered why I wasn't able to make an impression on Big Minh and Don and those people that would have lasted longer than three years. I had a letter--first of all, when I left there, President Diem told me that he was soon inviting me back to visit Vietnam as a guest of the country. And I had a letter from him to that extent after I'd been home about a year, and it said, "You'll hear from me through the Vietnamese embassy." Well, I never did hear from him, or I never did hear from the Vietnamese embassy. Now, I'm sure that if he sent such an invitation, it was stopped on purpose by the V.N. Ambassador who's on a different side of the fence from myself.

I had at least one Vietnamese officer, general, of some importance write me one time-- prior to the coup--and said, "You promised that you were coming back, and if you're coming, you must come soon. You have been gone too long now." Or words to that effect, see? And I thought to myself, "Well, now, if I had taken the bull by the horns and realized that it was possible that the Vietnamese Ambassador or the American Ambassador was keeping me from going back over there, I should have applied for a visa and gone over on my own and talked to these generals and said, 'What's going on here? I've been gone too long. What the hell are you people plotting?'"

Now, this is going to sound egotistical as hell, but it's possible that if I had had enough foresight to do that, or enough intelligence to do that, or enough get-up-and-go to do it, I could have stopped something. I might have stopped that coup d'etat, then--carry my theory on--if Diem had lived, had stopped the damn war and saved how many thousands of American soldiers that were killed in Vietnam.

Q: But could you have made any difference with Lodge in the picture in the way that he was?

WILLIAMS: I doubt it seriously, but maybe I could have neutralized him, if that's the proper word. I wouldn't have attempted to confront Lodge.

I would merely have talked to the Vietnamese. How strong, what kind of hold he had on the

Vietnamese, I don't know. I don't believe he had very much. But he could have.

The other day, you were asking me a question about Lansdale, and I said I hadn't corresponded with him very often. And cogitating on that, I wondered if you had something particular in mind, because I think maybe that I've corresponded with Lansdale more than my answer may have indicated. I don't know exactly what I did answer you when you asked me about Lansdale.

Q: I asked you if you had much contact with him after he went back to the States in 1956, and the reason I ask is because I know that he was continuing to work on Vietnamese problems while he was in Washington, and I thought perhaps that had been an occasion for you to correspond.

WILLIAMS: Well, we have corresponded. Not over anything of particular importance that I can remember.

Q: I was thinking specifically of the time when you were in Vietnam between, well, I guess about 1957 and 1960. I thought perhaps there was an official connection there, since he was continuing to work on Vietnam back in Washington.

WILLIAMS: No. We have corresponded to this extent. He writes to me occasionally, I write to him. His wife died; he wrote and told me about it. He married one of the people that worked for him when he was over there. He's very happy with his new life. I think he's consulted by the Military History Division of the Department of Army at times; it's run by a brigadier general by the name of [James L.] Collins.

Incidentally, you asked me a question here one time that I could have elaborated on. Collins's people have been down here; one of them came down here and spent a week at least going through my files and xeroxing records and taking them up there. I don't have much to do with them anymore because I've lost faith in them. They sent me a draft and said they were preparing a history on Vietnam, and they sent me a draft covering the period 1954 to 1960 and said, "If you have any changes or suggestions, make them on the margin, and we'd appreciate it."

Well, I mulled over that a little while and I sit down at this old typewriter and took out some foolscap paper and wrote them five or six pages, almost paragraph by paragraph of what they'd said was wrong and what I thought was wrong and sent it back to them. Then I wrote to an officer up there, an ex-officer that I'd known that had written some books and had been kind enough to send me an autographed copy--and I think his name was [Charles] MacDonald. Does that name mean anything to you? I told him, "If you're still with that outfit up there, you sure better do some looking around. I've got this thing down here and I've written a number of pages." I said, "The stuff that the historical section put out on World War II," I said, "I used some of those things as reference datas." Well, hell, here's one of them right here, for instance. That's Rearming the French. That's put out by that office.

I said, "That's some of the best stuff I ever read. Beside [that] this thing that they sent down here is atrocious. And if that office can't do as good as it did on World War II, I think you ought to do something about it." He wrote back and told me, "We have examined your comments. We had a murder board here, and your comments were discussed, and we've decided, in view of your

comments and others--"and he didn't say who the others were--"that the work was not of satisfactory stature, and we've given the historian twelve months to rewrite." And he says, "I can assure you that when we do publish, it'll be as good as anything we published on World War II, or it won't be published at all." "Sincerely and cordially" and so forth, and that's the last I heard.

But I heard no more about that. Then I got another letter from some other man--I don't know who he was, I don't remember his name--he said, "We're making a pictorial history of the Vietnamese War and we find that we have no pictures for our pictorial history prior to 1960, and we're about to go to press. Can you furnish me any pictures that could be included in such a volume?" Well, I wrote back and I said, "I'm sure that I have a lot of pictures here, filed away in this place and that and another, but I have none immediately available." And I said, "Here's two or three that are available, and I'll send those to you." And I sent them to him, and I got back an answer. He said, "Well, these are fine and we'll hold them and see whether we use them or not, but we were looking for something less formal." He said, "We're about to go to press until we discovered here that we had nothing prior to 1960." So I wrote back and I said, "How in the hell can you put out a pictorial history of South Vietnam and have it start some time in 1960?" I said, "You remember the French fought a war out there, and we got our nose in it in 1954, and that's six years before your history begins."

Q: I was going to say you need to go back to about 1945, I would say, if you want to pick it up at the beginning.

WILLIAMS: So that's the last of those people, and as I say, I've lost faith in them. So when they start talking about records--other people have talked to me about records. People at the University of Texas, egged on by some of my University of Texas alumni friends, communicated with me, and I answered their letters and so forth, and they suggested eventually that I put my files down in the University of Texas museum at El Paso, Texas. One of my very good friends was Slam Marshall. His records are there. Then for some reason or another, somehow or another, the Hoover Institution of War, Peace and Revolution got hold of my name out at Stanford, and they wrote me a letter, and I started corresponding with them, and I ended up by shipping lock, stock and barrel.

Addendum

WILLIAMS: As this is the end of this interview let me summarize by repeating that when I was sent to South Vietnam in 1955 my Directive was a) to organize, train, and equip a South Vietnamese army, navy, and air force; b) that I was to support the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem.

This Directive was not changed during my tour in Vietnam which was extended from the normal two year tour to five years.

I would be remiss if I did not include remarks about the U.S. military personnel assigned to help me as Chief of MAAG. Without exception the officers, NCOs, and soldiers assigned by the army, the navy and the marines, and the air force, especially the army, were of a high calibre. Far above the average. Several of the army officers went on to higher rank and some eventually

retired as general officers. More should have.

We had no disciplinary problems among the U.S. military and the use of drugs or the excessive use of liquor was unknown. No commander could have asked for better help. The problem was the numbers were inadequate for the tasks at hand. This shortage was not corrected until several years after I'd left Vietnam.

CHRISTIAN A. CHAPMAN
Political Officer
Saigon (1957-1958)

Christian A. Chapman served 10 months in Saigon (1957-1958) before being transferred to Laos. He was born in 1921 in France of American parents. He entered the Foreign Service 1951, serving in Morocco, Lebanon, Iran, Luxembourg, Paris, and Cyprus. He was interviewed in 1990 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Your next post Saigon, was another trouble spot. How did this happen?

CHAPMAN: I was in the foreign service to be active. It was a French speaking area, and it was going through a difficult period. I was single and that was a factor. I was sent as deputy chief of the political section, which was a very nice promotion. This was in 1957.

I was acting chief for several months because the previous chief had left. Tom Bowie, the new political Counselor, came in three or four months later. It was fun.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CHAPMAN: Durbrow. Durbrow came in after Reinhardt and Daniel Anderson was the DCM. As a Foreign Service tit-bit, the administrative counselor asked me to stay in the residence to keep an eye on things in the interim between the two ambassadors. I jumped at the chance and there gave some of the best parties ever in my whole career. It was elegant living!

Q: What was the situation as you saw it in 1957?

CHAPMAN: I think all of us felt it very difficult to penetrate the Vietnamese situation. I attended a number of so called political meetings and there were a lot of formalized speeches in Vietnamese. Not knowing Vietnamese it was difficult really to get a grasp of the reality of political life. Diem and his family were very close knit, and completely ran the show, which was in the tradition of the country. Flowering democracies are not many in this world.

There was no political party that was impressive as such or that you could determine its true configuration. The country had completed what I call the French chapter in 1954 with the signing of the Geneva Agreement and the departure of the French administration. Many of us were

disquieted by the tensions that existed between French and Americans and it just happened that there was a group of recently arrived young American officers who spoke French well and were trying to bridge the gap between the French and ourselves. Some Americans were coming over and saying, "well, now that we're here, we are going to save the situation, and the French don't know how to do anything. They fought the war poorly but now we're going to be here and teach the Vietnamese how to fight."

These were American military officers mostly. Particularly, the more senior officers. The captains and lieutenants who had been out in the field, had a much better appreciation of what was involved than the colonels and generals.

The lieutenant general in charge of the MAG at that time was called Hanging Sam Williams, because he had been responsible at Nuremberg for overseeing the execution of the prisoners condemned to death.

The junior officers had a better sense of the nature of the insecurity, than the senior military coming out of World War II. The latter tended to be disparaging of the French; the junior officers, both military and civilian, felt that this was not a terribly intelligent attitude, because the French had a good understanding of the country and still held very important positions. To start with, the Vietnamese leadership spoke French more than English and still felt surprisingly warmly towards France. There were French schools and French businesses were still a major factor. So most of us thought it was better working with them rather than against them.

1957 was a year of restoring relations between the French and American embassies. We managed quite well but with the military it remained difficult. These were also some of the rare years of peace between 1954 and 1960, when the war heated up again. In 1957, you could actually drive a car from Saigon all the way to the highlands. There was a remarkable sense of security and it was a beautiful country. The people are hard working and interesting. Very pleasant and interesting posting.

Q: Did you feel optimistic about how things were going to go?

CHAPMAN: I think we were optimistic because we were putting in a lot of money, a lot of effort and a lot of good people, and felt that Vietnam could be built up into a viable country.

Q: Having come from Iran where you were seeing this corruption, did you feel this was being duplicated.

CHAPMAN: Again, it is so hard for a foreigner to measure such things. There was a feeling that Diem was absolutely honest, but that feeling didn't extend to his family. That was one of the strong factors that led us to support him. He was a stabilizing influence. He was clean. He was patriotic. He represented a tradition, even though he was a Catholic, and he represented a moral force. But even in '57, we were debating among ourselves how much support Diem had among his people. Our impression was that Diem was very rigid and that he was alienating a lot of his countrymen. The country had been very heavily worked over by the communists, who were still gaining positions in the countryside. So while we respected Diem, we had a very uncomfortable

feeling that he was not establishing the sort of authority that would pull the country together. To this day, I find it very difficult to make a judgement of how in fact he was viewed by the Vietnamese themselves because after his murder, there was a series of coups but there was no one who was really able to establish his authority. In countries like Vietnam which have always experienced authoritarian regimes, it is crucial to have a respected central authority, and to be able to work with it.

So it was a time of hope. Diem represented a leader of eminent qualities: honesty, patriotism, seriousness. In many ways he represented the kind of leader whom we have looked for in many developing countries, but we remained nagged by doubts regarding his ability to cope in a confrontation with a major communist challenge.

DAVID I. HITCHCOCK, JR.
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Hue (1957-1958)

David I. Hitchcock, Jr. was born in Massachusetts in 1928. He graduated from Dartmouth and Colombia and served in the U.S. Army. He joined USIA in 1957, serving in Vietnam, Japan several times, Israel, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1992.

HITCHCOCK: I was the second PAO in Hue. It was the first post outside of Saigon.

Q: Which years were you in Hue?

HITCHCOCK: 1957-59. Bob Lochner was the PAO in Saigon when I got there.

Q: What was the nature of your work there?

HITCHCOCK: I had two major roles. I was the U.S. advisor to the Vietnamese Information Service in Central Vietnam, and to that end, traveled a great deal with and without Vietnamese officials, advising them on how to get their information program going more successfully. It was a regional post in that sense. We covered Da Nang; we covered the four prefectures of Central Vietnam, as well as Hue.

The second, and perhaps in the end, more important project was to assist the University of Hue and get it going. This was Ngo Dinh Diem's favorite project. He had persuaded some young, talented Vietnamese who had been trained in Paris, Brussels, New York or London, to come back and become the faculty of this first university where everything would be taught in Vietnamese. Everything was taught in French in the universities in Saigon and Hanoi.

In Hue, this faculty was, in effect, writing its own text books as they went along. I helped to cast a net to the US for interested foundations and others who could offer to help get this new university going; to get a Fulbright program going; to launch a major book donation program for

the university: these were activities that I was involved in. In the end, another aspect of my job was to be a "morale booster" for this university's faculty, which very soon found itself demoralized by the authoritarian character -- not so much of Ngo Dinh Diem's, but of his brother, Ngo Dinh Kanh in Hue, who quickly squashed all intellectual journals and free speech that these young teachers had brought back from abroad with them.

He outlawed dancing. One of my major accomplishments in Hue was to get the government to allow me -- it took me a month -- to hold a dance party in my house for 12 young Vietnamese faculty members and their spouses, with the curtains down and the music not too loud. There wasn't a dry eye in the house by the end of the evening, because this was the first time...it became a symbol of all of their frustration with the iron rule they found themselves under in Hue, when they thought they were going to practice Jeffersonian Democracy in a free society. [They were very naive.]

Q: To what extent did the government crack down on their curriculum?

HITCHCOCK: It began to do that also, but it cracked down more on their intellectual activities and journals. Some of them were arrested. My wife, Lee, started the first Vietnamese-American Association outside of Saigon in Hue, with my help. You never could tell how many people were going to be in our class, because some of them who weren't there, had disappeared during the night. Of course the Viet Cong was beginning to target district chiefs in the rural areas, not in the city. And they were not targeting us, although I had an armed jeep with me whenever I went up to Quang Tri or went across from the coast inland towards Laos, near the border.

At the beginning of my tour, we were very active in interviewing refugees who were still coming across from north of the parallel, and getting their stories to the VOA.

CHESTER H. OPAL
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Saigon (1957-1960)

Chester H. Opal was born in Illinois in 1918. He joined the Department of State in 1946 and later USIA. He served in Poland, Italy, Austria, Mexico, Vietnam, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1989.

OPAL: I opted for Far East on my spring trip in '57: it was a new area for me. George Hellyer was the area director for Far East in the Agency and learned of my interest in the Far East. Since French was one of my languages, he thought he had somebody. So he asked me to take the country PAO job in Saigon the upcoming fall. I tentatively agreed, and I visited the Vietnam on my War College tour. It was good that I did, as I learned on the very first day I was in charge on October 22, 1957, a month after I reached Saigon to take over my duties.

I spent from 1957 to 1960, 30 months, in Saigon, as country PAO. USIS was one of the larger posts in the world, with over 220 locals and some 20 Americans and actually some other contract

employees. We had operations in Hue and, during my time, in Cantho and the peninsula. With the help of facilities in Manila, we produced a weekly newspaper, a newsreel under Alan Fisher, and a monthly illustrated magazine. We originated radio programs for the Saigon government and operated an information center in Saigon itself.

On October 22, 1957, during the Colombo Conference there, the communists targeted the Americans for the first time since the Korean War. We couldn't believe that the Viet Cong were doing this -- in fact, our first surmise was that the French were doing it. A couple of years before, when some bombs went off in flower pots and under car-hoods around American homes, we found the French were doing it. They hated us. They didn't want us taking over the country. So you assumed it was they. But it was a little dangerous, what they were doing, and we found people with maps, routes, and everything, and it was the Viet Cong from the north. They had me targeted, and they had two generals, General Williams and Meyer of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), and Wesley Fishel, who was head of Michigan State Advisory Group, which was training the police and the civil service in Saigon.

I escaped because of a fluke of timing. My language tutor was late that morning, and so we left my house a little after 9:00. I would always have my language lesson just after breakfast and between 8:00 and 9:00. We were a little late. We came to the palace, and there was a wooden horse in front of the street leading in front of it, because they were doing some repairs farther down the street. We took a route on a side street.

My bomber, it was later learned, was waiting about 20 feet beyond this on the palace street, behind a tree, and he was all set to blow me up as I came by. The generals just took diversionary routes because they always did; they never took the same routes. Wes Fishel had the flu, so he was safe. Anyway, they bombed a bachelor officers quarters billet, and made an attempt against our men at the airport. Then because I had been to the post just that one day in the spring of '57, when I'd asked someone to take me over to the library center, I found an American librarian, Nance O'Neill, working at her desk, and it was during the siesta hour. Here she was working at her desk, and it was terrifically hot. I thought, "What a terrible thing." It was a Sunday, and she worked there all the time. She was a work horse.

Well, I remembered this, and when the bombings went off on the MAAG billet, and they got the bachelors' office quarters, (I didn't yet know they were after for the generals and me), and as soon as I got to the office, I said, "Call our center. Call the library." They couldn't get through. So I sent Walmsley, my executive officer, across town with the words, "Get everybody out of there!" It was approaching noon. I said, "Get Nance O'Neill out of there, too. I don't want her to even have lunch there or even hand around." So they got her and everybody else out.

I went home and took a siesta. I was wakened from my nap by some fellow from the security office. He said, jokingly, "Okay, what other prediction do you have?" The Viet Cong had bombed the center. The bomb had been placed in a book and put on a shelf. It blew down the whole wall right over Nance's desk, and it destroyed the tables. What was terrible about this thing was that the local employees who worked in the library slept on the tables during the lunch hour, the siesta hours. They slept on the tables during the siesta hours, and she worked in the back room. All of this was just avoided because I'd been there in the spring and seen this woman

working on Sunday. I thought, "This woman has no gift for time. Time doesn't mean anything to her." And I was right. Of course, she was always grateful.

I tried to turn it into a joke. A couple of days later, they had the South Vietnamese Independence Day parade in Saigon. They had chiefs of staff and General "Big" Minh, who was later head of the government after Diem fell, came by standing in his tank, and General "Little" Minh right behind him, and the troops marching. We Americans officials were in a little stand, sitting up on benches. Behind us was the Saigon harbor of the Saigon River. Wham! Pow! Rockets or a cannon or something went off behind us, and it was just a salute. The president was about to come, and this was a salute. Everybody was tensed up because just a couple of days before we'd had these bombings. So I, with great to-do, stepped down from my seat, stood in front of everybody in the stands, and I said, "I regret to say I have but one library to give to my country." All laughed, and this broke the tension. (Laughs) It was a gay, gay ceremony. But I was as tense as anybody, I can tell you.

After that, I had a precede car and a follow car and a security man riding shotgun in the front seat. I lived in what had been the home of the French admiral of the French Government, their imperial government. It was a huge house, and I had a Sikh guard who slept all the time. He was not really a guard. I told the security people, "Why don't you tell him to stay awake? He's not guarding anything." This was an enormous place. I had rooms for 15 people -- servants, monkeys. They had monkeys back there and everything! In fact, anybody had access. I knew that my number-one gal was a concubine for the cook of the acting Defense minister, a great pal of mine. I knew that. This is not security; the cook could come and go any time during the night.

Somebody in the embassy dreamed up this business of locking the gates every night, with the Sikh still as the guard. So we locked the gates every night. So this damn thing had to be opened and closed all night long for the concubine! (Laughs) Well, this was not security. But I did discover, too, that there were men on pedicabs, the Saigon pedicabs, who were security police, and they were planted all over the place, watching. But nothing happened to me, thank God.

Now I'll go back to Vietnam. I think we were covering a little bit of the objectives of the program when we were talking last. When I came to Vietnam, we needed a new country paper, and I had great difficulty getting one that the ambassador would approve. The problem in Vietnam was that we had to sell Diem to his own people. We were not selling the United States, we were not really selling American objectives, except tangentially and coincidentally, if they matched those of the Diem government. This struck me as a legitimate enterprise in the light of our policy, although this is just the sort of policy that burned us in Iraq when Nuri Pasha fell in 1958, as our ambassador there, Waldemar Gallman, later recounted in his book. It's the same all-our-eggs-in-one-basket policy that hurt us in Iran, too, later on.

We had a weekly newsreel that Alan Fisher produced with a Filipino staff, which would be processed in the regional production center in Manila. By this newsreel, which was mainly to promote the U.S. aid program in Vietnam, we hoped to cement Diem's own relationship with his own people, to give him identification with his own people, because in Saigon and generally in the Cochin China part of South Vietnam, there was a feeling that Diem was not one of them simply because of his Annamese accent, and he spoke French whenever he could, even to his

own people, because this was the second language of the country, thanks to the ninety-year French colonial influence.

We Americans also faced this problem where we had a state within a state. There was a secret state, actually, like Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang relation to the Chinese people. There was a certain amount of control of the population which was not at all the kind of control that was exercised in the north. I used to say the difference was that in South Vietnam, if a man wanted to study the color of flowers, he could do it. In the north, if he studied flowers, he had to work in the message that the flowers had this color because they served the Party interest. There's a great difference in a positive statement. In the south, there was that kind of freedom, relatively.

As a consequence, we had many of the products of USIS which were indigenous in their appearance, at least. These were not black propaganda, but they were obviously promoting Vietnam. We talked much more of Vietnamese developments and Vietnamese tradition than we did of American or worldwide events. This made for a different program, too. This was all necessary. Diem was our choice, he was anti-communist, and quite vigorously so.

Madame Nhu and I had a strange relationship. I was believed by the palace to be unfriendly to their interest. Madame Nhu, who had a negative view of the Minister of Information, Tranh Chan Thanh (Diem's own choice), never felt that he was her man. Once she invited me to the palace and I went. She designed a whole interview, if I may put it so, such that we went from big reception room to little reception room, and wound up behind closed doors in the room adjoining her bedroom. Her intent, obviously, was to create an impression that I was her lover. I later wrote a dispatch on this. We conversed in French the whole time. I had one little cup of tea on my lap, which I carried from room to room as it got colder.

OPAL: I never got to drink the tea, and I assured everybody, including the ambassador, that I had it the whole time that I was in the palace. Well, nobody believed me -- it's like the question, are you still beating your wife? -- and the reason they didn't believe me is that Madame Nhu made it a point in front of my wife, at the palace, at ceremonies and so on, to make sure that she cavorted before me in her latest gown or dress. She used to pirouette before me. All of this was a deliberate act on her part. In the States, as you know, she was known as "the dragon lady." She was the power behind the throne, and her husband was the brother of President Diem. This was to frighten anybody who had close relations with me and would therefore be a little more circumspect because they would then believe that I was in her pocket, so to speak, and therefore they couldn't be as confidential with me, they couldn't be as intimate with me in their relations. I'm referring to the other ministers, the nominal Minister of Defense, who was a close friend, and also Tranh Chan Thanh.

I might parenthetically say that after Diem was deposed and there was a great purging going on under "Big" Minh, one of the generals -- I don't know if this was in the time of Nguyen Cao Khi or whoever -- but at any rate, in 1964 or 65 I received a wire from Mim Johnson, who was a gal of ours in Paris and had been in Vietnam while I was there, in which she asked whether I would please say something about Thanh, whose life was in danger. She'd been in Saigon and knew that I had worked with him, and could I say something in his support? I sent back a telegram supporting him and saying that he was an honorable man, and that he hadn't been difficult in the

way others in the Diem government had been. As I understand, this and other statements of this kind managed to save his life. He later headed the constituent assembly in Vietnam that wrote a new constitution. Of course, this was all in the sixties, after my time.

The use of law by Madame Nhu to get a Catholic family bill passed in a country that was 90% Buddhist or animists was a violation of social tradition. This was typical of her attitude toward her own people, which was expressed very horribly years later when they were taking to the streets, and Buddhists were burning themselves, and she said, "Let them barbecue themselves." The new gospel of Personalism which derived from Mounier in Paris, a combination of a kind of socialism and Catholicism based on the person, was a new ideology which the Ngos were trying to graft on people to whom this was, for the most part, quite alien. This was part of our difficulty.

One thing I felt very strongly, and I used to impress this on Wolfe Ladejinsky, who was counsel to President Diem, and who used to come and put his feet up and "flirt", as he put it, with my wife during all my years in Saigon, and who was running the land redistribution program. I believed that it was important for Diem and Diem's government to have the support of the American people. The support could only come when, whether wisely or unwisely, the American people felt that there was some democratization going on in Vietnam. The more the South Vietnamese government seemed to be imposing restrictions, the more Brother Nhu was seen as the power behind the throne and so on, the more the American journalists would report with a very critical eye -- which was in fact the process that prevailed through the whole Vietnam War. This went on from the very beginning of our time there.

I tried to impress this upon Mr. Orem of Orem Associates, who were handling public relations for President Diem in the United States. I said that unless the American people saw South Vietnam proceeding in a democratic line, eventually the Diem government would lose support in this country. This, as it turned out, was what happened. I remember telling our Agency deputy, Don Wilson, in 1964 that I felt that the Vietnam War would be fought on the streets of New York, and he said, "What do you mean -- troops?" I said, "No. The demonstrations." I didn't foresee the free speech movement at Berkeley [California] or anything else, but I just felt the American people would not countenance any kind of war in which they felt they were supporting an oppressive government.

We remember very well how every step was taken to impress the American people with the fundamentally humane government in the Soviet Union during the war when they were allies. I've talked earlier about how Bert Wolfe, for example, couldn't get published because he was critical.

At any rate, Orem took this to notion to the palace, where Diem and his tribe accepted this as proof of the fact that I was out of sympathy with him. One local Vietnamese girl, who remained anonymous, wrote a letter published in The Washington Post, with the help of one of our American staff photographers in Manila. It was critical of conditions in South Vietnam. The palace was convinced that I was behind it. Our photographer had visited South Vietnam for purposes of developing materials for a Vietnamese language publication which was distributed in Vietnam. (This publication, I might say, was the currency used in barter in the provinces, it was so well dressed up and "permanent".) He had been distressed by conditions there, and he had

talked to this Vietnamese girl. He had given her the address of the editor of The Washington Post, and they assumed, since the photographer nominally was under my charge while in their country, that this was somehow my idea. It was not. But at any rate, because the girl was critical of the Diem regime, I was felt to be critical as well. Whatever I may have felt about the regime, I certainly never stated it publicly, and I was very careful about it in that respect.

However, I will say that while I was in the post in Saigon, there was a full-scale security investigation of me because of views that I had expressed under classified circumstances to a member of the faculty of the National War College that had come on a Far Eastern trip in 1958. Anthony Bouscaren, who was said to be the leading McCarthyite in American education, was the temporary faculty member involved. Bouscaren was at my table when I gave a dinner for several of the War College class who were visiting, and I told him, in a way which was meant to be taken ironically, that the North Vietnamese had a "more democratic" constitution than we did; why, they even quote the Declaration of Independence. He never understood that I was just being ironic in that sense, and he took everything that I said as the literal, serious truth. I said, "There is a lot that is going on here that could be better from the standpoint of acceptability to the American people, but I'm not sure your briefings tomorrow are going to elaborate on them." Just as I had talked to Orem, quite openly, in a frank discussion between men on the same side of the struggle. At any rate, this with Bouscaren was a closed meeting, with only men cleared for highest security. I think there were three people. William Kehoe, of my staff, was one of those at my table, although I never thought I'd need a witness to this.

At any rate, when Bouscaren got back to Washington, he met with a Catholic group. One member of the Catholic group was Edward "Ted" Heffron, who was our public affairs officer in Malaysia. Heffron denounced me to the Agency, and started this security inquiry on the basis of which I was said to be out of sympathy with U.S. policy and godknowswhat else.

Q: Ted Heffron was on the staff in USIS-Brazil when I was deputy and then acting head of the program. He was noted for his far-right-wing views, and he was a devoted Catholic. Jack Vebber was the PAO. He warned me to be very careful about saying anything in Ted's presence that might even remotely be construed as left-leaning. Ted later proved on several other occasions that he was capable of the kind of thing you mention.

OPAL: This is interesting, because let me tell you what the upshot was. Of course, the inquiry was held and reported also to CINCPAC, and the admiral there sent an admiral to the post, and he talked to Ambassador Durbrow and me. Durbrow couldn't have cared less. I mean, he thought all of us were woolly-eyed liberals -- and that "included those guys in the Department." USIS and Washington was full of woolly-eyed liberals, you see. I don't know where this "woolly-eyed" came from, but he certainly believed that. That was one of the reasons I had difficulty getting my country plan approved. He couldn't understand why I should worry about democratization in Vietnam.

Also at this time, the time that the security question arose, I was asked to come back to chair a promotion panel. I had just had about five months before come down with a sciatic attack. The sciatic was a very serious one. I used literally to crawl up into the embassy elevator, lie on the floor, crawl to my desk, and lie on the sofa, working. I did this for three months. I conducted my

affairs. I didn't lose a day in the office that I can remember, but this is how I worked. Durbrow, perhaps to get me off the scene or even out of personal sympathy, was very happy to take this occasion when the telegram appointing me to a selection panel in Washington came through, and he said, yes, Opal could take the relief from the post, that I wasn't in good health and so on. I'm sure he wasn't without some sympathy for my condition either. He always was civil to me, and I admired his hard-working dedication and his hard-headedness.

But because the security investigation was on, this became germane to our whole program in a way. This is the only time that I have seen where the fact that the Agency is independent of State had a meaning. George Allen was Director of the Agency at the time. He sent a telegram, and he said, "No, we've decided to keep him at the post and let him serve out his time." As a matter of fact, I served two and a half years instead of the regular two years at this hardship post. Allen, instead of bringing me back, decided that Durbrow was trying to get rid of somebody, and this was his way of doing it. Whether this was so or not was beside the point; the point was that the Agency could not have done this if I had been part of the State Department. He knew Durbrow, he knew what type of person he was, and decided that this was the whole point. He wanted me to go through the whole security thing, which cleared me completely. Bill Kehoe was called and couldn't remember the conversation very well, but it was obvious that this was a hatchet job.

I must say, then, in 1959, I was at a PAO conference in Baguio in the Philippines, and at the end of the week's sessions, Ted Heffron came over to me and said, "I've had my eye on you."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Well, I want you to know that I have never heard anybody talk about the Cold War and about the menace of communism as eloquently and as wisely as you have. I have a confession to make to you. I am the man who denounced you. When I go back, I'm going to write a letter to everybody that I wrote my original letter to and tell them that I was absolutely wrong, and that I regret it. I'll meet with anybody and tell him why I was wrong to do this thing."

I hadn't realized it was Heffron. I had no idea what had started this. I thought it was purely Bouscaren writing a letter, but it was not. It came out of this Catholic group -- and me, a one time Catholic! Heffron told me about the Catholic group. Another man that they denounced was Bob Clarke, who was PAO in Hong Kong. What was Bob's curse? Bob had said -- and many of us believed this -- we would never really have any kind of standing and thorough diplomatic relations with Asia until Red China is recognized. After all, when Ike tried to surface this idea at West Point once, the press and the lobby in Washington just castigated him, and he pulled in his horns. So there were many people who felt this. This is true.

In fact, at that conference in Baguio, I presented a paper which I called "The Porcupine Theory of Chinese-Soviet Relations." I said, "They should be driven so close together that eventually China will draw apart," which is precisely what happened. It was interesting, because the shaking of heads, and even the puzzlement of George Allen, who was at this meeting, was strange to behold. I thought, "What have I proposed here?" But I felt that this was something. I said, "This is the Schopenhauer theory of porcupines. Their gregarious instincts draw them together, but their quills drive them apart." At any rate, it's things like this, I guess, that made some sort of an

impression on Heffron and made him confess. That's the only background of it that I ever discovered. It was all a mystery. This is a strange thing, too. It was a mysterious denunciation, and I had to answer in the dark, unable to face my accuser.

At any rate, I got a letter from our security people saying that the security clearance that I'd had at such and such a date had been renewed. No reference to the inquiry or anything else. But this was a distressing thing in many ways. It could only have come because of this Catholic group and because of Bouscaren. I think they were connected somehow with the Maryknoll Fathers, with whom President Diem lived as a recluse while in the States and who sponsored him. Diem was really a defrocked priest at heart. He was a very pious, very chaste man. So this was the thing that I ran into there.

Also we had programs that were addressed principally to the 1 million Chinese who lived mainly in Cholon, who were being wooed by Red China. Diem had policies toward them which were cruel, in a way. He banned their language, he made sure that they were integrated into Vietnamese society without their own native customs and so on. Chiang Kai-shek, over in Taiwan, even objected to these policies, but he had no effect. Diem proved right, because the Chinese, who were great accommodators, accommodated themselves to this thing. Working among them for an anti-communist cause were Belgian and Chinese priests who had come out of China and who felt very strongly about the Red Chinese and the communist government there. So it was not hard to work among these people and to get them at least seemingly on our side.

I don't know how the Chinese behaved during the war itself. I left Vietnam in spring of 1960. The Viet Cong were attacking in battalion force, and in the provinces they would rob the cashiers of the plantations, which remained French still, destroying village elders, beheading and killing village elders, probably 50 a month by that time. But it was not a big engagement in the sense that it became later.

The MAAG group, our military assistance advisor group, had only 660 people in Vietnam when I left. They had 300 people on the equipment recovery mission and 300 training the Vietnamese military. I felt -- and most of us, even in the military -- that we were training -- and it was probably reasonable under the circumstances -- for a 1950s-like invasion from the north, crossing the river by the North Vietnamese, and there would be that Korean War kind of warfare, not the deep engagement of guerrilla forces in caves and using the Ho Chi Minh Trail that later developed. But there was nothing we could do about that, and the USIS program was mainly one to make Diem and what he stood for a part of the culture and the society of the time.

While I was in Vietnam, one of the public affairs meetings we had in Baguio, under George Allen also (this is the one where I presented my "porcupine paper"), I made a crack which George Allen took umbrage at. We had just had the written exam which was given to people in our reserve programs to make them career officers, and several of our people took the exam and apparently did very well. But I said at this meeting, "You know, we talk about cultural shock and so on, how our officers go overseas and have culture shock. I don't think our Agency en masse has ever suffered the kind of cultural shock that our officers did when they faced that written exam. This was the greatest cultural shock they ever experienced of their life." Of course, everybody laughed, but they knew very well what I meant. It was a serious document which

called for a lot of knowledge and a lot of understanding of America, and I thought in many ways a good exercise.

Among the other programs we had there was an English-language center, where I had a succession of madmen in charge. I had more madmen in Vietnam. I would have madmen on my staffs everywhere, but I had really a concentration of them in Vietnam. We had people breaking down in Poland, and I've had them elsewhere. But in Vietnam, they came cuckoo. We had one fellow, Joe Flickop. He provided me with a lesson in personnel management. When we had our bombings in October, he got a call from Boston. His mother had seen headlines about Saigon bombed. She telephoned Saigon and asked for her son. He answered the phone but she thought he was a ringer. He said, "Mama, this is Joe! This is Joe Flickop! No, I'm not a ghost. I'm not a substitute. Mommy, this is Joe! Remember Uncle Willie? He's my uncle. Remember the sled I hid under my bed? I'm alive! This is Joe! I'm alive!" I went and summarily hung up the phone, he was tying up my line. I had no idea what was going on, that the whole of Saigon was wiped out in the Boston tabloids.

Anyway, Flickop, whom I loved, was slightly kooky. He manufactured a ghost family of three children and two wives and nobody got on him until he started to talk about the spooks. Then there was some objection to him. Well, he'd settled down when I discovered, by a little bit of staff work, that he went around into local taverns with a billfold, which he took out for everybody to behold the photos of his imaginary wives and imaginary family. So I called him in one day and talked to him. He calmed down and stopped all this business about the spooks, which was what had brought him to my attention. I told him I used the word "the enemy" and nobody knew what I was talking about when I spoke of "spooks." I advised he do the same. It was my patented word, used by another man in the embassy, too, I learned. Then because he was just a Junior Officer Trainer (JOT), he was going to spend the major part of his two years abroad in Vietnam. For his last nine months Personnel was assigning him to Laos, to Vientiane. I remember telling him -- and I've used this line ever since -- I said, "Joe, you're going to Vientiane. Laos is the end of the universe! This is like being assigned to Siberia or Aden or Tegucigalpa. Do you realize, from now on you're going to have a career in which you're going to be able to confront a personnel officer and lean down to him, and say, 'No, sir, I've already been to Vientiane!' You're going to be able to say that the rest of your career!"

The reason I cite this is that once I was questioned in Washington in the sixties, when I came back from Saigon, on how I felt about men who had had no foreign service experience heading up Agency personnel. I said, actually I didn't object to it if either the director or the deputy had no foreign service experience. It didn't bother me. I think one of them should, but if the director or the deputy did not, it didn't bother me, because I think what happened with personnel people who have had too much foreign service experience is that they get autobiographical about it and personalize it. They will not listen sympathetically to complaints about posts. They say, "Well, when I went into the Service, it had all those horrible places. I went there, by God, they sent me there, and you're going to go there." And the more you protest for one reason or another because of your family and so on, the less response you're going to get from them. It seemed to me that a personnel officer who took that autobiographical view didn't necessarily enter anything meaningful into his analysis of personnel needs.

At any rate, a little bit of less of that, I felt, would be helpful. For this reason, once I was asked by Bill Weathersby, who headed Personnel, how I felt about this, and I told him I had no objection to a domestic personnel man having to do with foreign personnel. Somebody said, "That's interesting. Would you give me a memo on it?"

I said, "No, I won't give you a memo. I'll let you quote me and I'll back you up."

He said, "That's not the general feeling." This, oddly enough, got to Mosley some way or another when he was appointed Personnel chief in spite of having no foreign service experience, and he said that apparently this had become doctrine, but was probably descended from God, they probably found it written on the tablets on Mt. Sinai or something. It's no longer attributed to me, by which, I mean, it became authoritative. At any rate, it was a point. But Joe Flickop, bless him, was the man who started this little chain of thought in my life.

The use of the Manila Regional Center, which I think was started up by Earl Wilson a long time ago, was marvelous from the standpoint of operations throughout the region. It was a very sophisticated outfit with a lot of excellent facilities available. In fact, I think our film and our radio unit also had people who had worked there and were working on scene in South Vietnam, who were marvelous. They were such superb professionals, and also very wise. In all the time I was there, I never had any flak on policy or anything. I used to try to communicate policy, but I had to rely, just because of the size of the operation, on the common sense of Alan Fisher and our radio officer, Hunt Downs, who later wrote a novel on Vietnam which I titled for him, The Compassionate Tiger and got published through my agent. These people were just given to feeling the atmosphere and communicating it. But the main thing was the locals who could handle it because of the language. Except for one man I assigned to open our facilities in Can Tho, none of my people knew the language. Without the locals we were lost.

Q: By the way, the man who ultimately became the chief local editor, Filipino, in the Manila center, is now in the United States, and I think he's a citizen now. He's publishing the only Filipino newspaper in California.

OPAL: In the Filipino language? In Tagalog? In English?

Q: English.

OPAL: English is their lingua franca, really.

Q: It's a weekly, and he puts it out. It's quite a newspaper, about 36 or 40 pages, and he puts it out weekly. When I was president of USIA, he sent me several copies of it, and I got a little note about him in the last newsletter, saying that here was this man who had been trained by USIA in the center, made an editor, and now he was in the States running this paper.

OPAL: That's wonderful. You know, it's interesting that the fellow who ran the press section, a Lebanese, is in Washington now as the head of something in our Near Eastern IPS. George Shehade is his name. He's from a very distinguished family. He was a wonderful person and the kind of person who absorbed your own feelings almost by instinct, took your own coloration,

and you could trust him implicitly in his motives and in his expression of views. George was one of my tutelary spirits in Beirut. These people helped us educate ourselves. These were great people.

In 1960, I got on board the S.S. of the Messageries Maritimes. Maybe this story doesn't bear repeating. Anyway, there was a delegation that came aboard the ship it lay in harbor in Saigon, as I was getting set to return with my family to the States on home leave. This was after 30 months in the hot-house of Vietnam. This delegation, General Williams' wife and his staff, I think his chief of staff, marched aboard and presented me with a plaque. The plaque said, "C.H. Opal, Corporal (simulated)," and cited me for intrepidity and all sorts of silly virtues that made up the acronym, USIS. At any rate, this was a great tribute to me, because I was being promoted right there in my name. It showed that something that had happened years before at the National War College was somewhere remembered, and had preceded me to Vietnam.

At the War College in 1956-57, General Patch, who was the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, delivered one of those special two-hour lectures, at the end of which for 20 minutes we would question him from the floor. I came from lunch that day, I suppose sleepy and from too many martinis -- two, at least -- and I was sort of groggy. An Air Force colonel on the faculty grabbed my arm and said, "Why don't you ask the general what the Marine Corps does that volunteer groups in the other services can't and don't do." He said this as I was passing by and I proceeded to my seat. I sat there, and then when the general was soliciting questions from the class, I sort of tentatively raised my hand, and sure enough, they called on me. So I stood up and heard myself repeating the colonel's words, "General, sir, can you tell me what the Marine Corps does that volunteer groups in the other services can't and don't do?" With that, I sat down. General Patch, who'd been in trouble with the press recently because he'd forbidden wives from joining their husbands in Japan, turned on me waspishly and said, "Young man, will you tell me what volunteer groups in the other services do do?"

I stood up, all befuddled. I was still sleepy and thoroughly groggy. I said, "General, sir, there is nobody in this class that is more civilian than I am. I have the rank of private first class (simulated). I have no idea what the volunteer groups in the other services can and do do." With that, I sat down. Of course, he never answered the question, and the class broke up in laughter.

This preceded me, and this little plaque that I received in Saigon Harbor in 1960 was, in effect, a promotion. I'd been promoted from private first class (simulated) to corporal (simulated). At any rate, this was General Williams' doing, and I still have the plaque and am very proud of it.

ALAN FISHER
Motion Picture Officer, USIS
Saigon (1957-1963)

Alan Fisher was born in New York in 1913. He joined USIA in 1945, serving mainly in Brazil. He was a motion picture expert. He served in Vietnam from 1957-1963. He was interviewed in 1988 by Lewis Schmidt.

FISHER: When I got to Saigon, I found a very good operation, but it was very difficult for me because there was nothing on paper. But it was a very interesting experience because that was the largest operation we had in motion pictures in the world. We had our own production staff of cameramen, editors, writers, directors. All the cameramen were Vietnamese and they were good. The writers and directors were Filipinos. When I got out there, Chet Opal then became PAO, and I talked to Chet and I said, "Chet, I really can't produce films unless I can also have the distribution, because I have to know what I'm distributing to. I can't produce them and hope somebody's going to distribute them.

There was a young officer there handling motion picture distribution who hadn't handled it before, and Chet said, "Great, because you have the experience in distribution, so you take it." Pat Green was the young officer who was handling distribution. "He needs some instruction." So Pat then became my assistant for distribution. Charlie was putting out a 16-millimeter newsreel for mobile unit operation, and really, it was a newsreel put out for the Vietnamese Ministry of Information. I had met the minister, I worked very closely with him and with his staff, and I proposed to Washington that we continue a 16-millimeter print distribution, but we go to 35-millimeter theatrical distribution. We'd distribute in 35 initially. I said, "That way we really get a picture of tremendous impact." So they approved it, and I immediately then started to distribute in 35mm weekly, opening on Thursday night at the theaters. We were opening at every major theater in Vietnam in 35-millimeter. That was like Paramount newsreel in the States.

Q: This was after Dien Bien Phu?

FISHER: Oh, yes.

Q: You were doing it for South Vietnam because the North had already separated.

FISHER: Yes. We were doing it for South Vietnam, and we had three objectives, basically: to support President Ngo Dinh Diem, to tell what USOM, the operation mission, was doing in Vietnam, and to support other American policy objectives through news clips which we brought in. So theoretically, I was to check every newsreel with the Minister of Information, but after checking with him a few times, he said, "You know what you're doing. Don't bother me with it."

So we put it out under their name. It was released in 37 theaters first run in Vietnam, all over South Vietnam, and very effective. I had two cameramen everywhere President Ngo Dinh Diem went. We had two cameramen with him. We always had a story of him, and that's the way they knew him. Remember this was before television, so they knew him through the newsreels. I think it was a very effective way of doing it.

Q: It didn't keep him from being overthrown, however.

FISHER: No, it didn't. He was a nice guy, you know.

Mrs. FISHER: He was not overthrown; he was murdered.

FISHER: Yes. Incidentally, an aside. Wes Fischel was the head of the United States Operation Mission at that time. He used to breakfast with Ngo Dinh Diem every morning and they'd work out a program for the day. We saw Wes in Washington when he got back. He'd left the service. He was a contractor. He came to the house for dinner one night, and we were talking about perils of living in the Far East. He said, "You know, I spent something like 18 years in the Far East, and I had stomach troubles all the time I was there. Because of these troubles, my diet consisted of just white rice and tea." He said, "You know, I just went through a series of allergy tests and they discovered I'm highly allergic to white rice." (Laughs)

To get back to Saigon, it was a good operation. We had a contract with USOM to produce 48 reels of documentaries for them a year. I was there on TDY at this time. Then at the end of this period, I went back to Washington. I had written a long report to Turner while I was there. When I got back to Washington, Turner came over and came out to the house for breakfast one morning. As we were having breakfast, he said, "How would you like to transfer to Vietnam?" And I got a terrible kick in the shins from Florence under the table.

I said, "I would like it. I would like it." Because it was exciting, it was fun. Professionally, it was great.

Q: How long were you there on TDY?

FISHER: Three months. I made those changes when I was there.

Q: Florence was still in Paris.

FISHER: She was still in Paris.

Mrs. FISHER: With our daughter, of course.

FISHER: So I agreed, and we went back, direct transfer to Saigon. I really enjoyed it because it was a job that took every moment of my time. In addition to that, I had supervisory responsibilities for production in Cambodia and Vientiane, plus a laboratory contract operation in the Philippines, where all our laboratory work was done.

When Turner proposed that I be transferred to Saigon, I said, "I will take it on one condition, that you get me Bill Ridgeway out of Korea, transfer him to the Philippines, to Manila, to supervise that laboratory operation." Because Bill was a crackerjack. I knew if I had him there, I'd never have any lab problems. He agreed to it, so Bill was transferred to the Philippines. I would go over every month or so and talk with Bill. He'd come over occasionally to Saigon. It was a good operation.

ELBRIDGE DURBROW
Ambassador
Vietnam (1957-1961)

NATO
Paris (1961-1965)

Elbridge Durbrow was appointed ambassador to Vietnam in 1957 and served in Paris as part of NATO in 1961. He was interviewed by Ted Gittinger in 1981.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, were you given a briefing, a formal briefing or informal, before you went to Saigon in 1957?

DURBROW: Oh, yes. I came back to Washington for about three or four weeks, I've forgotten how long. I'd been in Vietnam before, because I was stationed in Malaysia. I'd been up there [to visit] my predecessor, Freddie Reinhardt, [who is] a very close friend of mine, an old Moscow callow colleague. I'd been up to Saigon on a long visit one time, so I knew the situation up there, the physical situation. Then I came back and I was briefed in the department and in the Pentagon and in the CIA and everything else, a full briefing. I went out there in March of 1957.

Q: What were your expectations that you derived from the briefing? What sort of situation did you expect? What kind of problems did you expect to encounter?

DURBROW: Well, one way or the other, I was not surprised by anything for the simple reason that I spent most of my career dealing with communists. I went on my first mission to Moscow in 1934, was there for four years. I had gone into Moscow again during the war on a short TDY, about four months. Then I came back again to Moscow in 1946-48 as the deputy chief of mission there dealing with the Kremlin boys. I dealt with them during the war when I was with the East European Division. I had been in Italy, a big Communist Party there; I'd been in Poland way back when before that, so I thought I knew something about the way they operate. Nobody does really, but you get a better idea if you've been there. So I wasn't surprised. I knew what we were fighting, which is something I don't think they understand today, really. The American public and the press doesn't, I don't think. So therefore the public should learn much about it, what a war of national liberation is all about.

That's a technique that the Soviets developed a long time ago. They've perfected it, and Vietnam is one of the best examples of it. Our press, in Vietnam particularly but elsewhere even before that, they think this is a local insurgency, a local civil war, grow like Topsy in whatever country it is, and they're fighting for their freedoms against the oppressive government or the imperialist Americans, whatever you want to call it. So, in that sense, I suppose that's one of the reasons why I was sent there, because I had had experience in that sort of thing before. So I wasn't surprised in any way at all.

The problem was that they were trying to take over the country by subversive methods and terrorists. That's one thing I think that is not understood at all, is that a war of national liberation is a well worked out technique, and only one of the tools of that technique is terrorism. We're talking so much about terrorism today, and terrorism, well, that's part of it, no question about it. But I don't think anybody else has any--El Salvador is a war of national liberation. It's not a local civil war down there. Nicaragua is the same thing. Angola was the same thing. Vietnam, Laos,

Cambodia, Cuba, South Yemen, they're all caused by national liberation. I tried to bring that out in that paper I gave you the other day.

Q: Let me ask you about President [Ngo Dinh] Diem. Now, when you went to Vietnam in 1957, what was the generally held view of Diem and what he had done in Vietnam up till that time?

DURBROW: Well, his image was going up quite well by that time. Freddie Reinhardt, who had also done the Moscow tour and knew the situation, was there when he took over and he helped him to get started. We all did or our government did. So by 1956, 1957, he'd beaten down the Binh Xuyen in the town there in the 1955 war, fighting right in the streets. On the other attempts by the two to three thousand well-trained communist guerrillas that they'd left behind after the 1954 accords... They weren't supposed to, of course. And Hanoi hoped and expected [he would be defeated]. Diem wasn't too well known, he didn't have too much of a following in the country. He'd been exiled and out and that sort of thing. They hoped that by terrorism, subversion, propaganda, and intimidation that they could topple that government without having to go to an all-out military effort.

But by 1956 Diem had calmed those things down pretty well, beaten the Binh Xuyen. The Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai sects were collaborating with him. In the time beginning in 1956 he started to rebuild the country, the countryside and things of that kind. With our AID program and our assistance, we worked on a plan for land reform, which turned out to be quite a good one, as a matter of fact, eventually. As I remember the figures, there were about six hundred thousand acres taken from the larger landlords and divided up into seven acre or three hectare plots for about a hundred and twenty-five thousand families, mostly in the Delta, because that's where it was easier to do and where the best productivity on this land was.

Q: Let me ask you to follow on a line connected with that. Now, there was a lot of criticism then and later on the subject of land reform in South Vietnam, at least there was in the press. And there was some, I understand, among some members of the mission, too. Did you know Wolf Ladejinsky?

DURBROW: Ladejinsky, yes. I knew him very well. He's the guy that put it in. He's the guy that worked it up.

Q: Didn't something come up between him and Diem later?

DURBROW: Yes, but it wasn't over the land reform.

Q: Oh, it wasn't over land reform?

DURBROW: No, no. Wolf Ladejinsky had done a wonderful job in Japan, you know, before that. He got them to become eventually self-sufficient in their rice production. He'd worked in the Philippines and he came down to Vietnam. And Wolf did a very fine job basically in that field and other agricultural developments, helping with the rubber and new plants and that sort of thing. But there was no [disagreement there]. They fought over other things later, because he became a very intimate adviser to Diem. On some of the things I worked with Wolf, too. I'd only

maybe come into it later, I'll bring it up now, though. You probably have seen the Pentagon Papers or somewhere else or [David] Halberstam's book [The Best and the Brightest] about the instructions I asked for in September 1960 to help Diem to get a better hold on things and get things going in a better direction, more democratic and that sort of thing. Well, Wolf was all for me on that sort of business because the land reform was going great guns by then. So Wolf was a great help, but he was advising on all sorts of other things besides land by that time. So when the break came--I've forgotten--he and I talked it over, but it wasn't a "throw him out of the country in twenty-four hours" sort of thing. Just a disagreement--

Q: Falling out.

DURBROW: --falling out, yes. And he went on to India from there.

But the land reform, I tell you, was a darn good success, six hundred thousand acres, a hundred and twenty-five thousand families. I visited many times, saw the things and we did the cadastral work and a lot of the other stuff to help them out. It couldn't be done in the mountainous part of Vietnam; it could be done along the coast, the flatlands. But Diem founded these new villages as a program to get somebody to go up into the mountains to relieve the population concentration on the coast, particularly up the coast from the Delta. That didn't work too well, but it got the people--

Q: Was that the relocation program?

DURBROW: Yes, the relocation program, yes.

Q: What was wrong with that? You said it didn't work too well.

DURBROW: It didn't work for lots of reasons. First of all, who started it or whether it was a rumor or not [I don't know], but I think it was believed by most of the people. It always starts as a rumor, but by the time I got there it was believed that if you were a lowlander and you went up in the mountains, you were going to get some disease. You couldn't [survive], you're all going to die, your whole family's going to die. There were mosquitos or some kind of bugs up there, I've forgotten what the cause was. But you were up there and you were going to get tuberculosis and all sorts of things could happen to you. So there was [one reason]. All people who have ancestor worship as their basic religion, and the Vietnamese do--it's not a Buddhist country at all, by the way, not at all; it's not what the press tried to tell us over here--they want to be near their ancestors. So their graves were down on the lowlands and all that sort of thing, so it was quite a wrench.

Diem didn't use force, but he used a lot of persuasion to get them to go up there, inducements, too. They gave them this plot of land and they cleared one hectare completely for them, gave them the bamboo and other things to build their huts with, or thatch and that sort of thing. We helped them work out various crops that would grow in the highlands in that type of soil. So it didn't work very well because people didn't want to be moved. Now, if you were down there in the Delta and you were going to get this piece of land you had lived right next door to for a long, long time, why, that's home. So that was one of the main reasons, as I understand it, that it wasn't

working.

Q: Was there any friction with the Montagnards over this?

DURBROW: Oh, yes, sure there was, naturally, because the Montagnards are a very interesting people. I spent a long time up with them. All through that whole part of Southeast Asia, not just in Vietnam, they have this economy they've developed themselves, indigenous. In order to make this--they had no fertilizers at all, didn't know about animal fertilizers or anything like that. They had very few animals, as a matter of fact. They burned the forest down, and the ashes, the stumps and all to get humus and fertilize the land so they could plant their little crops and move on to mountain rice and that sort of thing. They'd move on and burn another big area down, and Diem said, "You can't do that anymore. You can burn these places down and that place, but this is a new village area, so you can't do that." And that caused friction, naturally.

There was always friction, of course, between the Montagnards and the Vietnamese. They're animists, among other things, and they're very primitive people, but very friendly. I stayed up in camps with them and so forth. They, knowing we weren't Vietnamese and we weren't French--although the French got along with them better than the Vietnamese did. The French realized their problems when they built their coffee plantations up there and tea and other plantations, and they paid attention to local taboos and that sort of business and got along better than the Vietnamese did. So there was friction with the Montagnards, yes.

Q: Did you go hunting when you were up there? I understand you hunted.

DURBROW: Oh, yes. I didn't get my real spurs as an ambassador, because I never got a tiger. My predecessors had, and Freddie Reinhardt's wife got a tiger before he did, incidentally. So I went off, I think I added them up one time, anyway, about thirty-nine days I spent in the jungle, which was very, very interesting. I'd been through a jungle, you know, a rain forest here and there down in Haiti or somewhere like that, but to spend four or five days up there in the jungle camping out under a canopy of three trees, when our troops got in there, I had a very definite idea of the problem of how the local guerrillas can hide. From twenty feet away you can't see them, you can't smell them, you can't do anything, and this canopy of three tiers of trees in the jungle made it very easy to hide in. Orange--was it called?

Q: Agent Orange?

DURBROW: Agent Orange had to be used.

But I enjoyed that. I always liked to camp. I did in Moscow, I went down the Caucasus and had an eighty-day horseback trip up in the Caucasus. That sort of thing relaxes me, so I did quite a bit of that. I didn't get my tiger.

Q: Well, I'm sorry. (Laughter)

DURBROW: Tigers are an endangered species now, I'm glad I didn't.

It was a very sporting thing the way they do it, though. One way, they dig a hole in the ground and they get some new boughs, branches, cut down just from the local scenery so it looks like home. They make a little top in this thing and they leave a hole, get a dead buffalo or a big deer or something down there that's at least five days putrid. So the tiger finally gets a--a tiger, I understand, has a very bad [sense of smell], sensitive ear, sight, but not too sensitive a scent. So they' try to put the carcass down near a path to a waterhole, hoping they'll smell it and find it and come back for a meal. So you sit there for five or six hours on end, and you can't talk to your partner. You wait for the tiger to come and you have this little peephole and he can walk right on top of you. He's more scared than you are, so it wouldn't be too bad. I got two shots, wounded one and goofed on the other one, so I'm not a hunter.

Q: Well, I heard you were. I heard differently.

Regarding the military situation in South Vietnam, what kind of threat did you perceive as not most likely but perhaps likely? We've been criticized for paying too much attention to a possible Korean-style invasion. Now, that, of course, comes later. What about in 1957? What were your views then?

DURBROW: Freddie Reinhardt before me warned me about it and it turned out to be 100 per cent true. One of our biggest problems was going to be with General [Samuel T.] Williams. He was a nice guy and all that sort of thing, but he and I just didn't get along and Freddie didn't get along with him either. He had no respect for civilians. He knew how to run a military outfit and we had nothing to do with it, so he thought. He had been a private, got in World War I, came up through the ranks, became a very good operator in the field of various types, infantry man and then a tank man. By the time I got there--and Freddie had been fighting it, too--he was building this Vietnamese army of ten small divisions with tanks and they didn't have very many personnel carriers then, but there were a few of those, as if they were going to come down the main roads in a column of squads or column of tanks. Having been in Malaysia, I knew what the British did down there to get rid of the communist insurgents there. When you worked in the jungle, you had to put this, that, infiltration and all the rest, cutting off food and whatnot. I had a pretty good idea of what--and I knew [Sir Robert] Thompson down there, too, who set up their whole operation, came up to Vietnam later.

Q: Isn't that R. G. K. Thompson?

DURBROW: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

DURBROW: The great guerrilla warfare expert, whom I saw in Hamburg last June, who's quite a guy still.

So I had a very definite idea that this column of squads thing coming down the main road across the DMZ, maybe they were going to do that, but you had to expect them to do otherwise. Once you got in the jungle and lived, saw how it is to get through the jungle--we had jeeps of course, we had to cut down trees to get into our campsites, the roads were few and far between. We built

some good roads, but they were just the main arteries, the Jersey Turnpike, so to speak. In the mountains you've got to go on foot or pack animal or something. So I was already set for a problem with my friend General Williams and we had some real knockdown, drag-out fights. I was fortunate, Eisenhower had put out an executive order--I've forgotten, it was 1956 anyway, 10566 or something else like that--which laid down the fact that the ambassador in the country was the personal representative and was responsible to the president and therefore he was the principal representative of the United States government in that country and he would control all of our operations.

Q: Why would he find it necessary to say that?

DURBROW: Well, because of just the problem I was having, because it was done before I got there. I knew about it from Malaysia, but [it happened] all over the darn place. Remember, we didn't do a doggone thing in foreign affairs until we got hit at Pearl Harbor. I mean that categorically from World War I. I mean, we had a neutrality act and we had very small embassies. We dido very fine reporting, I hope, on what we thought was going to happen to that Czech government that might fall in two months, but if they fell, we didn't do anything about it. [it] didn't make much difference except you got good marks for predicting they would fall, and whether the right guys came back in or not was not our business. We were neutral.

So we won World War II and mostly by ourselves. We were a side issue in World War I, basically. We helped, though. So all of a sudden these military guys were all over the world, bases here and bases there, Vietnams, MAAGs all over the place. We knew how to run the railroad, we won the war, we know how to do it, and so forth. You guys, you can run the political stuff and talk about the elections, that sort of thing, but this other business, how to protect the country's our business. I don't know exactly why, I'm sure something along that line, because I'd run into that before.

Q: So it was not uncommon for MAAG and the embassy to have their friction?

DURBROW: Oh gosh, yes. The most interesting guy I did [encounter] before that [from] my experience in Moscow was Bedell Smith. He was Ike's chief of staff, of course, and he was the ambassador, and I happened to be the number-two guy. There was a fellow named Macon [?], General Macon, a hell of a nice fellow, had a fine record in World War II and he was a very fine tank commander and so forth. He ran the MAAG, the military section of the embassy. It wasn't called MAAG there, but it was the same thing. They had twenty or thirty officers. Of course in the Soviet Union the secrecy and the surveillance was quite different than it was in Vietnam. But nevertheless, here Macon knew who Bedell was, of course, naturally, but he thought he could run his little bailiwick by himself, but I can tell you Bedell Smith made sure that didn't happen. Maybe Bedell got Ike to write that executive order, I don't know. Because Bedell had quite a battle, really; they just told him to shut up or "I'll get you kicked out of here. I'll call my friend [George] Marshall and you'll get out."

Q: I have heard from other sources that it was not uncommon for MAAGs to have their problems with the embassy and vice versa.

DURBROW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There's no question about it. But fortunately this executive order came out, so one of my first jobs was to draft my own order based on that, how all the various [groups], the CIA, the MAAG, the agricultural boys in the AID program, would coordinate their operations this way, and no basic policy change will be sent out to Washington without my knowing about it. If I agreed, I'd endorse it; if I didn't, I would say I wouldn't endorse it.

Well, Williams didn't understand English or something because I caught him right on, I mean I learned about it through the channels. The grapevine works better than telegraph lines sometimes. So I had to tell him to come over there. I said, "This order means what it says. Now if you want to go against what I'm suggesting or putting down as the policy of the embassy, fine, go ahead, but let me know about it so I can say to Washington why I disagree with what you're doing." And we had one thing in about 1959, I guess. I had a military attaché as well on my staff. You see, the MAAG was a separate agency. And Colonel [Richard H.] Comstock came and said, "Mister Ambassador, I was just talking to my friend Colonel somebody of the Vietnamese Army who I've been working with very closely, trying to help out on getting the special forces camps going, guerrilla training of these special forces--"

Q: Is this Vietnamese special forces?

DURBROW: Yes. Yes. And I'd worked like the dickens to get that through and Williams got orders from Washington to go ahead and do it, and he wasn't doing hardly a thing about it when I got there. Freddie Reinhardt had tried to get it done, too, but he just resisted, so Freddie had helped me on getting started on the thing. I tried to follow through.

Q: Do you know what he had against that idea?

DURBROW: "They can't handle that. They're going to come down the main road. I know how to handle that, we can handle that. There'll be a few snipers here, there, and that sort of thing." It was obvious. As I said, I'd had the experience, I'd gone up into the jungle in Malaysia with [the British]. The British were very kind to me there as a friendly representative. I'd gone on treks through the jungle with the officers up there on the inspection trips, so I had some idea what the problem was in Malaysia and it's the same kind of climate and place. But Williams just didn't want to believe it. So anyway, without telling me, Williams canceled the arrangements made with the Vietnamese to set up five or six--I've forgotten--special forces training camps. They had one pilot plant already going. So from Colonel Comstock I learned this thing, and I had one hell of a fight. I had to go right back to Washington and say, "Here it is, boys." And they put it back on again. But he resisted from well before I got there this idea that there was going to be guerrilla-type war, not a trench warfare, World War I, or maneuvers as in World War II or anything of that kind.

You're going to bring up [Lionel] McGarr later. Well, fortunately, McGarr who came much later--I might confess to one of my many mistakes in life, I made two of them in one place, in the same place and at the same time with the same person. It was about General Williams. It was discovered in the archives of the Pentagon that General Williams, quite patriotically, he wasn't wrong, because as a kid he'd lied about his age.

Q: When would he--?

DURBROW: In 1917.

Q: Oh, when he enlisted. Oh, I see. I see.

DURBROW: He was not seventeen, he was only sixteen, but he wanted to go in for good, patriotic reasons, so give the guy full credit. They caught up with him later, so all of a sudden his time of station in the army on active duty came up.

Q: A year early.

DURBROW: A year earlier than was known to be. His record was still the seven-teen-year-old getting into the army. So I got word from the Pentagon through the State Department that General Williams would have to retire in a short time, but was there anybody I knew that I wanted, wanted to make some suggestions, something else like that, and please inform President Diem to this effect, he was going to be retired because of age. And I told Diem--of course Williams knew about it--and Diem just begged and plead and screamed because he and Williams got along very, very well. He liked to have lots of tanks and armies for his parades, I guess, I don't know why. And Williams had won his confidence before I got there, of course, and he counted on him for advice and things of that kind in the military field. I told him that I was afraid that it was a pretty strict rule, but there can be exceptions made. So Diem asked me specifically and officially on his behalf to ask that Williams be extended for at least one year. Well, I was having my battles with Williams, but I wasn't worried about that. I like battles. So Diem wanted it, and we were trying to do the right things in the military, and by the way, by that time Williams is coming around to doing a little bit of this special warfare stuff and guerrilla warfare and jungle training and that sort of thing. So I had a bird in my hand, so why not keep him there, he might be going in the right direction. So we got an extra year.

Then a year after that along came Anderson, who was under secretary of state, whatever he was--the cotton Anderson in Texas. What's his name? I know him damn well. Bill Anderson, was it? Anderson, Clayton Cotton Company.

Q: Yes, I know who you're talking about, but I can't call it to mind either.

DURBROW: That's the Anderson. I've forgotten his first name now. [Dillon Anderson?] But anyway, he was on his way to Malaysia to represent the President at the time that they got their independence from the British in 1958, 1959 I guess it was. Anderson stopped over to see Diem and check on what was going on over there for President Eisenhower. Diem got to him and said Williams told Diem that he was going to have to retire definitely this time unless some special arrangements were made. So Williams didn't tell me this; I knew it was true, but I didn't know what he was doing. But he got Diem to tell Anderson--didn't tell me--but to tell the President that he wants him to stay on another year. Fortunately, Anderson immediately did the right thing for our country and for the guy who was supposed to be the boss there. He told me. So I thought it over, and I went to Diem. I said, "What gives here?" He begged and plead with me again, so my second mistake was that I said, "All right, I'll go along with it if Eisenhower does." He did, so he

had two years, and I should have only had him less than that.

But that was fun. I don't mind fights, but it was hard to have to fight all the time to get things done. Because just after that, by golly, he canceled these special forces training camps for the And I learned about it in this roundabout way. Fortunately for me, I had been at the National War College for two years and the Deputy Commandant for the Army was a guy named [Lyman] Lemnitzer, whom I knew quite well as a personal friend as well as a colleague from the War College. So when they canceled this special warfare business, I not only reported it officially but I wrote a personal letter to Lem and I said, "Do something about this." So Williams didn't last very much longer after that, and McGarr came over. I guess because of that reason, I don't know exactly why, but the army did pick a man who was specializing in unconventional warfare at Leavenworth. He was a commandant at Leavenworth before he came over. When he went there some three years or so before, he had almost immediately instituted a compulsory course in Command and General Staff School on counter insurrection and unconventional warfare. So he was all set for it. By the time McGarr got there, everything was still on the track. These camps were going and they were training them in unconventional methods, but McGarr stepped it up quite a bit.

Q: This question just occurs to me, and I'm not even sure it's a valid question. I have heard that General Williams was hand-picked by General Taylor for the job in Saigon.

DURBROW: Could have been.

Q: And I know that General Taylor was very interested in counterinsurgency, you know, the flexible response and so on.

DURBROW: I know Max Taylor very well. I see him all the time now.

Q: And it just strikes me, well, why did he pick him if he was going to take this approach? Or is that a valid [question]?

DURBROW: I never knew that he did. He probably did. I think your information may be perfectly correct, but I don't know. But Williams just didn't understand it. He understood tank maneuvers and trench warfare of World War I, that sort of thing, but he just didn't want to have anything to do with it.

Q: How did Diem react? What policies did he institute as the security situation in the countryside began to go downhill in the beginning of 1957 or whenever?

DURBROW: Well, it really started going down in late 1958 and 1959. As I said, the early period, 1954 to 1956, was the "get myself in the driver's seat," and he did. He beat the Binh Xuyen and the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai and the rest of them. The three thousand-odd Viet Minh--not Viet Cong, they hadn't even been named yet--guerrillas weren't doing the job they were supposed to, to intimidate the whole countryside. [Then] they'll all rise to the communist cause and then Diem would be thrown out or bumped off.

So then from 1956 to 1959, building up the forces, we finally got Williams--and Diem was not 100 per cent sold on concentrating on unconventional warfare. He still liked tanks and that sort of thing. Williams, of course, helped to convince him of that. So there was a period of peace and quiet basically. There were incidents all the time, like in the new village of cutting off somebody's head or hand or the village chief or a teacher or a province chief or something like that. But, as I say, I traveled all over the darn country without any guard. I had a Vietnamese hunter, and he got a bunch of usually Montagnards to do the packing work for us as we trekked into the jungle. I just told him--of course he told me not to go to certain places like Zone D and Zone C on the Cambodian border, but outside of that I was up and down the spine and on the coast and all over the place and in the jungle.

Q: What kind of provisions did Diem make for local security, outside of the army? Didn't he have what they call local defense forces or self-defense forces?

DURBROW: Yes, he had the civil guard.

Q: The civil guard, right.

DURBROW: And they had their own police and the regular army. Incidentally, Williams wouldn't have anything to do with the civil guard, because he didn't control it, the military didn't control it.

Q: Who controlled it? Were they a police force?

DURBROW: The civil guard was a rural police force, if you will. They were not like most civil guards. It was a separate force that Diem would have that knew the countryside, weren't going to jump on tanks and come down the roads and that sort of thing. He did all he could to have the countryside policed, to fight off the bands coming out of Zone D and things like that, if he could ever catch them. Sometimes they did.

One of the big battles I had with the Eisenhower Administration was trying to get more helicopters. When I got there, they had six, seven or eight, I've forgotten. We wanted to get some H-34s, I think they were.

Q: The banana-shaped?

DURBROW: Oh no, no. The little-bitty ones.

Q: Oh, okay.

DURBROW: I've forgotten the designation, but nevertheless, you could get twelve Americans to sixteen Vietnamese--because they're smaller--[on them] with their gear and that sort of thing for dropping in through operations against the guerrillas and evacuating the wounded. For some reason--this was toward the end of the Eisenhower Administration--they resisted. Where they said we didn't have enough, we had other demands, we wanted lots of things. Even Williams went along with that one. And McGarr went along in a big way. So we got them before we left

there.

But Diem wanted to have that sort of thing to help protect the countryside. The diplomatic corps was invited--not all of them, but selectively, ten or twelve chiefs of mission--to go with Diem out in the jungle out on the Delta for two-day trips. They had security guards all along the line and lots of other things and then boats were down in the Delta area, in the rain forest. They did a pretty good job in protecting us that way. By the time McGarr got there, things were going pretty hot and heavy internally. 1960, at Bien Hoa Air Base there, you know, two of our guys got killed.

Q: Excuse me, I had the impression that was 1959. I may be wrong.

DURBROW: Maybe it was.

Q: It's not terribly important.

DURBROW: It was 1959, yes. That's the first real big effort they made--the Viet Cong--to get a very important base right near the center of the capital, fifteen miles away. And of course, it was a hit-and-run job, again. When they got two of our officers, you know, it was very sad. But then they started hitting other ARVN bases not to kill men, necessarily, to capture--they wanted to get medical supplies and guns and ammunition. The Ho Chi Minh Trail had not been reopened again. So there was Tay Ninh in January of 1960 or February of 1960. And then in October-November 1960, they hit a bunch of construction sites up the new roads Diem was trying to build up in the spine of the Annamites.

Q: Was that the road to Ban Me Thuot?

DURBROW: No, beyond Ban Me Thuot. North of Pleiku.

Q: Kontum, perhaps.

DURBROW: Beyond Kontum. There was no road there. You got up to Kontum and a few miles further and the route was just rocky mountains. So he was trying for military reasons and other reasons to put in a road to Nha Trang. They hit some construction camps there in a pretty good-sized operation. That was a day after they started up there, and I saw where they had artillery and shooting in various places. It was a well-organized affair. By that time, it was clear that they had given up hope that the guerrilla, terrorist, propaganda, subversive operation was going to topple Diem. So they decided they'd better do something more organized. Those are the first signs of it we had.

Then in December 1960, we got a report that some IL-14 Soviet transports were staging through Hanoi--our Canadian friends told us this, from the ICC, International Control Commission--flying off to the west. So we got that on early--about the second or third of December. So I asked my air attaché, who was assigned to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, all three, so he could fly around all around the place. Just file a flight plan, he could take off, didn't have to get special visas or anything else like that. So I said, "Why don't you fly up to Vientiane tomorrow and see

what you can see up there, what's happening."

So he got in his C-47 and flew up there, had some cameras with him. And sure enough, he flew a little bit out of his route over the Plaine des Jarres, which is a very flat plain in Laos there, the entrance to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and sure enough, got pictures of IL-14s flying in there. They were parachuting it in this day--this is about the second or third of December, I've forgotten what it was, early December. And there were pretty heavy things they were putting in there. Finally, he flew around a bit, saw what looked like a small tractor going in there, a bulldozer.

So we reported that, and on the day before Christmas, the twenty-fourth of December, he flew up again to get some more pictures with a better guy to take the pictures. We had no special plane for taking pictures. And this time these IL-14s had teeth in them. They let go at him, and thank God it didn't shoot it down, but several bullets hit the fuselage and one sergeant got a--

Q: Now, let me be straight. This was air-to-air combat?

DURBROW: Yes, yes, yes. Aerial combat. The IL-14 had seen our guy flying around. They said we better get some machine guns on board these things. So from these IL-14s coming in--they were landing by that time, they'd made an airstrip. They were landing. So in taking their pictures they got shot at, just a few holes in the tail of the plane, that was all, and they got to Vientiane. Then we reported that and we got permission through Bangkok to release the pictures taken by somebody--I don't know who it was--to show what was happening.

So they started opening up the Ho Chi Minh Trail at that time. This was full Soviet assistance, these IL-14s flying in. From then on in, they pushed down the Trail more and more, and the operations in Laos got more organized and larger scale, infiltration got much more concentrated down toward Vietnam. Then they started hitting these camps and that sort of thing.

Q: Had there been infiltration before this time?

DURBROW: Oh yes, sure. There'd been infiltration, quite a bit of it. But they couldn't do it in large droves and the very heavy equipment, trucks couldn't come through. The DMZ was pretty well protected. You could infiltrate men across the DMZ. It was very rugged, it had paths and that sort of thing. There was a jungle to help.

Q: How about by sea? Did you have much evidence of infiltration that way?

DURBROW: No, there was some, but very little. That was too hard. That was pretty well patrolled. Pretty hard to do. There was some. But the estimate of it then by 1959 was that the original two to three thousand had been stepped up to maybe six to eight thousand, we never knew exactly, because the operation was more sophisticated, they were better trained. See, the ones they left behind in 1954 to 1956 and so forth were all southerners. They spoke with a southern accent. While they speak the same language, it's like our Deep South in this country and our Down Eastern Mainers. They're distinguishable, quite distinguishable. So then when they started training the new cadre to infiltrate, they took boys that were up in the North, born in the South, that accent, because they'd run out of southerners to come down to fill out the cadre in the

South. But the build-up started really in 1959.

Q: Let me propound a thesis to you that I have seen proposed to explain Hanoi's actions in this period in the late fifties. It's been asserted that Hanoi expected to win by means more or less political in the late fifties and that was why they didn't push the shooting war any harder before 1959. And that Diem's anti-communist programs in the South--I think he called it the Communist Denunciation Program--was putting so much heat on the stay-behinds that the southern communists essentially told Hanoi, "If you don't start something, we're going to have to or we're going to be down the drain."

DURBROW: "We're not going to win." They weren't going to win. But how could they do it politically? They thought in 1954 that by intimidation, terrorism, propaganda and persuasion they could show this weak puppet called Diem, this American stooge and that sort of thing, "It's not going to do you any good. We've got a feel for the workers. We're all for the workers. Workers of the world unite," slogan things. But it just didn't work, even in the 1954-56 period. By 1956, 1958, 1959, they still tried it by raids on villages, and cutting off hands and heads, and terrorism, and it just didn't work. So deciding it could be done politically is--the people didn't rally to them by their intimidation or promises or propaganda or persuasion or subversion, so they had to change. Your version you just gave me is the same thing except that nothing can be done politically. It was not going to be done by this small group down there that would cause Diem to lose all backing among the people and they'd join the other team. Well, they didn't and they didn't all run either. Despite the fact when the thing got really going in the sixties, there were the police and the civil guard and the militia and the regular army, ARVN. There were some four hundred thousand guys who had guns in there. They could have shot it all at Diem and knocked him all up, but they stayed loyal to Diem and [Nguyen Van] Thieu and [Nguyen Cao] Ky and the rest of them. And the version you heard there, I'm afraid, was part of this revisionist historian type of stuff that's been put out by our press and others that we forced the people, the communists, to react. Please, just don't ever believe that junk.

Q: Well, I wanted to stimulate a reaction.

DURBROW: I lived too damn long behind the Curtain myself and we're dealing with that same problem today, "If we do that, that'll stimulate them to react." Of course they're going to react. Well, who the hell started it? When they left these three thousand guys behind, they hoped to do it, and it didn't work. Then they started infiltrating more down there. It didn't work, so they decided they'd better pour the regular stuff on, and they did by guerrilla type operations. By 1961-62 the Ho Chi Minh Trail was pretty well open then. They'd been working on it since before that [with the] bulldozer dropped to the Plaine des Jarres. They opened it up and they were getting quite sizeable convoys coming down. We weren't allowed to hit them. Diem wasn't allowed to hit them in Laos or Cambodia.

That brings up another thing. They were coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in piles but not by large convoys, and they set up these sanctuaries in Cambodia just across the Vietnamese line, just east of Phnom Penh and west of Saigon. They had all these Viet Minh troops in there and I went over to Phnom Penh every once in a while to see my colleague Bill Trimble who was a very close friend of mine from way back days. It was only forty-five minutes by plane. So I'd go

over to see Bill and sometimes I'd see [Norodom] Sihanouk, and Bill would come see me and [I'd say], "Do you want to see Diem this time?" We'd work out these things--and they weren't getting along, never did--hoping to get them to drop the hatchet a bit and then collaborate. We knew these Viet Minh troops were in Cambodia in 1960, and in January 1960 I was over seeing Bill and--when was it?--it must have been 1960. Well, I can get that for you later.

But anyway, Diem is squawking like the devil about this big bunch of Viet Minh troops having a sanctuary and operating out of a sanctuary area, parading into the Delta, getting rice, discombobulating the population in large units, company units and that sort of thing, pretty good size for that sort of operation. And why does Sihanouk let them stay there? So this particular day, Diem invited Bill and me to come talk to him. I'd gone to school in France and got my master's degree at the Sorbonne so I could speak French pretty well and Bill had better command of French than I have. So we both could speak to Sihanouk just alone, no interpreters around, free to let our hair down and talk Dutch uncle business. So in this conversation that came up, I said to Bill, "I'm going to try to work in to see if I can ask the question: why the hell doesn't he do something about getting rid of those Viet Minh troops in his territory, violating his neutrality and all that sort of thing?" So I've forgotten how it came up in the conversation, but I wheeled in and Bill helped me along a bit. Sihanouk--did you ever hear his voice?

Q: Yes.

DURBROW: A very high-pitched voice. "Je ne sais pas pourquoi vous posez cette question comme ca mais tout [inaudible]." So I said, "Well, you know, you don't get along with Ngo Dinh Diem and your people haven't got along over the centuries, but you're both in the same boat now. Hanoi wants to take you both over, Moscow does, and so does China. Why the dickens don't you try to bury the hatchet a bit? One thing, if you could possibly do it, is to try to drive those Viet Minh out of your territory right across the Parrot's Beak there and beyond the Mekong." He hit the high C's on this one. He said, "I know they're there. I know they're there." I said, "Well, there's quite a lot of them." "Yes, there's about twenty-five thousand of them. I don't have an army of twenty-five, thirty thousand with all my militia. There's the Mekong River in between, there's only one road, it's marshy all around the side. I don't want them there. They shouldn't be there. I can't get rid of them. Don't blame me." He was telling us all this, it was what we wanted to hear.

So he got all through and I said, "Could I pass that on to Diem that maybe you'll collaborate a little bit? You push them one way and you'll need your whole army and you push there and you'll cut off their line of supplies to the north somewhere and--" "No, no, no, we can't do that. I haven't got enough army." So he said, when I'd bring up this, talking, "Don't you tell that to Diem." I said, "I'm not going to tell him. I won't. Of course I won't." "And what's more, if either one of you tell your government about this and it gets published, I'm going to deny every word you said and call you both liars." (Laughter)

Q: I heard or saw him described a few years ago as a cross between an absolute dictator and Hubert Humphrey. Is that apt?

DURBROW: That's very apt. (Laughter) He was in town the other day, about within the last

year. He'd come to visit and I went up to see him to see what he looked like.

Q: Did you get to talk to him?

DURBROW: Oh, I talked--it was just a reception, about fifty other people there. But he recognized me of course, and we chatted for just a minute. He was trying to get us to do some setting up of his new government in Cambodia.

But anyway, things were going very bad by 1959. McGarr, as soon as he got there, went in for the unconventional warfare step-up.

Q: Can I interrupt a second? It seems to me that I have seen that in 1960 Washington directed that some kind of counterinsurgency plan--

DURBROW: That's what I'm going to talk about.

Q: Is that what you're talking about?

DURBROW: I'm going to bring that up.

Q: Good.

DURBROW: Under McGarr who was all for it. So we got the MAAG, the AID program, and the CIA to work together as a real team. We got a team going and no quibbling and squabbling about who's on first or second. So we had what we called the counterinsurgency plan and it took us about three months. And the military put all their input on why and how it'd be used, and where it'd be used, and what kind of rifles and machine guns and helicopters, everything. And we put ours in the CIA and all the different plans. That thing was worked on and worked on and worked on until finally sent out by courier just before Christmas. I'd say the twenty-second of December in 1960. We learned later by telegram that it had arrived in the department just before New Year's, had been glanced over and they said, "Keep up the good work. We'll give you some reaction."

Of course, in the meantime, Kennedy was just about ready to take over, and so we were given a few go-aheads on some of the things we had been looking for for a long time. "Go ahead with the old program. We can't tell you later." Then we were very gratified and they sent a photostatic copy, a Xerox copy of the--we had a summary of the thing in the first part, by itself I would think, and Kennedy looked it over apparently enough to [write], "Why so little? JFK." We were scared. It was about two hundred million dollars. We were making a hell of a--we were going for a big show. And "Why so little?" Then on the basis of that, Johnson came over there in May. I presume that is [why], anyway. I don't know why, but that made us rather gratified.

So the picture changed like the mischief beginning in 1959 when they opened up the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We knew it was going on, the raids in Tay Ninh, the one in Bien Hoa before that, way up north of Pleiku and all that sort of thing. So the fat was in the fire and anybody that tries to kid the American public that this is only because we were being mean to them and weren't

even letting them take over politically in the South, is the same kind of stuff they're talking about in Angola, Namibia and whatnot. If they don't get their way, we provoked them into doing something worse.

Q: Let me ask you a few questions about intelligence, because that's an issue that comes up from time to time, too. How good was our intelligence when you arrived in country?

DURBROW: It was fairly good. The CIA was doing a good job. A fellow named Nick Natsios was the chief of station when I first got there. We became very good friends. Bill Colby was the fellow who succeeded him. I'd been with Bill in Rome, all right, so we knew each other quite well, were very good friends. By the time I got there--of course, [Edward] Lansdale did a very good job, despite the reputation he's had. You know, he [Johnson] recommended I not stay there in 1961; he knew I was going out already, so he said I should be replaced.

Q: Oh, that was when he made the visit in 1961. Okay.

DURBROW: Yes. I developed my throat among other things, and my nose was running and I was six years in the tropics. Knowing there was a change of party and also a change of regime at home here, I'd written my good friend Loy Henderson, who was once a Moscow stable mate of mine. I said, "I'm not rushing to get out of here, but I've got this sinus drip and this sort of thing." It irritated my upper lip so much I had to raise a mustache. I had great big scabs all around here. I'd been there so doggone long in Saigon that I became chief, you know, the dean of the diplomatic corps. Go around kissing babies and cutting ribbons, so I had to raise a mustache. That was fine. I got this French tropical doctor, military doctor, [who had] been out there for years, a very nice guy named Kessier [phonetic], a very nice fellow. And he said, "I can cure it up." So he said, "It's an old cure, an old cure. They don't use it anymore, but it's going to work." An old German dye, gentian violet--have you ever seen any gentian violet? So he said, "You put this on in the evening and you sleep with it. Then you take it off in the morning with this." And it burned. And my gosh, did it hurt. But my mustache was purple. (Laughter)

So here I am running around kissing babies and doing all the things that the dean of the diplomatic corps [is supposed to do]. So I had asked Loy to move me out of here, and I made a recommendation that because of the so-called elections, which weren't our type of elections, but they're better than none, that Diem was going to have in May of 1961--there was a lot of controversy whether he's going to have re-elections and all that sort of business, who's going to be in the opposition and all this do-good stuff at home, which doesn't do anybody any good, us particularly. The country doesn't understand what democracy's all about. But I said, "Maybe it'd be a good thing if my successor"--before I knew who it was going to be actually--"could come in with a clean slate. The elections are won or lost, whatever happens to them. [Otherwise] he comes in and gets tarred with a brush that he didn't put enough in their democracy, and I'm an S.O.B., already." So that's why I stayed until May 2, incidentally.

Things were going much worse by then, but the counterinsurgency plan had started to work. [Here's] another bit of information that may not be in the records. There's a colleague of ours--and I've forgotten who it was in the embassy in Paris, a fellow I knew, anyway--[who] got to talking with a Frenchman I guess early in 1960. Something came out about how the French had

fooled us about the number of advisers they had when they left Vietnam in 1954. The official record was, at the Geneva Conferences, Geneva Accords, six hundred and forty-two. I've forgotten the figure. You can get those or I can check my records. Freddie Reinhardt worked--you had a bunch of recovery teams come in there, so we never got above nine hundred and forty-two advisers. The recovery team was a cover to get some more guys in there; we needed them. We did recover a lot of the equipment that was left there; they shipped it out. We didn't need three hundred more guys, but we did get them.

He said, "You know, we had about nineteen hundred advisers there in 1954 and we told you six hundred and forty-two and you guys bought it." So he reported this to me personally and said, "I don't know if it'll do you any good, Durby, but this guy, I drew him out quite a bit and he gave me some champagne or something and more details: 'We had about nineteen hundred and some-odd--'" So we said, "Sure it will." So we asked the department to run this thing down, to double-check it and get somebody in the French government to officially confirm that yes, they had lost some records or something and they didn't realize how many they did have, but it was nineteen hundred and sixty-six. So by that time, we had the official record and the French said, yes, they did have that many military advisers in Vietnam and they should have given us that figure when they made the accords in 1954.

So here we are, Christmas time, presents all over the place, so it was on the basis of that that JFK and the rest of the boys bring up their [proposal]. It was already in the mill when Kennedy actually took over. But that's how we got the bunch of advisers. It wasn't something that happened, that Kennedy did overnight. We knew that we needed many more to carry out this counterinsurgency plan. We made this lucky discovery, confirmed by the French. So we told the ICC--the International Control Commission--the Canadians, the Indians and the Poles. They checked the records. Yes, the French confirmed that they made a mistake in 1954, so under the accords, we were allowed to have the same number the French had. So that made it possible.

Q: The ICC bought it?

DURBROW: The ICC bought it, yes. Not the Poles, but the others did.

Q: Well, the Poles never--

DURBROW: The Poles never did. Incidentally, one of the guys--well, several of them; I was there four years and a half--one of the Poles I knew very well when I was in Poland, way back when he was a young man, of course.

Q: Well, you get on these career tracks and you just keep crossing trails.

DURBROW: The elite. (Laughter)

Q: Now, I have seen some place a CIA National Intelligence Estimate, an NIE, I guess they're called.

DURBROW: NIE, yes.

Q: --that was done in 1959. Now, I don't know what month; I can't recall off-hand. I have the impression that Chester Cooper had a hand in writing it--maybe he was the chief author, I'm not sure--which said that one of the things that was making things worse was that Diem's repressions were alienating too many people. Now, was that intelligence coming from Washington to you, or were they feeding off what you were telling Washington?

DURBROW: We were getting it. Have you read my request for instructions in September, 1960?

Q: I can't remember seeing it.

DURBROW: Well, by the time I'd been there several years, a year or two, I got to know Diem very well and I admired him and respected him. He wasn't a Jeffersonian Democrat, and he couldn't be. He didn't understand it, among other [things]. His country couldn't run that way. To try to demand that they must all have free, open-seated elections overnight is just impossible in any country, wherever it is, unless they have some mores and build-up for the thing, some feel for it and understanding. So it got so that I could talk to him really very frankly. I had many very frank talks with him. I'd see him once a week, sometimes more often and sometimes three times a month, whatever it was. But you had to set a half a day aside when you went over there. He talked and talked and talked and talked and talked.

He didn't delegate any authority--one of his problems--except with his brother a little bit, some of his generals, but just a little bit. He was trying to do too darn much and things weren't getting done on the AID program, the military program, the social programs or wherever, public relations, among others. So I'd had many frank talks with him and had had instructions, which I usually asked for, to get pretty frank with him. And he could have thrown me out as persona non grata, but we got on a very good man-to-man basis, not agreeing on everything but with mutual respect, I guess you want to call it.

So I asked for these instructions. We got together the country team and said, "He is not getting over public relations-wise, not only with our country. People back at home [think] they're not democratic enough, [he] doesn't have enough free elections and this, that, and the other thing, and no free press and all the rest of the thing." But do you know what the Can Lao Party is?

Q: Yes.

DURBROW: That's the Diem party, the Nhu party--Nhu was the head of it--and CIA penetrated it. I don't know how the hell they penetrated it, but they did. We knew a great deal about what was going on--really a lot--and the grumbling and how things are going better, the economy is going better. They passed the pre-war rice production in 1958, rubber in 1957, exports were going up and things were going much better. The land reform program was all over in the Delta; the new villages up in the mountains weren't going too well for the reasons I explained, but that was all fine. The Can Lao Party was antagonizing too many people and arresting too many people. We knew it; we didn't know how many exactly of course. So he was our man, he was on our side, he was an anti-communist, he was not anti-American by any means. He was a dedicated patriot, he was not corrupt anymore than any other Asian, clearly less than most of them, some of

them in the Philippines, their own little country. I was all for him. The department was, too, I think, and our government in general.

So we worked up these instructions, a rather long request for instructions, and it bandied back and forth with changes here and there. And finally I got my go-ahead, and I had about three or four--very long ones this time--maybe four-hour talks with Diem as a straight Dutch uncle about setting up a joint chief of staff to have some say-so. "Don't try to run everything, delegate authority here, do this, do that, the Can Lao Party be--" I told him two or three times about some of the things we knew the Can Lao Party was doing, monopolizing the cinnamon trade and all that sort of thing, and getting money from the South to enforce declarations going through our custom. We had quite a bit of dope on this whole [thing]. For a little country of that size, the CIA and the AID people were doing a good job, too. One way or another we got pretty good intelligence.

So anyway, I got these instructions and had this long talk and he didn't agree with any of it basically, but he didn't throw me out or didn't try to change the subject. He promised to think them over. He started to implement some of them, quite a few, and that's what I'm after. I sent--what you get in the Pentagon Papers is a New York Times version--my request for instructions to tell him this, and telling him the other thing. Then at the end of the thing, if the department approves of me talking along these lines, in the event that by chance he doesn't go along, doesn't want to go along with most of them and doesn't try to do what he can to help himself with our suggestions and assistance, it is perhaps time for us to give serious consideration to look around and see if we may not have to look for another leader over here.

Q: Now, Mr. Ambassador, let me interrupt you a second. You have mentioned a number of specific things that you talked to Diem about on this occasion, delegating authority through a joint chiefs of staff sort of set-up and so on.

DURBROW: And the civilian side, too, yes. Premier. The vice president. Let the vice president do some things.

Q: Now, these all strike me as being administrative sorts of improvements, loosening the reins of authority a little bit and so on.

DURBROW: Yes. Free press.

Q: How does this approach the subject of the repressions that were supposed to be--?

DURBROW: Well, the Can Lao Party operation was brought up in quite a big way.

Q: You mentioned they were arresting people.

DURBROW: And they were.

Q: What sorts of [people]?

DURBROW: He didn't have just thousands and thousands of political prisoners. He had hundreds and they were pretty key people in the opposition, so they got squawks from their other people. But it was authoritarian government. It wasn't a dictatorship, he wasn't Stalin. I had the dubious pleasure of spending all my six years in Moscow under Stalin. I knew what a real so-and-so can be and how he operates, with real secret police and no opposition whatsoever. There was opposition in Vietnam and you could talk to other people. They'd come and talk to you and it wasn't this omnipotent KGB-type operation. So it was authoritarian. It has to be. They'd never had any government of their own for some two or three centuries, and the French and others.

Q: Wasn't it in 1959--I'm a little shaky on this, I think it was 1959--wasn't there sort of an ad hoc group of notables who got together and wrote an open letter to Diem recommending improvements?

DURBROW: Yes, yes.

Q: They got in trouble for doing that.

DURBROW: Yes, they did. We helped them to write it a bit, the CIA--

Q: Oh, you did?

DURBROW: Yes, we did. They didn't get in real trouble. Oh, they lost their influence, so to speak. But the guy was right, the country was going very well economically, going along with a lot of those things, but he just couldn't help being the good old mandarin that his ancestors had been. His father had been a mandarin type in Hue and that sort of thing. So he had to make some moves in a relaxing direction, and we didn't demand that he have free elections better than New York City or anything like that. But [we recommended] having more free elections and more freedom of the press, give press conferences and things to allow the people to have some safety valves, talk to the senators and the representatives to allow them to have safety valves and other grievances.

Anyway, Halberstam in his book gives me a great deal of credit--I was the guy that tried to get rid of Diem way long back. We should have gotten rid of him way before that, but Durbrow did have the good idea of getting rid of him in September 1960. I had no such idea whatsoever, because I had this shirt tail on the thing and in case it doesn't work, boys, just don't think we got to back this guy up forever when we ever start to thinking about who the hell could we get to replace him somehow. And we were paying for all these darn things and we were trying to hold it in our days of containment, which is the only way to run the railroad against the Soviets as far as I'm concerned. So if we can't get this guy to help us on this thing, we got to look for somebody else.

Just an afterthought sort of thing. So I was the guy that really wanted to get rid of Diem in 1960, and why did we not do it until 1963, says Halberstam.

Q: If you had to give Halberstam a grade for the things he says about your tenure in Saigon, what would it be? F?

DURBROW: He gave me the wrong grade. He gave me an A. I should have had an F from his point of view.

Q: But I want you to grade Halberstam now.

DURBROW: Well, I've never met Halberstam. I haven't tried to duck him, I haven't had an opportunity to meet him. He got there after I left there. I was so concerned about his stuff for the New York Times, as I read it in Paris--I was transferred to the NATO Council in Paris--that I went to Drew Middleton, who was the chief of bureau there. And I'd known Drew very, very well in Moscow at the end of the war and then in 1946 to 1948. And I had lunch with Drew several times. I never did meet this guy Halberstam. You know I just got out of Vietnam and what he was saying there was just completely crazy, "These Buddhists are being persecuted by Diem." By the way, Diem was not an anti-Buddhist. He was a Catholic of course, a very devout Catholic, but he was very tolerant of religion. Halberstam saying this, that, and the other thing, I said, "Why the devil did the Times send a guy like that, because the only thing I can tell you there is that they're completely wrong." "I don't know, Durby."

Finally he saw these things coming and whatnot, these dispatches. Halberstam did his two years, he was transferred from Saigon to Paris and I think it may be my poison, but anyway, Drew said, "I won't take him." By that time Drew is pretty high up in the Times' foreign correspondents business. He'd been in since the early part of World War II. So Drew didn't take him in his bureau in Paris, and he went to Poland and was the bureau chief there in Poland--where he met his wife, incidentally.

But to get back to Halberstam, I've not checked this through myself personally because it doesn't make any difference, but a young kid, a young graduate student came to see me four or five years ago from American University here to talk about this period in Vietnam and war. And he said, "You got the best marks of any ambassador from Halberstam there." "Yes, I noticed that." I told him why he was wrong, it was just exactly the opposite. Now, if he was trying to tell the whole truth, why the hell didn't he put in--because they are available in the Pentagon Papers, too--my reply of my four-hour discussion with Diem where he'd agreed to do things and was doing things then and whatnot? If I was such a good guy, why didn't he give the full story?

But he said, "Don't you know where Halberstam got all that thing for The Best and the Brightest in his book?" I said, "I know when he was sitting out there. No." "He was allowed to see the Pentagon Papers before they were leaked." Those direct quotes, I said I couldn't understand why Halberstam could quote so-and-so, Marshall or I don't know who all, Rusk or McNamara or all over the place, those guys, direct quotes doing this, that and the other thing. It sounded like they're official and real. He saw the Pentagon Papers. He worked on the Pentagon Papers, made a lot of money, supposed to split with Daniel Ellsberg, too, I don't know.

Q: Well, of course Neil Sheehan was a good friend of Halberstam.

DURBROW: Oh, yes, sure. Yes.

I want to finish on this Diem thing. He started in really doing quite a lot of them, really going very, very well for about six weeks until November 11 and the coup. You can bring up the coup then, the [Nguyen Chanh] Thi coup, which is a serious thing, but we had rumors of coups every other week there. The CIA had the place pretty well cased. I must say they did a very fine job there. They didn't know this particular one on this particular day, you are never sure.

But they had it all set up and it started about three o'clock in the morning. My residence was half a mile from the palace. The chancery's half a mile the other way about as the bird flies. We had an air-conditioned room, so the windows were closed and I heard, "Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!" I went out on the balcony and I could see flashes down there, fireworks. What's this? Before I got to the telephone to the duty officer down at the embassy--because that was higher up, that was a seven or eight-story building--to see what he could see and whatnot, who was on the phone but Bill Colby, the station chief of Saigon whose house was literally on Independence Avenue, which is the main drag leading up to the palace, two blocks north of the palace. The guys were all becoming reporters right in front of his house. And Bill was reporting, getting his own boys around, and by about five o'clock that morning one of them came through the fire and got into my house, gave me a full report, who it was, Colonel Thi, what he was doing, how the others were handling it. It really went on for a couple of days. But my beautiful thoughts and my beautiful efforts and the State Department's and everything else to get Diem to go on the right track were thrown off the track immediately.

Q: Now, why was that?

DURBROW: Somebody really revolted against him. And all these things we said, these democratic things, these freedom things, these relaxing of tensions, "Well, look what I got to face, by God! The air force at least went after me. I'd better do something about it and I've got to go back to my old ways of operating."

Q: Lansdale reported -- I may be paraphrasing him slightly--when he came back in 1961 that Diem had developed a deep distrust of the State Department. I think that's a direct quote.

DURBROW: He probably did say something like that.

Q: Can you account for it?

DURBROW: Maybe I'm one of the reasons. We tried like the dickens to get him to do these things. We thought it would be in the long-range interest of Vietnam and ourselves as well, but basically his. It wouldn't hurt us too much if he got bumped off. It caused a lot of trouble and got us in a war, but we weren't thinking in those terms then. But Fritz [Frederick] Nolting got along with him very well, you know, and with Nhu as well, even better than I did, I understand from what Fritz tells me and others did. Maybe because of that September tete-a-tete I had with him. I had a couple of others with him, too, before I left in May.

Incidentally, Halberstam said that after I tried to get rid of one of those instructions that [Diem] didn't give the answer to, that I hardly ever saw Diem from then on in until I left; he didn't even give me a farewell party. He gave me three.

Q: Three?

DURBROW: Oh, yes. One was a very intime one for my wife and myself, the Nhus, General Thieu, the chief of staff, and his wife, and about eight or ten. Nobody else on our side, just all these Vietnamese. We had a wonderful evening. Then I got the big one, then the one from the foreign office. I saw him just as often after September as I ever did, but Halberstam [wrote that] the guy that really tried to get rid of that son of a bitch wasn't spoken to for the rest of the six to eight months, he had no contact with Diem. Well, we had all kinds of contact with Diem. That's what I think of Halberstam.

Q: Can you account for that in Halberstam's book at all?

DURBROW: I don't know why our press then and still now, in many cases, are bending over backwards to make us look like boobs, around the world, be it El Salvador, Nicaragua, Angola, name it. When I was there, there was very little press, you see. They had a couple of stringers and the boys that come down from Hong Kong or from Tokyo to spend a week, two weeks looking things over, and a lot of them I knew before. But as soon as we got troops in--I guess by the time the Vice President came over, Johnson came over, and you had all these new advisers coming in and the counterinsurgency plan was coming in over the docks, you couldn't miss seeing it--the boys started flocking down. So why they turned out that way and just almost 100 per cent undermined everything that was going on [I don't know]. Wrong, wrong, wrong, terrible, terrible, terrible.

Q: I have seen an interview that General Williams gave to U.S. News and World Report about 1964. He said that when he left South Vietnam--and I think he left in September of 1960--and this is a quote, "the situation bordered on the critical," unquote, and what he meant was in the context that relations between Diem and USOM were so bad that the situation was critical. Would you comment on that?

DURBROW: I remember that. That was one of our problems with Diem. A lot of our AID stuff was not getting out in the field, out in the country, and fertilizer was not going out to the farmers and the rest of it. So I had a very good, tough USOM guy--Haraldson, by name, Wes Haraldson--and we concocted [a plan]. He talked to his counterpart numbers in the government and I'd talk to Diem about that sort of thing. That they had to show better use of the stuff and not have it stacked up in warehouses.

Then we had reports. We never got them quite 100 per cent, but I think they were true, that the Can Lao was using some to feather their own nest maybe or to get their own cohorts to stick faithful to them. Despite the reports in the press, incidentally, about Nhu and Diem having these millions of dollars in Swiss bank accounts which [they were] flying over--you've heard the expression Radio Catinat? Catinat was the French name for Tu Do Street. That's where the hotels are where all the correspondents lived. So I've been in lots of places with lots of rumors, but I've never been in a place anywhere where the rumors popped up [as they did] in Saigon. Unbelievable! [There were rumors that] Radio Catinat had all this money stashed away and everything else like that, they were feathering their own nest, getting ready to fly. Well, I don't

know what money they had in what bank account in Switzerland, if any, or whether Mrs. Nhu really had this coffee plantation that she was supposed to have down in Brazil or the Rex movie theater in Paris. We got the CIA to check that any doggone way they could to see whether [they were true]. Those are two reports I particularly remember. And [there was] no verification whatsoever, not even hints about it.

But when they both were bumped off--Nhu and Diem were bumped off in 1963--Mrs. Nhu was out of the country and saved her neck that way. In Paris, when I was later on in Paris, she lived with Brother Nguyen--that was the youngest brother of the Ngo family--in one of these great big French apartments where you've got lots of room. The Nguyens had eleven children. She had two, and herself. Then one of our military guys on the NATO staff lived literally right below her. He saw her go up in the elevator and knew the concierge. They were living like peasants in this room, just stacked in like sardines in a tin in this fairly big apartment in a nice part of Paris. Finally they had to move.

She moved down to Rome where the oldest brother of the family, the Archbishop, was able to get a little place for her to live out in Frascati, just outside of Rome. I checked that with my CIA friends, and they checked on it. She was living very frugally. She lost the key to all these riches or they didn't know where it was or they didn't tell her. But this idea of corruption was greatly exaggerated, but our press just fell for it hook, line and sinker.

Talking about USOM and Williams, I haven't heard that one before. But anyway, he didn't like the USOM because they were getting much more aid than he thought his boys should get, dividing up the pie in many cases. They had the civil guard under their... They were supplying the supplies.

Q: Wasn't there some kind of argument over the civil guard?

DURBROW: Oh, God, yes. A hell of one.

Q: What was that about?

DURBROW: "Well, if I can't control it, I'm not going to give a damn if it all goes to pot," was Sam Williams' basic idea. And Diem didn't want to put it under the military and we knew it was a good idea that it should be a rural police sort of thing, as it was really supposed to be and you need different kinds of weapons. You don't need tanks, you don't need personnel carriers or that sort of thing. So USOM funded the military supplies for the civil guard and we tried to get--McGarr went along with it very nicely--Williams to make some suggestion, for God's sake, for something besides the military, the regular army, to help these guys to do their operation in the countryside for internal security.

Q: Who was in charge of the training of the civil guard? Or were they being given any?

DURBROW: Oh, gosh, I can't remember. It wasn't MAAG.

Q: Was MSU [Michigan State University] involved in that?

DURBROW: Yes, MSU was, that's right. Of course they were.

Q: I was curious.

DURBROW: Oh, yes, yes. MSU, yes. They did a very good job, by the way, I think. Now, I'd just forgotten this--my mind. And they got civilian trainers to come over from police forces and that sort of thing and it was very good. They set up the police force in Saigon, too, as a matter of fact. I'd forgotten about MSU. Had it in my notes but I'd forgotten about that.

Q: I've heard there was a controversy over the fact that General Williams went out of channels on one occasion over a question of arms for the civil guard. Do you recall any such incident?

DURBROW: Yes, yes. Gosh, I can't remember the details. You're quite right. He did. Gee, I can't remember. No question, I remember very well it happened, [but] the details--that just slips my mind.

Q: Well, I don't know the details, but I thought--

DURBROW: Yes, yes, he did. I told you that one of my many mistakes were those two. Hanging Sam was his name, you know.

Q: Yes, yes, I've heard that. Apparently that was famous throughout the army, that he was Hanging Sam.

DURBROW: Yes, because he was the guy, the guard at the Nuremberg trials.

Q: Were you able to brief your successor, Mr. Nolting?

DURBROW: Yes. You never brief your successor at the post. That's an old tradition. Why I don't know. It's obvious why, I guess. You're the has-been and don't gummy up the works, and he comes in as a fresh mind or fresh ambassador, fresh look, new administration, whatever it is. Fritz and I were old friends anyway, so we debriefed each other at Honolulu. I left on the second of May and he got in about the seventh or eighth, got there just in time for LBJ to arrive. We had a day and a half at CINCPAC in Honolulu.

Q: What did you tell him?

DURBROW: Oh, I told him more or less what I'm telling you now. We were very old friends. [We discussed] the problem I was having with Diem and why I thought they rose up again, the coup, and that sort of thing.

I saw a lot of Nhu, incidentally; I haven't mentioned this before. I didn't see him as often as I did Diem. I made a point of seeing Nhu, but the CIA boys worked more closely with Nhu, and I'd see him maybe once a month. Very little socially, because he didn't ever go out at all, but I'd try to make a point of seeing him, the foreign minister. But Diem really ran the show.

Q: Can you tell me what kind of picture you painted for Mr. Nolting, just in broad terms? Did you tell him the situation?

DURBROW: Well, I know definitely, as I've said already, I liked Diem very much. He was our man. He was not the kind of guy we'd have picked if we were picking the perfect guy for the job we had over there, but he was on our side and all the rest of the things that I've said. And I told him about taking half a day off if you're going to go over there. You're going to spend time, he'll talk with you. I told him how to break in if you can. If you can get him to break in, he'll listen to you. And Fritz spoke quite good French, too, so try to not have any interpreter, he didn't like it. He doesn't want his own staff to know what he's told you.

Incidentally, on that score he very politely and very delicately, after he learned that I knew French quite well and I translate back and forth, asked me when some bigwigs came over there, Lemnitzer or whoever it was, would I mind being the interpreter. He didn't want his own staff to know what he said to these guys. So I said, "Please, go ahead, s'il vous plait." So I talked to Fritz along those lines.

Q: Now, you say you went to Paris, is that correct, after this?

DURBROW: Yes.

Q: Were you able to follow from that vantage point what was happening in Vietnam?

DURBROW: Yes. I'd been there four years plus I liked the place, I'd tramped around the place, I'd been around, I hoped I'd done them some good, and then when I saw these really Halberstam-type, Sheehan-type stories and all the rest, they just made me burn. So I went to Drew Middleton and said, "This guy's telling a bunch of hoopla." Of course, I was still getting the traffic, the State Department traffic, and you get traffic from the Southeast Asian part of it, too, so I didn't bother to read it all. Anyway, I didn't have time. But in one sense the word that while NATO--that's out of the NATO territory, dealing with the French and other powers, and what of our picture in Vietnam and what we were doing out there and when our troops came in. So I was Mr. Vietnam on the American delegation to NATO and discussed it with the council once in a while, something that happened and what did you hear about it. So I tried to keep in fairly close touch with it, not just from the press.

Q: What was your reaction when the news of the Diem coup, the one in 1963, came over?

DURBROW: I was just stunned. I was. I couldn't tell you, guarantee what happened. I knew it was going to be one hell of a mess. There's nobody can take over, because [when] I made that suggestion, sent with this instruction, and I said you might think about [replacing Diem], we had tried to think who the heck we might get to be forceful enough and have enough backing in the country, constituency in the country, and we couldn't think of anybody. We had some names, but nobody would be even half as good as we thought Diem was. Because he worked like the devil, you know; he was a bachelor. He worked too much to delegate authority. I understand he worked about sixteen hours a day and never took any vacation or whatnot. I knew there was going to be

one hell of a mess and it turned out to be worse than I thought it would be.

Q: What was your reaction to the revelations that it was apparently an American initiative which started that ball rolling down that hill?

DURBROW: I didn't doubt it from what I knew already and from what I'd heard after I left, that he wasn't democratic enough. Now, I want to make this clear, and I want to say it whether anybody likes it or not. We are completely wonderful in our thoughts about everybody having all the four freedoms, all the civil rights and all the ten commandments and the original ten Constitutional amendments. It's a beautiful thought and I hope it works in every country, but it can't. It just can't work. Today in the world there are about fourteen countries that have really practiced democracy in our sense of the word that the authority has changed hands by a fairly honest secret balloting process. Only about fourteen left. Latin America doesn't count; Eastern Europe doesn't count; Germany doesn't count--I mean, since the Take the day of the Soviet revolution in 1917. From 1917 to date, there are about fourteen countries that have changed their governments by the ballot process, by the secret ballots and freedom of the press and so forth. They're wonderful thoughts and they work when they work, but to try to say we must have Diem or the generals in the Argentine or wherever it is, Duarte in El Salvador today, [to tell them], "You have free elections or else we won't back them up any mere," it's a beautiful thought and I wish it were practical, but it isn't.

So I resisted all these ideas about these free elections and I said, "Well we have to go through the motions." And the May 2 ones were, for that part of the world, pretty good. [He] had a few opposition token things, and people went to the ballot box. Now, Ky, on the other hand, when he had his election in 1964-65--I've forgotten when.

Q: September 1966 I think.

DURBROW: 1966, yes, yes, sorry. But when the Buddhists boycotted it--I want to get that on the record: Vietnam is not a Buddhist country, never has been a Buddhist country and can't be, unless they boot a bunch of them in. About 10 per cent of the population in Vietnam were Buddhists. About 10 per cent were Catholics. There were the Montagnards, a million of same. The census out there is very elastic. Nobody else had one, really. The Chinese are about two million, and in my day out there, there were about fourteen million in South Vietnam. And there were the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao and the Binh Xuyen who got wiped out. There were the other Buddhists--the Cambodian Buddhists, Mahayana, what do they call it?

Q: Mahayana ?

DURBROW: Mahayana, yes. And most of the population, about 40 per cent of the population, are synergistic religion. It's a composite. It's a mixture of Confucianism, Taoism, some tenets of Buddhism--but very few tenets of Buddhism--ancestor worship and When the Halberstams and the rest of the boys would get this telegram, this telephone call that Thich Quang Duc is going to burn himself up at Forty-second and Broadway in Saigon, he's going to speak on Tu Do Street, they'd all go over there with a camera. And we had the impression that this dirty, mean old Catholic Diem--and I'm not a Catholic myself--was persecuting these nice, poor Buddhist

people. It was just the best bunch of propaganda and undermining operations you can think of.

Q: What do you suppose was motivating those Buddhists who immolated themselves?

DURBROW: Well, I think what started the thing probably--and this happened while I was there, just before I left, on Buddha's birthday in 1961 up in Hue they had this march. They weren't supposed to parade as Buddhists per se, and they did and somebody in the militia or the civil guard shot and killed quite a few of them. That gave them the martyrs, and it was from that time on that the Buddhists tried to get this publicity and things of that kind. I wasn't there when it was going on, but they were just so wrong that it was a Buddhist country and this dirty old Catholic--he was very tolerant of religion. He knew the difficulties that he was having as being basically a Catholic, and a very devout one.

Q: How did you read the disorders in the cities during that summer of 1963, the so-called Buddhist troubles?

DURBROW: They were all contrived, all contrived, I think probably by the disinformation department in Moscow that induced these guys to do it. The Viet Cong, the Viet Minh, the rest of these people, the NPLA in Angola, those are all--the SWAPO in Namibia right today--that, Moscow started backing and applauding and praising SWAPO in 1964 in Pravda and Izvestia -- which I read all the time, one of my sins. And they go on to these things and it works, and they kept people to give them some supports, supplies, munitions. Well, they found this Buddhist group after the shooting up in Hue and said, "Hey, we can disrupt this whole doggone thing down there. Let's get going and use them." And I don't know. That's the way it operates, I know from other experiences.

Q: The Tonkin Gulf incident--and I know you were not there--

DURBROW: Yes.

Q: But of course everybody at the time and since has put some kind of interpretation on it if only to explain it to themselves, and the one that mystifies me--and I have no reason to think that you know more about this than anybody else, but I want to ask you--what motivated the North Vietnamese in that incident? I have never heard a good explanation, not that I've asked everybody.

DURBROW: Well, again, I get back to what I started to talk about earlier, that we don't understand what a war of national liberation is all about. And your other sources that said this was what they hoped to do by political means and we forced them to come with force, that is just for the birds. It's happened all over the damn place, in Cuba, Vietnam, El Salvador, South Yemen, the Pathet Lao in Laos. They concoct these local insurrections and they don't work, they've got to use more and more and more and more force. By that time, the boys weren't doing too well, their armed forces and whatnot. And they started blowing up our barracks down there in the South and things of that kind. They'd done some of that when I was there, you know, they did two bombings when I was there. Fortunately, nobody was really badly hurt, but they could have been. They tried to do it subtly. I'm talking about the communists, not just North Vietnam,

the apparat. Every once in a while they'd want to get a provocative thing going and they'd do it. It's not done by some battery commander that got drunk that day and pulled the lanyard and shelled the land just as far as whatever it is. I don't know exactly what the motivation was, but they were up there in their territory, of course, in the Gulf of Tonkin, and they were getting pretty in close I suppose, and they said, "Well, we've got to try to scare these guys off." I don't know. They're not afraid of doing a thing like that and when they feel they're not doing too well otherwise, why not try to shoot the works a bit?

By the way, I took my oldest son out to see the Verdun war battlefields out there, and we'd gone out for the weekend in Paris and were driving and I had the radio on and by golly, I heard about the Gulf of Tonkin. I cheered, "We're finally going to clean that place up."

Q: How did you feel when the first combat troops went in? This would have been about a year and a half later.

DURBROW: Yes. I was all for it. The one thing that I really don't like and still don't understand, and I blame basically McNamara for this, but the graduated response which turned out to be also--and I hadn't heard about this before until I got to NATO. When you're trying to do a graduated response on the trip wire and on the Iron Curtain and all that sort of business, [it] just threw me for a loop that we should think in those terms. You either go in to win or you don't go in. Now, if you're not going to go on to win with this graduated response and a little bit more, a little bit more, then the bombing pattern was wrong as hell. What Nixon did in 1971, mined the harbors and bombed the hell out of Haiphong and Hanoi, should have been done from the day we went in and then they'd understand you. The only thing they understand is force and we'll use it if necessary, and if we go in there using force, you've got to have plenty to make it work. We just put more and more troops in, more and more troops in without doing [anything]. We should have] cut off their supplies. How the British did it in Malaysia, they just cut off all the supplies to the Chinese in the jungle. [There are] mostly Chinese down there, you know. The people that lived on the fringe of the forest, the jungle, they had to curfew at night, one person outside just got shot dead, period, no human rights, or they've got the wrong [person], woman or child, no My Lais. They just said, "You're out of bounds. Pfffft!" Of course, the My Lais are another thing.

Q: Yes, there's a difference.

DURBROW: Oh, well it wasn't at all. There were many My Lais in Vietnam, many, many, many. When you're working under conditions of that kind in a guerrilla operation in a jungle area, hostile, unfriendly area, you can't tell whose black pajamas are whose black pajamas, and you're taking you're company through. Suppose you're going to capture Hill 202 up there, you've got to go through some villages, you send word in, "Everybody in their quarters. If one person comes out, we're going to shoot." And when your troops have been hit before by kids being taught how to throw grenades, use small automatic weapons, so do women, when you've got people that have been trained to do that and they do it all the time, they've been doing it for a long time. Poor [William] Calley got caught and made a heel of, a terrible killer. God, that went on all the time, My Lais. You can't have Hague convention rules of war apply in a jungle, unconventional warfare type operation. You've got to be tougher than hell.

Q: How would you answer the people who talk about hearts and minds in a war like this?

DURBROW: Well, again, I say the hearts and minds of over four hundred thousand in the militia and the civil guard--five hundred thousand Vietnamese in the South were given arms by us through their government and they didn't turn around and shoot them in the other direction. They were dead against Hanoi, they were dead against the communist type of operation, they didn't want the Viet Cong, a lot of them had lived under it. So it's too bad if you get some women and children when you're going through a Viet Cong [area]. The Vietnamese understood. They did it. They weren't going to let their boys get killed because there might be a woman who did or didn't have a gun and she was looking out of a window and she had a broomstick in her hand. You just shoot. This hearts and minds and this hearts and flowers, do-gooder stuff is beautiful, but when you're in a war, you've got to go in to win. The reason we didn't win this war and lost a hell of a lot was--I haven't got the paper I gave you on it; I can give it to you later, because I've got it xeroxed now. But I ended up by saying, quoting Vo Nguyen Giap, the commander of the North, "This is the model war of national liberation. If we don't win this one, we won't win any others. If we win this one, it's going to go wonderful for us and the imperialists will lose." And we have ever since.

We just don't understand what that damn system is. I'm working on a piece right now for a committee over here in the Senate to explain where terrorism fits into this thing. Because way down the line in there it's a tool they use to make a war of national liberation work, or in countries like Italy or France or Germany where they have a stabilized, western type parliamentary government, to try to get their communist party into the government in cabinet positions by showing the people that the present government can't maintain law and order. People get shot in the streets in Italy or wherever it is and grenades thrown there and the Prime Minister gets captured and killed, [Aldo] Moro. "Gee whiz, these guys are no damn good. We'd better try to confuse issues, get their people disgruntled with their own present government," and then by using the ballot box, we've got a nice communist party in Italy, France, wherever it is, not in Germany. But then they get them in the government and start worming from within. And that's the kind of terrorism they use there.

Q: Have you--I'm sure you have--read or do you know the work of Douglas Pike on the Viet Cong?

DURBROW: Oh yes, yes, sure.

Q: What's your reading of him? He wrote a book later, I think, on the Viet Cong use of terror, specifically. Did that confirm your own observations?

DURBROW: Yes, it did very definitely. Gosh, when they cut off hands, they cut off heads, they put a village chief's head on a pole, not always but very often, and they impressed the kids. They'd go in at night, "Join us or else." They didn't dare desert, although some two hundred thousand did desert by the way of the Viet Cong forces--Viet Minh, Viet Cong forces. So in the hearts and minds of people, they didn't think Diem was God's gift to manhood, womanhood and all the rest of the world, but they had more confidence in him than they did in letting the Viet Cong take over.

And that's one of the things our press does. I don't blame them. They've got to sell newspapers. And they've got to make it sensational for anybody to read it: "Three Women Killed Yesterday." Ah, terrible. "American Soldiers Shot" whoever it is, or our side shot somebody. The four nuns in El Salvador, who the hell shot them? I don't know, I don't think anybody knows. But why are four women out at an airport unless they had some real reason to be out there, coming back at ten o'clock at night on a patrolled road, a road that was ambushed on many other occasions, with roadblocks on it by one side or the other, driving down the main drag in a panel truck you can't see who was in it? They either went by a roadblock they didn't see or didn't stop, and the boys let go and they got them. "Oh, my God, we got some women. Look, they're nuns. Let's try to hide the bodies over here." It's too bad they're dead, they were courageous women, but they were foolish to go down a road in a place where they operate at night. The guerrillas work at night as well as the other people.

We got ourselves all hot and bothered about these little bit of things. Our FBIs were saying all this time about whether this bullet came from this gun. Too bad the women are dead, but why the hell were they going down that road at that time of night? Too bad they were killed, it's terrible, but I don't think anybody has even suggested that it was done deliberately, their ambush was just to get those four American women, whether the rightists or the leftists or the middle got them. We get ourselves all mixed up in that sort of thing. So I hope we can get more realism of what's going on in these various operations. A war of national liberation's working like a charm for our Soviet friends. Vietnam was one of them.

JOHN W. KIMBALL
Assistant Security Officer
Saigon (1958-1960)

John W. Kimball was born in California in 1934 and received his bachelor's and master's degree from Stanford University. He was positioned in Saigon, Sarajevo, Brussels and London. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 24, 1999.

Q: *You were in Saigon from '58 until when?*

KIMBALL: July, 1960.

Q: *That should have been fascinating.*

KIMBALL: It was very interesting. I should add that I was married in the summer of '58 as well.

Q: *Where did you meet your wife?*

KIMBALL: In the State Department. Lyla (Rustan) was a secretary in UN Political Affairs and we were introduced by mutual friends. In those days one could arrange blind dates, and this one

worked out very well for me.

Q: Not too much earlier I've had men say that they were called before personnel and some crusty old gentleman would say, "You've been overseas long enough and we want you back here in Washington and it's up to you to get a wife." It usually worked out too.

KIMBALL: Lyla went from IO on assignment to New Delhi and stayed there for about six months. I finally was able to persuade her to come back and we got married in July of '58. Soon after, I learned of my assignment to Saigon and we got there in late August, via stopovers in Tokyo and Hong Kong. (Our memorandum of assignment was dated August 13 and told us we should arrive at post on or about August 30!) I was assigned as the assistant security officer in a regional security office which covered Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Q: What was Saigon, South Vietnam, like at that time?

KIMBALL: I had to consult a map at FSI to make sure I knew where I was going because my interests had been concentrated on Europe. It struck me upon arrival as very much a French ambiance. That was because we drove down the main street of Saigon and saw what the French had left. There were still French restaurants, and French was still a language that one could get around in. Saigon itself was a very pleasant city. Cholon was also fun to visit, with its own ethnic Chinese population. But you didn't have to go far to see how lower-income Vietnamese lived in what for us were very poor conditions. I also learned that even in late '58, early '59, we were not to drive around the countryside at night. We had to take precautions.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you were there?

KIMBALL: Elbridge Durbrow was the ambassador for my entire two years.

Q: Did you have anything to do with him?

KIMBALL: At that time our Embassy was on a corner not far from the Saigon River (Vo-di Nguy and Ham-Nghi streets) and the security office and the administrative office were in the annex which was a couple of doors away. I didn't have contact with the Ambassador directly. However, our house was across the street from the Residence and we frequently went over there on Sunday nights to play badminton, and enjoy the gatherings he put on for Embassy personnel. Our cooks traded tablecloths when entertaining. Ambassador Durbrow was an old EE hand and he knew a couple of people with whom I had worked on the Soviet desk. However, as a junior officer in the "annex," I had no regular access to the substantive work of the Embassy.

Q: As a security officer what were your responsibilities?

KIMBALL: We screened local employees and conducted the traditional physical security checks such as controlling public access, Marine guard deployments, and document security. My supervisor, Warren McMurray, did the liaison with the Vietnamese authorities, assisted by a local employee, Dick Robertson, a young man of English parents who had grown up in Saigon. For a new junior Foreign Service officer it was a good way to find out how missions operated

and for an administrative job - and maybe I shouldn't put it this way - it had some substantive overtones to it. You had to know what was going on. You had to work with some of the other agencies in town. There was a huge AID mission in Saigon at the time and we had to help them out sometimes. Incidentally, the first two names on the Vietnam Memorial on the Mall date to July, 1959, during our tour.

Q: We're talking about people killed in action, Foreign Service people killed in action?

KIMBALL: No, these were military advisors, whose names are etched on the Vietnam Memorial here in Washington. The first two military names on there are dated July, 1959, and they were killed by Viet Cong in Bien Hoa, outside Saigon, while watching a movie in their compound. We got word of that late at night. McMurray was away at the time, so I had to go immediately to the Embassy and make sure that things were secured adequately. One aspect of that job that I remember with pleasure was the opportunities to travel to our posts in Hue, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh, which were very interesting in those days.

Q: We didn't have one in Da Nang did we, it was Hue?

KIMBALL: Yes, it was Hue.

Q: What was Hue like?

KIMBALL: It seemed a very quiet and peaceful place. Lots of Vietnamese history and culture there. We had Vietnamese language officers assigned as consuls. Being in the boondocks, they were experiencing the realities of living in Vietnam much more than we in Saigon. I developed a lot of respect for the work they were doing. Especially after our next tour in Sarajevo, I often wondered how much the Embassy or the Department listened to their observations.

Q: Obviously some people had been shot, but how was the Vietcong or the communist insurgency viewed when you were there?

KIMBALL: It was something that we knew was out there in the remote areas of South Vietnam but you didn't need to worry about it on a personal basis living in Saigon. The rules were to not travel country roads at night, and to check in with the security office before you traveled to many places outside Saigon. I don't remember any specific instances where American civilians were threatened, or harmed, It was a precautionary thing rather than a response to specific threats.

After a great weekend in the cool hill station at Dalat, a small group of us returning in two autos had the misfortune of not just one but two flat tires, one on each auto. On one car the tire was changed but on the other, for some reason, the spare was not usable. So it was decided the repaired car should drive towards Saigon and seek assistance, while one colleague went along with a tire to try to find a place to get it fixed. Meanwhile, the remaining group, including us, had to sit parked on a remote stretch of road battling biting bugs and getting jumpy about those creepy jungle sounds as the sun began to set. Imagine the relief when a local bus came wobbling down the highway and stopped. Out hopped our colleague, Harry Christie, with a repaired tire. Always with a dry sense of humor, he had us exploding with laughter as he stated he would not

have minded the hot and crowded bus if it hadn't had all those ducks sitting on the rafters leaving their "calling cards" all over the place!

Q: I would have thought that in hiring Vietnamese it would have been somewhat difficult to screen them because you had this massive flow only three years before from North Vietnam and these tended to be probably the people that you were more likely to hire, I would think. They were probably a little better in French, better educated, and all of that. Was this a problem?

KIMBALL: In retrospect, I'm not sure we had a very reliable methodology. We handled name checks through a local employee who as I mentioned earlier had grown up in Vietnam and seemed to have a solid foot in both cultures. He conducted name checks with colleagues in the Vietnamese Sureté and I never understood exactly what resources were available to them. Of course, we checked with other elements in the Embassy too. At least nothing bad happened on our watch.

Q: Was it a concern that the communists might infiltrate into our secrets?

KIMBALL: I don't believe there was an active concern that they were actually going to infiltrate us by means of employment, although naturally we had to take precautions. In any case, our local employees were located primarily in the "Annex" and USOM (AID), not the Chancery. Our worries were more about the security of American personnel traveling around the countryside and the safe handling of classified documents.

Q: This was not the era where people were coming around with bicycles full of explosives.

KIMBALL: No, but it could have happened very easily given the nature of traffic and circulation in Saigon. Luckily for us, however, we were there in a trough between the French war ending in 1954 and the American combat involvement later on. We were there at a relatively benign time with no overt hostility to Americans, at least in Saigon.

Q: Was there much of a knowledgeable cadre of people in the officer corps who knew much about Vietnam when you were there?

KIMBALL: There were colleagues in the political section and in Hue who were Vietnamese language speakers. We also knew John Monjo, an ex-roommate in Washington, who was a Cambodian language officer assigned to Phnom Penh. Yes, there was a real effort to get below the surface and I think that they were doing that. However, neither in Saigon nor later in Washington in the '60s and '70s could I ever satisfy myself that their expertise and insights were being adequately factored into the decision-making process.

Q: What about our American military, was that very apparent?

KIMBALL: There were about 600 military advisors. Professionally I had few contacts, but there were several nice bachelor officers quarters or enlisted men's quarters which were always fun to visit. They had great steaks, lettuce, and ice cream! I'm sure these installations, and the advisors, must have been obvious to the Vietnamese. A commentary sometimes heard among the junior

Embassy officers was that American advisors were helping the Vietnamese prepare for another Korea-type military invasion from the North across the 17th parallel, a contingency which did not seem as likely to us as a more subtle and insidious infiltration into South Vietnam's countryside, where we reckoned it would be difficult for outsiders to distinguish friend from foe.

There was a very large AID mission financing a lot of projects. In my second year there, I began to wonder whether there wasn't something missing: was money, or so-called development, going to solve all our problems? Was there a reciprocal desire on the part of the Vietnamese leadership to make the most of the foreign economic and other assistance they were getting? The longer I stayed there, the more that gnawed at me.

Q: Were people talking about basically corruption, nepotism, and all that?

KIMBALL: In my position I didn't notice corruption as much as I did simple unwillingness or inability of people in government to make decisions, or to make the decisions that we thought were necessary to use the assistance effectively and affect popular political attitudes. But there again I was an outsider as far as the AID program was concerned. There were a lot of well-intended things going on.

There was another factor that didn't get enough notice, I believe, and that was the Vietnamese' official antipathy to the ethnic Chinese resident in south Vietnam. While we were there, the Government decreed that all ethnic Chinese should use Vietnamese surnames. We seemed to let that pass, presumably out of our larger interests in the stability of the GVN. But it also seemed a symptom of the GVN's inability to capitalize on its own resources and co-opt the talents of a significant group in its society. On the other hand, this same antipathy led me to believe that we didn't have to worry as much as we did about the possibility of close cooperation between Hanoi and Beijing.

Q: Later it became almost overwhelming, but I was wondering about the CIA presence. This was something that as a security officer you would be aware of, but was it a big establishment at that time?

KIMBALL: I thought our office had a friendly relationship with the deputy at the time. They occupied a certain amount of space in the Chancery which I didn't consider overwhelming. In fact, the deputy, one Bill Colby, and his wife graciously included us in a dinner party at their home one evening. Beyond that I was not aware of what, specifically, they were up to.

Q: Did you have any contact yourself with the Vietnamese government, sort of at the local level, police stations, and all?

KIMBALL: I must confess that I did not because either my boss did it on the formal level or local employees did it on the working level. For some reason, it did not seem very necessary. It may have been a mistake in retrospect.

Q: You say you had Cambodia and Laos. Did you get to Vientiane much?

KIMBALL: I made a trip to Vientiane, where I did a formal security survey, with the assistance of a very cooperative Administrative Officer. At the time Vientiane seemed a long way away from anything and Laos had yet to achieve the notoriety that it did later. I remember being fascinated by a return flight from Vientiane on an Air Laos plane that was older than a DC-3. It stopped at dusty runways in Pakse and Savannakhet. For Christmas of 1958, we visited friends at the Embassy in Phnom Penh and drove with John Monjo to visit Angkor Wat. The stillness, the ambiance of Angkor in its undamaged and relatively undeveloped state, was a memorable experience. It was our first taste of an old colonial hotel, in Siem Reap, complete with sagging beds and huge mosquito netting surrounds.

Q: Laos was beginning to heat up wasn't it?

KIMBALL: It was beginning, at least in the remote areas. Again, it was a fairly friendly situation for Americans in the capital and of course we did not yet have the infiltration problems we later had with Laos and Cambodia.

Q: It's just getting impressions of this.

KIMBALL: Let's put it this way, it was safe to travel and what I remember most was the travel rather than the politics of it. I can't say I did anything that qualifies me as an expert on the area.

Q: When you were in Saigon were you picking up from other junior officers at all about whither Vietnam?

KIMBALL: Yes, I have mentioned several items already – the training objectives of the MAAG, the uses of our economic assistance, the use of our language officers, and the difficulties of getting the GVN to act in its own self-interest. I think we also covered the idea that the Vietnamese - north or south - had their own agenda and the seeds of doubt were sown in my mind about the “domino theory.” The Vietnam situation seemed just too unique and it was hard to imagine the North could have any interest, or ability, to carry its fight beyond Indo-China or allow their future to be mortgaged to the Soviets or Chinese. In the 1960s, I would ask myself whether it really would make any difference to us “who ran Saigon.”

If I can generalize about it, the feeling during our tour was that the Diem government was very hard to deal with. It was very hard to push in the directions that we wanted it to go to but it probably was the only administrative mechanism available and probably better than any alternatives. That was kind of a dilemma that was I think noted at the time: that you can't really do without him and yet you can't do much with him. By then he had absorbed the opposition in the South, the local warlords, and the religious factions, and things seemed to be on a path towards improvement and on the way up. If they would just use our aid correctly and unbend a little bit, they would have a lot going for them.

Q: Any discussion about the ability of the South Vietnamese army?

KIMBALL: I never got involved in any specifics on that. I knew we were trying to train it and work with it but I never saw any evaluations.

THEODORE J. C. HEAVNER

Political Officer

Hue (1958-1959)

Political Officer

Saigon (1960-1961)

Vietnam Working Group

Washington, DC (1961-1963)

Theodore Heavner was born in Canton, Ohio in 1929 and was educated at Case Western Reserve College, the State University of Iowa and Harvard. He entered the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included posts in Hue, Saigon, Medan and Georgetown, Guyana. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: What were you getting about Vietnam? By this time it was divided and Ho Chi Minh was the ruler in the North and Diem in the South. Were you getting anything about a contrast between the two places?

HEAVNER: I focused on the fact that here was a country not occupied by the Soviets or the Chinese communists which had nevertheless emerged from World War II as a communist state. North Vietnam seemed to have a genuine popular base which was, I thought, quite different from what we had seen in places like Eastern Europe. I examined a number of factors I thought had led to that outcome. However, I'm not sure we saw a glaring difference between North and South at that time. Subsequently, there certainly was a great difference. It was never like North and South Korea, though. The North was never that different, it seems to me. The Vietnamese think of themselves as northern, central, or southern, and in a way the division of the country was a throw back to earlier periods in Vietnamese history when the country had been divided between north and south. So, in some respects, 1954 was not that much of a departure from their past. But the Vietnamese are one people with a common history and culture.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when?

HEAVNER: I went first to Vietnam in 1958, had a brief stop in Saigon and was in Hue 1958-60. Then I served briefly, six or seven months, in Saigon in 1961 at which time I came back to the States and worked on Vietnam here. After a period in Indonesia I was pulled out and sent back to Vietnam during the war, i.e., 1966-69.

Q: Let's go back to 1958. You went first to Saigon. What were you doing there?

HEAVNER: I was assigned to the political section, but I think the intention from the beginning was that if I seemed suitable, and they wanted to look me over pretty carefully because this was

my first Foreign Service assignment, I was to go to Hue and replace Bob Barbour. That was fine with me. I thought that was a wonderful idea.

In Saigon, I was asked to do some very minor chores, and there were a lot of social events in which I think I was certainly being sized up. But it was all really just a prelude to going up to Hue, and it was a wonderful experience just getting there. I chose to drive up, and it was the beginning of the rainy season. Route One, the only road that still, I think, goes all the way along the coast was broken in many places by floods, with bridges down and various hazards of one kind or another. It took the better part of a week to get there. I had a great introduction to rural Vietnam.

Q: What was the political situation in Saigon when you arrived in 1958?

HEAVNER: Diem had had to deal with a number of private armies, the Hoa Hao and a couple of others.

Q: Wasn't that rather close to Saigon?

HEAVNER: Yes, the Hoa Hao were, certainly. Diem had to face up to them, and he succeeded in imposing his authority. He seemed a very vigorous and straightforward person. We felt he was a pretty good choice as head of the government, and it seemed at that time that with some help from the U.S., South Vietnam could become not only economically sound but also politically healthy. We unfortunately thought then that Diem was inclined, at least, towards democratic institutions. So, it was kind of a honeymoon period with Diem.

I saw him three or four times in Hue. The consulate corps consisted of only three consulates, the Chinese, the French, and the U.S. Diem's family was in Hue, his very old mother and a younger brother who ran central Vietnam like a fiefdom under Diem. Consequently, Diem came to Hue quite often, and when he did the consular corps, of course, would be out at the airport to meet him. On a few occasions he took us with him on his travels around central Vietnam. So, unlike most junior officers and certainly most consular officers, I actually interacted with the head of government on a fairly informal basis a few times, which was really heady stuff for a young Foreign Service officer. This was especially exciting because the embassy was intensely interested in what Diem said and how he behaved when he was in his own particular area, i.e., central Vietnam. I liked him then. I thought he was a very dynamic person.

What ultimately went sour, of course, was his dependency on his family. He essentially trusted only family in running his government and they turned out to be not very trustworthy. They let him down in a lot of ways. They were also very authoritarian in outlook. The idea of democracy was the furthest thing from Ngo Dinh Can's mind. He set up what was supposed to be a secret political party, which wasn't very secret, known as the Can Lao. That party was what he really used to control central Vietnam. All the prerequisites which he could give to the Can Lao party in order to generate funds for them, like a monopoly on the cinnamon trade, was done.

Q: Cinnamon was a fairly substantial crop?

HEAVNER: Well, it was in great demand because among other things it was old cinnamon which grew wild in the highlands and was thought to have great medicinal powers. Consequently, it brought quite a high price. There was also ordinary cinnamon, not from old trees, and production costs were very low, so I guess the take from that was substantial.

I knew the Can Lao chief financial agent, whose home was in Da Nang. In fact, he took me tiger hunting, but we never encountered any tigers, for which I was very grateful. He had a very sporting notion of how one hunts tigers, and the tiger really had a chance. He not only ran the cinnamon industry for the Can Lao, he also owned the entire Vietnamese merchant marine. I'm not sure he actually owned it, but it was all in his name. Their merchant marine consisted of only four or five vessels, but still... That is how it was.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you arrived in Saigon in 1958?

HEAVNER: Elbridge Durbrow. I read his obituary just a week or so ago in the post. I was amazed that he had lived to age 93 because I remembered him as a) a chain-smoker and b) a very active, overweight person. I thought he was a prime candidate for an early heart attack. Durbrow was quite a character.

Q: I'm trying to get a feel for these people. Was the embassy small enough so that even as a junior officer you were within his orbit?

HEAVNER: Not really, because I was in Hue. He came to Hue once and was our houseguest. I was in his orbit at that point. The Vietnamese laid everything on for him. I remember we went to Quang Nam province and went up the Tra Cuc River on a barge that could only be described as minor league Cleopatra. They had a couple of big armchairs on the barge for him and the province chief. It was powered by a little, very antiquated outboard motor. Durbrow was famous for mumbling, and he was mumbling and I was translating. This was difficult because the motor was going put-put-put- bang, put-put-put-bang. Durbrow would mumble, then look at me and I would say, "I'm sorry, Mr. Ambassador, I didn't hear what you said." It was not my finest hour.

Q: I take it the feeling at the time, 1958, was that South Vietnam was going to make it?

HEAVNER: Oh, yes. We certainly thought so.

Q: Was there any particular threat from the Viet Cong?

HEAVNER: Yes. There was indeed. In fact I am proud to say I must have been one of the very few people who saw some of that coming. I wrote a dispatch based on talking to missionaries and district chiefs, in the highlands primarily, who told me about infiltration from the North, that the Viet Cong strength was growing. I said this was a growing threat and an ominous one. Indeed, when I finally saw Ngo Dinh Can, who did not ever receive foreigners, but he...

Q: This was Diem's brother?

HEAVNER: Yes.

Q: And sort of the godfather of the central area?

HEAVNER: He was indeed and a very reclusive, mysterious figure. My predecessor, Bob Barbour, had gotten to see him once. I was very anxious to duplicate that as was the ambassador. I can't say that I got to know him, but I did see him. I spent the better part of an hour with him. One of the things I asked him about was this fact, as I saw it, of increased communist activity in the highland provinces as well as Quang Ngai. I don't know if he was ill-informed or simply wanting to put me off, but he made light of it. He did not appear to see it as a threat.

Q: Where is Quang Ngai?

HEAVNER: Quang Ngai is on the coast. If you go south from Hue, you hit Quang Nam province and then the next one down is Quang Ngai. The consular district included all of those central coastal provinces down to Binh Din and the embassy later added, because they wanted me to go there, Pleiku and Kontum, two highland provinces. The Montagnard country.

Q: Was there a consulate in Da Nang at that time?

HEAVNER: No.

Q: So you had pretty much the north?

HEAVNER: Yes, including Quang Tri which was up near the border.

Q: What was the situation in Hue when you got there? A little about living and then how a young Foreign Service officer goes about working in an area like that.

HEAVNER: Hue was a consulate although they didn't want us to do any consular work. If anyone wanted a visa or passport they had to go to Saigon for it. The reason for that was not terribly clear to me because we could have done consular work there. There wouldn't have been that much demand for it.

The main reason I was there, and Bob Barbour before me, and a number of other people after me, was to report on the situation in central Vietnam and in particular the area bordering North Vietnam and the activities of Ngo Dinh Can and his people. So, it was a political reporting post. I think the intention was when they opened the post that we would get soundings from North Vietnam. But it was a sealed border. We never learned anything about North Vietnam as far as I know. Certainly we didn't while I was there.

Q: Was there concern from the embassy and was it transmitted to you about Ngo Dinh Can and his activities at that point?

HEAVNER: We didn't know what to make of him. Certainly the word that the government

gave us was that he was doing a lot of good things. He was very interested in education and very supportive of the University of Hue. He was busy working through his people with USAID [United States Agency for International Development] to build rural schools and put in small irrigation works. One of the things I did was to travel around and look at those and it seemed to me that the money for the small irrigation works, in particular, had just evaporated. When I talked to Can, he was indeed interested in education, particularly the University of Hue. I think some of the money which he made or taxed was going there. This was a despot but he was not entirely bad by any means. There was certainly a benevolent aspect to Can and to Diem. They did want the country to prosper and they did want the people to be taken care of, as long as it was clear who was in charge and who would get the cream of the crop.

Q: Were you picking up any mutterings against him and the Diem family while you were in Hue or was Hue pretty much in their pocket?

HEAVNER: One of the things I reported on was how Cam had picked up on a lot of communist tactics for controlling the population, like peasant farmer organizations and political study sessions. He had not done nearly as good a job as the communists did in the North, but he had picked up on a lot of their methods and people were afraid to complain about him and Diem. There was no freedom of expression. I think that central Vietnam was a pretty introverted, reticent kind of culture to begin with and became more so under Can.

This was the heartland of Vietnam in many respects. Hue was the old dynastic capital for many years, and Bao Dai had been there under the French not so long before.

Q: Was there still a royal presence in Hue and did that have any significance?

HEAVNER: There were relatives I was told, but I never met them and they had as far as I could make out no political impact. I think any of them who might have been interested had been forced to leave. Bao Dai, himself, of course, was very much out of the picture.

Q: Yes, he was in France.

HEAVNER: And I don't think he was wanting to come back.

Q: How did you go about your business?

HEAVNER: That was a bit of a problem for me initially. It was not entirely clear how I would operate there. I began by doing a lot of traveling. In fact I did a lot of traveling throughout because I found that the people who would talk most readily were district chiefs and sometimes province chiefs outside of Hue. I made a lot of contacts within the city, although there wasn't a lot of social life there to begin with. But these tended to be very careful about what they said. I got a lot more information from people in the countryside about what was going on. I reported that. We did a series of provincial surveys in which I described everything I could find out about each province - its economy, its political structure, and what the Can Lao seemed to be doing there. Who the province and district chiefs were and where they came from and how they interacted with the Montagnards in the case of the highlands at least, and in the case of Quang

Ngai with the Cham minority. Strangely enough there is still a Cham minority there.

I did a comprehensive survey of each of those provinces as I could, beginning with Binh Dinh, because my predecessor had done Thua Thien and Quang Tri. I did Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Pleiku, and Kontum. That took quite a while, actually because I had to come and go several times and travel over those roads was slow.

Q: This was long before the time when if you wanted to go anywhere you just whistled up a helicopter and off you would go.

HEAVNER: Yes.

Q: Were there many missionaries there?

HEAVNER: I found one who was a very good source and very knowledgeable. He had spent many years there, mostly in the highlands, but also along the coast. He didn't have the parochial point of view that so many of the missionaries encapsulated themselves in. He really was interested in the political structure and what was going on across the board. I quoted him a great deal in my reports.

Otherwise, my main sources were some province and district chiefs who were a little more loquacious and friendly than most of the others. As I said, I did get to know the financial front man for Can Lao pretty well. I was his guest at his home a number of times and that was an overnight guest because he was in Da Nang. As I said, he took me tiger hunting twice and thank God we didn't find any tigers because his idea of hunting tigers was to get a shotgun with what I think they called a triple 0 shot. It had only three pellets. You went through the brush on foot with a miner's light on your head. The idea was that you would pick up the cat's eyes in this light and that would stop him long enough for you to let him have it with the shotgun. A very sporting proposition it seems to me still. Fortunately, I didn't encounter a tiger with him. I did later, in a much safer situation, but I didn't get that one either.

Q: At that time was there a feeling of oppression? How would you describe what you were getting out of the country?

HEAVNER: It was not at all well received in Saigon, but I thought, as I said, it was a pretty tight, well regulated communist style regime in central Vietnam, given the way the population was organized and required to do this and that. That dispatch was not well received because it didn't read very well from the point of view of this friendly, supposedly increasingly democratic regime that we were supporting. I did not see it as a particularly benevolent regime in that respect. Freedom of expression was not there.

Q: You say it wasn't received well at the embassy. I think an interesting thing is the difference between the...

HEAVNER: Well, Saigon was a very different place. In Saigon, the opposition did mouth off and they did get reported in the press. There was nothing like that in central Vietnam.

Q: Would you go back to Saigon from time to time and were you getting they would rather have you reporting on a different view, or something like that?

HEAVNER: No. I wasn't told that this was biased reporting, although I think that was the message. I think there was also the view in Saigon that "Hey, this country has never been a democracy. These people have never exercised much in the way of democratic rights. Don't get so concerned about it." Although that was never said. There was some justice in it, too, by the way. We are not exactly seeing a democratic regime there these days.

Q: In 1954 there was this mass exodus of Catholics from the North. Did that have an impact on your area?

HEAVNER: I think so, as Diem, of course, was Catholic. He used a lot of northern people who were Catholic. I visited some of the Catholic groups in central Vietnam who were still in very bad shape in 1959. They were on very unproductive land along the coast and being supported in part by the GVN and in part by USAID. They were certainly not going to be able to grow enough rice to take care of themselves. They were heartedly despised by many of the southern and central Vietnamese by the way. They were seen as carpet baggers and the fact that Diem used them as well as his central Vietnamese Catholics was part of the reason, probably, that he was not more successful in uniting the country under his aegis.

Q: How were relations in your area with the Buddhists at that point? Later this became a major, major issue.

HEAVNER: That is one of my regrets of my Hue assignment. There were a lot of Buddhist temples there and I saw them and thought about them. They were completely excluded from the political scene or excluded themselves from it in those days. But, I thought it would be interesting to get to know them and the structure of their organization and to write a report on it. I had always intended to do that but never got around to it before I left, unfortunately, because as you pointed out the Buddhists became a potent political factor later on. I suppose Tri Quang was there in those days. I did not know about him. I had not heard of him when I was there.

Q: Tri Quang became the Buddhist leader and very controversial figure later.

HEAVNER: Much later. I did meet him later on in Hue, but that was during the war.

Q: Was the Catholic church playing any role up where you were?

HEAVNER: Probably, but again that was not something that was easy to plug into. There was an assumption, I think, that the priests would do whatever was necessary to assist and support Can and Diem. They were very active in some of the social welfare organizations and educational efforts in central Vietnam. My assumption always was that they were important in that respect. The rector of the university in Hue was a Catholic priest. He was, however, central Vietnamese, not northern. I knew him pretty well, seeing him socially a lot. In many ways he was a very admirable man who worked very hard to set-up a university and bring to it

Vietnamese who had qualifications for teaching. Father Luan was his name. In fact, he came to the States when I was working on Vietnam here and visited me and had dinner with us. I think that was the last time I ever saw him though. I think he had died before I went back to Vietnam. He had a very active secretary general at the university. A young man who was very, very intelligent and very fluent in English, whom I also got to know pretty well. He was not clergy and had been educated in French as had his wife. The university was a pretty good organization as far as I could make out, a reputable, substantial educational institution.

Q: What about the consular corps? You said there was a French and a Chinese consulate. Did you ever work with them or was everyone off on their own?

HEAVNER: We did not have a lot of social interaction. The Chinese consul was an elderly man who as far as I could make out rarely went out and certainly didn't travel. His English was negligible so communication with him was in French and my French wasn't very good. So, I didn't have a lot of interaction with him at all. The Frenchman was an interesting man. I think the French did not regard that post as important and I think he was on the skids careerwise. He was a very tall man, about 6' 6," which made him remarkable indeed in a country where most people are five feet and under. I think he did have good connections in the remaining French community. There wasn't much left of that, but he was worth listening to when he was willing to talk, which wasn't very often. I think he saw the Americans as usurping the French role in Vietnam, however, and doing a pretty poor job of it. He basically was not very friendly to the U.S. or to me. In short, by and large, not a useful contact.

Q: What was the social life like there?

HEAVNER: Minimal. There was a Cercle Sportif, a nice building and right on the river, but it seemed like a haunted house. It had been a French enclave, of course, in the old days and the French were largely gone. In fact, as far as I could make out they were pretty much all gone from Hue. I recall going over there early in my tour at noon and walking around all alone in this big building and thinking how nice it was and how lonely it felt.

What social life there was was dinners. They weren't much for receptions. There would be national day receptions and that was about it. The province chief and the delegate, they called him, who was the central government figure for the whole region, but who seemed to be much less powerful than the province chiefs, would come to my home when invited. They rarely reciprocated. I think I was never at the delegate's house for dinner and only a few times at the province chief's home.

The head of the hospital there was very friendly, however, and he did have us around many times. When I departed, his wife thought it would be wonderful to give me a traditional Vietnamese costume, which for males was all black and white and sort of like a tunic with a headdress which was peculiar to, I believe, central Vietnam. So, they were good and well plugged in people and useful contacts as well as nice friends. My wife was a nurse, which probably helped. She had something she could talk about to him that made sense to him and was probably useful at times.

The head of the university and his secretary general were intelligent and knowledgeable people who when they wanted to could tell me things that I found very interesting. Often they were pretty circumspect.

Q: What was your impression of the Montagnards vis-a-vis the central government?

HEAVNER: I think it is fair to say the Vietnamese in general, then and perhaps still, regard the Montagnards as slightly less than human. They were not well treated and the animosity was reciprocated. The Montagnards did not like the Vietnamese any better than the Vietnamese liked them. I did manage to see and talk to some Montagnards, which was difficult because most of them spoke no Vietnamese. Those who had any foreign language spoke French, and my French was not very good. Neither was theirs, I might add. Subsequently, when I was in Saigon during the war, we had a marvelous go around in which a large group of Montagnards that had been trained and armed by our people had decamped into Cambodia and we were trying to cajole them to come back into Vietnam and deal with the Viet Cong and the Ho Chi Minh trail. The head man insisted that our ambassador, who was then Henry Cabot Lodge, come out to meet him on the border between Cambodia and Vietnam. Lodge was not about to do that so he sent me. I and an army colonel landed in a helicopter in a clearing. As we were coming down the pilot said, "We haven't prepared this landing." I said, "What do you mean you haven't prepared this landing?" He said, "Well, usually we spray it with gun fire to make sure that there is nothing down there in ambush." When we landed and were surrounded by Montagnard troops it was a pretty hairy moment. It turned out they were friendly. But, communicating with them was very difficult, even at that date, because they still weren't speaking English. The colonel had no French and mine was rudimentary. We finally did get the leader to come into Pleiku and talk to the Vietnamese there. Ultimately they did succeed in bringing them back into the fold.

This was much later during the war. The time you are talking about, making connections of any kind with the Montagnard minority was difficult. I did make an effort and did see some Montagnard leaders. They did not make a favorable impression because alcohol was a big problem and they did a lot drinking. A leader there could afford to be drunk most of the time and they often were.

The Vietnamese once staged a Montagnard buffalo sacrifice for my benefit, which I attended as a guest of Can's financial front man. It had to do with Can's interest in the cinnamon trade, because the Montagnards were in the area where most of the cinnamon grew. The Montagnards were given water buffalo to sacrifice and it was a pretty sad, but I remember vividly the dancing women and the dancing men and the spearing of the buffalo who died very slowly, I'm afraid. A nasty business. Even though this was meant to be something the Vietnamese were doing for the Montagnards, I felt strong currents of animosity even at that event.

Q: Was Pleiku used as a special place at this time?

HEAVNER: There had been a lot of tea plantations in Pleiku before the French war and there was still one French planter up there whom I talked to a few times. I don't know how much tea he was getting out. Pleiku was kind of a wild west place then. We had an American construction company there that under USAID was building a road from the coast right up to Pleiku. This

was quite an undertaking because the terrain was really very rough. They had actually finished before I left, and I was among the first to traverse that route from the coast up to Pleiku. We had a military MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group], as we called it, there. I don't think there were more than a dozen officers there, if that. The main MAAGs were in Da Nang, Hue, and Binh Dinh. These were the military advisory groups. They would be a handful of officers usually, not a big contingent. And then, of course, there were the Montagnards themselves in Pleiku, with their strikingly different traditional housing arrangements on stilts with the beams going up. If they entertained you, which they did do a few times for me, a major part of the entertainment was to serve you rice wine. The idea was that everybody sups from the same straw, and if the rice wine won't get you, that straw will. You had to partake because it would have been a terrible discourtesy not to.

Q: Did you get any feel for the South Vietnamese military while you were there?

HEAVNER: Yes and no. The general in charge of what later became I Corps was a man who grew up in Rome and whose Vietnamese was not very good but whose French was impeccable and who spoke pretty good English. I used to see him occasionally. He was one of the principal leaders of the coup against Diem ultimately. I don't know that I knew him well, but I did know him.

Q: What was his name?

HEAVNER: Well, you know, one of the things that happens to you as you get older is that although these things are still all there, the recall mechanism becomes rickety. As I was sitting here thinking about him I could see his face clearly, but I'm blocking on his name. It will probably come to me as we go along. You would recognize it, I think because he was a well known general at the time of the coup. He was probably the only Vietnamese general whom I knew when I was in Hue. Tran Van Don was his name. There were plenty of military about and increasingly they were functioning as district and province chiefs, although most of the province chiefs were still civilians at the time I was there. That changed later on. They came under the military government almost entirely. But even Diem was using some military in those days.

Q: You left Hue in 1960 and then went down to Saigon for a while. What were you doing then?

HEAVNER: I was in the political section. I wasn't doing anything that I thought was of any consequence, but I happened to be there at the time LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson], then vice president, came to South Vietnam. He insisted that he have an American as his interpreter. Well, that was okay when he went to see Diem. We sent Tom Conlon whose French was impeccable and Diem was probably happier in French than Vietnamese and might have felt insulted had they sent me. Also, it would have cut the ambassador out of the exchange. However, Johnson wanted a Vietnamese speaking American to go with him when he went into the countryside to look at the AID projects, etc. So, I spent a day and a half literally on the laps of the Secret Service when we were in the vehicles and more or less at Johnson's elbow otherwise. It was one of the most incredible days of my life. You probably have heard a lot of Johnson stories, I think they are all true.

I remember we had stopped along a road bed AID had financed and there was a cortege of Vietnamese, mostly women, standing along the edge of the road waving American flags. Johnson riveted one Vietnamese woman and said, "Tell her that I am the Vice President of the United States of America and have come here to help the Vietnamese people." I told her that and she said, as Vietnamese do when they don't know what else to say, "Yah." And he asked me to tell her that this road is one of the great things that we have done to help the Vietnamese people. I did and she said, "Yah". Then he asked me to ask her if she has heard about the American AID program. I did and she said, "Yah". He then asked me what is she saying? Well, in Vietnamese "yah" is a "yes, I hear you," it is not "yes, you are right." It may be "yes, I don't believe a word you are saying" or "yes, I don't understand you," but it is just, "yes, I'm listening." I said, "I don't know, Mr. Vice President, she really didn't say." He stepped on my foot very firmly and said, "Ask her again."

It got more difficult as we went on because we were getting farther away from Saigon and the Vietnamese, at least, were getting a little anxious about his security. We got to a bridge and the abutments were festooned in barb wire. Johnson jumped out of the car, as he had been doing right along to press the flesh, and somehow he got around the barb wire and down into the village that was stretched along the creek down below without any escort. The AID director, whose name was Gardner, pattered after him and said, "Mr. Vice President, you shouldn't come down here alone. It is dangerous." Johnson looked at him and said, "Nonsense," I guess, and kept on going. Gardner persisted and Johnson whirled on him and said, "God damn it, if you can't talk nice you can't come along." He then moved on into the entrance of one of these little straw huts along the river and successfully cornered a Vietnamese woman in the hut. He went through the same drill again of how he had come to Vietnam to show our support for the Vietnamese people and did she know about the American AID program. She said quite clearly, "No." She then exited under the back of the house and Gardner not understanding much of what was going on got very exercised about what he thought and articulated as turning her back on the Vice President of the United States of America where upon Johnson bellowed at him, "I told you once, if you can't talk nice you can't come along." And so it went.

We got to the border of the next province over and the province chief had erected a magnificent arch across the highway which said in English, "Welcome to the Vice President of the United States of America." Johnson really liked that, so he stopped the cortege and got out and said to the vice president of Vietnam, Tho, who was with us... by this time they had put me in the front seat of that car, by the way, and I was supposed to translate Tho's English into Johnson's English, which after a few efforts caused Tho to stop talking all together, because his English was pretty good. Both Tho and I thought that Johnson, when he stopped there and said to his military attache that he wanted to take this with him to show the American people, meant that enormous arch. Tho said that it would be very difficult to get it down and get it into the airplane and it wasn't until Johnson, himself, and the military attache started to detach the banner that it was clear what was wanted. They did get the banner down with Johnson helping and put it into the car and off we went.

We finally got to what was supposed to be a military display. There were some maneuvering of troops and Johnson was sitting on a grandstand in a big easy chair. Sitting beside him was with what to me at least was a novelty, a portable tape recorder, property of an American reporter, a

rather attractive young woman. She had this tape recorder under Johnson's mouth. I don't know what he was saying, I couldn't hear it, but she was asking him questions and he was responding into the tape recorder. His hand was hanging down over the side of his armchair and he began to pat her on the thigh and then on the rump as he talked. Well, if I could see this, I am sure some of the Vietnamese could also see very clearly what was going on. But she is not paying any attention at all to that. She is just busy doing her interview, by God.

That was probably more than I should have told you, but there was more.

Q: Well, let's hear more because this is the personality of somebody. I take it Johnson was feeling rather constrained in the Kennedy White House and would kind of like to get out and do his thing elsewhere.

HEAVNER: He acted as though he was running for office in Vietnam, at least when I was with him, and as if this were an American audience he was playing to. He did everything, I believe, as he would have done it in Texas, and most of it was right over the heads of the Vietnamese.

Q: By the time you left and particularly being in Saigon, did you sense any change in the atmosphere between 1958 when you arrived and 1961 when you left?

HEAVNER: Yes, I think it was pretty clear by 1961 that the North was making a serious effort to infiltrate and organize a Viet Cong underground. The threat was maybe not a big cloud on the horizon, but it was certainly there. I don't know how clearly we saw that. It would be nice to say that I saw it coming, but I don't think I did. I knew from my own experience in Hue that some of this was going on, but if someone had said it would turn into a major conflict and Vietnam would become the linchpin of our whole foreign policy, I would have laughed. I couldn't see that coming down the pike and I don't think anybody else did.

Q: Did you see any change in the attitude towards Diem during your time in Vietnam, both throughout the country and within the embassy?

HEAVNER: There was a lot of increasing skepticism about Diem and in particular, his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu and his wife, the famous Madam Nhu. There was a very articulate, intelligent, well educated upper class in Saigon who thoroughly disapproved of Madam Nhu and her husband. They told us a lot of truths and probably a lot of exaggerated truths about them. How corrupt and nasty they were. Much of that rubbed off on embassy personnel so that under the level of the ambassador and the political counselor, I think, there was increasingly in the political section and other parts of the embassy a lot of questions of whether we were supporting a regime that a) could make it and b) that we wanted to be associated with. But it was our policy to support Diem - and that is why Johnson came - to be very closely associated with and supportive of the Diem regime. That was obviously how Johnson saw as his role and why he made the visit.

So, there was a certain tension in the embassy, and I was part of it because I had become increasingly skeptical about the Diem regime and I don't think I kept that to myself. Not that we weren't good soldiers, but when we talked in house we said what we thought, and I didn't think

the Diem regime was very effective or promising for the long term. I did believe all the stories about the corruption, some of which I was aware of firsthand from my time in Hue. It was difficult in Can's case to call it corruption because he did a lot of good things as well. In Nhu's case, if the stories were true, it was pretty out and out - there were probably Swiss bank accounts and the whole nine yards. Anyhow, there was a lot of disenchantment about the Diem regime in the embassy ranks. You may remember that when Durbrow left, he, himself, had become pretty disenchanted and he was replaced by Nolting whose mandate was to repair our relations with Diem and to reaffirm our commitment to support that regime. Fred Nolting did a good job of that.

Q: Did you sense that there was a larger commitment toward Vietnam when the Kennedy administration came in?

HEAVNER: Well, it was the Kennedy administration that really got us started there down that road. They were the ones who first introduced American combat forces, although it was done clandestinely. We had some close air support in Vietnam early on which was called Farmgate. I don't think you can blame Johnson entirely for our deepening involvement in South Vietnam. It seems to me that the Kennedy administration really got it under way. I was working on Vietnam back here until shortly before Diem was overthrown, which was authored in the Kennedy administration too, by the way. I don't know that you can say that Kennedy wouldn't have continued just as Johnson did. I think he might have done.

Q: You left there in 1961. When?

HEAVNER: It would have been the summer or early fall of 1961. I came back here and went to work for Sterling Cottrell who was then head of what was called the Vietnam Task Force and Ben Wood was his deputy. I had known Ben in Saigon. I was happy as a clam because I really liked and admired both of them immensely and we were doing something which was obviously increasingly important in our foreign policy. It had the attention of the White House. I recall Cot, as we called him, going to the White House and riding back to the State Department with Kennedy one day. The interagency group, which started out being called the task force and later became the so-called Working Group, was an interagency organization chaired by State and obviously of great interest and concern to the President himself.

Q: Why don't we stop here. We will pick it up next time and talk about your time on the task force which was from 1961 until when?

HEAVNER: Just two years, 1961-63.

Q: But a very important time.

Ted, we are going to be talking about the Vietnam Working Group, 1961-63. When did you leave in 1963?

HEAVNER: It would have been in the spring of 1963 because I went from there into Indonesian language training.

Q: Could you talk a bit about your leaders in the Vietnam Working Group and how they operated and how this very important apparatus was put together and what it was trying to do?

HEAVNER: It was already put together when I came on board in 1961 so I am not sure how it was initially established. My recollection is that Sterling Cottrell was the first director and Ben his first deputy, although I could be wrong about that too. It was an interagency organization that was clearly led by State in a way that in retrospect seems kind of unusual. It was Cot and Ben who did take the lead and clearly had the blessing of the White House as well as the seventh floor. It was a very nice organization from my point of view. I thoroughly enjoyed all the people in it. We met periodically with the other agencies. It was my relationship with Cot and Ben that made my working life then so pleasant, however.

Q: Ben?

HEAVNER: Ben Wood. After Cot left, Ben moved up to be director and I became his deputy. I think Hilsman was still the assistant secretary then and Averell Harriman took the job later on. Harriman was assistant Secretary then. I thought Averell Harriman was a very remarkable man. I remember him talking on the telephone, reading a draft, and interrogating me at the same time, which I thought was quite a feat. I also learned very quickly if you didn't get his attention in about the first ten seconds, you might as well forget it. He used to take out his hearing aid which was kind of a signal of "I'm not interested in what you are saying." That was when Harriman was assistant secretary. He came in with Kennedy, as you may recall, and after a very distinguished career at much higher levels, accepted that assistant secretary job under Kennedy. I guess this was a real vote of confidence in Kennedy as well as something interesting for him to do.

In any event, I ran into him again in 1975 when I was on Caribbean affairs and Carter had decided that all our ambassadors would be vetted and recommended by a panel of distinguished diplomats and other distinguished folks, one of whom was Averell Harriman. They were talking about each area subsequently and in due course the Caribbean came up. It was the custom that the country director, which was me in this case, was asked to join them for their consideration not of specific names but of the requirements of the chiefs of mission jobs there. Although I wasn't asked for it, I assumed that they also wanted recommendations. Harriman was sitting down at the end of the table and I came in and sat down for my ten minutes and began to talk about the requirements for the job in the Bahamas. About ten seconds after I began, sure enough, out came the hearing aid. I thought to myself that I had lost him again!

Q: When you arrived there did you find this group had a realistic, from your point of view, view of the situation in Vietnam or did it seem to be more dominated by the Washington establishment?

HEAVNER: I think it is fair to say in general we did not have a very good understanding of Vietnam, so probably we would have to say it reflected Washington concerns and outlook far more than anything else. Counterinsurgency was big in those days as you may recall. In fact, I think there was a period not so long after that when everybody was supposed to have

counterinsurgency training. So there was a keen interest in the problem. It was seen, I think through insufficient historical background and even more importantly through insufficient strategic point of view. The assumption from the beginning was that it was not going to be too costly. We were not going to be in a situation where we really had to expend vast amounts of treasure and blood. At no time, I think, and this extends into the Johnson years as well, did we face up to the idea that okay you are in a war, do you mean to win the war or not. We were never prepared to make the ultimate effort, for example, to somehow challenge Ho Chi Minh on his home ground. On the contrary we reassured him repeatedly, at least during the Johnson era, that we were not threatening the integrity of North Vietnam. That we weren't going to invade and take over that part of the country and reunite it by force. We never were willing to face up to the possibility, in short, of another confrontation with China and so we were sort of playing from a bad poker hand it seems to me. In retrospect it is easy to say we never should have gotten in there in the first place, but having gotten in as deeply as we had then, it seems to me we needed to make it clear to ourselves, primarily, but also to the enemy, that we were quite prepared to do whatever was necessary to bring it to the conclusion we wanted. We never reached that.

Q: At the Working Group level were you so involved in the details of working the situation that you all were just not even talking about what might be done?

HEAVNER: Well, there were a lot of phases. Again in retrospect, I think it is fair to say that we won the war a number of times and each time our opponent raised the ante. In 1967, for example, things were in pretty good shape. In fact, I reupped for a second tour there because I wanted to be there when the war ended. I don't think that was an unrealistic expectation given the situation then on the ground. The difficulty was that none of us foresaw the ability and the willingness of North Vietnam to inject more and more men and materiel into the effort, and for the Soviet and Chinese backers to continue their support at the necessary level to raise the ante.

Q: Let's go back to the 1961-63 period. While you were sitting with this Working Group was it a topic of discussion where we should go or something of this nature?

HEAVNER: We thought a lot of precedents like Malaysia, and in fact had an expert on Malaysia come talk to us a number of times. The assumption was that if that strategy which was translated into strategic hamlets in the Vietnam context worked in Malaysia, it ought to work in Vietnam. The difficulty, of course, was that Malaysia had no common border with a communist supporter and therefore was not able to get the continuous infusions of assistance that North Vietnam and the VC got. The other problem was that the Malaysian communists just weren't of the same stripe as the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese are very tough people, very determined and had a long history of fighting off foreign invaders. The French were not the first, the Chinese were a continuing problem and the Vietnamese had driven them out a number of times historically. So, they were an entirely different kind of opponent and I think that was never understood.

Q: What were you doing in the Working Group?

HEAVNER: The idea basically was to coordinate all of our efforts. The AID effort which grew

tremendously over those years. The military effort which also grew greatly over those years. And the political effort which was to build or try to help Diem build support for his regime. That perhaps fared worse than some of the other efforts. Building up military support appeared to do rather well, although in retrospect it is fair to say that we never created a very effective military organization in the South. Certainly the AID program generated a robust, although very dependent economy. All of that needed coordination and direction and repeated infusions of American assistance which grew and grew and funds for it had to be found in the U.S. budget. Dealing with congress was part of Cottrell's job, not the part of it that I got into. When we got into the business of strategic hamlets, the Working Group, primarily at our instigation, although CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was for it, too, was to do a series of provincial surveys. We got what we thought was an okay from the Diem regime to do that, and they sent me back to Vietnam to organize and start the effort. The trouble was the Vietnamese kept dragging their feet and although I was there for six weeks, we couldn't get it off the ground. We finally gave up trying to get a joint provincial survey effort. It wasn't until much later, I think, under CORDS, that we actually did provincial surveys, province by province.

Our biggest concern from my perspective was the relationship with the Diem regime and how to strengthen it. Diem started out with some heavy obstacles. The Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai private armies were opposed to him. He really didn't have a lot of support even in the Catholic community and yet in 1955 he had managed to take over and exert control. So, there was a lot of vigor and determination there. Whether that deteriorated, got old or something, I don't know. But it became less and less evident that he was able to really take charge and marshal support the way it was required. Part of the problem was again a failure on our part and perhaps on his, to take into account the fact that Vietnamese people in general haven't supported governments. They have tried to keep government of whatever stripe at arm's length. Primary loyalty was to family and village. That was certainly true when I was in the Vietnam before the war.

One of the things that I think I mentioned in one of our earlier sessions, was the extent to which Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Can, had taken over essentially communist methods, mass organizations of all kinds, compulsory study sessions on a regular basis, right down to the family units which were responsible for one another. If you got a bad apple in your group who defected to the Viet Cong, God help the rest of you. They had had 10 years of that before Can came along because the communists were in charge there before. So this population was highly organized, highly disciplined and I think very scared and resentful of government of whatever kind. So, Diem, I think couldn't probably have marshaled the kind of popular support that we seemed to think he was needing and we wanted to help him build.

Later on in the Thieu Ky period, we tried to somehow graft our notion of political parties onto the Vietnam scene. The trouble was that our notion of a political party didn't resemble anything in Vietnamese history. They had absolutely no experience of it. They had had secret societies, all the communist organizational kinds of control apparatus, and religious based organizations like the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao and the Buddhists, but nothing like a western political party. In their experience, you didn't get support by getting a lot of votes, you got support by having your people in the right place to pull the levers. You had cadre in short.

Q: While you were on this Working Group could you give the perspective that the military were

giving to the group and also the CIA in this 1961-63 period?

HEAVNER: To be truthful, my recollection of that is pretty hazy. But, I think it is fair to say we were all pretty much of a single mind. I don't think there were any nay-sayers in those days. We all thought it was manageable. That with the right infusion of assistance and increasing advise bordering increasingly on direction, it probably could be done. We could defeat the Viet Cong and maintain at least a more democratic and more free section of the country than the North.

I don't think it was until the end of my time, and even after that, that we began to have people with real doubts. Paul Kattenburg succeeded Ben as the director of the working group and Paul, subsequently became certainly very anti-Vietnam war, as you may recall. At the time he took over I think he had doubts but they were not operative. When Lodge went out to Vietnam, and Kattenburg was part of that operation, we all, including Paul, I think, still thought that the war could be won and that a free independent South Vietnam could be maintained - and at an acceptable cost, I should say.

Q: Did you while you were with the Working Group begin to sense a growing unhappiness with Diem?

HEAVNER: Oh, yes. That was certainly a feature, and fairly early on, of our thought. I had come out of Vietnam in 1961 with a lot of reservations about Diem's regime viability. Those didn't diminish as time went on. We considered other options pretty early on. By the time I left we were actively asking ourselves what kind of transition might take place, who might be a better leader, and how that might come about. I consider myself fortunate that I left the Working Group before this had degenerated into a formula which ended up in the assassination of Diem and his brother. I feel that my hands are clean in that respect. I think we could have avoided that. It seems to me that it was really quite unnecessary.

Q: You mentioned that one time you ended up coming from the White House with the President...

HEAVNER: I didn't, Cottrell did. Kennedy was coming to the State Department to address the whole department, I believe at that time. He was keenly interested in foreign affairs from the start of his administration. One of the things he did early on was to come over to the Department and talk to us about how he saw things and to inspire the troops, which he did. When he did that, for whatever reason Cottrell was in the White House and when Kennedy went to the Department, Cottrell rode back with him and they talked about Vietnam. I was not privy to the conversation but I was delighted, of course, to hear that it had taken place, that we were getting that kind of high level leadership.

Q: Did you have any feel for the role of Dean Rusk while you were on the Working Group?

HEAVNER: I never had any contact with Rusk. Both Hilsman and Harriman were less enthusiastic than Sterling Cottrell, but Cot pretty much had his way on most issues. I think Cot talked directly to Rusk, certainly to the seventh floor, on many occasions and had their support.

I did have a fair amount of contact with both Hilsman and Harriman. I remember one of the things that Harriman was very much concerned about, and rightly so as we have subsequently learned, was the use of defoliants. He thought that was a very bad idea. That destroying food crops was a form of warfare that would backfire on us. That it would be seen worldwide as an inhumane kind of weapon.

Q: I worked for Roger Hilsman in INR about a year before you got involved in this. I remember he was a great enthusiast about guerrilla warfare, etc. He had been in the OAS in Burma. I have a feeling that he was the person who was kind of helping to sell the idea of counterinsurgency, etc. and that this was the key to everything. Did you get any feeling about his particular brand of activism about getting out there and putting the kibosh on the Viet Cong?

HEAVNER: He once spent an inordinate amount of time, I thought, telling me about his experience in Burma which was apropos of nothing we were discussing, or at least it didn't seem so to me. I think again though that I'm a poor source in that regard because although I had some contact with Hilsman, it was Cottrell and Ben Wood, subsequently, who had most contact with him.

Q: What was your impression during the 1961-63 period of how the media dealt with Vietnam? Were you following the media and what the American public was getting?

HEAVNER: We must have done. We were very concerned about the impact of casualties on public opinion. I can't say I recall following the media intensely, but I think we must have been concerned. I am not sure the media was at all hostile then, however. It doesn't seem to me it was. Again though, I'm pretty unclear about that.

Q: It may not have been a matter of great focus either at that point.

HEAVNER: Well, by September, 1963, I'm just looking at an old State Department Bulletin, there was a statement by Assistant Secretary Hilsman and a Vietnam situation speech that I gave to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Clearly it was pretty central by then. The other contents are education and the USSR. Up front is Asia and Vietnam.

Q: What date is this bulletin?

HEAVNER: September, 1963.

JOSEPH A. MENDENHALL
Vietnam Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1958-1959)

Political Officer

Saigon (1959-1962)

**Deputy Director, Southeast Asia Affairs
Washington, DC (1963-1965)**

**Chairman, Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1964)**

**Vietnam Affairs, East Asia Bureau
Washington, DC (1964-1965)**

**Vietnam Affairs, USAID
Washington, DC (1968-1970)**

Ambassador Joseph A. Mendenhall was born in Missouri in 1920. He entered the Foreign Service in 1946 and served in Turkey, Iceland, Switzerland, Vietnam, Laos, and was ambassador to Madagascar. He was interviewed in 1991 by Horace Torbert.

Q: Well, I think it is a systemic weakness of diplomacy very often that you are afraid to make anybody mad.

About this time you began to get in to the Vietnam business?

MENDENHALL: Yes. After two and a half years of economic work, the Director of the Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, decided to switch me over to the Vietnam desk. I was very interested in this job. After all, the desk officer was then and I assume still is in the Department in many ways the principal focus of the U.S. towards the country concerned. So I was very happy to take on this assignment. I might say that at that time the Vietnam desk officer ran not only political matters, but all the economic matters with respect to his country. That was true of all the Indochina countries, it wasn't true of the other countries in Southeast Asia. I had handled Thai and Burmese economic matters but not political matters when I was in the economic unit of the office. But that economic unit did not handle economic matters, for some anomalous reason, with respect to the Indochina countries, the desk officers did. So I had responsibility for all aspects of U.S. policy and operations vis-a-vis Vietnam. At that time we had only one officer on the desk. I don't know what it is today, but I know before I retired, the Department had mushroomed and you had two or three desk officers dealing with countries.

There is one particular case I would like to raise in connection with my Vietnam Desk experience here in Washington. I think it is worth noting for posterity.

One of the principal things that arose during my tenure of about a year and a quarter on the desk, was approving the armaments and training of the civil guard in South Vietnam. The civil guard was a paramilitary organization similar to the Gendarmerie in France, which I think probably was its predecessor, since the French had control in Indochina, or the Carabinieri in Italy. We in the United States don't have anything exactly like it. We have either military organizations or

police organizations. We don't have something that stands sort of half way in between.

Well, the Vietnamese wanted because of the increasing insecurity in the country -- the communists had already launched terrorists activities and assassinations in 1957-58 -- to improve the arms of the civil guard. Unfortunately, President of South Vietnam Diem's proposal was to give the civil guard tanks and artillery, which was ridiculous as they would then be no different from the regular military. But there was an intermediate way of stepping up the quality of their arms and finally we got the Vietnamese government to agree to request the right kind of arms. The request came back to Washington through ICA, the predecessor of AID, which had a very strong police program.

It got here and the head of ICA said that this was not a regular police police. Which I think was quite right. He said, "This is not something which I think ICA should get involved." The Department of Defense was not about to take it on either because the civil guard was not included in the approved military personnel ceilings for military aid which had been approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for military aid programs in South Vietnam. So here we were falling in between the two stools. I kept pushing ICA on this and finally the head of the organization said he would do it if he got a direct order from John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State. So I drafted a direct order and Dulles signed it. ICA then agreed to undertake this program. As it turned out, the head of ICA was fundamentally right. ICA could not do a proper job of training and arming the civil guard. It was too big an organization. It was far bigger than any police program they had ever taken on. The civil guard consisted of about 50,000 people. This problem was never really resolved until about three years later after John Kennedy became President and had authorized a big increase in our military personnel and funds in Vietnam and finally induced the Department of Defense to take over the program. That was the really efficient way that it could be handled.

Q: Was there any question of it possibly be handled by CIA at that time?

MENDENHALL: No, because I think it was also too big to be handled by CIA.

One other thing that I did during that period was to handle Cambodia as an additional duty for a few weeks during the summer of 1958 while we were between Cambodia desk officers. I remember the office director said to me, "I am rather reluctant to intrust Cambodia to you because Vietnam and Cambodia are traditionally and historically at loggerheads. You are the Vietnam desk officer and are apt to be rather prejudice in favor of Vietnam. But I don't have any alternative so you will have to take it on."

Well I handled it for a few weeks and was very pleased when my temporary service came to an end and he said to me, "You have treated this with very fair objectivity."

During that period Prince Sihanouk, who even then was the head of the Cambodian government, paid his first visit to Washington. It was not an official visit in the strict sense of that term where he is invited by the President and therefore President Eisenhower would have nothing to do with Sihanouk while he was here. He would not work him into his busy schedule. I understand the President has a busy schedule, but when people like Sihanouk, leaders of small countries, could

go to Peking, or to Russia and get all the honors and attention from the heads of those governments, when they came here and didn't get the same thing, on a number of occasions, I think, it worked very substantially against our interests. We could not get President Eisenhower to agree to see Sihanouk, the best we could do was to get him received by the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. Sihanouk had shortly before diplomatically recognized Communist China. That was at the time that the U.S. was holding a line very strongly against further diplomatic recognitions of that country. Sihanouk did it because there had been one of the periodic flaps in Vietnamese-Cambodian relations over a little border marker in the wilderness, which had been blown up to such proportions that he decided to resort for diplomatic support to Peking and recognize them diplomatically.

He arrived here with this very recently on his record. I accompanied him on his call on Walter Robertson, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, whose meeting was almost completely a lecture to Sihanouk on the evils of communism -- predictably the way Walter Robertson would handle it. Then I accompanied Sihanouk to his meeting with John Foster Dulles. Dulles had this reputation of being an anti-communist fire eater. This was the only time in my career that I was ever in Dulles' office and I have never forgotten the way he handled Sihanouk. He didn't take the Robertson approach at all. He took a very philosophical approach in talking with him. He explained to him that we felt that the containment policy vis-a-vis the communist countries -- both China and Russia at that time -- was the one to follow because if we held that line over time those communist regimes might begin to change, to modify themselves. To be sure that is what eventually happened in both China and the Soviet Union. It is not the kind of attitude normally associated with Dulles, but he expressed that point of view and I think in view of what subsequently happened in 35 to 40 years of history it proved rather prescient. I think that is something that some of these anti-Dulles academics and writers might take into consideration some time. Of course, I don't know if this is even in the public record. It should be.

Q: I am not sure about this particular incident, but the idea has been discussed in the last few years by scholars, partly stimulated by Eleanor Dulles, perhaps.

MENDENHALL: I witnessed this and I can testify to it. I am sure I have a memorandum of this conversation between Sihanouk and Dulles in the official files.

Q: That is an extremely interesting point of view. Was there anybody else that you worked with in the Far Eastern Bureau besides Robertson that was particularly impressive at the time, or that you remember as an influence.

MENDENHALL: Yes, I have already mentioned Howard Jones with whom I have worked considerably when he was economic deputy assistant secretary. Graham Parsons came in as the political deputy assistant secretary in the summer of 1958. Interestingly enough, Graham Parsons has probably told this himself in his oral history, but this is another incident of my diplomatic career which I have always remembered.

Walter Robertson, as you know was the key man in holding the line against Communist China in the 1950s. When Sihanouk recognized Communist China Robertson happened to be away and Graham Parsons was holding the fort there. Our ambassador in Cambodia, Carl Strom, had done

everything possible, knowing the policy of the U.S. government, to try to prevent Sihanouk from proceeding with diplomatic recognition. His cables sounded increasingly desperate as they came in. Then a copy of an outgoing cable came across my desk which Graham Parsons as the Acting Assistant Secretary had sent to Carl Strom in Phnom Penh. It was a cable which was very understanding of the anguish that an ambassador in a remote country knowing that U.S. policy vis-a-vis his country was in a sense going down the drain was going through. I happened to be in Parsons' office right after that. He turned to me and said, "I went through a similar kind of experience as ambassador to Laos. I knew how lonely and distant from Washington he feels under circumstances like that. He needs something that bolsters him in the way he is handling himself." Again a human approach based on previous experience in the Foreign Service.

Q: I think that is as good a justification for a career Foreign Service as you could make. You went from there to Saigon.

MENDENHALL: Yes, I had been told when I became the desk officer that, if I handled that job properly and the ambassador in Vietnam, it was Elbridge Durbrow, agreed, that in the summer of 1959 when the assignment of the then political counselor in Saigon expired, I could succeed him. And that was the way it turned out.

I arrived with my family in Saigon in August of 1959 and served there for three years in what proved to be one of the two most challenging and interesting assignments of my career.

Q: What was the other?

MENDENHALL: Director of the AID Mission in Laos. Not as Ambassador to Madagascar which was less interesting.

In Vietnam I arrived when the security situation was already deteriorating in the countryside. In a few months, by January, 1960, the war, as I define it, actually started. In January, 1960 there was an attack on a regimental post of the South Vietnamese army by the Vietnamese communists and at the same time a reign of terror in an entire province south of Saigon. This was a quantum leap in terms of the kind of violence that the communist had been engaged in, so I have always stated that the beginning of the war was January, 1960.

At the same time internal non-communist dissent with the way in which President Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, his right-hand man, handled the government was increasing in Vietnam. These were our two great problems at that time and to remain so for a number of years. In September 1960, the Embassy, partly as a result of my pushing as political counselor, decided to try to put pressure on President Diem to appease his non-communist opponents by bringing some other men into the government and making some other changes and principally by getting rid of his brother Nhu, who was the focal point of disagreement. Nhu and his wife, Madame Nhu, were the two principal foci of the growing non-communist opposition in the country.

On Labor Day weekend, 1960, we drafted a message to Washington and got approval of a demarche to Diem on this point. The demarche was actually made when Graham Parsons, who was then the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, was visiting in Saigon. He and

Ambassador Durbrow called on President Diem and the demarche was made. Our principal recommendation was that Diem get rid of Nhu, perhaps by sending him abroad as an ambassador -- one of the classic devices for getting rid of a man who is unpopular. The whole demarche fell completely flat. Diem did nothing of what we recommended to him at that stage. Within two or three weeks, the first military coup attempt to overthrow him took place. This is what we were concerned about because we knew there was increasing disillusionment and dissent within the armed forces. The Vietnamese military were increasingly feeling that with the way in which Diem and Nhu ran the government war could not be won against the communists. These were non-communists, not communists at all.

I had been very much a pro-Diem man, even when we drafted these proposals to make a demarche to him. I wanted to see him get rid of Nhu, but was in favor of keeping Diem. But after that first coup attempt when Diem showed that he had learned nothing -- had made no changes whatsoever as a result of this first coup which had come within an ace of succeeding -- it became increasingly obvious to me that Diem, himself, would have to go if we had any hope of winning the war.

Now that, of course, was the beginning of the time of great disagreement within the U.S. Mission about the U.S. policy towards Diem. Disagreement which came to a head two years later, which I shall reach in a moment. The mission was split right down the middle as was the U.S. government here in Washington over the policy towards Diem. My own judgment was that the conflict could not be won because of the utter disorganization of the way Diem and Nhu ran the government.

At the same time that this was going on the communist war in the field was expanding and it was decided within our mission that we ought to draw up a unified counter-insurgency plan and propose it to the South Vietnamese government. A country team subcommittee was created with membership from the Embassy; MAAG, which was a large military assistance mission; AID organization; CIA and USIA -- five agencies represented on it. I, as political counselor, was chosen as the head of the team to draft the counter-insurgency plan. Much of the work on it was done by my military colleagues on the committee, with whom I had close and good personal working relations. After a couple of months we had the plan completed and submitted it to Washington for approval. The first, as far as I am aware, official act which John Kennedy as the new president in January 1961, took was to approve this plan personally, because we got a brief telegram from Washington -- "Plan approved at highest level." That term was reserved for the President.

Then came the job of selling it to the South Vietnamese government. The ambassador turned to me and said, "I want you to conduct a briefing and negotiations with the number three man in the Vietnamese government." The number one being Diem and the number two being his brother Nhu, the number three being a man by the name of Thuan, who had two hats -- he was the Chief of Staff of the Presidency and also the Secretary of Defense. So I spent a week doing that. I had sessions every day with Thuan, accompanied by some of my military and other colleagues.

Thuan was one of the ablest Vietnamese I ever encountered. A man whose subsequent history was in a sense tragic. In 1963, he, like so many officials, finally broke with Diem and Nhu,

himself. I believe he had to flee across the Cambodian border for his life. He escaped to Paris and never became involved again in affairs in Vietnam. I thought he was a great loss to that country because he had one of the best minds of anybody... And could organize and knew how to operate. I had very high regard for him.

After we concluded these sessions with Thuan, he had to present it to Diem. By that stage relations between Diem and our ambassador Durbrow were at a low level because Durbrow had on Washington's instructions, been pushing Diem on so many things. Diem was not about to concede anything to Durbrow. It was also known that Durbrow would soon be leaving on transfer and be replaced with another ambassador. Diem held out until Durbrow actually left.

Our DCM was on home leave and I, as political counselor, was Chargé for about five days. I think within 24 hours after Durbrow's departure, Thuan telephone me and said -- by that time we had reduced the plan to two essential demands: 1) unity of command in the armed forces (which seems to me absolutely essential in conducting a war) and 2) a unified central intelligence organization. The Vietnam government under Diem had neither. There was no central focus of command in the military and there were all kinds of intelligence organizations. Thuan said that President Diem had agreed to those two points. Well, I cabled it off to Washington, but the sad upshot was that this proved, not to my surprise, to be an agreement only on paper. Diem never did implement these recommendations. He was so afraid of a military coup against him that he wanted to keep his own military and intelligence divided. My answer to that was that by doing that and thus failing to conduct the war against the communists effectively, you increase rather than decrease the chances for a coup. But Diem didn't see it that way.

At the same time, I had been Chargé about 24 hours, I received a NIACT or FLASH from Washington -- "Lyndon Johnson, then Vice President, will be arriving within a few days on an official visit. Please get the concurrence of the Vietnamese government." The message was brought to me while I was at the main hotel in Saigon at a dinner the Vietnamese were giving for Senator Dodd from Connecticut. He had arrived that day and they were giving him a dinner. I got the message, I remember going out to the reception desk, and immediately telephoning Thuan. He said, "I will ask President Diem in the morning." I said, "Can you ask him tonight?" "No," he said, "I can't ask him tonight." Knowing how Washington, and particularly people like LBJ, could be impatient for immediate responses, and if you don't get them the guy who is in charge on the American side suffers. I had a rather sleepless night, but Thuan came through in the morning. I cabled it off to Washington. Then there was much back and forth. Johnson wanted to stay in a hotel and Diem wanted him to stay in the President Guest House. Diem finally won on that one -- Johnson did concede.

Our new ambassador arrived about 24 hours prior to Johnson -- Frederick "Fritz" Nolting. Nolting having had no experience in Southeast Asia before, let alone Vietnam, obviously knew nothing about the situation, so he let me handle the visit of the Vice President. I worked out all the scheduling with the Vietnamese government, all the activities. I remember being in the Vietnamese Guest House....this is something that I have always found remarkable, Tully. The first night that Johnson was there -- he was on a six nation tour, Vietnam was the second stop. This was a man who six years earlier had had a severe heart attack when majority leader in the Senate. He slept one hour of that first night. I was in his room with Lady Bird Johnson sleeping

in bed, Johnson on the telephone to Washington at 2 and 3 am in the morning. He slept one hour and had four more countries to go. Where that man got his energy I do not know.

Q: No politician could survive without it.

MENDENHALL: I have always prided myself on having a considerable energy, but at the end of that Vice Presidential visit I was more tired than I have ever been in my life and I didn't have four more countries to go. I may add one more thing in respect to that visit. Johnson was there two nights and one full day and I remember on the afternoon of the full day the Vietnamese general who was in charge of Johnson's security turned to me and said, "Your Vice President has changed the itinerary so often during his time here that I can't possibly keep up with him. I haven't the slightest idea where he is going to be or what to do to protect him. I can only hope the communists are just as confused as I am with all these changes he has made. That is his only hope under the circumstances."

Q: I never traveled with Johnson, but I did once travel with Nixon. Different personalities but...

MENDENHALL: Johnson was not the easiest man. Lady Bird is a real lady. Johnson was not an easy man at all.

Q: I saw a good deal of him during the days I was on the Hill.

MENDENHALL: As I indicated, our new ambassador, Fritz Nolting, arrived just before the Johnson visit. He came with instructions from President Kennedy to get along with President Diem. Nolting very quickly became convinced 1000 percent of the rightness of these instructions and was a total pro-Diem man. By that time I had reached the stage in my mind that Diem could not win the war against the communists and therefore it no longer served our interests for him to be in power. So there was this big disagreement between the ambassador and me, as political counselor, and it was well known.

Q: Who was the DCM at this time?

MENDENHALL: Francis Cunningham who was later succeeded by Bill Trueheart.

As a result of this disagreement, my influence and range of activities considerably declined. I indicated that I had been very close to the number three in the Vietnamese government, Mr. Thuan. He noticeably had cooled on me because he knew I no longer had the influence with Nolting as ambassador as I had when Durbrow was ambassador. A very interesting example of how power can wax and wane. So during my last year in Saigon I was considerably less involved, less prominent than I had been during the first two years.

I think for the sake of new Foreign Service officers, or even present Foreign Service officers in training, it is also interesting to recall some of my experiences under Nolting. We as political officers had very little contact with Vietnamese military officers even though we regarded them quite important in a political sense, because we felt that it might well endanger them personally if they were seen in contact with political officers. One night at a dinner party given by the

director of the AID mission at which General Big Minh, who was prominent in Vietnamese history for 15 or 20 years, was present. I managed to get myself seated at a table for four with him and talked to him in the indirect fashion in which one always talked with Vietnamese about possible dissent with the government. There was never a direct conversation. One had to conduct it very carefully in terms of circumlocution, but if one had experience in dealing with the Vietnamese one knew exactly what they were saying. Well, I had this talk with Minh and it became clear as we had heard that Minh was becoming increasingly disillusioned as far as the government was concerned.

I went back to the Embassy the next morning and prepared a message on this. The ambassador saw it, but he, like his predecessor, had always insisted that everything going out be cleared by all agencies. He sent it over to the chief of MAAG, a Lt. General, for clearance. The latter came back and said, "Minh had never said anything to me like this, I don't believe it." Well obviously he wasn't going to say this to the chief of MAAG because he knew the chief of MAAG was pro-Diem and any Vietnamese who valued his hide wouldn't talk like that to anyone pro-Diem. Everyone's views at the American mission were known by the Vietnamese -- they knew whom to talk with and whom not to talk to. Subsequently the chief of MAAG became as anti-Diem as I did, but at this time he was still very much pro-Diem. As a result the ambassador canned my message. This was not the time when dissent messages could get out.

I also around the same time drafted an assessment on the so-called strategic hamlet program. This was a program that was pushed by the British general who had been prominent in the successful British anti-communist guerrilla campaign in Malaya and who by then was in Vietnam advising the Vietnamese. It was basically a good idea that was picked up by Ngo Dinh Nhu, the president's brother, who ran with it and executed it in utterly the wrong way so that it was not being effective. It was complete chaos. I drafted a frank assessment of how this program was going based on the views I was getting from my Vietnamese contacts. Since this disagreed with the assessment of the ambassador and the chief of MAAG, that message got canned too. It didn't get out either.

The other message of some significance which I did draft during that last year was, I think probably the first one that dealt with bombing North Vietnam. I was in favor of initiation of bombing for retaliatory reasons. I never see why your enemy should get away with raining destruction on you unless you rain some on him. I was not of the view that it would be decisive in any way, but I suggested targets and so on. I think this was the first time, as least as far as the U.S. Embassy was concerned, that any such message had gone out. Both the military and the ambassador approved of it and it did get out.

So after about a year of this my three year tour in Vietnam came to a close. In the summer of 1962 I came back to Washington. I had a three year assignment here. The first year I was a student at the National War College, which was just what I wanted at this stage of my career. I enjoyed it very much, learned a certain amount while I was there and always look back on that year with considerable pleasure. I regard it as having been useful. My military colleagues, who of course were getting increasingly interested in Vietnam, were all fascinated with my experience there so I developed a very good rapport with them at that stage and found it a very satisfying experience. The Department deputy commandant at that point was Ambassador

Winthrop Brown who had been our ambassador in Laos and I had a good relationship with him as well.

I looked around, as one does at the War College, before the year was up for assignments. I thought the next step in my career might be a small post DCM position, but I did not find open any which I thought were sufficiently of interest careerwise to make me want to pursue the possibility. I did get a request to come over to the Bureau of International Organizations for an interview as deputy director of the office of economic and social affairs -- the office in which I had rejected at a lower level job earlier. I went through the interview and declined that job as it was not one that would interest me either professionally or careerwise.

Meanwhile, Roger Hilsman, who was then the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, indicated that he wanted me to come back into that Bureau. First as the so-called United Nations Advisor, which was a senior advisory slot, FSO-2 level, which had been held for many years by a lady by the name of Ruth Baker who executed Walter Robertson's anti-Communist China policy vis-a-vis the Bureau of International Organizations. He said that this would be an interim assignment because what the Department was planning to set up in many of the geographic bureaus was an office of regional affairs which would absorb several adviser posts that each bureau had maintained previously. He wanted me to be deputy director of that office.

So, I agreed to this assignment. I immediately found that virtually all I was doing, though it was regional, was Vietnam affairs, as Hilsman, himself, was at that stage. It was at that point that the only real footnote in history which I will ever have occurred. President Kennedy fairly often sent out special missions to Vietnam to assess the situation and report back to him. The Secretary of Defense, Mr. McNamara, had gone out fairly often as well as other members of the government. In early September, this was at the height of the Buddhist crisis in Vietnam in September 1963, Kennedy had a meeting of the National Security Council, or whatever he called the equivalent of it, dealing with the crisis in Vietnam and decided that he would send General Krulak, a two star Marine Corps general and known as the Brute because he was so small...

Q: I knew him.

MENDENHALL: ...out on a special assessment mission. Krulak was known to be a 100 percent pro-Diem and was very close to McNamara, Secretary of Defense; and General Taylor, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At this NSC meeting Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, probably at the prodding of Roger Hilsman, suggested to President Kennedy that the State Department should also send a representative. Hilsman, himself, was anti-Diem so he would have liked to get somebody in to balance Krulak's view. After he got back he asked me if I would be willing to go. I said, "Sure." He called Dean Rusk who said, "Mendenhall's anti-Diem views are so well known maybe we should try to get somebody else." Hilsman said, "I don't have anybody else. I still think we should send him." And Dean Rusk agreed. This was about 11 o'clock in the morning. Hilsman said to me, "The helicopter is leaving the Pentagon for Andrews Field at 1 o'clock." I said, "Well, I need both money and to pack some clothes." He said, "Well, I will call your wife and tell her to go cash a check and get some money while you go home to get some clothes." This was probably the only time in history that an Assistant Secretary called and told a wife of a Foreign Service officer to go cash a check.

I managed to reach the helipad at the Pentagon in time to get on the helicopter with Brute Krulak. We went to Andrews Field, got in a plane and took off for Okinawa. We arrived Saturday evening in Okinawa to be informed that there was a curfew at the airport in Saigon. That we couldn't get in before 6 am. So we had a few hours to kill in Okinawa. We went to the Saturday night dance at the Officers Club and I tried to get a little sleep before we got on the airplane again. We arrived in Saigon about 6 am.

The first thing I did in Saigon was to get together with Henry Cabot Lodge, who was the ambassador, who also knew my views -- his and mine were pretty similar. Krulak and I separated completely. Krulak, I knew, would have everything laid on by all the resources of the military. He could get around the country anywhere he wanted. The only thing the poor Embassy had was the Air Attaché's aircraft which was a slow moving propeller job. So Lodge arranged for me to have that aircraft, which took four hours to fly up to Hue and Da Nang. I knew that Krulak would come back here and say "Well, I have been in x many number of provinces. I know the situation on the ground and the war is going excellently." So I knew I had to get out into the countryside in order to counter balance his view and I got up to Hue and Da Nang. I stayed overnight and talked to people up there. Came back to Saigon where I saw a few old Vietnamese friends whose judgment I knew I could trust. At that time there was a virtual reign of terror in Saigon. Bill Trueheart, the DCM, invited my old friend, the number two in the Foreign Office, for lunch and told me it was even dangerous for him to come to a lunch at an American Embassy official's house. The fact he is coming and is an old friend and knows you indicates that he is willing to brave the situation even though it is personally dangerous to him. The situation had deteriorated to that extent in Saigon. Americans, including Trueheart, himself, were on an assassination list -- not of the communists, but of the Vietnamese government because of the pressure we were putting on Diem and Nhu.

I saw what the situation was both out in the field and in Saigon. Thirty-six hours after we landed, Krulak and I were back on the airplane headed back to Washington. We left Washington, Friday afternoon and were back here by Tuesday morning at 6 am and by 10 am we were both in the Cabinet room at the White House reporting to the President and the National Security Council. We gave very diametrically opposite views on the situation in Vietnam politically and as far as the war was going. When we finished, President Kennedy turned to each of us and made that remark which has been so often reported, "You were both in the same country weren't you?" This is what got into so many books -- my small footnote to history.

Fortunately on the airplane we had brought back with us two officials from the U.S. mission whose tours were up. One was the director of USIS, John Mecklin, and the other was an AID official by the name of Rufus Phillips, who had been running the AID program in the provinces. Both of them supported my point of view at the meeting with the President. Phillips, in particular, lent considerable credibility to my point of view because of the kind of assignment he was on -- he knew the area and the situation in the countryside very well. I might say that at that meeting with Kennedy and his NSC, Fritz Nolting, who had just been replaced as ambassador by Henry Cabot Lodge, was present. He immediately tried to impugn my credibility before the President. The man who sprang to my defense was no less than McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Advisor.

Q: But you stood up under all this...

MENDENHALL: At that meeting, though, I learned subsequently, that I totally alienated the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the point that the next time I went to the White House for an NSC meeting on Vietnam, I went with Alex Johnson, who said, "Don't open your mouth at this meeting." Alex was then responsible for liaison with the Department of Defense. I now know he was getting this kind of line from McNamara and Maxwell Taylor.

As a matter of fact this had repercussions on me and my assignment and career later which I will get into in just a few minutes. One doesn't alienate some of the great powers in Washington without consequences as you well know.

Q: You have to wait quite a while for a change in personnel. By this time were you Chairman of the Vietnam Working Group?

MENDENHALL: No, not yet. I was still Deputy Director of Regional Affairs for the Far East. The next event of significance in my job and career came at the end of October, 1963. It was known in Washington on the basis of cable reporting that there could be a military coup in Saigon. At that stage we were mounting a 24-hour watch in the Operations Center. I happened to be on all night duty the night the coup took place. I saw the first messages that came in to the Operations Center. As soon as I saw them I got on the telephone. I awakened the Secretary of State, Mr. Rusk, the Secretary of Defense, Mr. McNamara, and the National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy. I asked if he wanted me to call the President. He said, "I will take care of that." They got their first word through me of the fact that the coup was then in progress.

Everybody, I think, knows the outcome of that coup. It was successful, but within about 24 hours after the coup had ended, Diem and his brother Nhu were slain, assassinated, by military officers. It was General Big Minh who took over the government with two of his colleagues. Whether these assassinations were done with his knowledge I really don't know. I for a long time thought it probably was done by some military officer on the spur of the moment. But I have seen books and articles which indicate that Minh was responsible for it. I just don't know.

That, of course, was a traumatic experience for the Administration because they had no anticipation that Diem and Nhu would be assassinated. It was thought that they would be exiled. If one wants to look at this in a real politik manner, it probably from that standpoint was better in the end that they were eliminated. This wouldn't be a very popular point of view to express in the United States at all, but Diem and Nhu would have constantly plotted their return and added enormous complications to the situation.

Well, what happened in Vietnam after that unfortunately was a series of coups. We had two years of political chaos which did nothing for Mendenhall's political reputation because I had been in favor of replacement of Diem. But eventually General Thieu took over the government in 1965. I believe, although one can make a very good case that the coup against Diem was a disaster because of the subsequent chaos, over the longer run it was the wiser thing because I

think Thieu governed Vietnam more effectively and with better organization than Diem and Nhu did and certainly permitted closer collaboration with us Americans than Diem and Nhu would have. It was through that kind of close, integrated, cooperative Vietnamese-American effort that we finally succeeded in the counter-insurgency pacification program. As I said I was responsible for the first counter-insurgency plan which I know fell far short of the kind of effort which after many years of experimentation we finally devised in Vietnam by 1967, which succeeded in eventually winning the guerilla war in that country.

Now this is something I would like to stress. Many Americans, even many who were for the war, do not understand what actually happened in Vietnam. We were losing the guerilla war for a long time, but from 1967 on we and the South Vietnamese organized ourselves properly to win that war which was won by 1970 or 71. South Vietnam was eventually defeated not in the guerilla war but in a straight conventional conflict after we had withdrawn our forces and the Congress had cut back very greatly on the amount of aid going to Vietnam. As the general who led the Vietnamese communist forces in the final great push which took central Vietnam and eventually succeeded in taking Saigon said, "The South Vietnamese wound up fighting a poor man's war. We were better equipped than they were." -- because the Congress had cut back so much on military assistance to Vietnam. For the sake of the United States in the future, we should understand that we did win the guerilla conflict but we and the South Vietnamese lost the one where we should have won, the conventional war.

Q: I think a good deal of that is now coming out from others too, as well as yourself. It will be a long time before we have this history totally organized.

MENDENHALL: Tully, I might go in to one other thing with respect to Vietnam before I leave that subject -- you can see it is one that interests me very greatly. That is the upheaval within the Department over responsibility for Vietnam. I think this is something that would interest Foreign Service officers.

I have indicated that Roger Hilsman who was the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs was also a man who thought that in the early stages of the war the Department of Defense was not conducting our part of the war properly. That we should be putting much more emphasis on anti-guerilla activities rather than the conventional war at that stage. Hilsman was influenced by the fact that during World War II he had worked in anti-guerilla units in Burma so his personal experience had influenced him greatly. Hilsman made no bones either within the government or talking with the press about how he thought the war should be conducted. He and McNamara were totally at loggerheads. McNamara, of course, being the more senior official, met along with the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor every Tuesday with the President at lunch to talk about Vietnam. McNamara's attitude towards Hilsman was such that the Secretary of State had to agree in February, 1964 to remove the responsibility from Vietnam from Hilsman as Assistant Secretary, put it in a special unit attached directly to the Secretary's office. I was not chosen to head that even though I was director of the Vietnam Working Group because it was also known that my relations with McNamara were not good.

Bill Sullivan, who was then special assistant to Averell Harriman, the Under Secretary, was chosen to head the unit. I was moved in under my good friend Bill, and a lot of other officers

from various Departments were added until we had an integrated government-wide working group under Bill dealing with Vietnam. It worked all right but there wasn't really enough for both Bill and me to do so I decided that after a few months I ought to be looking for some other assignments.

Meanwhile Hilsman had resigned because in addition to the blow of responsibility for Vietnam being removed from him, there was a decision to send a special emissary to Cambodia to deal with Sihanouk over the situation in Cambodia and instead of Hilsman being chosen somebody else was and it was the last blow as far as Hilsman was concerned. I don't think you find this in Hilsman's book as the reason for his resignation, but these two things together I think are what led to Hilsman's resignation.

Hilsman was replaced by Bill Bundy, who had been the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs in the Department of Defense. He was very close to McNamara and obviously a man who could get along with McNamara when he came to the State Department.

Q: It was, however, Mac Bundy who had defended you before.

MENDENHALL: Right, they were brothers.

Bill Bundy asked me whether I would come back into the Bureau of East Asian Affairs to be the director of regional affairs. I had been deputy director. I agreed to do it and served about a year in that capacity. I can't say that year was one in which I did anything of very great significance. One thing I do remember doing there was to send a memorandum to Bill Bundy in the summer of '64, July, I think, when we got the first intelligence that North Vietnamese military individuals and subsequently units were being infiltrated from North Vietnam into South Vietnam. Prior to that time the North had always infiltrated southerners who had been taken to the North in 1954 at the time of the division of the country into the two zones -- North and South. They had exhausted that supply and were beginning to infiltrate northerners. That to me represented a change in the nature of the war. The North Vietnamese had always tried to portray that this was a civil war within South Vietnam of the southerners against their government and they had had some success up to that point because they had been using southern communists including those who had been taken north in '54 and retrained and armed up there. Having exhausted that supply they began to send in first individuals from the North Vietnamese armed forces and then units. It is pretty easy for a Vietnamese to determine who is from the south and who is from the north by accent. They know immediately where a Vietnamese comes from. So on the basis of that I sent Bundy a memorandum recommending that what we should do to win the conflict in my judgment was to send American military forces to Vietnam. At that point Johnson had not made the decision to send military units. We had a lot of American advisors, but no military units as such. I suggested just off the top of my head about three divisions to establish a barrier along the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam and all the way across Laos to Savannakhet on the Mekong River to cut off to the maximum extent possible the infiltration of men and supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam -- the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Preventing the North from sending down northerners I thought was increasingly important. I have remained of that judgment ever since: that is, in terms of strategy we, the US, followed the wrong one in trying to apply the attrition strategy which had been successful in World War II in the Vietnam

situation. What we were dealing with in the case of Vietnam was what was in effect a sanctuary in North Vietnam. Certainly we bombed them, but we had no intentions of sending ground forces in because of our experience in Korea. So in effect the North Vietnamese had a sanctuary in North Vietnam and in Laos. We bombed the Ho Chi Minh Trail a lot, but you cannot interdict by bombing alone. This may be relevant to Iraq today, I do not know. You have to do it on the ground.

So my strategy was to try to reduce to the maximum extent possible the constant flow of replacements. With an attrition strategy you cannot hope to win it if what you attrite is always being replaced by new men and new equipment and that was what the North Vietnamese did since they were operating from what in effect was essentially a sanctuary.

So as early as '64 I recommended this as the strategy to be followed in the war. Obviously we know that that strategy was never adopted by the United States. There are books published since the war, including one by a four-star general, Bruce Palmer, which indicates that he thinks this kind of strategy should have been followed as well. We also have another Foreign Service officer who recently published a book to this effect -- Norman Hannah. His book is A Key To Failure, I think. The South Vietnamese Chief of Staff, General Cao Van Vien, also recommended this approach. But I don't think it was ever very seriously considered within the United States government. It certainly was never adopted. Maybe I should not say never taken seriously. I think at one point the Joint Chiefs of Staff even suggested this, but it was never adopted by McNamara or President Johnson -- the two men who in my mind are primarily responsible for the outcome of the war in Vietnam for failing to adopt the proper strategy.

Q: However, general American psychology in the long run is what cost us the war.

MENDENHALL: Yes, but if we had adopted this strategy, Tully, we wouldn't have lost American public opinion. As General Palmer said, we would not have had to put in nearly so many in the way of forces and our casualties would have been substantially less. These were the two things that turned around the views of the American public.

Right at the moment we see this factor operating in the case of the war against Iraq. The Administration is following the path of the air war as long as possible because it keeps the casualties down and therefore they don't risk a reversal of public opinion.

Q: Well, does this get you pretty much through...?

MENDENHALL: Let me just say a couple of things. One of the interesting experiences I had during that period was to attend a meeting at the Foreign Minister level of the SEATO Council -- the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, which never began to amount to the same thing that NATO did in Europe and was eventually dissolved. But at that time there were annual meetings at the Foreign Minister level and I attended one at which Mr. Bhutto, then the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, subsequently the Prime Minister and President, was present. Bhutto, though Pakistan was a member of SEATO, was as anti-American in the views that he expressed at that council meeting as anybody I have ever seen. My view of him was formed very much on the basis of how he conducted himself at that meeting. Pakistan's foreign policy, of course, has always been

guided in large measure by its view towards India. In more recent years, Afghanistan has played a very important role in determining Pakistan's foreign policy. But then at that time Pakistan was being very cosy with Communist China and therefore Bhutto was very anti-American. Subsequently, when he became Prime Minister some years later, I think he modified those views and moved to a considerable degree towards a pro-American position. I think his daughter now is quite pro-American I understand.

The other thing of some interest which I did as director of regional affairs was related to an Afro-Asian conference. We don't have these any longer today, but in the 60s following the first Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia, I think in 1955, there was considerable interest in this. The second Afro-Asian meeting was to be held in Algiers in April or May, 1965. Of course the U.S. would not be attending such a meeting in any official capacity, but I was going as a lobbyist to try to prevent whatever damage I could with respect to our cause in Vietnam.

I had made a swing through the Far East prior to that time talking to friendly governments, officials at foreign offices, about the meeting and urging attendance and doing what we could to hold our position. We knew we would be outvoted as there would be more radicals at that meeting than there would be friendly countries. We were trying to follow a policy of damage limitation as well as we could. I was on my way to the meeting and had arrived in Paris where I had to pick up a plane to Algiers when word came through that there had been a coup d'etat in Algeria and Ben Bella had been overthrown by Boumedienne.

I thought since it looked like the Afro-Asian meeting was going to proceed that the best thing was to go on down and adhere to our damage limitation policy. I got on the telephone to the embassies in Paris of various Far Eastern countries that I had visited to talk to them to urge them to proceed to attend. I was on the telephone with the Thai embassy talking to an official when all of a sudden the Thai Foreign Minister got on the other end, I had met him at the SEATO council meeting earlier, and he talked to me directly about it. He said he was uncertain whether to go and I urged him to go. He agreed to go. We all got down there and I tried to stay in the background as much as possible because it would have been counter productive to put myself forward as the American representative, but we had these friendly countries who would be on the floor of the conference and we would do what we could.

The afternoon for the opening of the meeting arrived. Bill Porter was our ambassador in Algiers at that point. All the ambassadors were invited to the opening ceremony and he said he would take me along to the opening. We arrived at the door. The Algerian officials greeted him, he had credentials to get in, and I started in but was told I was not permitted in. Porter turned to him and said, "But he is my interpreter, I have to have him." Well, Porter was one of the best linguists in the Foreign Service. The Algerians said, "Oh, but Mr. Ambassador you don't...." "Oh, yes I actually do...so you come with me." So he pulled me through and I went right through. The Algerians were looking sort of agape at the way that he got me through. Out of sight of the officials he turned to me and said, "Now you are on your own, I can't take you into the seat." I started down a corridor and another security official challenged me. I had no credentials at all. He said I would have to get out of there. At that moment his attention was diverted so I dived into a loge box and stayed there monitoring. I was right in there where I could see everything. The meeting opened and within five minutes was adjourned by the Algerians and never resumed.

I have never known exactly why the Algerians did that, but from our standpoint it was the best outcome of the meeting, because we couldn't have won if the meeting had proceeded. My friends from other embassies whom I had urged to attend were a little annoyed. They felt their dignity had been compromised by this denouement. No, they were not annoyed with me, they were annoyed with the Algerians. So it turned out all right.

MENDENHALL: Then I came back to Washington and though I had not been very well supported by the Bureau for Far Eastern Affairs, AID fought for me as much as it could. AID asked me to stay on in their organization as the number two man in the Vietnam bureau. In 1967 Lyndon Johnson had insisted that the Vietnam operation in AID be set up as a completely separate bureau equivalent to a continent, equivalent to Asia, Africa, etc. That bureau had rapidly expanded under a very able man, Jim Grant, and had between 400 and 500 employees here in Washington.

When I arrived in the summer of 1968, Lyndon Johnson who had been the instigator of that bureau was on the way out of his presidency, so Bill Gaud, the head of AID, said, "What I want you to concentrate on is cutting the staff of that bureau down substantially. In the course of the year and a half I was with the bureau I succeeded in cutting it in half. That doesn't render one very popular as you well know, Tully, and it wasn't a very easy thing to do because personnel who were about to lose jobs were inclined to get hold of their Congressman and one is involved in a lot of correspondence and discussion with members of Congress over personnel matters. But we did get it cut in half and I was rather gratified by it.

After I had been in the bureau for half a year, Jim Grant, the Assistant Administrator, the head of it, decided to leave the government and go to an important private job and I became his successor as head of the bureau for a year.

It was a very interesting year. You are an old Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional relations and one of the few Foreign Service officers I imagine who ever had extensive contact with Congress. My understanding is that besides the Bureau of Congressional Relations and those in the Management Bureau who deal with the budget of the Congress, the normal Foreign Service officer in the Department, even Assistant Secretaries, don't have all that much contact with members of Congress.

Q: Some, particularly in the Economic Bureau.

MENDENHALL: In AID, on the other hand, one is in touch with Congress almost all the time because the key principal function of the AID Bureau is to get money out of Congress.

Q: As I remember you had a delightful Congressman to deal with.

MENDENHALL: We did indeed. As a matter of fact the worst afternoon I think I ever passed in my life was with Congressman Passman of Louisiana who was the chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee dealing with AID appropriation. Passman had been in that

chairmanship for about 15 years and knew his way around very extensively. But he had the habit of subjecting the AID people who came up to defend the appropriations request to a third degree harassment with a whole series of minor questions which they couldn't fairly be expected to know the answers to and then trying to ridicule them. He had a staff member who sat beside him and whispered the questions in his ear during the whole process of the hearing. I was up there for the AID appropriations for that year and was on the stand for four hours continuously. At the end of that time I don't think I have ever been so tired in my life. I think I didn't let slip one unguarded answer toward the end on which he pounced to try to show that our AID appropriation at the level we were requesting was not justified. I don't know how much you dealt with Passman.

Q: I saw him but I never faced him.

MENDENHALL: It was the AID people...

Q: There was a Congressman from Maryland who was a problem too about that time as I remember.

MENDENHALL: No, I didn't...Oh, yes, I remember there was one -- Long. He became chairman later. Passman finally got his come uppance. He was put on trial for something in respect to Korea, I can't remember it now, but that ended his political career. I don't even remember what the outcome of the trial was, but it ended a long congressional career.

The other man who gave me a certain amount of grief was also from Louisiana and that was Senator Ellender, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. I remember he harassed me at one point during an open, public hearing to the point where my middle daughter, then about 14 or 15 and sitting in the audience, got up and shook her fists at Senator Ellender saying, "You can't treat my daddy this way."

I would like to talk a bit about an interesting encounter with Senator Packwood from Oregon who was then a freshman Senator and is now the ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee. In 1968, Jim Grant, the Assistant Administrator of the Vietnam Bureau, before he left had driven through the U.S. government a policy decision in favor of the initiation of a drastic land reform program in South Vietnam. He even insisted in getting the signature on the cable of Henry Kissinger who was then the National Security Advisor. Everybody approved and that became the official policy of the U.S. government.

I was all in favor of it. I did think it was important that farmers buy the land and not be given it on a grant basis because my experience in Laos was that when we in the Aid Mission did anything completely on a grant basis for rural villagers they regarded it as "the American project" and not theirs and if the communists came along wouldn't raise a hand in defense of it. On the other hand, if one involved the villagers, say in the construction of the school they provided all the labor on a self-help basis and we provided the materials, they had a real interest in that school because they had put something into it and would defend it against the communists.

So I felt that in South Vietnam it was important for the farmers to have a personal stake in the land reform program by having paid at least something for the land they got.

This position that I held became known fairly widely in the government when I became the head of the Vietnam Bureau in 1969 and one good day Senator Packwood summoned the AID Administrator and myself to his office on the Hill and read the riot act to us as though I was completely opposed to the land reform program. I endeavored to explain my position but it is sometimes a little difficult to get some things across when a preconceived idea gets into the head of a man up on the Hill. Packwood had by his side a professor from the State of Washington who was known as a man who thought that the total key to victory in South Vietnam and the war was land reform. Nothing else mattered. Land reform would give us the victory. He was the man who was feeding ideas into Packwood's head.

Later the chief Agricultural Credit official from South Vietnam came to Washington on a visit and I arranged for a luncheon on the eighth floor of the State Department for him and invited Senator Packwood to attend the luncheon. I thought I would try to demonstrate to him that my heart was in the right place; that I was supporting agricultural development in every way possible in South Vietnam. Unfortunately during this luncheon it became clear that the Vietnamese director of agricultural credit was not particularly in favor of the land reform program. So this whole effort of mine boomeranged with Packwood. I came out worse than I was before I went in as far as he was concerned.

Later the professor from the State of Washington who had been with Packwood when the AID Administrator and I had been in his office and subjected to his third degree, published an article in the Seattle Post Intelligencer which was front page banner headline attacking me personally for opposition to the land reform program in Vietnam. When this was brought to my attention I sent out a letter in response to the article. The newspaper did indeed publish the letter which explained my position but then published a retort of the professor's side by side, which further confirmed that in a battle with the press you can never really win because they always have the last word, simply because of the nature of the media.

Another congressional experience which I think may be worth recording was one with Senator Ted Kennedy who was the Chairman of the Refugee Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee. Kennedy had manifested very great interest in the refugee program in Vietnam, much of it I think for his own political reasons. He decided in March, 1969 that he would conduct public hearings on that program. The AID Administrator and I were summoned up to testify. To open the hearings, somewhat to my surprise and annoyance, Senator Kennedy read out the conclusions of the hearings before they actually opened. Why? Because the press was there for the opening of the hearings and would not be there later during the continued sessions. So his conclusions had already been given to the public before he even listened to us. That has, I think, rather influenced my views of Senator Kennedy over the years.

The other man with whom I had a certain amount of experience over the years is one whom I know you have a different regard for from mine, Tully. That is Senator Claiborne Pell. I met Senator Pell in the summer of 1968 over dinner at a club here in Washington and at that dinner he and I got involved in a rather heated exchange over the war in Vietnam. He was a dove and I

was a hawk. I didn't think much more about that until I learned toward the end of 1969 that Pell had made it clear to Bill Macomber, the Under Secretary for Management in the Department, that he would oppose me for nomination to any significant position in East Asia or indeed elsewhere if it involved anything of any importance. And that explained to me why the year I was head of the Vietnam Bureau in AID I was always Acting and never named officially and my name submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I had never thought very much about it. I had as full authority Acting as I would have had with Senate confirmation and I had developed excellent rapport with AID people -- indeed when I left at the end of that year I was given a very fine sendoff from the AID Administrator and my colleagues as Assistant Administrators. But that did explain why I had never been formally nominated and confirmed.

Q: He must have learned all that from Fulbright who used those tactics.

MENDENHALL: To me, Pell is a reverse McCarthyite, the way he pursued me, the way Javert pursued Jean Valjean in "Les Miserables."

At the end of 1969 the Administration decided to nominate a Republican as the Assistant Administrator for Vietnam. I decided it was time anyway for me to come back to the Department. I had been four and a half years on loan to AID which was, from a career standpoint, long enough. I enjoyed it, learned a great deal and look back upon it as one of the highlights of my career. The Inspector General, Fraser Wilkins, asked me whether I would take on an inspection job and I agreed to do so. Interestingly, I indicated some interest in going to Italy -- there was to be an inspection in Italy in early 1970. When Fraser got the assignments worked out whom do you think he called to say that he was giving us Italy -- not me, but my wife. He knew that my wife was especially interested in going to Italy.

CECIL S. RICHARDSON
Political Officer/Staff Aide
Saigon (1959-1961)

Cecil Richardson was born in New York in 1926, and graduated from Queen's College. He served in the US Army from 1944 to 1947, and overseas from 1951 to 1952. Entering the Foreign Service in 1956, he was stationed in Dakar, Saigon, Lagos, Niamey, Paris, Accra, Brussels, Quito, Tehran, Lima, St. Paolo and Bahamas. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 5, 2003.

Q: Southeast Asia.

RICHARDSON: Southeast Asia. I went to Saigon, which delighted me. That was a good time to be there. The French war was over a couple of years and the American War had not yet started. It was a war alright. It was a Vietnamese War, but this was the period when they were developing the plan, how to win the hearts and minds of the people and send in the Green Berets and small groups to give medical attention and this and that. That was when that was going on. So that was an interesting time.

Q: So you were there from ... ?

RICHARDSON: '59 to '61.

Q: What was your job?

RICHARDSON: I was the political section.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

RICHARDSON: Elbridge Durbrow.

Q: You went back, he was an old China hand, wasn't he?

RICHARDSON: No, no. He ... where would he have been before? I don't know, but I don't think he had had any previous experience in that area.

Q: No, maybe not.

RICHARDSON: And then he was soured by old things.

Q: How, what was the situation in Vietnam when you arrived, we're talking about South Vietnam.

RICHARDSON: Well, we were solidly in support of Ngo Dinh Diem.

Q: Was there ...

RICHARDSON: We were not yet, not yet disillusioned with him as happened later on in the Kennedy Administration.

Q: Well, were they still talking about Diem being Arguit the Abonese Magsaysay, and all?

RICHARDSON: Well, that, if no one ever said it in my presence, but certainly he was our man. He was Syngman Rhee. He was Magsaysay. He was our choice. After he was, what in a convent, or a monastery in the States when they anointed him.

Q: What, where'd you live and how was life there?

RICHARDSON: I lived in an apartment. The first place I had was a completely air conditioned apartment and it was dark. Then there was an opportunity to move to the top floor of a small apartment building that wasn't air conditioned at all but it was so bright and cheerful so my wife and I moved there and enjoyed it. Yes, we really enjoyed Vietnam. We traveled all over the country north of Saigon. One time, I put something like 2,000 miles on that car, on the Volkswagen and it's such a little country I can't figure out how I got that many miles on it.

[Laughter]. And the people are hard working. They're cultured, I mean in terms of their own culture and of course they absorb the French culture and so for most and the food was ...

Q: When you get French and Vietnamese food, you couldn't ask for two nicer cuisines.

RICHARDSON: No, no. So we enjoyed that very much and it was a good time because as I said the French War was over and the American one had not begun.

Q: Who was the head of the Political Section?

RICHARDSON: Joe Mendenhall. I think later Ambassador in Madagascar, I think. I know that he went from Saigon to head up the AID mission to Laos, at a time when it was a very big operation.

Q: What piece of the action were you given in the political section?

RICHARDSON: You call "dog's body." The one thing that I had that I did all the time was in North, was a weekly report on North Vietnam. Now, where did I get that information from? Very often I got it from people who'd been there. They had the international commission.

Q: I see ...

RICHARDSON: These are Canadians and Indians.

Q: Yes, but Canadians, Indians and Polish.

RICHARDSON: Well, the Poles, we didn't have much luck with them but the Indians and the Canadians, we were able to ...

Q: And they traveled back and forth.

RICHARDSON: And I would include stuff that I'd been given from the political section that they'd picked up, a lot from the agency people.

Q: Well, how, was the CIA outfit the station, or a substantial station?

RICHARDSON: Yes. I would say that in my 35 years service, the best relations that I've ever experienced in my time. When I arrived, Nick Natsios was the head of the office and he took me around his shop to meet his people and you know there were no new barriers. And he was followed by Bill Colby, later Agency director. My wife and Mrs. Colby still see each other. So there were excellent relationships between political and the agency. As a matter of fact, they even called on me once because they wanted some cover. They wanted to make contact with a Pole and he played bridge so I invited him over to play bridge and the fourth was the guy who wanted to meet him. And when we left Saigon, Mrs. Colby gave a big tea for my wife. This produced a lot of question within the embassy, "Why is Mrs. Colby giving your wife a tea party?" Because they got along well, but it had nothing to do with Bill and me. Later, a few years

later, sort of a happen stance, we traveled from Europe to the States on the same ship so we've had lots of contact, but if you go back to the professional part of it, I've never had or seen better and closer integration of effort and activity.

Q: Well, what were you seeing up in North Vietnam at the time?

RICHARDSON: Who were we seeing?

Q: What were you seeing developments up there?

RICHARDSON: There was activity in agriculture collectivization and efforts to keep people from fleeing south.

Q: Did you have much contact with Vietnamese, South Vietnamese?

RICHARDSON: Yes. Matter of fact, I'd go out one weekend, yes I had Vietnamese to my home all the time. Very often they'd turn up without their wives and a bunch of flowers, but still they came. And I'm glad our relations with French too, who are still there. There was this colonel who headed up the brewery there. 33 is the brand. Another was a doctor who lived right opposite the presidential palace. Oh, and there were French there with whom we had very good relations. One amusing thing, I don't know if you think, we just talk, I was at dinner one night and I met an absolutely charming Frenchmen, delightful fellow. And his name was Oquinel. It sounded like something that you eat. At the end of the evening, we exchanged cards. His name was Raymond O'Connell. His father or grandfather was some Irish adventurer who ended up in Indochina in the 19th century.

Q: Well, did you get out and talk to the French on the plantations and all that?

RICHARDSON: Yes, but we had a better informant for that. I did spend one weekend up with the French at a rubber plantation, but we had a secretary, Larry Pat Hughs who was up there every weekend.

Q: Was the American presence sort of overpowering at that time or very small?

RICHARDSON: No, but they were there. My guess is there were probably as many as 1,900 U.S. Military, but I can't speak with any exactness about the figure. This is the impression I have from that period, there may have been as many as 1,900. No combat units. It was definitely a highly desirable assignment for the Military at that time because this was the only war going on and they would come out to get their cards punched.

Q: How about, were the French Military around?

RICHARDSON: No, no. The French had even given up training the Vietnamese Army in 1954. They turned that over to the U.S. a couple of years earlier. When was Dien Bien Phu? 1954?

Q: Ah, '54, I think.

RICHARDSON: And so, in fact, I think in '56 they turned over responsibility for training the Vietnamese Army. to the U.S. so the French Military were there maybe only as attaches.

Q: Did, how about, did you have many, much communication with the Chinese community and so on in other places?

RICHARDSON: No, no.

Q: How about ... ?

RICHARDSON: With them, there would be mostly a language problem. I don't know how good their French was. So one night, I was astounded, when it was very late, 11:00 at night and some, for some reason I think it was, my wife and I in Chalon, eating, why we'd be eating that late, I don't know, but we got into conversation with the waiter who spoke very good English. And so we asked him some questions about that, and do you know where he learned his English? From a Chinese teacher of English. [Laughter]. His accent was good. But, that's as I say that's the only serious conversation I've ever had with a Chinese.

Q: How about your days going down to the Delta and often times to the Highlands?

RICHARDSON: Highlands, I would, North of Saigon we went everywhere up to the DMZ. That's where I had my Volkswagen bug.

Q: You had what?

RICHARDSON: My Volkswagen bug, the car.

Q: Oh, yes.

RICHARDSON: But the Delta was out.

Q: Why was that?

RICHARDSON: Because guerilla activities had picked up. When I first arrived, Tom Barnes and I talked about using public transportation and going down to the Camau Peninsula, to the Delta, to see the country, but we didn't. Before we could put that into operation, within 6 months there was so much guerrilla activity that we could never get permission to go down there so we ended up going North to go hiking in the Highlands. On another occasion I traveled to the North and back. Up along the coast and back through the highlands.

Q: Do we have anything on Da Nang?

RICHARDSON: You mean as a consulate?

Q: No.

RICHARDSON: No we had only Hue. Da Nang was military.

Q: Was there any sort of North-South, I'm talking about difference within the political spectrum between North and South Vietnam and Southern-South Vietnam?

RICHARDSON: Well, of course, you had the Northerners who had escaped from the North, but they had moved South and they were predominantly Catholic so you had a difference there. Both of geography and of religion. And you had more political opposition that probably came from Buddhists or types that didn't have any particular religious affiliation, but the government was not very tolerant of them, tolerant of opposition.

Q: Yes. Were they having that battle, I can't remember, between I can't think of the name right now, it was sort of a sect, a religious sect?

RICHARDSON: Bao Dai. Yes.

Q: Yes.

RICHARDSON: Yes, but there were guys who ran the whorehouse.

Q: Yes, I mean ...

RICHARDSON: That was a gang.

Q: It was a gang essentially.

RICHARDSON: Yes, well he squashed that before I arrived. What were they called, I've forgotten?

Q: I'd say Wha Wha or something like that.

RICHARDSON: Hwa Hao.

Q: Hwa Hao, something like that.

RICHARDSON: Yes, yes. No, that was, that gang, but there were two of them: Wha Hao was one, which we're calling Wha How and then there was another one, they were Hoods, I think. And they were operating the whore houses, they had that kind of activity and it was also a threat to law and order, but while I was there, there was an attempt by some army unit to overthrow the government and that was in November, I know it was November 11th because that's the Marine Corps birthday is. So it was November 11th, the night of the 11th/12th.

That coup attempt lasted the entire weekend. After the Marine Corps birthday reception Friday night, there was no ball due to security concerns. My wife and I went to an after-hours club where we fell in with a bunch of Canadians and Political Section secretary Mary Pat Hughes. We

got home about 2:00 after dropping off Mary Pat. As I was putting the car in the garage, heavy gunfire broke out nearby with tracers passing over the house so thick it looked like a lighted path in the sky. Along the way I found Mary Pat on the street curious about what was going on. She jumped in with me confident that a secretary would be useful. And she was. Other than communicators and Marine guards we were the only staff at the embassy until Sunday afternoon. The ambassador had set up a command post at the residence where he was getting reports from our people on the street. He dictated cables to Mary Pat and I signed off for transmission. On Sunday afternoon a couple of us were going out to the top floor balcony when we stopped because of nearby gunfire. The fellow immediately in front of me spun around and was pressed against my chest. Just then he caught a bullet in the back. He was other agency with a sense of humor. Reaching around to his wound he complained "someone has put a hole in my cloak." He survived.

Mary Pat certainly deserved an award for her work, initiative, and devotion to the job, but I don't know if she ever got one.

Q: I think November 10th, as I recall.

RICHARDSON: Okay, that night. That would have been '60. Colby was already there so it must have been '60 because one of our junior officers, John Helble, distinguished himself by reporting by telephone from the balcony of the Colby house overlooking the presidential palace and was able to give the ambassador a blow by blow report. Well, have we talked long enough?

Q: Well, no. I'm thinking in terms of, I want, I'd like to finish up the Saigon bit and then we can stop. How about, did we have much contact with say the Buddhists. I assume we had relatively good contact with the Catholics and all.

RICHARDSON: With the Buddhists as Buddhists?

Q: Yes.

RICHARDSON: I don't know. I'm not aware of it in the political section, but I would, I think I have to assume that this would have been something the intelligence agencies would have been doing because the political section, the embassy as the embassy would have been very much concerned about alienating Diem by being seen to cultivate his enemy so I think that ... they would have to leave that to the intelligence people.

Q: How about, did you run across the news, I was thinking Madame Ngu of course and her husband which was, who was it Tim's brother.

RICHARDSON: No, I didn't. No, what's his name? Nhu.

Q: Well, anyway ...

RICHARDSON: Nhu.

Q: Yes. Were they figures when you were there?

RICHARDSON: Oh, very much so. We regarded Nhu as the principle advisor and confidante of his brother. The one person he trusted. And, remember, he had ambitions and evidently had real influence, this was the impression we had. She was a power to be reckoned with ... a very strong personality and she still is I think.

Q: Yes. Well, were there any attacks on the embassy or ... ?

RICHARDSON: No, but right after I left they blew up the embassy.

Q: Yes the bomb went off right in front of it.

RICHARDSON: Yes and there were, there was a bomb of sorts thrown over the wall at one of my colleagues, I think he was USAID. I don't think anybody was injured, but there was concern, but not, if, there wasn't so serious a situation that I couldn't get permission to drive all over the country except down South.

Q: Well, then maybe this is a good place to stop?

RICHARDSON: Except, do you want to finish Saigon?

Q: Yes.

RICHARDSON: LBJ was coming out as Vice President.

Q: Well wait, he wouldn't have, he didn't come in until '61.

RICHARDSON: As Vice President.

Q: Yes, I mean Kennedy was elected in '60 and they came in '61 and you were still there?

RICHARDSON: Yes.

Q: You were there from '59 to '61.

RICHARDSON: Yes, now so LBJ is coming. Of course this is a big deal so they get us all together and I had not had too high of an opinion of the Admin. Counselor, but when I saw how he organized this big deal that was coming up ... my esteem for him went up considerably. Well, my job was to organize a reception, guest list of about 600 people and by then I had left the political section, I was staff aid.

Q: For Nolting?

RICHARDSON: For Nolting.

Q: Ambassador Nolting.

RICHARDSON: Yes, yes. Durbrow had just left. He wouldn't let me leave until he left. So I get out a guest list and did what everyone has to do to organize a big affair and the morning of the affair, I boarded a ship going out to the South China Sea. [Laughter]. At 6:00 when the first guest was due to arrive, I was just clearing the river going past Vung Tau with tears in my eyes, into the South China Sea. So, it's the only time I'd really run away from my responsibility.

Q: Yes, that's probably a good one to get away with. I think when the Kennedy's, Jack and Bobby, sent Lyndon Johnson out to get him out of town more than anything else.

RICHARDSON: Yes. But I was very saddened to leave. I'd had such a good time, I had become so attached to the country that I literally stood in the stern of that ship as we went past Cape St. Jacques and tears were rolling down my face. I went back there just a couple of years ago as a tourist and got to Hanoi which of course I couldn't have gotten to except as a prisoner in those days.

Q: okay. We were able to, when did that bombing of that waterside restaurant, The Barge, did that happen while you were there.

RICHARDSON: I don't think so. I don't remember, I think I would remember that. Oh, but one thing I do want to include on this note is for several years after I left, '61, I tried to get back to Saigon and I did until the number of troops in the country reached the figure of 100,000. Then I stopped asking to go back because it was no longer a Vietnamese War that I could support, it had become an American War which I could not personally support and so that- (end of tape)

Q: In 1961 where did you go?

RICHARDSON: I went back to West Africa. I went to Lagos, Nigeria.

Q: Alright, we'll pick it up next time then. Did you say at one point you went hiking with your wife and what did you do?

RICHARDSON: No, no this was with Tom Barnes.

Q: Tom Barnes.

RICHARDSON: Tom Barnes, when we decided, it was decided for us that we couldn't go through the Delta and the peninsula by public transportation as we had hoped because of the guerrilla activity so we went North into the Hill country and drove the Volkswagen up the footpath to a Montagnard village where we left the car, hired some people to carry our equipment, because we were going to be camping to the next village and we worked our way around the hills for about a week and made a circle and got back to the Volkswagen and this was my only real contact with the people other than the lowland Vietnamese and they couldn't have been more gracious and accepting.

Q: Did you get any feel for the division between the lowland Vietnamese and the Montagnards?

RICHARDSON: Not when I was traveling there because we had a Vietnamese armed guard with us, but he was very, he was courteous and circumspect in his duties, but everything else we heard was that the lowlanders, the Vietnamese were contemptuous of the “primitives” in the hills. We found them gracious and very, very open. Now we’re up in the hills and the streams there are pretty cold. When we would come to a stream, our porters would get a bar of soap and take off their clothes and jump into the water. [Laughter]. And so Tom and I got into the habit and we took off our clothes and jumped in after them which was just as well because that was the only occasion we had to bathe.

Q: At that point had we put special forces in?

RICHARDSON: No, no, no. We were talking. The embassy staff were working on the anti-insurgency plan. That was in development while I was there in my last 6 months or so and everybody was contributing to it actually. Hansbacker of USIA had an important input and everybody got a piece of that one. And that was the anti-insurgency plan which involved bringing the green berets in for medical assistance and things like that, to win the hearts and minds.

BEN FRANKLIN DIXON
Political Officer
Thailand (1959-1962)

Ben Franklin Dixon was born in North Carolina in 1918. He joined the State Department in 1945 as a civil servant, dealing with Near Eastern and Greek matters. Joining the Foreign Service in 1956, he served in Morocco, Thailand, Pakistan, and Washington, DC. In Thailand, he dealt with Vietnamese matters.

Q: Did the early stages of our involvement in Vietnam play much of a role in what you were doing at that time?

DIXON: Yes. I was up and down in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam quite a bit, as well as Australia, Indonesia, and Singapore, about various and sundry things. I figured, you know, what could we do to try to bring Vietnam on our side? We had this Mekong development. And, you know, we at that time were trying to have peace with the North Vietnamese. The war had not gotten to the stage that it later got onto, and it was still possible to do something about this.

I therefore wrote a dispatch recommending certain projects, which the North Vietnamese obviously couldn't participate in the Mekong thing, and suggested that we use these things as bait to try to interest them and join the Mekong, stopping the war in effect.

President Johnson used this basic idea in a speech at a college to propose this. But the Vietnamese would have nothing to do with it.

The other thing was that I knew the president of Vietnam. Also, there was the guy, Wolf Vladijinsky, who was...

Q: He was the very famous advisor both in Vietnam and in Japan, too.

DIXON: Yes. I was up in Laos on special duty when the incursion came in from the north. Wolf was there then, I got to know him. And he got to telling me about how bad things were with Diem and his family and all of those secret organizations and so forth. Later, while I was in Vietnam, he introduced me to Diem. And I got into the conversation, saying, in effect, you know you ought to get rid of Madame Nhu.

Q: Diem was the president, and Madame Nhu was his sister-in-law.

DIXON: Yes. And I had occasion a couple of times after that to talk to him about it. He clearly was aware that it was a liability to him, but, on the other hand, he apparently seemed to think that all this organization and so forth that they had was really important to his support. There wasn't much I contributed to that.

There was some resentment against Diem. There was a rumor at an ECAFE conference that Diem had been deposed. The Vietnamese ambassador rushed over to me and said, "What is this? Have you heard?"

I said, "I don't know, I can go over to the embassy and find out if there's anything."

And I went down and found it wasn't true.

But they didn't know what the hell to do. They heard that somebody else was taking power. You know, they wanted to be on the right side. And a great, great to-do.

And finally, when we got this thing straightened out, he acted as though nothing had happened, but I think he was getting ready to try to throw his weight on the other side.

I went down on an inspection of the Mekong, and we went down to look at something in Can Tho. There was of course fighting in there, but it wasn't very great.

Q: This is in the Mekong Delta, Can Tho.

DIXON: Yes, and we took a look at this thing. We were riding in Jeeps, and there was an Army truck with some soldiers in it that sort of went with us. It was an area where there wasn't any fighting to speak of. But on the way back, somebody started firing, and they stopped that big truck. The driver said, you know, it made him nervous to sit there. And I said, "Well, I agree with you. I was in the Marine Corps, you don't ever let yourself get caught while you're just sitting like a duck somewhere. Either let's go back or let's go in to Can Tho." So we just drove around that big truck -- with some difficulty, they didn't want us to, but we went on into town. They didn't get out of there for hours after that. But they sat there, of all stupid things. That was

my only encounter with that down there.

While I was there, this incursion into Laos came. The Pathet Lao had come into the north there. They needed people up there and I went up. John Holt, who had inspected me in Rabat and thought very highly of my work, asked that I be assigned up there. And I stayed up there nine months. I drove back and forth to ECAFE things, and then went back when things were quiet.

But I did two things there. One was that we borrowed the United Nations mission to take a look and see what was going on. I had worked with UNSCOB on Greece, when I was the assistant Greek desk officer.

Q: What was this?

DIXON: United Nations Commission on the Balkans. And I knew generally how it was organized, so I explained to them, and we did the basic preparations to set up for a mission there. A guy named Jilliard, I think, who was from the U.N., finally came out there. But he didn't know much about this either.

We also had to see about getting aircraft that could get people up to that high level up there where this thing was going on. And I got the Naval attaché and we talked to the people in the Navy channel to sort of figure out what sort of plane we could use to go up there. We finally found the only kind of plane we could use. Helicopters wouldn't do very well. But the landing place there was in the shape of a "U" cut out of a mountain. And you had to come in, turn around, and land on a very short strip. So that you could not get more than about two or three planes in at a time. The only plane we could use was a Canadian plane named something like a duck or something like that.

Q: An Otter, I think. There's a Canadian plane called an Otter.

DIXON: Otter, yes. And you could only take a few people up there.

When we were organizing for this, the minister of defense asked that I come out and talk to him. I went in there and sat down and expected him to ask me a question. And he said, finally, "Well, what do we do?" And I explained to him how UNSCOB had been organized and what we ought to do, and that we ought to send people up there to take a look around, we ought to interview people and explain how the mission should work. And generally I worked on...

When the mission came, we had a great guy, a Japanese who was on the mission, who had been Mariel's handler in Istanbul during World War II. But he was an active guy and got out and did things. The son of the president of Tunisia was there, but we couldn't get him to do anything.

Q: Bourguiba.

DIXON: Bourguiba, Jr., yes. They were the two outstanding ones -- Bourguiba for not doing anything, and this Japanese, whose name I don't remember right now, who was very good and very active.

Anyway, they went up. We got the aircraft in and everything worked fine. And they did the interviewing and finally got up a pretty good report on it.

The other thing that I got involved with there was, there were two Gudden brothers who had an airplane, who rented their plane and flew commercial missions for people. They had been down to...I've forgotten where they'd gone to, but they had stopped, because they were low on gas, at a field they saw in Indonesia. Well, they landed there, and it was the CIA field that they were trying to build up, or outfit, to get rid of Sukarno. They had a terrible time with the Indonesians and, I guess, the CIA getting out of there.

But they finally got out, and they got up as far as Laos and they ran out of money. They got a contract with a local guy, hauling something from Cambodia somewhere. They were just bags of things. They finally realized they were hauling opium. They refused to do it anymore. Don Corli, who was a Corsican living in Laos and running dope out of there, took over the planes. I went down to the Lao government and told them to give the planes back to the owners. And, after long representation, they finally did.

This Don Corli, however, was still doing a lot of things, and they were trying to find out who the hell was supporting this thing.

The Lao ambassador to India came there, went down to the Banc D'Indochine (the French Indochinese Bank), and did some transactions. I talked one night to somebody, and I was asking about him. Something made me think that he was somehow involved in this. So I went down to the Banc D'Indochine and talked to some people there. And I found out that the Indian ambassador was sponsoring Don Corli and that he, of course, was very closely tied in with the prime minister.

This absolutely sent Horace Smith, who was the ambassador, wild, because he [the prime minister or the ambassador?] was the principal supporter of the Indian ambassador and apparently must be getting some rake-off from this thing that Don Corli was doing. And that explained why we had so much trouble in trying to get this thing straightened out. It was very interesting. But the CIA had been unable to find anything about it. And I guess it was just by accident, in talking to one of these Laos who said something that gave me the idea that he might be tied-in to the problem. And I must say that, for bankers, I was surprised they would tell me as much as they would tell about him.

JAMES HOWE

**Program Officer, International Cooperation Administration (predecessor to USAID)
City Unspecified, Vietnam (1959-1962)**

James Howe was born and raised on a farm in Gage County, Nebraska. After spending two years in a small teacher's college, he transferred to the University of Nebraska, where he majored in foreign affairs. He received a degree in public

administration from Harvard. He has also served in Brazil. He was interviewed by Sam Butterfield on April 24, 1997.

HOWE: In 1955, I took a job with ICA (as AID was called then), in the Central Planning Office, which we called "DDP," (Deputy Director for Program or for Planning). DDP put together the programs to be requested of the Congress each year and did other kinds of planning work. One example comes to mind that was interesting. It was probably in about 1956 or 57. We had a new Director, a businessman from Colorado who knew little about foreign matters. Someone called to his attention that the US had collected billions of dollars of foreign currencies as a part of the deal we made with host countries when we sold them surplus agricultural products (PL 480). He conceived the idea that, with these billions, we could meet the needs of the developing countries without asking Congress for fresh appropriations. So he invited three businessmen to come to Washington for a month or two to look into the matter and advise him. I don't remember all of their names. One was Bill Bristol of Bristol-Myers. Another was Strauss, head of an investment company in NYC and the third man I don't remember. My job was to squire them around town to all of the relevant experts so that they could gather the facts and come up with a report. They were very enthusiastic when they got the basic facts about the great volume of foreign currency "owned" by the US and set off with great relish to save the taxpayer the burden of funding the foreign aid effort. I tried to quell their enthusiasm by pointing out that: a) money is not a resource; it is a claim on resources; b) this money was only "ours" on condition that we use it in the country (with some small exceptions) and that we use it with their permission. Since what they needed from the US was not a claim on their local resources, but actual imported resources (either imports of goods or of technicians and other services), there was really no way (with small exceptions) to use the local currencies to substitute for these resources. Bill Bristol saw the point right away. The others took a month or two longer to give up the hope of using the currencies to alleviate the US budget burden. I wrote the first several drafts of their report and, with some compromises and considerable disappointment, they accepted it. This was a fun project. I stayed with DDP until 1959, when I took a job overseas in Vietnam as the program officer. It was the program officer who put together the annual program for each year. It also had the training program assigned to it. This sort of cut my eye teeth on what we do overseas because Vietnam was a big program - 230 or 240 million dollars, as I recall in those days, a big part of which was the program to import commercial products to be sold on the market in Vietnam to generate a local currency to be used to support the military effort. I remember that I got into a difference of view with the military because it was very clear that we were importing more than our need for local currency. The reason I said that was because we used an exchange rate, if I remember correctly, of 35 piasters to a dollar. All other markets were '70s and '80s and the black market was over 100. But for us, it was 35. Why? Because we had agreed to it. Now, what did they do with the dollars? The folks who imported goods with them were able to sell the commodities and what did they do with the local currency? They converted some of it into dollars. Their third largest export after rice and rubber was of US dollars to Geneva and such places to put it in bank accounts. We could have had the same effect, I remember arguing, if we had just changed the exchange rate to 70 or 78 or so. We still could have generated the local currency that they needed at half of the cost to us. But that idea didn't sell well in those days. This was an aid program totally dominated by the military effort that we were slipping into.

So, I stayed there for a couple of years. Other formative things or major events that loom? I did

become exposed to the different view that one takes in the field from what one takes in Washington. I remember feeling desperately the need for AID in Washington to rotate their people out to the field so that they would have that point of view. Some of the views in Washington, I thought, were terribly unrealistic. That was a thought which grew in my mind in the subsequent assignments, both in Washington and overseas, this wide gap between the world view from the field and the world view from Washington. You'll hear more of that, I'm sure, as we talk on.

Q: I recall a comment you made to me once about technical assistance. You said all the planning was fine, but the thing that really mattered was whether you had a highly competent advisor on the technical assistance side.

HOWE: Yes, that really was the critical thing. Most of our planning went into our files and I don't think there was a large transfer of knowledge from that to the host country. Of course, that was the purpose of technical assistance, the transfer of knowledge, and the host country didn't pay an awful lot of attention to the paperwork side.

Q: Were there any people there or any individuals, US or other, that you recall with particular favor or interest?

HOWE: Well, there was Hanging Sam Williams, who ran the MAAG, the Military Advisory Assistance Program. He used to say, "When I look into the morning and I am shaving myself, I say to myself, 'You're going to meet General Giap (the military chief of Vietnam). You're going to meet him on the field of battle. You're going to meet him on a field of battle with tanks and planes and all those things. You're going to have to take him.'" This showed how completely General Williams misunderstood his assignment. But I have other, better impressions than that, like Ambassador Durbrow, who was a great guy, and Arthur Gardner, who was our Mission Director there, and a variety of people. One doctor, Doctor Boyton, who was from Maine, put together a list of pharmaceuticals which, taken together, couldn't do any harm, but were designed to treat some of the more common ailments. He would give them to his barefoot doctors. They would go out on the trail. He taught them the rudiments of how to diagnose these very common disorders and how to treat them. I thought that was very effective. It didn't have any long-term, lasting thing, but it certainly served a very acute humanitarian need at the time.

Q: You remembered something which I thought was very important to get into the record because of its singularly personal impact. So, without further ado, we will rewind to Vietnam and when you were there in your first overseas assignment.

HOWE: One of the places that we had in Vietnam was a pretty decent golf course about four or five miles out of the city. I would go there on Saturdays and play golf. One day, we were playing golf. We had played the first nine holes and then, as was traditional, being hot weather and all, we would go into the little clubhouse there and drink an orange soda or something to quench our thirst and visit the men's room and go back out and go on with our golf. Well, we had gone through that ritual and we were standing on the ninth tee, which was about 80 or 90 yards from the clubhouse when the clubhouse blew up, right straight up in the air it blew. It turned out that some little guy was hired by the Viet Cong to go down and put a plastique bomb under the men's

urinal. Then he had left. So, in the aid program for a couple of days after that, people go around asking other people, "Did you hear how far Jim Howe was from the plastique bomb?" They would respond with a gesture, "About this far. No, about that far."

While we're on the subject of personal danger, I didn't have any intense personal danger, but another episode-

Q: That was very close.

HOWE: That was a close one. We had four kids there, little bitty ones, and we had taught them that, in the event of any gunfire, they were to hit the ground quickly. Well, there was the attempted coup against the president, Ngo Diem Dinh. There was a lot of gunfiring near our house and we were up the bedroom, Carol and I. We raced downstairs and here were our kids, all flat on the floor, just as they had been told. One of them was on the stairway and he had dropped right there on the stairway, as he had been told. That was an interesting episode, too.

Q: Indeed. They had learned their lessons well.

HOWE: They had learned their lessons well.

Still on Vietnam and the personal danger sort of thing, we did lose a number of people. We lost one of our malaria technicians, who had been shot by the Viet Cong.

GEORGE F. BOGARDUS
Economic Officer
Saigon (1959-1963)

George F. Bogardus was born in Iowa in 1917 and graduated from Harvard University in 1939. He served in the US Army during 1941 and joined the Foreign Service in 1941 and his first assignment was Montreal, Canada. His overseas posts included Canada, Kenya, Czechoslovakia, Algeria, Germany, and Vietnam. He was interviewed on April 10th, 1996 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: How about Vietnam?

BOGARDUS: Oh, sure. When the Tet Offensive occurred, they were very keen to talk with me about the exact situation, where things were and so forth within Saigon because our installations were being attacked. Saigon is where we also became very close with the William E. Colby family. There were two coups d'etat attempted while we were there. During the first one, they took refuge with us.

Q: That was earlier, wasn't it?

BOGARDUS: Earlier than what?

Q: I'm just trying to keep this somewhat chronological. We've already talked about Vietnam.

BOGARDUS: We arrived in Vietnam in January of 1959. We stayed there with home leave interruption until July of '63.

Q: Have we talked about Vietnam?

BOGARDUS: No, we have not.

Q: Why don't we start with Vietnam then? Somehow, we've jumped up to '67 and I want to get back.

BOGARDUS: I do want to just make another point about service in Stuttgart. We had been there in Vietnam when we were not allowed to have more than 863 individual military personnel conducting training. It gradually went up. Finally, they had changed to General Harkins with a big command -- MACV it was. That changed everything. We Americans in Vietnam were front paged. With that background, having been there for four and a half years with the embassy, even though my work there was almost all with the USOM (in other words, economic development), I had a lot of local knowledge of people and events and the way things went there. I felt in Stuttgart that, in response to the embassy and the USIA, I should give lectures before university students in Germany on behalf of justifying our cause in Vietnam. I did it, both in Stuttgart Institute of Technology, and at the University of Freiburg, the University of Tübingen, the University of Heidelberg, the University of Bremen, the University of Hamburg, and a couple of weekend seminars with supposed leaders of public opinion. It wasn't very easy to do that auf Deutsche. Fortunately, the German students were not very pugnacious.

Q: The earlier era, yes.

BOGARDUS: Remember, the American military forces were defending Germany at that point. When they asked, "Why did you go in there?" "Well, we were invited in." But the ones who did cause trouble were the Greek students and the Iranis and the Turks who were studying in the German universities at that point. They were really pugnacious. But I was able to tell them what was true. They nearly all were Marxists, thought of economic determinism and so forth, so I'd say, "Well, it wasn't colonial at all." I remember very well (and this was the truth) Ambassador Nolting came back on a very hot afternoon at the end of a day to a staff meeting in the embassy. He said, "You know, I was sitting there for hours having tea with President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Diem Nhu and so forth, and arguing and debating and talking. At one point, the brother, Ngo Diem Nhu, turned to me and said, 'You Americans need us more than we need you.'" That really threw these Marxist students because it was the God's truth. It completely refuted any colonialist Marxist ideas.

Q: When did you go to Vietnam?

BOGARDUS: We arrived just before Tet, late in January of '59.

Q: The Tet Offensive was in '68.

BOGARDUS: Yes, the Offensive was, but Tet happens every year.

Q: Excuse me, I'm sorry. When one says "Tet" these days, you always think of THE Tet.

BOGARDUS: I was in Intelligence Research in the Department, which was, from my standpoint, horribly boring. I did everything I could to get out, to get away.

Q: So, you went to Vietnam in '59.

BOGARDUS: About January 15.

Q: And your job was economic?

BOGARDUS: Yes, in the Economic Section there. I was writing weekly reports on the way things were going and then a monthly sum-up. I was number two in that section. There were seven of us, including two secretaries. We of the Economic Section were of the Embassy, but most unusually were not only in a building two miles from the Chancery and were subject to the USOM Director, Arthur Gardner, who was also Economic Minister. He headed 175 officers throughout Vietnam and also supervised the activities of contractors for specific jobs, such as construction, training police and civil servants, and normal schools. So we in the Econ Section were just a small part of the whole USOM show. As loyal members of the team, we were eager to signal advances. Yet our job was to report the progress or lack of progress of all phases of economic development, and Mr. Gardner had signing authority. So, from time to time there was a distinct conflict of interest as to his own and the Embassy's report card.

Q: While you were there, what was the security situation?

BOGARDUS: It wasn't bad until about September of 1961.

Q: Then what happened?

BOGARDUS: We had to retrench. We couldn't go out of town. In the meantime, we had made one trip as far as Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, by car. It wasn't too difficult in January 1960. You just had to be sure that your car was in very good condition and drive it. We got back and later on, we were able to go into the highlands, Banmethuot and up to Nha Trang and Dalat and along the coast there, Da Nang and Hue (pron. whey) and that sort of thing. But it gradually became extremely dangerous. We were sort of circumscribed in staying in greater Saigon.

Q: What about the problems in the programs there, of corruption? Was this a difficult time?

BOGARDUS: Oh, yes, sure. But the main thing was that they badly needed a land reform. The records were not there for land use title, land ownership. There were squatters nearly everywhere because of the war against the French for so long.

Q: The ambassador then was, what, Nolting first?

BOGARDUS: No, it was Elbridge Durbrow, affectionately called "Durby".

Q: How did you find him?

BOGARDUS: He was a workaholic and never stopped. He thought it was just great to have everybody come over there at his house on our day of rest to keep the embassy together. There were a lot of us in the fairly large embassy, you know. He was very congenial. I eventually got into negotiating PL 480 treaties or agreements and had to associate with him on that, mainly with Arthur Gardner and so forth. Elbridge Durbrow left in '61 and Ambassador Frederick "Fritz" Nolting came from Paris in the beginning of May of '61. I had just ended my home leave at that point. My wife stayed on, didn't come back to post until July or something of that sort. But Nolting was there with Bill Trueheart, who was his DCM. They had been together in Paris.

The first attack by rebels, the first coup d'etat, had taken place in late November, I think, of '59. The airplanes came over and really frightened the daylight out of us. There was a second one later on, in which we lived not too far from the palace. The first one was when the Colby family took refuge with us. Then the second one was 13 months later, early 1961. On that occasion, there was a real battle on our street for an hour. Fortunately, they were fighting each other along the street and we were 100 feet back to the side.

Q: We're talking about not the communists, but within the Vietnam army and the rebels against the president.

BOGARDUS: That's right, yes. Mainly, it was the southerners against all the northerners that had been brought in into high places. To a certain extent, it was also a religious rebellion of the Buddhists against the Catholics. Mrs. Nhu, Madame Nhu, when she married her husband, Nhu, (Diem's brother), converted to Catholicism from Buddhism, but the rest of her family remained Buddhist. Her father became ambassador here in Washington, as you recall. I notice you were there a bit later.

Q: In '69, yes. From what I understand, there was a certain disagreement between these two friends, Nolting and Trueheart, over how we should proceed in Vietnam.

BOGARDUS: That only came out when Fritz Nolting went on vacation, home leave in July 1963, which he spent in the Greek Aegean islands. I had been passing on to Bill Trueheart inside information from one of the prominent Buddhists, who was Truong Dinh Dzu. I was able to safely play golf with Truong Dinh Dzu without any danger of being overheard on the golf course. He was a most interesting man, Truong Dinh Dzu. He had been a boy scout and then he went to University of Hanoi. When we knew him, he was a very successful attorney, able to plead in Vietnamese, French, and English. He had also been a governor of Rotary for Southeast Asia. I did an extensive confidential biographic data report on him with lots of things, including the fact that he had been told by an astrologer down in the Mekong Basin that, one day, he would have a very high post. Eventually, that's what encouraged him later on, after Diem was gone and the other military regime, to run for president in 1965, I think.

Q: Something like that. I'm not sure exactly.

BOGARDUS: He was passing this information to me about what was going on in Hue, for example. The visits from Buddhist emissaries from abroad and the frustrating results, and their not getting anywhere with the regime. I would pass this information, send it down to Bill Trueheart, who was DCM, head of the Political Section. Also, I did a biographic report on Madame Nhu, a lot of information about how she had -- There was another sister who was married to a Franco-Vietnamese big game hunter. This was the inside story of these people running away and troubles within the Ngo family over this sort of thing. You remember, Madame Nhu was so powerful that in 1958, she forced the passage of a law that all kinds of gambling, including card games, were absolutely illegal and felonies and that no divorces were possible unless the president approved it (reaction to her sister's elopement).

Q: Later, she tried to have a law against dancing, too.

BOGARDUS: Yes, I know! A number of us Americans and Chinese and Vietnamese families introduced the twist as a bootleg thing and had bootleg dancing parties, where they would send the servants out on the street to give warning if any police were likely to come nearby. A bit of comic relief there.

Q: Did you feel constrained in your reporting, the difference between, say, when Nolting was there, as opposed to Trueheart, and what you could talk about?

BOGARDUS: When that rift occurred, we were just leaving ourselves. We left on July 14 of '63. The real dust up didn't occur until the end of the month. Senator Cabot Lodge arrived late in August, as I recall. We saw the Truehearts a year later here in 1967 or '68. We didn't go into it too much, but he said that he was no longer a hawk.

Where I did feel constrained was, particularly under Arthur Gardner, that we had to report an overly optimistic picture. In '61, I opted to stay on. I had the choice of three years without home leave or two years, home leave and back. Joe Rosza, who was head of the Section, was leaving, probably retiring. I opted to stay under Arthur Gardner, meaning that I would have home leave, and come back for May. But my relations with Arthur Gardner, unfortunately, became more and more unpleasant. Towards the end, in September of '62, we had an inspection by Wilson Flake, who was a retired ambassador. He was out to get Arthur Gardner. As it turned out, he felt it was necessary to lambaste me, too, in order to do this. Wilson Flake, it turned out, fervently believed that it wasn't necessary to learn any foreign languages -- let them all speak English with you. I had seated him beside the Vietnamese Minister of Commerce, Thanh, who spoke pretty good English. But those officials were very few and far between. We Americans dealt with all the other Vietnamese officials in French, Flake didn't bother. So, he had very little -- Then he criticized my reporting as being far too long and not necessary -- cut things back and so forth. He gave me a black eye and it hurt my career.

Q: Back to Vietnam, when you left Vietnam, all hell was going to break loose in October and November of '63. But you left in July of '63.

BOGARDUS: When things went bad, we were in Stuttgart.

Q: What was your feeling and can you say about the other officers in the embassy about Diem and the regime about the time you left in mid-'63?

BOGARDUS: We thought that Diem and Nhu, something had to be done about them, most of us. Fritz Nolting had very clear instructions to be the nicest, sweetest, most seductive, persuasive ambassador who was a philosopher and a devout Episcopalian, which is very close to Catholicism, and so forth. He was trying and sincerely thought he could persuade them, I'm sure. Then he was really angry afterwards when Bill Trueheart reported, "Things have really gone too far. We can't continue." John F. Kennedy finally agreed with him. The way I read it, they never said we were going to shoot Diem and Nhu, but we did say, "Well, if you guys want to push him out of the way, you generals, it's okay. We won't stop you."

I met the CIA agent who carried the message to the Vietnamese generals. I'm trying to think of his name. He was an American officer, major or lieutenant colonel, of Belgian origin. It's a matter of historical record. I met him later at the Colby house on Bill Colby's birthday January 2, either 1968 or 1969. That is the way that happened. I didn't have anything to do with the falling out of Nolting and Trueheart, but I feel sure that afterward Fritz Nolting could see how the change in policy came in his absence, and insisted that he could have succeeded in his mission, and so on. He thought that, probably, until his dying days. He died two years ago in Charlottesville. Maybe this is a good point to...

Q: This might be a good point to stop, I think.

BOGARDUS: Yes. I'll tell you this though, just lately, I've finally read a book called *Approaching Vietnam*. If you haven't read it, I recommend it to you. I have it at home. I forget the author's name. What it does detail is from 1946 to 1954, Dien Bien Phu, over and over again we were placating the French government one crisis after another, about Vietnam and rebuffing Uncle Ho.

Q: Ho Chi Minh, yes.

BOGARDUS: Ho Chi Minh. We did rebuff him several times. All that was hidden from us at the time and until contrarily much later. If I had known that sort of thing, I don't think I could have been so eager and sure of the righteousness of the cause. Even now, it's very painful. I used to debate with our daughters, teenage and so forth. Oh, boy!

NEAL DONNELLY
Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer
Saigon (1960-1961)

Neal Donnelly was born in Buffalo and educated at Canisius College. He entered

USIA in 1960. His career included posts in Saigon, Hong Kong and Taiwan. He was interviewed by David E. Reuther in 2001.

Q: How was your reception in Saigon? They were waiting for you and had housing?

DONNELLY: They had housing but I don't remember anybody meeting us. We got to the office and they had an apartment for us in a building that was owned by the Bank of Vietnam and we were the only Americans in it. Most of the Americans lived elsewhere in houses and things, but we had this little apartment.

Then I settled down to my job which was junior officer training, and that means you work a little bit in each section. The section I worked in most was the press section where I assisted the press officer in selecting stuff from the wireless file to send to newspapers which they probably ignored, and typing a lot of things and running around. I did just a little bit, a week or so, in the cultural section and just a little bit in the exhibit's section, but most of the time I was in press.

Q: How big is the American Embassy in Saigon at this point?

DONNELLY: Well, we weren't in the embassy; we had our own building. I really didn't get to the embassy except once or twice.

Q: How big was USIS then?

DONNELLY: USIS had about ten offices; if I stopped I could think of all of their names. We had about ten offices and the Vietnamese staff was probably about forty. We had a fairly large building with a good, large library. We had an auditorium, a large exhibit section. It was centrally located. It was a better looking building than the embassy; the embassy was sort of a greenish-gray building, very dull looking. Our building was nice, bright, and white and we were right in the central square near the opera house and the hotels. We had a very good location.

Q: This is going to be your introduction to the various USIA functions. So your first job was in the press section and here you're taking various wireless file things and trying to place them in Vietnamese newspapers?

DONNELLY: Yes, because I spoke Cantonese they had me concentrate on the Chinese city that was adjacent to Saigon, Cholon.

Q: Cholon.

DONNELLY: Cholon, yes. So I knew most of the editors and even the owners of the newspapers there.

Q: So part of the job was to get out and meet the local press people so that that personal contact would assist you in placing...

DONNELLY: Well I had a three-month stint at the branch post in Can Tho. There was a hiatus

between the outgoing branch PAO (Public Affairs Officer), Greenwald, and the new one coming in, Dolf Droge. So they put me down as a branch PAO for three months. I know it was over Thanksgiving; it was probably November to January, something like that. There again, nobody told me exactly what a branch PAO should do, so I sort of went by Kentucky windage. The other guy had English teaching courses and gave little talks at schools and then they had a mobile unit which showed movies out in the countryside and it did all of those things.

One thing we would do there is we would record the morning VOA (Voice of America) broadcast and then transcribe it and put it on a mimeograph sheet and send it around as a newspaper because there wasn't really any English news at all in that city and not much news of any kind. So everyday we'd have this newspaper which we would distribute to a couple hundred people, which was nothing but the VOA news.

Q: On the distribution list was?

DONNELLY: Schools and police stations and just the regular sort of people you'd expect. A funny thing happened; Kennedy and Nixon, of course, were challenging each other in the presidential election and someone in Saigon took a black and white photo of Nixon and one of Kennedy and put them on something called the gastetner, which you may remember.

Q: That's the old memory card.

DONNELLY: You could take a photo and make a mimeograph image out of the photo and then you could run it off on the mimeograph machine; it's a reasonable facsimile. He sent enough Nixon photos and enough Kennedy photos so that we could clip the winner onto the newspaper the day after the election.

I'd be down there alone without my wife and I would go back to Saigon a couple days a week. I went back the day before the election and left word with my chief local who unfortunately later was killed by the Viet Cong; a very nice guy named Lou. I left word with him to clip the winner's picture on the news the day after the election. I came back and found out that he had clipped Kennedy's picture on it the day before the election because he knew he was going to win, which negated the whole idea of free and fair elections.

Q: Where was the branch post?

DONNELLY: Can Tho; it's in the Delta. When I was there, there were six U.S. (United States) military officers outside of town and I was in town, the only American, and that's all we had in the Delta in those days. To get there – there was no airfield – the military would fly me down in something called an Otter or a Beaver, a six passenger plane, and they'd land on an abandoned roadway because there was no airport. To alert my chief assistant to come out and get me in a jeep, they would buzz the building. It was actually a lot of fun in those days and it's a lot of fun remembering about it.

Q: So there was three months down in the Delta. So when you came back to Saigon, how much was left on your tour?

DONNELLY: I think I went to Hong Kong after that in – it had to be in June, because I remember in May of that year Vice President Lyndon Johnson came out to Saigon. He was a pretty rough guy to deal with. I remember he gave a speech one night at a late dinner and Ed Robinson, the press officer, and I were captioning photos or doing something all day and were leaving about eleven o'clock at night and somebody runs up with a tape from an old Uher tape recorder, open reel tape. He said, "Lyndon Johnson just gave a speech and they want you to transcribe it and give it to the press." So we did. I ran the tape machine and Ed did the typing and we put it on a mimeograph and then we had to get it mimeographed. Of course it took us a while. Sitting out in the front office is Sarah McClendon, who you may remember - she's the old Texan newshen, yelling and screaming at us.

I actually have a copy of that speech, which is unbelievable; Johnson calling Ngo Dinh Diem one of the greatest men. He was greater than Roosevelt because Roosevelt couldn't get 89% of the vote. All sorts of stuff, but I can give you a copy of it if you want.

Q: I think ADST would be interested. Speaking of Diem, there was an anti-Diem coup at the time that you were in Saigon.

DONNELLY: But he didn't fall; the coup was two days after Kennedy's election. I was home; I was in Saigon at that time and I woke up at about three o'clock in the morning and there was a lot of firing right outside our apartment, so I said to Joan, "If they're still there in the morning, it's a coup and if they're gone in the morning, it's the Viet Minh causing trouble." We called them Viet Minh in those days. They were still there in the morning and so we were sort of pinned in our apartment for three days. It was hit with grenade and rifle fire, but no real damage. We were the only Americans there. The embassy didn't contact us for two days. Finally, they... We didn't have a telephone; there was no telephone in our apartment. These are the sort of things that could not possibly happen today.

Q: It sounds like your children are beginning to have good Foreign Service stories. I mean, if she was in the apartment at the time.

So here on your training assignment you saw your first American election from the overseas side of it. What was the atmosphere in Saigon in the 1960s? This was the end of the Eisenhower years.

DONNELLY: Well, the Vietnamese are rolling with the punches, the ordinary peasant, they'd been through a lot; they'd been through the French. But the elite, the educated, or "intelligencia," as they liked to call themselves, were very pro-French. The French had nothing to do anymore in Saigon, but they were pro-French as a way to show that they were anti-American, I think, but everybody had to depend upon the Americans. Now this was long before we had a lot of troops in there. We had, I think, six hundred American advisers throughout the country at that time and they were just advising how to put the bullet in the gun, that sort of thing, and maybe a little bit of technical information, I don't know.

There were a couple people in USIS who were advising on psywar things. We had a motion

picture outfit that made a weekly newsreel for the government; it would be shown in the movies. It was a propaganda thing. Ngo Dinh Diem, when he took over, like Marcos when he took over, was universally accepted, but things began to happen. He was very open, I'm told, when he first came in. He would see anybody; very, very free. As time went on, he became suspicious and would see fewer and fewer people, and at the end, I'm told – he was speaking only to his brother and his sister-in-law, he mistrusted everybody. That was part of his problem.

Q: Can you talk a minute about the traveling USIA film program? Is that worldwide or was that just something in Southeast Asia?

DONNELLY: It was worldwide and it was being phased out when I came in. There weren't movie houses and of course there's no television anyplace and peasants in the rural areas would very seldom see a movie. USIS would have these jeep-like trucks, I guess they're called Jeepsters, and have a generator in there and a sixteen millimeter projector and a screen. They would send out to villages and set up maybe in the village square with the assistance of the mayor or police chief or someone and show movies. The movies were probably inappropriate; they had movies of the Hudson Dayliner going up and down the river, the Tower of Learning in Pittsburgh, sometimes health movies about hygiene and whatnot, but people came to see them because they were images moving on a screen. Now of course in a sophisticated world it's hard to imagine that this had any use at all, but we did it.

I went with a couple and actually we went right into what you might call a jungle, just a clearing, and a hundred people would show up and sit down and watch a movie about the Pittsburgh Tower of Learning.

Q: You were telling me earlier about working with the Chinese newspaper people in Cholon. What was their relationship to the whole political scheme?

DONNELLY: They were very pro-American because they were anti-communist. They were very much anti-communist, but they weren't all that pro-Diem except they were closer to Diem than the ordinary Vietnamese were. He was fairly good to them, I think. The Chinese like to be left alone and he left them alone pretty much. But the city of Cholon was Chinese; everybody spoke Chinese. They contributed to his campaigns. In the election that I was there for, President Ngo Dinh Diem, as Lyndon Johnson said, got 89% of the vote. He really lost in the countryside or he got maybe 50-50; I forgot what, but he got the Chinese vote overwhelmingly which is what brought his numbers up. The Chinese are status quo people; they don't like change. They know what they've got; they don't know what they're getting. So, they supported him.

Q: They of course wouldn't have the nationalistic view that the Vietnamese would have.

DONNELLY: No, not at all, and they were anti-communist and Diem was an anti-communist.

THOMAS F. CONLON
Principal Officer

Saigon (1960-1962)

Thomas F. Conlon was born in Illinois in 1924 and received his BS from Georgetown University in 1948. He served overseas in the US Army from 1943-1945. Upon entering the Foreign Service, he was posted in Havana, Surabaya, Singapore, Saigon, Le Havre, Manila, Nice, Canberra, and Bangkok. In 1992 Mr. Conlon was interviewed by Arbor W. Gray.

Q: Then in 1960 you headed out to Saigon.

CONLON: Yes. I was assigned as Consul to the American Consulate in Hue, in Central Vietnam. I welcomed this assignment, as I felt that I could really become fluent in the language, away from the Embassy and with few Americans to associate with. The Consul in Hue had a nice house to live in, even for my large family, and a convenient office nearby. There were acceptable, French schools for my sons and daughters of school age, and I was looking forward to this assignment.

On arrival in Saigon I called on Ambassador Durbrow, who had been our Consul General in Singapore in 1955-56, when we served there. He told me that I would not be going up to Hue immediately. He wanted to keep me in the Political Section in Saigon for three months to get well read into the situation. In the event I never went to Hue, other than for occasional, short visits, spending the next two years or so in Saigon. I was, of course, pleased to work with Durby once again. He was one of the very best ambassadors I ever knew.

1960-62 was an eventful and decisive period in South Vietnam. Initially, I did the bulk of the Embassy reporting on the communist insurgency (although almost everyone in the Mission got involved in this, one way or another). Later, I did the reporting on the internal political situation, and still later on external developments, including North Vietnam, or the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam," as it was called. Along the way, there were two failed coups d'etat in Saigon to report on. One took place on November 10-11, 1960, and was ultimately unsuccessful, though it gravely weakened the anti-Communist government led by President Ngo Dinh Diem. The latter incident, which took place in February, 1962, involved the bombing of the Presidential Palace by two Vietnamese Air Force A1H attack aircraft, in an attempt to kill President Diem.

Unfortunately, we lived across the street and were dangerously close to possible near miss bomb explosions. In fact, our house had some broken windows, but none of us was hurt.

I mentioned 1960. In fact, the National Liberation Front, the NLF, so-called, was formed in December, 1960. I had occasion to write, I think, the first report by any post on the establishment of the NLF, which later was to become a major factor in the situation in Vietnam. It was clear from the beginning that this was simply a front group, completely controlled by North Vietnam, but it did have the tissue of being of southern origin. In fact, it was not that.

The basic decisions on American policy and involvement in Vietnam were, of course, being made in Washington, and the Embassy in Saigon often learned of them well after the fact. As I saw it, President Kennedy dithered steadily in making decisions on what to do about Vietnam. The decisive point in our involvement in Vietnam was reached in October, 1961, when we

increased the size of our forces from the 888 members of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group to 16,000 military personnel. Typically, Washington was very reluctant to face the implications of what we were doing and initially portrayed the increase in the number of American military personnel by saying that they were there to help deal with the floods on the Mekong River (an annual event, in any case). This obvious falsehood lay at the roots of our problems with American journalists then and later on in Vietnam.

Perhaps here I had another opportunity to nudge history. In October, 1961, I recall talking to Ambassador Frederick Nolting, who had replaced Ambassador Durbrow in April, 1961. Ambassador Nolting was considering making a recommendation to increase our military commitment to South Vietnam substantially. I told the ambassador that, if it were our intention to halt communist aggression in Southeast Asia, the best place to do it was in Vietnam, as our access to the country lay across a string of U. S. bases in the Western Pacific, and the Vietnamese people in South Vietnam had proved that they were willing to fight against the communists. I said that I thought the situation in South Vietnam was similar to the situation in South Korea in 1950- 53, when our support was critical to the security of Northeast Asia. I think that I had some effect on Ambassador Nolting, for he did recommend a major American intervention in South Vietnam. Of course, the decisions were being made in Washington, and what I said may have had little effect. Unfortunately, we ultimately lost our nerve and withdrew from South Vietnam but never withdrew from South Korea--correctly, in my view. We had failure in one case and success in the other, though our combat losses in both places were similar.

Perhaps one other thing I might mention was that then Vice President Johnson in May, 1961. I was supposed to be the Embassy control officer for the visit, although anybody presuming to control the visit of a personality like that has to have great illusions. Anyhow, the whole visit was disorganized, to an extreme. I was told one evening about 10:00 PM, called at home, and told that I was to interpret in French for Vice President Johnson and President Diem the following morning at breakfast. I was to be at the Presidential Palace at a quarter to seven. So I did. I turned up at a quarter to seven, knowing nothing about what was going to be discussed. The Embassy had a general posture at the time of trying to press the Saigon Government under President Diem to undertake substantial reforms in a number of areas. In exchange for that, we would increase our military and political assistance. The assumption was that, if he did not make these reforms, we would not increase our military assistance. Well, I was astonished to hear Vice President Johnson simply giving assurances of increased military and economic assistance without insisting on anything in return at all. This was just the reverse of the Embassy policy. As an interpreter, I had, on the one hand, to do the interpreting job and, on the other hand, trying to absorb what was clearly a fundamental change in policy. An interpreter should never be put in a position like this, but I was, in this case.

Well, our youngest daughter was born in Saigon in 1961.

Q: But, of course, much of the Vietnam controversy lay in the future.

JAMES MARVIN MONTGOMERY
Economic Officer
Saigon (1960-1962)

State Department; Vietnam Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1962-1964)

James Marvin Montgomery was born in New Jersey in 1935. He received a BA from Juniata College in 1957. After entering the Foreign Service in 1958, he has been assigned to Saigon, Mexico City, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Johannesburg. Mr. Montgomery was interviewed by Thomas F. Conlon in 1996.

MONTGOMERY: After I applied for Thai, they called me up and said, "The Thai language class is filled. How about Vietnamese?" I'd just read an article about the Cao Dai religious sect in South Vietnam. It sounded pretty interesting, so I said, "Sign me up." That's how I ended up in Vietnamese language training, which I began in September, 1959. This is when you, John Helble, and I met, under the aegis of Dinh van Ban, God rest his soul.

We began to struggle our way through learning the Vietnamese language. As you recall, the language study materials were really not developed. It was a hit and miss operation. We certainly learned something and were much better equipped at the end of the course than we were at the beginning. Of course, when we arrived in the Embassy in Saigon, we were faced with great scepticism on the part of some of the people there who felt that Vietnamese was a silly language to learn and that French was really all that you needed. The only people that counted in Vietnam, of course, spoke French.

Well, I didn't speak French, so I was required by circumstances to push harder on my Vietnamese. I ran into a lot of Vietnamese who were pretty interesting and who gave me a picture of what was going on. They did not speak French. It was particularly true in the Vietnamese labor movement and out in the countryside.

Anyway, you will recall that, when we finished Vietnamese training, all three of us were assigned to Saigon. During my first two years in the Foreign Service, I had been married to a young lady from North Dakota, a French teacher. Off we went to Vietnam, via Copenhagen, Paris, Rome, and Saigon.

Q: Did you know in advance of your assignment to Saigon? Were there any other places beside Saigon where you could have been assigned?

MONTGOMERY: I suppose that there was the Consulate in Hue, but, you know, I just didn't think of it.

So we arrived in Saigon in the dead of night and were whisked off to the house at 6-A Rue Thevenet, or Duong Tu Xuong in Vietnamese. It was interesting to have an address with both a French and Vietnamese name.

Much to my surprise, I started in the Economic Section, instead of the Political Section. The Economic Section, at that time, was not in the Embassy proper. It was in the USOM [United States Operations Mission] building, the name at the time for the AID [Agency for International Development] Mission. It was next to the Xa Loi Pagoda, of subsequent fame when the Buddhists rose up against the government of President Diem in 1963. I had a non air-conditioned office. I was assigned to follow the government's various programs in the countryside, including land reform, the agricultural credit program, and what have you. I found it ultimately quite fascinating. It gave me a good picture of how well the government wasn't doing and how it was losing, if it ever had it, any base of support in the countryside. And how the Viet Cong [the communists] were able to organize the people in the country.

I remember picking up off the street in December, 1961, the first leaflets announcing the formation of the National Liberation Front, the NLF. They were in Vietnamese. I was one of the few people in the Embassy who could read them. Nobody seemed to pay very much attention to the NLF at the time. One of my great regrets is that I didn't save one of those leaflets.

Q: I prepared a report on it, but it was based on an FBIS, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, intercept.

MONTGOMERY: Yes. Looking back over the two years that we spent in Saigon - our first child was born there. She is now the mother of twins, living here in Bethesda, Maryland. This was the closest I ever came to leaving the Foreign Service because, after Laura was born, my wife, Dee Dee, developed an infection in her breast, which was enormously painful and didn't seem to go away. I was really ready to pack it in. Then the infection cleared up, and that crisis passed.

Q: The organization of the Embassy was kind of interesting because, as you said, the Economic Section office was co-located with the U.S. Operations Mission, and the Director of USOM was also the Economic Counselor, Arthur Gardiner. What did you think of this as an organizational tool?

MONTGOMERY: Well, in looking back on it and thinking about it, as opposed to what I thought of it at the time, it was clear that one of the functions of the Economic Section was to be a cheerleader for the assistance programs. You really were not expected to come up with scathing criticism of economic developments that had a high, USOM quotient in them. As you recall, this was entirely consistent with the positive thinking approach - and I remember that phrase - that Washington could only handle a limited amount of bad news. We really weren't going to tell them about difficult things that were developing. Somebody pointed out that the Ambassador [Elbridge Durbrow] lived in a house that was at one time the home of Dr. Coue, the Frenchman who was the proponent of positive thinking - even before Norman Vincent Peale.

I remember that aspect of things very well, that "We don't want to hear that things are not going well." I remember positive thinking, cheerleading sessions led by the Ambassador. Well, my view was that you first had to conclude that anybody was better than President Ngo dinh Diem, because that was what we were going to get. I always felt that we were intellectually dishonest in even deciding that Diem was the only figure that we could work with. In that case, you don't hide the negative aspects and the fact that he had very real limitations. We went through a lot of

bullshit in our reporting, and stuff like that. I think it was a mistake.

Q: To go a little further in this direction, do you think that we should have avoided becoming as deeply involved in 1960-1962, as we did?

MONTGOMERY: Not at the time. I thought that we were doing the right thing and were stopping the communists. I thought that this was a worthwhile thing to do. We had seen what happened when the communists took over Eastern Europe. That was pretty bad. The Hungarian uprising [of 1956] was very vivid in my mind. It was very clear that the North Korean communists were not very nice people, and the people who lived under that regime were in a pretty poor position. At that time I felt that we should give the people of South Vietnam every chance to survive and thrive on their own. The idea that, somehow, we had cheated Ho Chi Minh [the communist leader of North Vietnam] out of national elections in 1956 struck me as pretty silly. I just felt that, as part of this view, we had to have a very clear understanding of what was happening in South Vietnam.

To jump ahead a little bit, I remember most vividly that when the decision was made to make a major deployment of U.S. troops to South Vietnam in 1965...

Q: We had greatly expanded our military personnel in South Vietnam in the fall of 1961, from 800 or so to 15,000-16,000.

MONTGOMERY: No, I'm talking about when we put in formal units of the U.S. armed forces. My attitude at that time was, "This is the right thing to do, but it's going to be very, very difficult. Much more difficult than the top levels of the U.S. Government realize."

I would say that people like you and me, Jim Rosenthal, and other people who had been down a little bit at the lower levels of the Vietnamese people and were dealing with the realities of their political aspirations, had a much clearer idea of just how horrendously difficult it was going to be - while still believing that it should be done.

I remember reading the book, "The Ugly American," by Burdick and Lederer, when I was in the A-100 course at the FSI. I took it on board. I thought that this was the way we were supposed to behave, that we could whip these bastards.

So, looking back on it, did I nudge history when I was in Vietnam? Probably not. Do I have anything to contribute to the historical record that's not already in the record because of my time there? I don't think so. I think that the only thing that adds just a touch to the record is the idea that there were at least some of us who recognized the difficulty.

I think that that's about that. There were so many people involved in Vietnam, eventually. So much has been written about it. I don't know about you, but among the other people you've interviewed there were probably some people who were in Vietnam.

Q: Not to any great extent. Actually, only a very small part of the Foreign Service ever served in Vietnam.

MONTGOMERY: Well, I did not keep notes of my time in Saigon. I chronicled the progress of the land reform program and the legal provisions to control land rents in favor of the tenant farmers under Vietnamese Government Ordinance 57, and the arrangements for the National Agricultural Cooperative Organization. All of these were largely failures, particularly in political terms.

Q: So you left Saigon in July, 1962. Where did you go then?

MONTGOMERY: I came back to the State Department to work on the Vietnam desk.

Q: Did you have any choice on this matter, or were you simply assigned?

MONTGOMERY: I was simply assigned. I didn't even think that there was going to be any choice in the matter. The idea that I could finagle an assignment in the Foreign Service hadn't yet crossed my mind. [Laughter]

Q: First of all, how many people were on the Vietnam desk, who were they, and what were you doing?

MONTGOMERY: Well, I think that Ben Wood was in charge - Chalmers B. Wood. We worked for Barney Koren [Henry L. T. Koren], who was the Director of the Office of Southeast Asian Affairs. The Vietnam experience or enterprise was still subordinate to an Office Director. This was in the middle of 1962, after the mission to Vietnam led by Eugene Staley, which dealt with the counterinsurgency evaluation that led to an increase in advisers. Still, the Vietnam desk came under the Office Director of Southeast Asian Affairs, in what was then called the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. When did you come on the desk?

Q: A year later, in August, 1963.

MONTGOMERY: By then Paul Kattenburg was there, a special fellow in his own right. I think that there were, perhaps, four or five officers on the desk.

Q: What did you think of Paul Kattenburg?

MONTGOMERY: [Laughter] What did I think of Paul Kattenburg? He was one of the most interesting people that I ever met. I thought that he was totally unsuited as a bureaucratic operative. There was just too much pressure on him, and he came out with a skin condition which was clearly related to his nerves.

Q: You and I were on the desk, and so was Lyall Breckon, another good friend of ours.

MONTGOMERY: He came about the same time that you did. Then the desk became the Vietnam Working Group. Later, it went off as a separate office in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary during your time on the Vietnam desk?

MONTGOMERY: When I first arrived there in September, 1962, the Assistant Secretary was so bloody remote that I'm not even sure that I remember who it was.

Q: I think that it was Averell Harriman.

MONTGOMERY: I think that you're absolutely right.

Q: But he was on in years. He was replaced some time early in 1963, I think, by Roger Hilsman, who had been the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence Research.

MONTGOMERY: I don't even remember the Deputy Assistant Secretaries in the bureau, except Bob Barnett.

Q: Bob Barnett was one of them. I remember that during the summer of 1963 we had two college interns whose names I can't remember. One was a woman, the other was a young man. They were very, very good.

MONTGOMERY: The woman was Janice Church. During a later assignment I used to make speeches for her. The last time I saw her, she was in the civil service in the Office of Personnel Management. She ran courses on how the government works. When I was in the Bureau of Congressional Relations, I would speak at courses that she arranged.

Q: She used to handle a lot of the correspondence on the Vietnam desk. I had deep doubts about interns, but in my view they turned out to be very capable.

MONTGOMERY: I always had positive experiences with summer interns, throughout the years.

Q: So you were there on the Vietnam desk. What were some of the principal points? You came on the desk in September, 1962. 1963 was one of the great watersheds. What was the principal question then?

MONTGOMERY: In 1963 the principal point was the Buddhist uprising and the runup to the overthrow and death of Ngo dinh Diem. Diem was murdered just before the assassination of President Kennedy. It all sort of blurs in the mind when I look back. You often wonder if there wasn't a connection between the two events. So much has been written about it.

It was just a matter of increasing involvement in Vietnam, increasing frustration with the actions of the Vietnamese Government. Frederick E. ("Fritz") Nolting was Ambassador. In fact, he arrived in Saigon as Ambassador in May, 1961, well before we left there. I'm not sure that I can add a lot. I have one little anecdote during my time in Saigon. Some historian can look it up some day because I think that the paper trail is there, if you know where to look for it.

This happened after the coup d'etat in 1963 which overthrew Diem. I think that Nguyen Cao Ky was high up in the Vietnamese Government. There were charges of corruption, possibly involving him. I remember that we were working in the Operations Center on the Seventh Floor

of the Department. It was called the Vietnam Working Group.

One day I received a NODIS telegram to handle. This was a distribution control which meant that there should be No Distribution Outside the Department of State. The issue was that the Vietnamese Government had decided to replace the 200 piaster note. Apparently, this was the note of choice for black marketeers. It was the largest denomination note. They were going to replace it, wash out a lot of ill-gotten gains, and all of that kind of thing. They wanted to do it secretly. They had, I believe, contracted with Thomas Cook in London, which printed banknotes in those days.

I know that it wasn't the American Banknote Company. It was in London. The issue was to get a U.S. Air Force plane laid on to bring the banknotes to Saigon and keep it all very secret, so that the bad guys would be surprised. I forget the value of the banknotes involved, but let's say that it was 3.0 billion piastres worth of 200 piaster notes.

So I arranged for the U.S. Air Force plane to pick up the new 200 piaster notes in London, and they were delivered in Saigon. That was sort of the last I heard of it for about a month. Then, an UNCLASSIFIED Economic WEEKA - do you remember the Weekly Economic Airgram? - came across my desk. It said, perhaps in Item No. 24, that there had been confusion in the exchange of the new 200 piaster notes, which occurred on such and such a date - and it was the right date. The item said that they were surprised at the number of old 200 piaster notes in circulation, because they only had 2.0 billion worth of new 200 piaster notes!

Q: So 1.0 billion piastres had disappeared.

MONTGOMERY: A billion piastres had disappeared. I drew this to the attention of a variety of people, but no one was really interested. [Laughter]

Q: The Australians say, "File that in the 'Too Hard' File."

MONTGOMERY: The "Too Hard to Do" file. You hear about corruption and all that sort of thing, which is very subtly done. But that was one of the most blatant operations I've ever heard of. You just get that UNCLASSIFIED Economic WEEKA and set it alongside that exchange of NODIS telegrams, and you can figure that one out.

I was on the desk at the time of the Tonkin Gulf crisis in August, 1964. Looking back on it, the Vietnam Working Group was located in the Operations Center when this happened. I spent a lot of time in the Operations Center. There has been a lot of material written about the Tonkin Gulf crisis, with the strong implication that it was all manipulated, and we all knew that it was not what it purported to be. That may have been the case but, certainly at my level, everyone I knew genuinely believed that there were two separate attacks on those U.S. destroyers. I knew about OPLAN 34-A but I didn't...

Q: What was OPLAN 34-A?

MONTGOMERY: OPLAN 34-A was a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] run operation to

harass North Vietnam, to slip guerrillas into North Vietnam, landing them from the sea or dropping them in by parachute. It apparently was not a very effective operation. I saw an account of it in the newspapers a few months ago in which some of the South Vietnamese who were captured by the North Vietnamese wanted their back pay. And the U.S. Government wasn't going to give it to them! [Laughter] The fact is that there was an OPLAN 34-A landing opposite where the U.S. destroyers were reportedly attacked.

In the Operations Center we didn't know that there was a CIA operation going on at the same time as the attacks on the U.S. destroyers - the USS C. TURNER JOY and the USS MADDOX - which were steaming off the coast. I don't know whether those two destroyers had some kind of support role in this operation or not. I don't think that they did. However, it certainly would have been a normal reaction for the North Vietnamese to conclude that they did. The second night of the crisis probably involved more confusion than a genuine attack, but it seemed like a genuine attack.

Historians tend to ignore the fact that confusion can explain a lot.

Q: I think that's very true, both in military as well as civilian affairs.

MONTGOMERY: It happens in diplomatic matters, also. Diplomatic activity is rife with unintended consequences. That's just it, and people screw up. They screw up a lot more than you think is written down.

Q: You were talking about the Tonkin Gulf crisis in 1964. We glossed over quickly the overthrow of Ngo dinh Diem. As I recall, you spent the night of November 1-2 at the Operations Center. I relieved you early in the morning of November 2, 1963. Would you go over that? I thought it was an interesting story.

MONTGOMERY: It's interesting to go back and read some of the detailed descriptions of what happened. Richard Reeve's book, "Kennedy," is particularly well done on that score. I think that you and I were indeed involved in that telegram which went out with improper clearances and which is said to have given the green light for the overthrow of Diem. I was also up until 3:00 AM one morning with Bob Barnett, writing the instructions that stopped the Commercial Import Program in South Vietnam, which occurred maybe a week before Ngo dinh Diem was overthrown.

Q: The Commercial Import Program in South Vietnam was the principal element of U.S. support for the Saigon Government.

MONTGOMERY: It was the principal element of U.S. support. It generated the counterpart currency which made the whole thing go. We cut off the program and, obviously, the plotters of the coup d'etat against Diem knew that. It could well have been what drove them to stumble into action against Diem. I thought that it was clear that Henry Cabot Lodge was sent out in August, 1963 as Ambassador to Vietnam to "get rid of Diem." The decision had been made, at least as I saw it, that nobody could have any illusions that Diem and his family were going to start behaving any differently. We'd known them for too long and too well. This was after the Ap Bac

incident.

Q: That was an attack by the communists on a hamlet near the Mekong River, south of Saigon, early in 1963. The communists stood and fought, instead of withdrawing.

MONTGOMERY: And they shot down some helicopters. It was enormously dramatic and had tremendous political impact. In looking back at this, I probably thought at the time that it was time for Diem to go. Things had gotten to the point where my view at the time was, "We have to win the war." We had to beat the communists and we weren't going to do it with Ngo dinh Diem.

Q: This was clearly Paul Kattenburg's view.

MONTGOMERY: It was obviously the view of Roger Hilsman, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. Whether it was also the view of Joe Mendenhall [former Political Counselor in Saigon and a Regional Policy Planner in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs in November, 1963], I don't know. I had no particular insight into the situation. A couple of minutes ago, in this interview, I was crisper than I meant to be. I think that a better explanation is that they [certain U.S. leaders] wanted Diem overthrown, but they wanted no responsibility for doing it. They wanted it both ways.

Q: This raises a point because there's been a lot of public controversy about this. Did the U.S. actually engage in operations to overthrow Diem?

MONTGOMERY: I would say that what makes it hard to say "No" is the cutting off of the Commercial Import Program. I mean, that could have had no other objective, AT THAT TIME. Cutting off this program two years earlier could have been designed to pressure Diem to do something differently. But cutting off that program at that time, after the six-month long Buddhist revolt and everything else, could only have been designed to create the necessary conditions.

Q: As I recall it, you were in the Operations Center through the night of November 1-2, 1963. You left at about 4:00 or 5:00 AM, when I relieved you. As I recall it, you had the task of informing the White House of the overthrow of Diem. Could you tell us a little more about this?

MONTGOMERY: I don't remember it.

Q: Well, I'll tell you what you did, because you told me about it when I relieved you early on the morning of November 2, 1963. You passed the word to President Kennedy - whether you spoke to him directly or not, I don't know. Diem had died. The word you got back was that President Kennedy was very disturbed to learn this, because the initial story was that the Ngo brothers, Ngo dinh Diem and Ngo dinh Nhu, committed suicide. This disturbed Kennedy very much because he saw himself as responsible for driving them to commit suicide.

MONTGOMERY: I think that Kennedy probably was genuinely disturbed. I don't think that he wanted it to end up this way.

Q: Well, I think that in Ted Sorenson's book on Kennedy, he mentions a conversation with Kennedy between November 2, 1963, and Kennedy's own assassination on November 22, 1963. If I remember correctly, Sorenson quotes Kennedy as saying, "I didn't pay enough attention, I didn't read enough, I didn't fully understand." I think that this is probably correct. There were people in the U.S. Government who honestly believed that the overthrow of Diem was going to help us achieve our objectives in Vietnam.

MONTGOMERY: Oh, yes. The objectives themselves had not yet begun to be questioned, to use the passive voice. Isn't it interesting, though, that I had a conversation with the President of the United States, but there you are.

Q: Well, I'm not sure that you actually talked to Kennedy. But you talked to somebody who then talked to the President and relayed his comments back to you. At least there was that.

KEITH EARL ADAMSON
Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
Saigon (1960-1964)

Keith Earl Adamson was born in 1917 in Newton, Kansas. During college, he worked at the Department of State during the day and attended class at night. He graduated from George Washington University in 1943 with a degree in economics. He joined the Navy from 1943-1946, and returned to the State Department immediately thereafter. In addition, he has served in Egypt, Turkey, Colombia, Laos, Thailand, and Chile. He was interviewed on January 12, 1988 by Earl Wilson.

ADAMSON: Yes, I stayed on from when he came in '65 to January of '67, when I went to Saigon. I was his deputy then for a little over a year.

Q: Here's a man coming in from the outside completely. What kind of a relationship did you have with him?

ADAMSON: It was at arm's length for the first few months, and he brought in somebody from New York, whom I later saw when I was in Laos, a newsman. But nonetheless, he told me later, he said, "I don't understand why they appointed me. You're the professionals. You know how to operate this place."

I said, "Yes, but wait until you get into the politics of it. You were appointed by Lyndon Johnson, and that gives you some authority and influence that I do not have, and you can help the Voice in many ways that I can't. So don't worry about the day-to-day operations; let your deputy take care of that problem. You worry about overall style, what you want to do, what you want to communicate, the policy, and getting us the money to do it and the authority to do it."

The thing I think I appreciated as much as anything else was that maybe a year later, one day he

said, "Keith, over these months that I worked with you, I've finally gotten to the place that I can predict what your decision is going to be before you make it." And I got to thinking, you know, is that good or bad? But the point is, at least I was consistent. I had some standards that guided my decisions, and I thought that's better than not being consistent or predictable. So I took it as a compliment.

Q: I had the feeling that Chancellor seemed to be somewhat uncomfortable in that job. He really wanted to get out.

ADAMSON: He took the job reluctantly. He said something to the effect, "Lyndon Johnson is a great arm-twister." He said, "After his lecture and all of that, I would have felt guilty or un-American or something if I hadn't taken the job." But he was not happy with the assignment. But he worked hard at it. I must give him credit.

One of the things that he really brought in was the whole idea of most people are not going to be there listening to the radio eight to ten hours a day, and when they tune in, they want to get an update on the news, maybe a feature or two, and then that's that. And when they come back to you five hours later, they want an update. So what he was trying to do was have a news summary that brought the headlines up to date on a continuing basis. I wasn't around long enough to see what the audience response was to that, but we had a good audience. There was no doubt about it.

Q: During all this period, the war was developing in Vietnam, about a year. So in 1967, January, you went over there, right?

ADAMSON: Right.

Q: How did that come about?

ADAMSON: It was partly as a result of the fact that I had worked closely with Barry Zorthian, who was, in effect, the assistant director for programs, or something like that, at the Voice of America, when I was program officer for Near East South Asia. We'd gotten to know each other very well. Barry had gotten very good reports on my performance at the Voice after he went to Vietnam, and he asked for me.

Q: Good.

ADAMSON: I don't know if he regrets that or not, but we're still pretty good friends. (Laughter) When I was in Washington just a year ago for the 45th anniversary of the Voice, Barry and I got together and had a long chat. Barry had been loaned to the Department of State to be the Director of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office in Saigon, and I went over as his deputy. I found out later that that meant I was the Public Affairs Officer for Vietnam; Barry wasn't. But I had two roles. I was the Public Affairs Officer, which means that I should have (if I had known it, I would have) felt more responsibility for what I call the "normal" U.S. Information Agency activities in Vietnam. I would have worried a little bit more about the library, about the book translation program, and some of the other cultural exchange programs. But instead, I got so involved in

trying to build 12 radio stations and five T.V. stations, and operating the airborne transmitters until they could get built, and worrying about the provincial representatives of JUSPAO and flying out every weekend with Barry to see how the guys were doing and to keep their morale up and all that. I really got carried away with all this fighting the war and the insurgency and the psychological operations, which JUSPAO was involved in, and sort of neglected the normal programs.

Q: Did Barry sort of give you, hourly or otherwise, "This is going to be your division of responsibilities that I want you to take care of all these things?"

ADAMSON: Barry had his own way of operating, but basically, I was the day-to-day manager, and he would worry about external relations. Of course, he also had press relations under him. I was operating the information, cultural programs, and John McGowan was operating the press bureau. So I didn't get involved over there.

Q: As I remember, Barry went there in '66 or so?

ADAMSON: Barry went there in '64 and left there after I did. He was not going to stay one day less than Westmoreland. That's what everybody said. But nonetheless, he was there over four years.

Q: Because I remember that prior to his going there, the relations with the press were terrible, and he began to...

ADAMSON: He did a marvelous job with the press. He started background briefings with senior officers, intelligence officers, and the others. He'd invite in the network representatives, as well as the press services, and they appreciated it.

Q: Of course, the whole program in Vietnam was the largest in the world, certainly at that time.

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: It was different from anything we had anywhere else. There were questions and pulling and tugging and all the rest of it, and it's historically, still, an extremely important subject. Maybe you'd better spend some time on Vietnam and get into that a little bit.

ADAMSON: It's hard to know where to start. If a person doesn't really know all the things that we were doing, it's kind of hard to discuss the various aspects of it. I think it's best if I dwell on one thing that bothered me a great deal. When we decided, instead of just having advisors there, we were going to send in troops after the Tonkin Gulf attack on one of our ships, that's when we began escalating, which means going up. But in my opinion, we began going down. Several reasons. One, we were in a hurry. The war in Vietnam had been going on for centuries, not just a few years. The hostile groups were many, not just Communists and white hats or good guys. We were pushing in a hurry, instead of letting the Vietnamese learn how to do it their own way. I think that was our first and our biggest mistake: we were impatient.

Q: "Get out of the way, Charlie. I'll do it."

ADAMSON: So as a result of which, I was rather pleased when I began to hear from the Vietnamese, "This is our war. Go home." For a long time, you see, they were letting us do it. And for a long time, we would not give them the weapons to have the same kind of fighting capability that our forces had. I don't know whether we didn't trust them or we didn't have them or just hadn't thought about it. But an Army War College classmate of mine came out and he was working with General Abrams. They were upgrading the armaments for one division at a time, and they were also doing field training. Instead of pulling them off the line to learn about the weapons, they'd set up units to do training in the field. All of those were hopeful signs, but they had begun too late, in my opinion. I think as the action-reaction on both sides kept going, it had enabled North Vietnam to not only build up the Viet Cong cadres, but to install themselves strongly militarily in the south and to build up their supply chain so that it was one of the most efficient, incredible things that you could imagine. That was the background to what I wanted to say.

After a year and a half in Saigon, I was transferred to Laos. I said, "Why couldn't we have done in Vietnam what we're doing in Laos? We're helping the Lao fight their war." If it hadn't been for the ability of North Vietnam to build up and use the supply chain they had going, I don't think they would have succeeded in taking over in Laos.

Q: You've mentioned that our military was putting emphasis on itself, and more or less telling the Vietnamese, "Get out of the way." Let's think about the information and propaganda aspects of our effort. Were we doing the same thing?

ADAMSON: Sure. We were doing exactly the same thing. We had set up our crew in every one of the media; in production of motion pictures for both theaters and the television programs; operation of a government printing plant to print all kinds of propaganda and brochures; radio training and radio station construction; and we were doing all the leaflets, the air-drops of leaflets and what have you. There was not very much that the Vietnamese were doing other than serve as staff for the JUSPAO operation. They were supposed to be trainees and so on.

I had considerable opposition in both Laos and Thailand, because my duty was to turn over our surrogate operation to the nationals of the country and give them complete responsibility and authority. Several of my staff in Thailand were very opposed to turning it over. They said, "They'll never do the job. They won't be able to fight this insurgency if we get out of the business." But we did; we got out of it. We turned over equipment and personnel to the government, but we didn't do it in Vietnam.

Q: In Vietnam, given this type of policy, what do you think were some of the most successful things that we did, despite that?

ADAMSON: The fact that we had television programs that people could receive in the Delta area from those U.S. Navy operated CONNIES [Constellations] that were flying the transmitter run, people enjoyed those. They were very useful. We helped produce films about Vietnam, (not just about the U.S. forces and others that were coming around). We had radio programs with

Vietnamese music and well known artists, Pham Zuy and the gals. They were very much appreciated. In other words, that was something that did make a contribution.

Q: You could tell. You knew they were looking at those programs, and you could deduce that they were at least enjoying them.

ADAMSON: That's right. There were several daily newspapers in Vietnamese that they themselves ran. The extent to which they used our press bulletins and output and so on, I don't know. They attended the Five o'clock Follies and listened to the briefings about how the war was going. They didn't find out much about what ARVN was doing -- Armed Forces Vietnam -- because we were always talking to the foreign journalists about the U.S. presence. That's what the briefing was all about.

As a result of the printing plant that we helped establish, when the big election came along -- I'm not sure that was a good thing, but that's another story -- they were able to print all of these things to tell about the different parties, the different candidates and so on, and get them out -- period. That they did; we didn't do it. But they did it with their own facilities. So I would guess that had things turned out differently we would have left some bequest with them that they could have carried on and done better than they'd ever done before.

Nevertheless, we had a lot of good people up there working, and we lost a few. We lost one of our young officers. As a matter of fact, he was on loan from the Department. When the North Vietnamese attacked Hue, Willis was captured and held prisoner for a long time, along with some of our Philippine employees of the radio station up there. One of our NBC contract employees at the T.V. station in Hue was killed. Life wasn't easy out in the provinces. When guys went out there to live, it wasn't the best living accommodations in the world.

Q: You know, these many years later, the Agency has agreed to put a plaque in the lobby. [Tape recorder turned off]

ADAMSON: I just got my new USIA bulletin with all the news in it, especially the news that you were going to interview me in Honolulu.

Q: From what you say, then, it was very difficult for the Vietnamese to have creative ideas that would go up the line in information or persuasiveness.

ADAMSON: That would be my response. I don't know whether they were cowed or discouraged or just didn't feel that there was room for them to become involved and to try to do very much.

Q: Did you get any feeling that, on the one hand, they perhaps thought the Americans knew best, or at least what the Americans were going to do.

ADAMSON: Let me back up. I think they felt in most areas that the Americans were going to do what they wanted to do. But I want to back up a little bit. There were Vietnamese counterparts who had ideas and were not reluctant to tell us what they thought. John McGowan had developed some very good relationships with members of the press, and that worked out very well. We had

people in the television-motion picture production area, where it was their ideas as to what ought to be produced, to tell the people what they were going to do. They were completely responsible for some of the radio programs that were on their stations. So I must modify what I'd said earlier. But the problem was I think they were reluctant to go too far, because they felt that we had the resources, it was our money. And there was a certain extent -- "These area people who have had worldwide experience, and we're just local boys, and we don't know as much as they know." So all of these things entered into it.

Q: Did that begin to change when we entered the phase of Vietnamization?

ADAMSON: I left in May 1968 for Laos, and that was just really beginning getting going. So that is something you need to ask some others. Now, one person you're going to find will have a lot of answers of the later period is John Hogan, who is here. So when you get to John, that will be very good.

Q: Why don't you go on about Vietnam, and we'll pick up on Laos the next time.

ADAMSON: I don't know what else we have on Vietnam that we haven't covered. One of the things is, of course, I haven't explained just what kind of an operation we had in detail. I've mentioned the fact that we were trying to help the Vietnamese to build their T.V. stations, their radio stations, their printing plant, their motion picture production plant, and their skills.

The Navy was flying these two Constellations with T.V. transmitters aboard, and then when the Tet attack of January and February 1968 came along and they knocked out the downtown radio station, we then had to get their broadcasts somehow aboard, so we put them aboard the same planes that flew a pattern, and we put one of their best Vietnamese announcers on board the plane, so he would have some taped shows and then he would also have the news, which he was getting from this little two-way radio. Of course, they knocked out the T.V. station in Hue. They damaged another station; it hadn't really gone on the air yet in Can Tho, in the Delta. But that was about it. These were the kinds of things.

In addition, let me go back with an inventory. We had a JUSPAO representative in each province. Many of those were military, not any particular branch. It could be Navy or Air Force or Army, although it was Army for the most part. They were advisors to the local Vietnamese military command, not the U.S. But they worked very closely, of course, with whatever U.S. units happened to be stationed in that same area. They were our source of information as to what kinds of programs would be needed, what kinds of leaflets were needed, because they knew the order of battle and where the VC, as well as the North Vietnamese units were located, and what kinds of things they would suggest. So these provincial representatives were extremely important, but, also, they were very isolated. That was why I mentioned earlier we had three planes assigned to JUSPAO, and we would use those to send materials out to the province, keep them supplied, and so we would travel out, usually on weekends, to visit one or two or three provinces to see how they were doing.

Q: In general, it seems to me that with respect to the enemy, you were trying to get them to surrender as a major policy.

ADAMSON: That's right.

Q: In terms of the populace of North Vietnam, trying to get them to distrust their government, is that right?

ADAMSON: That's correct.

Q: And as far as in Vietnam itself, the south, you were trying to get them to be friendly to the U.S., on the one hand, and the allies, but it didn't have much political content with respect to their government, is that right?

ADAMSON: How can we sort this out. The objective to get the North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam and the Viet Cong to quit and surrender, I would guess, had less than a fraction of a percent success. To get the villagers to distrust and not cooperate with the Viet Cong, that was a different story. They cooperated at the point of a gun. In other words, they knew their life was in danger if they didn't cooperate with the VCs and others who came into their village. But they also found out that their life was in danger if they didn't cooperate with the ARVN when they came in, the government forces. So they walked a tightrope the whole time.

In the cities, however, it was a different story. I think there it was, to a certain extent, business as usual in the political field. They all had their own ideas as to whether they were going to be with their old familiar group that had its own leadership or these new imports from North Vietnam. Well, of course, Big Minh was born in South Vietnam. But a lot of the people that were involved in the government were Northerners. So it's very hard. I don't know if we ever did really get a clear picture. Doug Pike has written some of the most knowledgeable material about the Viet Cong and their background and their beliefs. Don Rocklin has interviewed more captured Viet Cong than any other single person and has a better understanding of what makes them tick. But I don't think that in our psychological warfare, we ever did really find out what to do. At one of the weekly meetings over at the military command headquarters, MACV, the PSYOPS people were telling how many leaflets they had dropped, in what sectors, here and there, and so on, and they had it in the number of thousands or tonnage, I'm not sure which. And General Creighton Abrams pulled his cigar out of his mouth and said, "Well, what the hell does that mean? Did anybody quit? Did anybody show up?" The good old questions about "Are you being successful?" That was one of the biggest problems we ever had.

Q: A broad-brush thing, too, here at the last part of this tape. It seemed to me the military, in the beginning, had almost a wishful, magical thinking about PSYOPS and how the whole information program was going to do wonders, and then as time went by, they became terribly cynical.

ADAMSON: Yes. I agree with you. There was a time when we thought, "We won't have to fire a shot. Just fire out a few leaflets."

Q: Right.

ADAMSON: In other words, they had an exaggerated expectation of what psychological warfare could do. We worked with the sixth PSYOPS Battalion out there very closely. As a matter of fact, they got their policy guidance from JUSPAO. Of course, when I got up to Laos, the guys down there got their policy guidance from me.

Q: Officers in the field in Vietnam, including the military and others that were attached, were they giving useful input on some of these problems to you?

ADAMSON: Yes and no. They gave us the best understanding we could have gotten from any source, I think, of the situation in their province. But again, the problem is you can't produce much for that single province from abroad. You have to try to generalize the material and then sometimes it doesn't respond. But we did have the capability of doing small quantities on the spot in the province for very specific targets, so that was one way we got around that problem.

JOHN M. ANSPACHER
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Saigon (1960-1964)

John M. Anspacher majored in Political Science while in college. After college, he worked for about 10 years as a newspaper reporter and editor. His government career started out in the Psychological Strategy Board, after his work in psychological operation in WW II. An old acquaintance, C.D. Jackson, who knew Anspacher from his days at Life Magazine, recommended him for a position at USIA. He has also served in Germany, Cambodia, Mali, and Ethiopia. He was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt on March 22, 1988.

ANSPACHER: I spent a year and a half, two years there trying to backstop the Far East PAOs. All of a sudden, in early 1960 somebody said "Saigon" and I jumped at it. So off I went to Saigon, stopping en route at the Far East PAO conference in Manila before I even got to the post. The then-deputy PAO/Saigon, Herb Baumgartner, who had been in Korea, had come down to hold the fort between Chet Opal and me. He came to meet me at the conference. They used to hold our PAO conferences in Baguio, the hill station outside of Manila, which was very nice. And what a collection of old timers there were there! Hank Miller's now dead. So is Harry Casler. I don't know where Dick McCarthy is.

Q: Dick is in Washington.

ANSPACHER: Dick is in Washington? Straightened out I hope.

Q: Who knows?

ANSPACHER: Who knows. Bob Clark.

Q: Bob is dead.

ANSPACHER: Bob is dead. Dear me.

Q: He was my deputy in Thailand.

ANSPACHER: Bob Clark had this interesting Chinese-language thing, I guess, of always, not always but frequently, phrasing his sentences as if it were a question. Like, "it's going to rain tonight?"

Q: Invariably. His conversation invariably ended as a question.

ANSPACHER: Fascinating.

Q: Rising inflection.

ANSPACHER: It must have been the Chinese which he learned as a child. Anyway, they were a bunch of old timers, including a fellow named Powell who was an ex-Marine. I've forgotten his first name.

Q: Ralph?

ANSPACHER: Yes, Ralph Powell.

Q: He later taught at the War College.

ANSPACHER: Later taught at the War College. He was considerably older than most of us.

Q: Terribly shot up as a Marine, too.

ANSPACHER: Yes. He had been Naval Attaché in Shanghai or in Beijing at one time.

Q: I don't know exactly how much we lost when the leader came on at the end of that tape, but just to review a moment, we were talking about Ralph Powell, who had been a Marine Corps Officer and also taught at the War College and had been -- what was it he was in China?

ANSPACHER: He had been Naval Attaché to the last American Embassy in China before we pulled out.

Q: So Ralph was a real Chinese expert and, as I say, taught at the National War College. He died a few years ago and I think it was a great loss. Okay, let's pick up from there.

ANSPACHER: There is another chap who was with us and you know him, too. He had been PAO in Tokyo. Great big tall fellow, red hair.

Q: Willard Hanna?

ANSPACHER: No, not Willard Hanna. Had a three-syllable last name, I think.

Q: Bradford?

ANSPACHER: Not Bradford, no. Now this was considerably later. Well, anyway, whoever. Those were the real old-timers, I guess, a lot of us anyway. Jack O'Brien was there, and Bill Copeland. I had known Bill in the United Press days and he and I were great friends. And Harry Casler, who is also now dead. He lived in Ireland. He and I corresponded for a while. He had been PAO in Indonesia.

Q: He'd also been in Caracas. I don't know where he was before that.

ANSPACHER: Well he came to Baguio as PAO, in Indonesia, I think. Those were the "good old days." Anyway, I pick up a whole Saigon thread from Baumgartner at the Baguio conference. George Allen was then the director of USIS. He apparently knew Chet Opal because he said to me, "I gather you have a document that Mr. Baumgartner, your deputy, has brought with him: Chet Opal's presentation." I said, "yes," pulling this thing out of a briefcase; it was inches thick. George Allen apparently knew Chet Opal. He said, "See if you can get that down to about five minutes, will you?" I looked at it and tried to boil it down. I've forgotten now what was in it. It was a status report and it was well done. Very good for my purposes but a little bit too much for the PAO conference.

After the conference I went on to Saigon. We were not yet in the psychological operations programs that Barry Zorthian eventually ran from the USIS base. It was a more or less normal USIS operation. I guess the biggest thing we had the first year I was there was the 1960 presidential elections, the election of John F. Kennedy. We ran that as a kind of "election special" for USIS, inviting a lot of people in, keeping the tote board, explaining who Kennedy was, and so forth. That was kind of exciting, because all of us realized that we were getting somebody in the White House who apparently had some charisma, at least. We had a feeling, as everybody did at the time, that we were perhaps opening a new era in U.S. relations with the rest of the world, as well as with our own people.

We made kind of a three-way connection with the AID information people and the Ministry of Information in Vietnam, as we had tried to do in Cambodia, but in Phnom Penh it wasn't really very effective because there wasn't much of a ministry. In Vietnam there was more of a ministry. They had learned considerably more from the French about how to establish a Ministry of Information and what such a Ministry should do.

They could never quite understand that the United States didn't have a Ministry of Information. We are one of the few countries in the world which does not have one. But in most developing countries, the official attitude is that every government needs a Ministry of Information. The concept of press releases and press conferences, of course, was absolutely foreign to the Vietnamese. We tried to address that problem although I didn't think that the palace in Saigon ever gave a press conference. It would never have occurred to them. We did, however, get the Minister himself to give press conferences from time to time. That was a change. So we had some influence on how they worked.

I brought whatever professional background I could to bear on the AID operation, using it as a liaison to the Information Ministry. One of our USIS press staff and the AID information "advisor" shared an office at the Ministry of Information which was fine, providing for a two-way liaison and cross-fertilization of ideas and programs and projects. I guess our USIS films office, perhaps more than any other, worked most closely with the Vietnamese Ministry of Information. We had the capability, the professional know how and to a large degree the technical apparatus with which to make films of use to them as well as to us.

Q: Were these shown in a field program? Did they get out into the boondocks at that time?

ANSPACHER: Yes, they did. They would go out largely by vehicle. Compared to Phnom Penh, Saigon was a million dollar operation. We had a whole building to ourselves with almost all the equipment, including vehicles, we needed. In Phnom Penh, we had half a floor, plus a library. But in Saigon we were a big thing, and we got to be very well-known. We were located in an absolutely magnificent place, right on the main corner of Saigon across the way from a large, modern hotel and down the street from the Parliament building. It was a stone's throw from the Palace. We made very good contact with the Ministries of Education and Information. They had a Ministry of Cultural Affairs too, where we also had some very good friends. I think we had some impact, certainly in Saigon, until "impact" became a matter of "how many Viet Cong did you kill today?" At that point our kind of impact was beside the point. All we had to do was talk anti-communist to be on the side of the angels, presumably.

At the time I was there, before the U.S. got into the kind of combat we eventually did, I think we did manage to inculcate the Vietnamese with some ideas about how the United States worked, particularly in the media area, and in some measure: democracy. Now, Ngo Dinh Diem himself was not a democrat by any means. He was about as autocratic and dictatorial as anybody could be. He has a brother and a sister-in-law who, with him, managed to run that country.

Q: Along with Madame Diem?

ANSPACHER: Well, his sister-in-law, Madame Nhu. She was the wife of the brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. She's still alive, so far as I know for what that's worth, somewhere in France, I think. Diem and his brother, Nhu, of course, are dead.

Our principal problem, as is frequently the case -- I'm sure it is in a place like South Africa -- was to present our concepts of democracy and political and economic theory and practice in the face of the dictatorial oppression that Diem laid on his people. We were fighting not so much ignorance or communism as the Mandarin in the palace. We had to be careful not to fight him outright or our Ambassador would hear about it. This was Elbridge Durbrow, at first, when Frederick Nolting. Durbrow was a very experienced diplomat who "took nothing from anybody," having worked in Moscow with Kennan and Bohlen and that crowd. He was used to a tough turf and he handled it very well. He and I had some differences but who doesn't? When we got to "Fritz" Nolting, who was Durbrow's successor, it was a different ballgame. He could not bring himself to raise his voice effectively against Diem on behalf of the United States. I found that disappointing and perhaps disastrous.

[Aside.] I found out considerably later that the appointment of Fritz Nolting to Saigon happened in the most bizarre way -- according to the report I have -- which may be apocryphal, but it's a great story. It is that President Kennedy, in the days between the election and the inauguration, sent Walt Rostow to the State Department to find Ambassadors for Southeast Asia, one for Bangkok, one for Saigon. Among the people Rostow talked to was a man named Bill Lacy, whom you may know. Bill Lacy had been very prominent in Southeast Asian affairs before the war. His wife wrote "The King and I," among other things. He spoke Thai. He spoke Lao. He spoke some Vietnamese.

Well, Bill Lacy and a lot of other people told Rostow that the man for Saigon was Kenneth Todd Young, who was not a career Foreign Service Officer. He had been with Standard Oil in Southeast Asia. He knew Diem and he knew Saigon and Vietnam. They said Young is the man for Saigon -- very strong, very knowledgeable, just the right choice. For the other side of the coin, Bangkok, they advised Rostow, take Frederick Nolting, a career Foreign Service Officer.

Somewhere between Foggy Bottom and 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, I have heard, those names were switched. Kenneth Young went to Bangkok. Fritz Nolting went to Saigon. I maintain to this day that if that had not happened, the course of events in Southeast Asia might have been changed. Kenneth Young was a completely different person. He would not for a moment taken a lot of the guff that Diem handed Nolting and which Nolting swallowed hook, line and sinker, I'm afraid.

I'll give you another anecdote. Once, when things seemed to be going badly for the South Vietnamese, I went to a dinner meeting of the Rotary Club, as a guest. After the meeting, six or seven prominent Vietnamese who were also members of Rotary came up to me and said they'd like to talk to me.

These were people who were known as loyal South Vietnamese, the "loyal opposition." They were not North Vietnamese agents so far as I know. They said they wanted very much to talk to Ambassador Nolting. Things are going from bad to worse, they said. He's got to take a stand with Diem. We can't get in to see him, they said.

The next time I saw the Ambassador, I reported this conversation. I said I think these people just want to talk to you. I don't know what they have in mind, but they're honestly concerned about the way their country is going down the drain. They are loyal but they are in opposition. And they want to talk to you. I think you ought to see them at your residence, not here in the Embassy, not in the Chancery. The Ambassador disagreed. He said the president wouldn't like it. At that point it suddenly struck me what was wrong with this whole situation. "Which president," I asked. "President Diem," he replied. I said, "Mr Ambassador, you don't work for President Diem. It doesn't make any difference whether he likes it or not. What matters is the president you work for -- Kennedy." But he wouldn't do it; he never did see them.

Well, things like this made me wonder how the course of history as we know it now might have changed if we'd had different people there. The Ambassador never really understood I'm afraid what was happening.

After we were all back [in Washington] a group of us Country Team Members, absent the Ambassador (the CIA Station Chief, William Colby, Political Officer, Joe Mendenhall, myself, the Military Attaché, and Bill Jorden, a special assistant to Averell Harriman) went to see Walt Rostow at the White House. Do you know Bill Jorden?

Q: Oh, yes. Very well.

ANSPACHER: He must be a neighbor of yours or almost, isn't he? He lives out in Virginia somewhere.

Q: No, he lives in the District now.

ANSPACHER: We tried to convince Walt Rostow that things were going from bad to worse under Fritz Nolting. He simply wasn't making any progress. Every time he went over to the Palace he was given a shopping list and he never argued about it. He never tried to tell Diem what was right and what was wrong.

Anyway, that's all really beside the point. Were we in USIS effective? We were up to the point of our getting into the war, when it became academic as to whether we were effective in promoting American and United States policies and so forth. Our job from that time on was to defeat the Communists from North Vietnam. And we had to go along with whatever seemed to be pointing in that direction.

During my stay in Saigon, we organized what eventually became the Psychological Operations Coordinating Committee. We had representatives from CIA, MAAG (Military Assistance Group), AID, and the Embassy political section. We had a pretty good little committee dealing largely with what the military was doing in psychological warfare, with the USIS and CIA support.

But it was until I got back to this country and ran into the officer who had been the liaison between MAAG and USIS that I realized that MAAG had never really been a member of our Committee; that this major was under orders from his commanding general to tell us nothing and to agree to nothing and to distance himself from everything we were doing. I had kind of suspected this might be the case. But I had never seen it or heard it spelled out that way. I think I was out of the Agency by that time. But in any event I think I reported this conversation to the Assistant Director.

Q: Who was it that told you this?

ANSPACHER: This was a man named Major Bartz, B-A-R-T-Z. He was a pretty decent guy. I've forgotten his first name. He had been the liaison between MAAG and USIS and it was General (Paul) Harkings who had given him direct orders to distance himself from our committee, provide no information, offer no assistance, agree to nothing, tell us nothing. Great way to run a coordinating committee!

Let's see what else. There are a lot of little anecdotes about the Saigon period. We almost killed Paul Neilson, for instance.

Q: Was he there as Press Officer?

ANSPACHER: No, he was Deputy Assistant Director for Far East and he came out on an inspection trip once.

Q: That's right. He was at that time. Ken Bruce, I guess was the Assistant Director for Far East. Paul died not too long after that.

ANSPACHER: Paul Neilson. Yes, I know. I rather liked Paul. Paul and I got along quite well.

Q: I first knew him in Indonesia.

ANSPACHER: Paul had a good friend on my staff named Ed Robinson. Do you know Ed Robinson?

Q: The name sounds familiar but I don't think so.

ANSPACHER: He's been in and out of the Agency. He was our Press Officer at the time, working for an Information Officer who was less capable than he. So he was suffering more or less visibly under that situation.

My deputy was Herb Baumgartner, who'd come down from Korea, a fine officer. He wanted very much to be a PAO and I don't think he ever made it. He felt that he ought to be PAO because he'd been deputy in Korea. He felt that he ought to have his own post.

Q: Is this Ev Bumgardner or Herb Baumgartner?

ANSPACHER: Herb.

Q: Herb was later deputy in Thailand but I don't think he was ever a PAO.

ANSPACHER: He never quite made it to the alter. I think he resented that a little bit. Ev Bumgardner's a different person. Spells his name differently and was a different type entirely. He had no illusions about being a PAO. He was a photographer and reporter and he also became a Vietnam expert of some sorts didn't he? Or Philippine expert.

Q: He's out of the Agency now.

ANSPACHER: Oh, yes. I think he was a photographer or artist or reporter or something. I think he worked largely for the Regional Service Center in Manila. Anyway, Ev was never on my staff.

This was Herb Baumgartner. Herb was Deputy PAO. Information Officer was Howard Caulkins. Films Officer was Dave Sheppard, whom I had insisted on keeping despite the fact that I had had pressure from Washington to take someone whom Washington wanted. Washington being -- who was our great films man in Washington for a while, later became an Ambassador?

Q: Turner Shelton.

ANSPACHER: Turner Shelton wanted some friend of his to come down from Laos to be Films Officer. But I was very pleased with Dave. I liked his attitude; his background seemed fine. He seemed to be doing a good job. So we kept him on. And I just turned Turner Shelton down. I do not regret it. And Turner and I may never have got along but that's all right. Turner's dead now, isn't he?

Q: He's dead now.

ANSPACHER: Well, it doesn't make any difference, does it? Anyway, Dave was the Films Officer. His assistant was a man named Douglas Pike, of whom you may have heard, the resident United States expert on the North Vietnam psyche, a venture which he started with a little cubbyhole of an officer and a Vietnamese secretary. Now he's developed this profession of being a Vietnam "expert." More power to him.

The Information Officer, Howard Caulkins, was a fine, nice guy, a sweet guy -- and I use the word sweet advisably. Almost never lost his temper. Never got excited. He was not terribly imaginative but he did his job in a very routine, pedantic, by the book way. He did what he was asked to do, did it reasonably well, but not with an awful lot of verve. The verve in the Information Office belonged to Ed Robinson, who suffered from ignominy, if you will, of working for a man to whom he was intellectually and perhaps even professionally superior and than whom he was more capable.

Ed Robinson and Paul Neilson were very close friends from their Burma days when Paul had been PAO in Rangoon. So they were thick as thieves. This got a little bit embarrassing because Paul really put me in a spot when he came to me. Ed Robinson had gone to Paul about his problems on my staff.

Paul came to me about them. But there wasn't anything I could do without making a drastic change which he had to do. I couldn't do it. The Area Director had to move people around, either remove Ed and transfer him or remove Ed's boss. I couldn't really initiate it without causing more trouble than it was worth. Well, as a result, I guess of this, on night Ed got a little bit exuberant about things and attacked me personally and physically which I felt was terribly unfortunate, because he didn't really know what he was doing. Both he and Paul came to me later and apologized; Paul had heard about the incident, not from me but from Ed.

As I told Paul, I had a perfect right at that point to ask for Ed out of there. It would have ruined his career if I'd written it the way I could have. I preferred to talk to Paul about it and let Paul straighten out Ed and let us go on with a person who was a valuable member of the staff. And he was valuable. He did a good job. And that's the way it was all solved. Since then Ed and I have

become quite close whenever we see each other, from time to time, in Washington.

Whom else did we have? We had some good Administrative Officers, some very good ones. People who in the best code of administrative procedure start by nodding their heads instead of shaking their heads. This is the way I judge an Administrative Officer. For instance, Jim Hoofnagle would say, "Let's see what we can do about it" instead of saying "No, that's impossible." There have been some like that. But I had some good administrative people who understood the rules of the game but also knew how to find the loopholes in them. And we had a pretty good operation, in Saigon Budgeted I guess, at about a million dollars annually.

Also, we had a good Country Team in Saigon. My personal relations with the Ambassador were fine until -- but this gets a little bit ahead of the story -- there began to be a large influx of American troupes. It was quite obvious; all we had to do was stand on a major street corner with a counter and figure that out there were more than the 688 "advisors" that were officially allowed by treaty.

One day two correspondents came to me and said, "We know, because it has been leaked out of Washington, that there is a "baby flattop" carrying helicopters and American troops, coming into a port down in the south of Vietnam." They said they would like to go aboard that vessel, to meet her and come up the river with her.

I suggested they talk to the Ambassador about it. We talked and we had an exchange of cables with Washington. As a result the Ambassador ruled out the proposed press trip. Now, because I could see the newsmen's point, this demonstrated one of the problems a former professional media man faces in a PAO job. There have been others like this, too. One finds oneself on both sides of the desk at the same time. I knew these correspondents were right. I knew what they wanted to do. I knew they were basing their requests on good information. But I had to stand on a policy decision that didn't make much sense. Somehow it had leaked out of Washington or out of San Francisco. Everybody knew it. It was in the public domain. Yet we had this hard and fast policy decision we could not confirm or deny that there was such a ship.

Then these two reporters, who up to that time had been reasonably good friends of mine (because I tried to keep these guys, some of whom I had known professionally before, on good terms), reported back to their newspapers (the Chicago Daily News and U.S. News and World Report) that I was being obstructionist, impossible to deal with, a discredit to the government.

As a result, who should show up on the scene from a distance but Pierre Salinger, who decided that, "something had to be done about this guy Anspacher." The first thing Salinger did, or somebody did, I guess it was Salinger, was to send out to Saigon a special Press Attaché, a man named Davis. Impossible guy. I don't think he'd ever been in the Agency.

He walked into my office and said, "I'm your new Press Attaché." He didn't really say "I'm your new Press Attaché." He said, "I am the Ambassador's Press Attaché." This was news to me. I'd never heard of him. He put his feet up on my desk and said, "Now, let's get things straight." Well, it seems the Ambassador had had a cable from Washington (signed Salinger) appointing this guy as the Ambassador's own Press Attaché with no relation to me, no responsibility to me.

I called the Ambassador and asked, "What am I supposed to do with this Davis?" "Cooperate with him," the Ambassador replied. Judging by the way he has started, it wasn't going to be easy, because he (Davis) had started off by saying, "Now, the thing we've got to do with these correspondents is get them laid. Get them drunk and get them laid, preferably with American secretaries," he said, looking around my outer office.

"We've really got a handful here," I said to myself. To him, I said, "We'd better understand each other. Either you're going to work with me or I'm going to have nothing to do with you and I'm going to tell Washington that you are completely on your own. If the Ambassador wants to put up with this kind of nonsense that's up to him. But I'm not going to. And I'm not going to have you responsible to me and conduct yourself any old way you please. So let's make an arrangement." He said, "Well, that's fine. I'll go off and work for the Ambassador." I think I wrote a memorandum of conversation for the record stipulating that I took no responsibility for Davis and/or his activities.

The next thing that happened was that there was one of those conferences in Hawaii with the President of South Vietnam and the high command of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and God knows who all, including the "Press Attaché" from the Saigon Embassy. I thought maybe it would be I or maybe my Press Officer. Oh, no. It was this Davis who, I guess, got all the correspondents drunk and laid. That's the way he handled press relations. Well, that wasn't the way I had been taught or experienced to do it.

As I said, I wrote an official memorandum of conversation disassociating myself and the U.S. Information Service from this guy no matter what Pierre Salinger said. And Mr. Murrow either took that under advisement, or swallowed it, or put it in the back of his hat.

Another such "memorandum of conversation" I wrote had been from Cambodia. We can backtrack a little bit. I came in to our office one Monday morning in Phnom Penh to find waiting for me the pilot of our USIS power boat, which we used to take films and publications and whatever we had up the river to show the hoards of fascinated peasants who would gather on the shore -- just as they did in the day of the old Mississippi steamboat.

The pilot came to me and said, "We've got to do something about this boat. The Ambassador ordered me and the boat out yesterday with 47 people aboard. That boat can't carry 47 people, especially if they're smoking the way they were smoking. I've got a full 55-gallon drum of gasoline on that craft. These people were all over that boat. I couldn't see where I was going. They were lying all over the boat, obstructing my vision and the running lights and so forth.

So I said, "We've got to do something about this." It just so happened that the Naval Attaché from the Embassy in Saigon was also responsible for Cambodia since Cambodia didn't have much of a Navy. What it did have he could deal with. He was due in town the next week or so. When he got in I asked him to take a look at this boat and rate it for passengers. And he stipulated, 23 or 24 passengers with life preserves and that's all.

I went to the Ambassador as gently as I could, because talking with Rob McClintock this way

was not the easiest thing in the world. I told him in words to this effect that something had to be done about this boat. It is rated for 24 people, I said, and that's all it can carry. "You really can't ask my pilot," I continued -- at this point he cut me off. He said, "I can ask your pilot to do anything I damn well please at any time of the day or night with that boat which belongs to me." Wait a minute. We've got real problems here.

So my first "memorandum" to the Agency said, in effect: "Make up your mind whether this boat belongs to the Ambassador and he can do with it as he pleases, in which case you better absolve us of all responsibility, or it belongs to USIS, and you straighten this out back in Washington." Well, we did get that straightened out in favor of USIS. But it was touch and go for a few minutes.

Now back to Saigon. As I say, my second "memorable memo" had to do with this Press Attaché fellow. I don't know what ever happened to him. Because the end of our tour was approaching and I was due for home leave. Largely as a result of all of this, I think, Salinger had arranged with Deputy Director Don Wilson for John Mecklin to replace me.

There was a PAO conference between the time my orders came in and my date of departure on home leave. The Ambassador said he wanted me back. And I said, fine. I'll leave all my stuff here and I'll be back in two or three months and Herb Baumgartner will handle things. We're virtually in a war time situation anyway.

Q: Are you now back in Vietnam?

ANSPACHER: Oh, yes, we're in Vietnam now. This was shortly after my confrontation with the Salinger-anointed Press Attaché and the Hawaii conference. I was furious at the way this thing had been handled. And I had a feeling that Ed Murrow didn't know anything about it. Well, anyway, between the time I had my orders and the time I actually left on home leave we had a PAO conference at Baguio in the Philippines. I think it was a joint conference with ambassadors, too. I'm not sure.

In any event, Don Wilson had come out to the Baguio conference. He and I went out for dinner one evening, and he said, "We're replacing you in Saigon." I said, "How come? The Ambassador and I, at the last report which was two days ago, had arranged that I would be back as soon as I could. He trusted Herb Baumgartner but not terribly far. And he wanted me back as quickly as possible. Wilson then said that the Ambassador doesn't know about this yet. But "we're doing it. That's just the way Salinger and we want it. He said John Mecklin would be my successor. I didn't know Mecklin but I knew of him. He had been a favorite of Don Wilson's when Don was an executive with Time magazine. And John had been, I think, either the Paris or Bonn bureau chief for Time, or both. He also had been in Saigon before. He had covered Saigon for Time. He knew the area. It was a good choice if the choice had to be made. He was not an Agency Officer. He was brought in from the outside.

But this was a shock to me, the way it was being done, and I felt it was being done because of what had happened with the two American correspondents. I thought this was unfair, that they had buckled under to the correspondents whereas I had stood with the policy.

I went to the Ambassador and asked if he had known about this. He said he had just had a cable about it. I said, "How do you feel about it?" He said, "Well, what can I do?" I said, "What can you do? You can object." "Well," he replied, "I don't really think I ought to." At that point I was just fed up. It was really a terrible blow. I had wanted to come back to Saigon.

I don't know that Murrow knew about all this. Ed and I had been acquaintances for many years. When I did leave he called me on the phone in Hong Kong, to ask that I take over the counter-insurgency program. I rather suspect that it was a combination of Salinger's pressure on Wilson, maybe Mecklin himself -- Mecklin reportedly had to get out of Paris for personal reasons which are not germane at all -- I think Salinger was knuckling under to the correspondents' pressure.

Don Wilson was in a position to do something about John Mecklin's future -- and mine -- in response to the confrontation I had had with the correspondents in Saigon about the incoming ship, which resulted in my being more or less "removed" from office. It had to do with Pierre Salinger's feelings about what had happened, and Don Wilson's interest in John Mecklin's future. They all came together and it seemed appropriate from Washington's point of view to replace me despite what the Ambassador had said he felt about it. And, of course, despite the way I felt about it. But there it was. There wasn't anything I could do except resign, which I would have done if it hadn't been for Edward R. Murrow, to whom I owed a certain loyalty just out of long-term friendship.

The experience in Saigon was one I would have wanted to extend because it was a fascinating exercise in the potential of propaganda, the potential of psychological operations (call it warfare or not as you please), which we had begun to conduct through our Operations Coordinating Committee. And eventually it got a lot of publicity, not so much under John Mecklin, whose tenure in Saigon was cut short because of ill health. Barry Zorthian became the great "psychological warrior" in Vietnam. I'm not sure that he invented most of the stuff that he lays claim to -- or which is attributed to his having invented it.

Thus, the Vietnam experience had several high spots and that particular low spot. I guess one of the things which stands out in my mind is not only the election coverage which I've mentioned before -- the election of John Kennedy -- but even more important, the assistance we provided to AID in training Vietnamese information people and correspondents, the guidance we were able to give them, the introduction to a "democraticness" we tried to provide for them.

The Vietnamese under Ngo Dinh Diem were not terribly fascinated by the idea of a free press as we know it. So I think we got some ideas across. But they were very rarely put into practice in the local press simply because of the control that was imposed by the Palace through the Ministry of Information. The minister himself I'm sure was not convinced of the role of a free press. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been the Minister of Information to begin with I would assume.

Then there was the visit of Vice President Lyndon Johnson -- three days that shall live in infamy in my view. I don't know that I'll ever forget those three days. It started with the press plane being taken out of action in the Philippines. So the press had to get into the back of the Vice

President's plane.

Upon its arrival in Saigon, our problem immediately was to get the press off that plane before the Vice President got off, so they could do the coverage that was necessary. Fortunately, we were fairly good friends with the Pan Am operations officer and we arranged by radio for the pilot or somebody to jam that front door long enough for us to get the back door open and let the press get out and get around to where they could cover the Vice President coming down the stairway from the (by now) unjammed front door.

Then there was the problem of the cavalcade into town from Ton Son Nhut Airport. The Press Secretary for the Vice President, whose name was George Reedy, said, that Vice President's car will be at the head of the line and that's that. And I said that wouldn't do. The Palace, not Reedy, was running things at that point. We had a long set to at the back of the airport while Johnson was getting ready to get aboard his car. The motorcade was set up by the Diem Palace and no Vice President of no United States was going to change it just because he happened to feel like it.

I don't think I won that one but it wasn't easy. And I guess I made an enemy of that press secretary. The Secret Service agent, who later showed up on the rear bumper of the Kennedy car in Dallas (his name was Trueblood, I think), came up to me and said, "That guy's been giving us trouble the whole trip. You should have popped him one."

Anyway, we got the motorcade into town and those three days began. One of the problems, as I think I've heard from other people who have experienced visits with this particular vice president, was that the only way to cover Lyndon Johnson is to have two teams of still- and motion-picture photographers who "leapfrog," with one team covering him at point A; the second team covering point B, while the A team goes on to point C, and so on.

Well, the Vice President kind of took a shine to Team A and when they didn't show up at Point B he raised Cain and had his Signal Corps man ask, "where's that guy who was doing the pictures at the last one?" I explained that he was at point C. The Signal Corps seemed never to have heard of this leapfrogging technique. We finally got that one hammered out, got the Signal Corps guy convinced. I don't know whether or not he ever convinced the Vice President.

But after the day was over the same Signal Corps officer came to me and he said, "Now, we ought to see the rushes -- or "dailies" on this one tomorrow." I said, "Where do you think you are? this is Saigon, Vietnam. These things have to go to Tokyo to be processed. There isn't any processing of color film short of Tokyo." He said, "Don't be ridiculous. I want these in my hands tomorrow morning." I said, "Fine. You sit there and wait for them; I'll get them to you when I get them." So we had that little set to. These were I tell you, three days that shook my world.

A day or so later, of course, was the farewell dinner which the Vietnamese hosted at the Palace. Everybody went in his bib and tucker and everybody there on the Embassy staff had a job. Mine was to act as interpreter for Mrs. Johnson and Madam Nhu, the President's sister-in-law, wife of Ngo Nhu.

In the meantime, the USIS staff was working up the Vietnamese, French and Chinese versions of the joint Ngo-Johnson communique which had been agreed upon earlier in the day. The staff was back at the office under Herb Baumgartner's direction. When that interpreting chore of mine at the Palace was finished I went back to the officer to see how things were coming along. Now, this is really anecdotal. It may not belong in this at all but it's fun. I got a telephone call from the official Vietnamese Guest House across the street from the Palace. This is where the Vice President and Mrs. Johnson and the whole entourage were staying. I was told that the Vice President wanted to see me.

So, grabbing pencil and paper, I drove up to Guest House, got upstairs and the State Department Officer at the head of the stairs said, "The Vice President and his staff are on the balcony on the other side of the bedroom. You've got to walk through the bedroom to the balcony." There was the Vice President of the United States, 6'4" tall, in his pajama tops. I repeat, tops. On the telephone to the White House. This is the telephone link which is relayed by radio via a ship at sea and thence to Washington. It's all "scrambled" as it goes.

Now here's the Vice President saying, "Jack! Jack! (obviously, talking to the President of the United States) Jack, this is Lyndon." I don't know what the response at the other end was but I can imagine that Kennedy, his wit sharpened to the extreme had asked, "Lyndon who?" Because the next word I heard was "Lyndon Johnson! Who do you think!"

So, between the Signal Corps and the photographer problems and communications between the White House and the Guest House in Saigon it was all just too much. We finally got the Vice President out of Saigon. And I guess it was then that he went off to Pakistan and did the camel driver routine. Was that the same trip?

Q: It was the same trip.

ANSPACHER: We were never so glad to see a vice president leave. Otherwise, did we do good in Saigon? I think we probably did, overall, until we got to a point where it was psychological warfare and nothing else. It had little or nothing to do with what USIA was principally intended to do in a normal peacetime situation. When you're at war the only thing that's going to make any sense is to conduct our kind of warfare, which is psychological warfare against the enemy. And so you have leaflet drops and you have cross-the-lines loud speakers. You have all kinds of gimmicks that might be feasible, and you try some that aren't feasible. So whether you succeeded in terms of the basic U.S. role and USIS mission is, I think, academic in such a situation.

I left Saigon under the circumstances that I have described with respect to the change in PAOs.

JOHN J. HELBLE
Political Officer
Saigon (1960-1961)

Consul

Hue (1961-1964)

**Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1965-1967)**

**Political Officer
Saigon (1973)**

John J. Helble was born in 1934 and raised in Appleton, Wisconsin. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in international relations. He was influenced by his father to enter Foreign Service. He has also served in Venezuela, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. He was interviewed by Thomas F. Conlon on April 5, 1996.

Q: And the opportunities for travel. Well, when did you leave Puerto La Cruz?

HELBLE: We left Puerto La Cruz in August, 1959. I had requested Chinese language training for my next assignment. I was informed by Personnel that there was a surplus of Chinese language officers and applicants for this kind of training. Since I had put down Vietnamese language training as my second choice, I was given that assignment.

So, after a brief leave, I went back to Washington and reported in to the Foreign Service Institute and began a nine-month, intensive period of training in Vietnamese.

Q: This was in the garage or the basement of Arlington Towers.

HELBLE: That's right. The old FSI.

Q: How was the course organized? I'm covering ground which I know very well because I was one of the other two Foreign Service Officers in the course with you. However, this is to record your experience.

HELBLE: It would be an exaggeration to say that the course was well organized. There were three FSO's in the class, one of whom is the interviewer, Tom Conlon; the second one was Jim Montgomery; and myself. Tom was very much the senior and more experienced. He had already had several assignments overseas and knew much more about the Foreign Service than Jim Montgomery and I. I had just had the assignment to Puerto La Cruz. Jim Montgomery had not yet had an overseas assignment.

Q: He was working in Personnel, wasn't he?

HELBLE: I believe that he was. In any event the three of us had a Vietnamese tutor, Dinh van Ban, who had been teaching for a couple of years, at least, at the Foreign Service Institute. He also had a full-time job in the Vietnamese service of the Voice of America. He started this job in the wee hours of the morning. Frequently, our class did not start until 11:00 AM. Then we would go on until late in the afternoon. The routine was six hours of classroom time, as a general rule,

with some relief due to our participation in the Southeast Asian studies course which accompanied all of the Southeast Asian language training courses at the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: In addition to Dinh van Ban, there was an American linguist, wasn't there?

HELBLE: An American linguist named James Bostain. He was rather a renowned "character" at the Foreign Service Institute. Indeed, he had had a great deal of language training and was a very interesting man.

Q: Do you remember that story about one of his lectures? He was a very good lecturer. One of his lectures concerned "cultural shock." Remember that one?

HELBLE: I remember some of that "cultural shock."

Q: Well, he would be speaking to people who were going to live in a foreign atmosphere overseas. He would say, "Now, I'm going to do something that may shock some of you," and with that he unzipped his fly. He didn't actually go beyond that, but immediately he got screams from some of the women in his class. He then said, "You've made my point. That kind of behavior is unacceptable in the United States. However, in many societies it is not particularly significant and no one is shocked at it."

HELBLE: Right.

Q: Bostain was a good linguist, in fact, but I don't think that his heart was really in it.

HELBLE: The days in the Vietnamese class were long and essentially tedious. The class time frequently degenerated into story telling in English, particularly when our weary tutor, who was on his second job of the day and was never able to get enough sleep, would fall fast asleep. He was a very nice fellow who related well to us, as we did to him. It was an enjoyable group. One thing that I very quickly learned, in the first couple of weeks, was that I had not had a lot of association with "brilliant" FSO's in my Puerto La Cruz assignment. I worked with three real "losers." There had been only one "sound" fellow to associate with during the previous two years. I rapidly learned, in the company I was keeping in this particular class, that I was the "dumbest" of the three...

Q: I doubt that.

HELBLE: And you fellows knew a lot more about just about anything than I did. However, you tolerated me. We got along very well and became lifelong friends through that experience.

I recall that I was delighted when the class finally ended in June, 1960. We were, of course, all assigned to the Embassy in Saigon. My initial orders said that I was to be Assistant Personnel Officer in Saigon. Tom Conlon was assigned as a Second Secretary in the Political Section, and Jim Montgomery was assigned as a Third Secretary in the Economic Section.

When my family and I arrived in Saigon, the Montgomery's had been there for all of 24 hours. Tom, I think that you were also there, although I don't recall exactly if you arrived a day or two earlier.

Q: We all arrived in Saigon at about the same time.

HELBLER: We arrived at about the same time. When my family and I arrived in Saigon, I was met by an Embassy representative and informed that my orders had been changed. I would be a Third Secretary in the Political Section. This was fine with me. Again, whatever the Service said was what I was going to do.

In retrospect, my change was fortunate in terms of my subsequent career activities and assignments. That's just the way the ball bounces, sometimes. Sometimes it bounces in your direction and sometimes it doesn't.

Q: That's so true, and timing is so much. I would just correct one point that you made there. I was actually assigned as Consul in Hue. When I arrived in Saigon, the Ambassador was Elbridge Durbrow, whom I had served under previously in Singapore, when he was Consul General. He told me, "Tom, we're going to keep you here in Saigon for about three months until you get used to Vietnam, before you go up to Hue. You'll be on TDY, you'll be in an Embassy house," and so forth. So I thought, "Why not?" "Durby" was a friend. Saigon was a good experience. At the end of three months "Durby" said, "Well, we're going to keep you for three more months in Saigon." I was still on per diem, still living in an Embassy house, and had no complaint about that. Then, at the end of six months, "Durby" said, "Well, you're going to stay in Saigon. You're not going to go to Hue."

I was sorry about this because I knew, from my previous experience with the Indonesian language, that you need a period after the FSI training -- whether it's a "good" FSI program or not -- to put it all together, walk down the street, talk to shopkeepers and merchants, and develop your knowledge of the language. I never really had this opportunity in Saigon. I knew that I would never really be able to speak Vietnamese fluently. That's the way it turned out to be. I look back on this as if I were in an aircraft at the head of the runway, revving up the engines, but never getting them running fast enough to take off.

HELBLER: Your description of your intended and actual assignments during that year [1960-1961] is consistent with my recollection. I had forgotten that you were not initially assigned as Second Secretary to Saigon. We knew that you were supposed to go to Hue as Consul, but you were retained in Saigon for basic grounding in the Vietnamese political scene.

To jump ahead, and this will come out sooner or later, so I'll say it right now. It was shortly after the visit to Saigon of Vice President Lyndon Johnson in May, 1961 that I was called in by the Ambassador and told that I was going as Consul to Hue and that I would leave in three weeks. This came as a complete shock to me. Then I felt very badly because I knew that Tom Conlon had been very anxious to go to Hue, looked forward to it and prepared for it. He and his sizeable family were counting on it. However, there was a change of orders and, in retrospect, it was my good fortune that I had that opportunity.

Q: I thought so. I thought that it was a good opportunity for you and I certainly had no feelings of annoyance toward you. You had nothing to do with it. This was Ambassador Durbrow's decision. I thought very highly of him and got a lot out of the Saigon assignment. What I did not get out of it was a chance to develop my ability to speak Vietnamese comfortably. I never reached that point. I can say a few things and would never starve, but that would be all.

HELBLE: Well, Durby's explanation to me was that you had become too valuable in the Political Section to spare you for Hue. [Laughter] So I got the message that I wasn't valuable and probably was expendable. [Laughter]

Q: John, one thing that you passed over. Maybe you intended to do this, but in November, 1960, a few months after you had gotten to Saigon, there was an attempt to overthrow the Vietnamese Government of President Ngo Dinh Diem. I saw part of this. I made my way down to the Embassy fairly quickly from my house and helped with the reporting. But you had a unique perspective, and you might go into that.

HELBLE: I'll go into that. As I said, I just "jumped ahead" for a moment to describe what happened in May, 1961, in terms of our respective assignments.

I was the "low man on the totem pole" in the Political Section, an appropriate status for me, with my background. My duties were of lesser, if not minor interest to the Political Section.

Q: What sort of things?

HELBLE: I "covered" North Vietnam, but, of course, "covering" North Vietnam basically meant reading the Foreign Broadcast Information Service daily output, the FBIS, as it was known. I tried, in a rather hopeless manner, to interpret what was going on in North Vietnam through that medium. It was the only thing I had going in many respects, although I received some intelligence reports which were of marginal value. I was also given responsibility for following developments in Laos and "agrovilles," projects which President Diem had recently created. These were, in a sense, model community farms in the rural areas. That project received a lot of "ballyhooing" and promotion from the government. It never "took off" in any meaningful sense. Visitors were taken to visit "agrovilles" which had been opened, and celebrations were held. This project had a "Potemkin-like" character. Banana trees which had been cut off the night before from some neighboring orchard were planted along the roadways. They might last one day in the soil, just long enough for the opening ceremony.

Q: I think that Diem really believed that these programs were making progress. However, as you say, they never really "took hold." The concept itself was, I think, fatally flawed.

HELBLE: The responsibility for following agrovilles didn't enhance my status a great deal in the Political Section, as far as I was concerned. However, it was assigned to me. I became interested in it and became engrossed in this and other work.

I recall vividly, just four weeks after I arrived in Vietnam in early August, 1960, suddenly being

summoned to Ambassador Durbrow's office, an experience which, at that stage in my life, awed me somewhat. Also present in the Ambassador's office were the Deputy Chief of Mission, Francis Cunningham, and the Political Counselor, Joseph A. Mendenhall. Durby, who was known as a rather rough, "barky" type individual, looked at me and said, "Helble, who the hell is Kong Le?" I had not the foggiest idea of who Kong Le was. I had to admit that I didn't know. The Ambassador said, "Well, you're following Laotian events, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, sir, but I just started." [Laughter] I admitted that I didn't know who Kong Le was. Well, he wouldn't be asking me, with all that seasoned talent at his side...

Q: They didn't know, either!

HELBLE: No. Of course, Kong Le was an obscure captain and battalion commander in Vientiane, Laos, who had just pulled off a coup d'etat. This was further evidence that I had some things yet to be learned in life. I certainly came to know who Kong Le was after that.

Q: Considering the amount of effort that we put into Vietnam, as well as Laos and Cambodia, too, I thought that the preparations made to underpin our policies were quite poor. We didn't have people in INR [Bureau of Intelligence Research] or on the desk in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs who knew very much about Indochina as a whole. The desk officer was Paul Kattenburg, who visited Vietnam once in 1952 and spent six weeks in the Red River Delta in North Vietnam. He didn't visit there again until after the Diem government was overthrown in 1963. He didn't know much about Vietnam, didn't know any Vietnamese, and took a very European "colonialist" view of the whole situation. In INR there was nobody following Vietnam in any consistent way. We just had no preparation for what was to come.

HELBLE: Yes, and we learned during our Vietnamese language lessons at the FSI that there wasn't a great deal of expertise around that we could draw on prior to our departure for Vietnam.

The 10 months that I spent in the Political Section certainly were of great value to me in terms of learning much more about the Foreign Service as it operates overseas, how a Political Section functions, and what the procedures, standards, requirements, and demands are. All of this was new to me. As I mentioned earlier, I had done some political reporting in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, but it was self-generated and self-guided. My efforts were based on nearly total ignorance about how to go about political reporting.

Q: One thing I thought about the Political Section at that time and have often thought about it since then was that it was a reasonably good section. The Political Counselor, Joe Mendenhall, was, in my view, one of the best Political Counselors I've ever run across. He was the most organized guy that I ever knew. You may have had a different view of Joe Mendenhall, but I thought that he was exceedingly capable and very intelligent. What used to "get" me was that he would remember things that he told me to do three weeks previously and which I may have forgotten about. Then I learned how he did this. He had a yellow, ruled, legal size tablet. He would write down what he asked me to do and date it. Then he'd keep on asking me about it until I did it.

HELBLE: I, of course, thought that he was first rate, without much basis for comparison

available to me. As I said, I had three absolutely "horrific" bosses in Puerto La Cruz, so Mendenhall could have been a lot poorer as a supervisor and officer than he was, and I would have been impressed.

I thought very highly of Mendenhall. We are still good friends to this day and see each other periodically. He certainly taught me a lot. He was "demanding," in a sense, but not unreasonably so. As you say, he was highly organized. Over the years I've certainly learned that I'm a "Type A" personality i. e., an activist. However, Mendenhall was a "Type AAA" person. It wasn't bad training that I had from him, by any means. It was good for me.

Q: One thing that came up in Saigon. You may have seen this, too, and I'd appreciate your perspective on it. I certainly was aware that there was really no great love lost between the Ambassador and Francis Cunningham, the DCM. The Ambassador tended to "bypass" Francis and deal directly with Joe Mendenhall. This helped in the functioning of the Mission, but it's not a good way to do business.

HELBLE: It's not the "ideal" way, but you have to deal with the talent that you have available. In Durby's case, the DCM he had available had no talent whatsoever. Francis Cunningham was a "gutless wonder" who really didn't have the foggiest idea of how to run a diplomatic mission or how to serve the Ambassador as a useful adviser. Durby's turning to Mendenhall as his principal adviser and the man who would "get things done" was simply the only course of action available to Durby as far as I could see.

Q: What do you think of this situation? I've seen cases like this, and maybe you have, too, where there obviously was friction and no love lost between the Ambassador and the DCM. In such situations some Ambassadors have been tough enough to say to the DCM, "Look, it's time for you to go. I'll ask the Department to get you a good post, but this is not the one for you. I'm going to ask for your relief."

HELBLE: That's one possible course of action. Another possible course of action would be for the DCM in such a situation to initiate this himself. However...

Q: That's drastic action.

HELBLE: It is. I think that generally, unless the situation is terribly acute, people try to "cope" with it and...

Q: It wasn't that acute.

HELBLE: No, I don't think that it was. Most Ambassadors "jury rig" the situation, as Durby did, using Mendenhall instead of Cunningham.

I certainly learned about journalists overseas for the first time in Saigon in following events in North Vietnam, as I did, since nobody else was assigned to that or had any more expertise than I did. In fact, the term "expertise" is a gross exaggeration. If a journalist came to Saigon and wanted to talk to somebody in the Embassy about North Vietnam, I was "it." I recall vividly the

encounter I had with Joe Alsop, a famous columnist who had his own orientation toward life.

Alsop came to see me, and I was rapidly developing what became my standard briefing on North Vietnam. After a few minutes it was evident that he was not interested in the things that I was saying. He was only interested in certain things that would buttress his already established convictions on the subject. I thought that this was a peculiar way of operating as a journalist. I thought that he should have had a broad perspective of events, and so forth -- and not just focus on the things that would buttress his own views, as expressed in his weekly column. I had other experiences with journalists, as most Foreign Service Officers have. Looking down the pike five years subsequently, I had the same kind of experience in dealing with Joe Kraft, another well known columnist. Joe Kraft always knew what he wanted as evidence to support his views.

Q: This is still in the Vietnam context?

HELBLE: Yes. So I got another perspective on life in the Foreign Service, as I had the opportunity for the first time to deal with journalists. Of course, in the succeeding years in Saigon and in Hue and associated with Vietnam, I had many "exposures" to the press -- to its strong points, in some cases, and certainly, in many cases, its very weak points. I had many such opportunities in the years ahead. But that was the first time I had to deal with this problem.

Q: One thing struck me, and I thought about it a lot because I also dealt with the press a great deal over the years in Vietnam -- and elsewhere, too. I think that the Vietnam experience was quite unique. Before that time journalists tended to be more or less "on our side," if I may put it that way. During most of the Vietnam experience, they tended to be highly critical of our policies. However, after the Vietnam war, they tended to be "on our side" again. Vietnam was a case all by itself. I never fully understand why it should have been this way. Did it strike you this way? Do you have any views on this?

HELBLE: Well, this is a fairly broad question. There were certainly many young journalists who came to Saigon, sent by their editors because they were eager to get into the battle, sometimes quite literally. In the early 1960's Vietnam was not yet the issue of great political significance in the United States which it had become by the late 1960's. There were a lot of young, "hard charging" journalists running around who lacked the same perspective that I lacked as a Third Secretary in the Political Section, in terms of any direct background and experience in dealing with a totally unique situation -- to them as well as to me. The difference between them and me was that they had access to publication on a global basis with their views, observations, and reporting. They were able to make very significant "names" for themselves in their profession. They tended to adhere to the proposition that "good news" is "no news" in terms of the world of journalism. They recognized that. There were many opportunities in Vietnam to depict situations in relatively stark terms. Actually, the situation in Vietnam was very complex, with no "blacks" and "whites" but many shades of "gray." You don't sell newspapers based on a profound, "in depth" article on the complexities of the situation. They wanted dramatic headlines, particularly as American troops became involved and the audience in the United States was very keenly attuned to the situation.

Q: Since you were dealing with North Vietnam as best you could, did you have much to do with

the International Control Commission [ICC]?

HELBLER: I did not directly. One of my colleagues, Andy Fink, whom you will recall, principally followed the ICC in the Political Section. He handled liaison with the ICC. I read some of Andy's reporting and certainly met some of the Canadians and Indians in the ICC. I don't recall at that time meeting any of the Poles involved. I recall encountering a number of Poles at social or "after hour" functions. I mostly recall long discussions with Andy Fink about the "hopelessness" of this organization, the ICC, particularly the "duplicity" of the Indians and the "frustrations" of the Canadians.

Q: I think that the Canadians did everything that they could to be straightforward.

HELBLER: They did. They were just outvoted. Of course, they had no "enforcement" powers of any significance. This was a lesson which I bore in mind. Jumping ahead again to January, 1973, I was assigned to the Embassy in Saigon for six months on a TDY [Temporary Duty] basis, as you were, too.

My post of assignment was the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I came back on TDY to Saigon and was given responsibility to assist in the physical establishment of the ICCS [International Commission of Control and Supervision], in effect something of a successor organization to the ICC. I served as the liaison officer of the Embassy in Saigon with the ICCS. The lessons learned about the failure of the ICC were still quite fresh in my mind a dozen years later.

Q: Anything else about your time in Saigon?

HELBLER: The "highlight," of course, was the matter to which you referred, the attempted coup d'etat against President Diem on November 11 and 12, 1960. In my case I was scheduled to go to Angkor Wat in Cambodia, with my family and with Andy Fink, whom I just mentioned, and his family. Angkor Wat was a place that I had heard a great deal about, and I was anxious to see it. We had all of our arrangements in hand.

On the morning of November 11, at about 3:30 AM, one of our servants, who lived in quarters just behind our house, came into the house, knocked on our door, and told us that the Viet Cong were attacking Saigon. I went outside and could hear firing going on. I lived approximately a half mile from the Presidential Palace, where the shooting appeared to be going on. It was dark, and I didn't see anything that I could or should do at that point. So we went back to bed.

About 6:00 AM Andy Fink came to my house. He said, "There's a coup going on against Diem. They've closed the airport. We're going to have to cancel our trip." Well, I thought, that's the way it is. Even though I had leave scheduled, obviously, under the circumstances, I said to myself, "I guess I have to go to work." I started walking toward the Embassy. Normally, I would take a cab, but the Presidential Palace was between my house and the Embassy. I walked toward the Palace. I thought that at least I could see what was going on and perhaps I would have some useful, fresh information to report to the Embassy when I got there.

I walked along the west side of the Palace, Hong Thap Tu Avenue, heading toward Cong Ly Avenue.

Q: Was the firing still going on then?

HELBLE: There was no firing at that moment. There had been some firing still going on when I started to walk to the Embassy, but as I got close to the Palace, the firing ceased completely. As I walked along Hong Thap Tu Avenue, I couldn't see anything going on of any great interest. I turned East on Cong Ly Avenue, the street which ran in front of the Presidential Palace...

Q: On the North side of the Palace.

HELBLE: On the North side. I noticed that the good-sized plaza or park in front of the Presidential Palace had a large number of ARVN [Vietnamese Army] troops in it. I continued to walk blithely along Cong Ly Avenue, as there was no firing. Then I noticed a jeep which had been shot up right near the front gate of the Palace and the body of a soldier lying in the street. I now noticed that the troops I mentioned before were all taking cover behind the numerous trees in the park.

Q: They were in cover, and you were not.

HELBLE: They were all looking at the Palace, with their guns "at the ready." I was about 20 feet from the fence on the North side of the Palace, approaching the front gate. Then I saw another body and began to realize that "something had been going on here." [Laughter] In any event, since I saw no one inside the Palace gate, I started talking to a young Vietnamese Army lieutenant from the Paratroop Battalion, who was standing behind one of the trees. As it turned out, his battalion was deployed in that area. I asked him, "Are the Viet Cong inside the palace?" That was all that I knew at the time. I had had only one, relatively unreliable source - one of my household servants who had said that the Viet Cong were attacking the Palace. Then Andy Fink told me that there was a coup going on against President Diem. The lieutenant said that the VC [Viet Cong] were in the Palace.

Suddenly, troops on the outside, where I was, began to shoot at the Palace, and there was return fire from the various buildings within the fenced perimeter around the Palace. I was somewhat exposed. There wasn't a tree available behind which an ARVN paratrooper had not already taken cover. I suppose that I could have just laid down on the ground but I would have been fairly visible there. I ducked down and scurried as fast as I could to the west side of the park, Alexandre de Rhodes Avenue. There was a large, masonry wall surrounding a villa there which was a common sight. The wall was about four feet high. I jumped over the wall and lay there, inside it. I felt that I was secure there. Bullets were flying around. The firing continued for several minutes, then slowed down and stopped.

I was lying there, wondering what to do, when a voice came from above me, saying, "John, what the hell are you doing down there?" I looked up, and there was Bill Colby, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] Chief of Station in the Embassy, standing on his balcony above me. He had obviously come out when the firing stopped, saw me lying down there, and recognized me. I

joined him in his house. He'd been trying to get to the Embassy, but there was just a little too much "action" in the neighborhood for him to move out safely. His wife, Barbara, and, as I recall, four children were in the house. He didn't feel that he could leave them. He had been in touch with the Embassy on the telephone, but he really had to get to the Embassy to perform his official functions.

After a while, Colby said, "Would you stay here and look after Barbara and the kids? I'll slip out the back way, make my way out of this, and get to the office." So I agreed to do so. I spent the morning there with Barbara Colby and her children, under intermittent fire. His house, incidentally, had been "riddled" by stray bullets, although it was not seriously damaged. There were holes in the walls.

Q: Glass broken?

HELBLE: I don't recall broken glass, but I remember a number of holes in the walls. Colby's family stayed on the lower level, toward the back of the house, in a windowless area. Periodically, I would go out on the balcony and look around to see what was happening. Then I would call the Embassy and give them an oral report of what I was able to see.

Q: I might add that you were our "OP" [Observation Post] and were in a "very good position," because you were right at the center of the action. We valued that very, very much. It happened, as you recall, that the civilian telephone system was not affected at all by the coup. The military telephone system had been cut off. Somehow, the coup planners had not thought to cut off the civilian telephone system. So at the Embassy whenever we were bored or short of something to report, we'd say, "Let's give John a call." We'd call you and find out whether you were still there.

HELBLE: To move on several hours, to nightfall that night, by that time there were tanks and armored personnel carriers APC's which had come in supposedly to support the coup d'etat forces. I remember that there was one tank parked right in front of Colby's house which had turned its turret so that I was looking right down the barrel of its gun. It was aimed right at Colby's balcony.

I was rather uneasy about this. Furthermore, various ARVN troops had taken up positions behind the same wall that I had sheltered behind.

Q: They may have seen you go over that wall.

HELBLE: There was an ARVN officer there with a radio, which was crackling out messages back and forth -- communications with other units around there. When dusk fell, and there was no firing going on, I requested that the Embassy NOT call me. I would call the Embassy if anything changed, because I thought that if the phone were ringing in the house right next to these troops, it would be an invitation to intrusion, at least. It was a one-way calling system, but, yes, I initially did get some calls.

Earlier in the afternoon of November 11 Colby asked if I could get his family out of the house, if I had any opportunity to do so. The firing was sporadic and intermittent. It wasn't going on

continuously. It would last for a few minutes at a time, with not much damage being done that I could see to either side. During one of the lulls I talked to the lieutenant who was running a little Command Post in the front yard of the Colby house. I told him that there was a woman and four children in the house and that I would like to get some kind of "safe conduct" arrangement to guarantee that I could get them out. All I would need was five minutes or so. He did some communicating on his radio. Eventually, he went forward with a white flag to the front gate of the Palace. A couple of Palace Guards came out to the gate, and they talked. The lieutenant returned to the house and said, "OK, you can take them out now. We have agreed that there will be no firing." There might not have been any firing anyway, but I felt a little better about having made this arrangement.

Q: A wise precaution.

HELBLE: So Barbara Colby and her children were able to leave, and I remained there, alone, for the rest of the afternoon and half of the following day. I helped myself to the refrigerator, for which I later wrote Barbara a proper "bread and butter" note of appreciation.

Q: I think that I saw that note. I seem to recall that Barbara Colby showed it to us.

HELBLE: The ARVN paratroopers had been there all day. A contingent of troops with APC's and tanks -- a total of 13 armored vehicles -- approached the square from the Cathedral north of the Palace. They were greeted with cheers from the paratroopers. There was some conversation between the commanders on the scene. The tanks moved into the park and took up positions pointing the muzzles of their guns at the Palace. Eventually, the paratroopers formed up into a proper line and marched out of the square. I had assumed that they had been relieved by a unit of the 24th ARVN Division from Can Tho, which, according to information phoned to me by the Embassy, had just arrived in Saigon. Is that correct?

Q: Yes.

HELBLE: Well, within 15-20 minutes after the paratroopers cleared the area, the tanks started up their engines, turned around, and pointed the muzzles of their guns "away" from the Palace. I duly reported this to the Embassy by phone. I thought that this was rather "strange." Of course, I was totally unaware of the fact that President Diem had been in communication with the commander of the 24th ARVN Division. They had come up to Saigon from Can Tho in the South in the guise of supporting the coup attempt and then, right before my very eyes, "double crossed" the paratroopers. [Laughter] I just couldn't figure out what was going on there at this point. However, as I said, when the tanks stopped maneuvering and settled in for the night, I was again looking down the barrel of the gun on one of those tanks!

In any event, the night passed quietly. Early on the following morning November 12, 1960, literally at the crack of dawn, I was awakened by a series of explosions. I peered out cautiously and saw all sorts of "red objects" sailing through the air and landing in the general vicinity of the Palace. I did not see any of these rounds hit the Palace directly. They fell on the grounds outside it. While this was going on, I got a call from the Embassy. They told me, "You'd better take cover. The coup forces out near the airport are going to be shelling the Palace." I said, "They're

not 'going to be' but are doing it." [Laughter] In any event, while that was "intense fire" for me, in retrospect I think that there weren't that many rounds fired. However, at that point I had never been under any sort of artillery or rocket attack.

Q: You find out a lot when you're close up.

HELBLE: That's right. In any event, there was no attack on the ground accompanying the shelling of the Palace by the coup forces. There was no shooting in the area, other than the "incoming" artillery rounds.

The next several hours unfolded as follows. As I recall, just before 8:00 AM I could see Saigon traffic moving "normally" a block and a half away from the Palace. People were on their bicycles, "xyclos" bicycle trishaws were going back and forth, and people were headed for work or for the market, just avoiding the immediate area around the Palace. This was a curious anomaly, because here I was in the midst of an armed camp, with sporadic shelling and firing. Everybody else was going about their business as if nothing was happening. I found this situation "curious," to say the least.

Beginning around 8:00 AM some people had been gathering near the Palace gates, in front of the tanks and the APC's. Then up came a jeep which stopped, and an officer got out of it. He appeared to be a paratroop officer, as he wore a red beret. He proceeded to jump up on the front of a tank which was closest to the crowd. He started to harangue them, but I couldn't hear what he was saying. He had a "bull horn." The crowd numbered perhaps 2,000 or less. Basically, they looked to me like curious onlookers. He spoke to them for several minutes and then, as if he had given a command, the front ranks of the crowd started to surge down the main street Dai Lo Thong Nhat toward the entrance to the Palace, which was a short block away, through this park area of which I have spoken. I recall an officer down behind the wall in front of Colby's house give a command over the radio. Within an instant, all of the guns of the tanks -- or at least as far as I could determine -- started shooting in the general direction of the crowd. The firing was being done by the machine guns on the APC's and the soldiers in the square who were facing away from the Palace, as their armored vehicles were.

Q: Toward the crowd?

HELBLE: Toward the crowd. There was an enormous din -- hundreds of weapons going off simultaneously, including some "big caliber" stuff. The crowd stopped moving toward the Palace, strangely enough. Those on the edges of the crowd close to side streets or walls of villas behind which they could take cover scampered off and took cover. However, the bulk of the crowd was left in a fully exposed position in front of the troops firing at or toward them.

Q: Were the troops firing into the crowd or above their heads?

HELBLE: At this point it was not clear. However, basically, the crowd that couldn't escape down a side street "hit the ground" -- just lay down on the ground. This process took what I estimated was about 45 seconds. Then, on command, everybody stopped. The crowd on the ground lay there for a while. You couldn't tell whether they were dead or alive. Gradually, one by one they

got up and scampered off to a side street. There was no more firing. So finally everybody got up and fled, leaving their bicycles, "xyclos," or whatever else behind them.

I had a pair of binoculars, so I looked at the wreckage on the street. Of course, there were some people who didn't get up. In one place I saw a head, but it didn't have a body attached to it. I certainly saw people who were wounded and in pain, as well as some not moving at all. At this point I forget what I calculated in terms of the number of casualties. However, if I recall correctly, it was something in the neighborhood of 13 to 15 people who had been wounded or killed. I don't remember now. I reported whatever it was to the Embassy. Certainly, several of them had been killed, while several others were badly wounded.

As it turned out, the officer who had "harangued" the crowd was the coup leader.

Q: Colonel Nguyen chanh Thi, wasn't it?

HELBLE: I believe that that was the one. He had apparently implored the crowd to "take" the Palace itself. The 24th ARVN Division, of course, had become the defenders of the Palace. For some reason they weren't prepared to tolerate the "mobs" going in to "unsettle" the President. The 24th Division troops were essentially "firing over the heads" of the crowd. As often happens in cases of this kind, some people who did not agree with the order from their commander fired into the crowd. Maybe they thought that something else should be done. They may not have been ordered to shoot into the crowd, but they did so.

In any event, that was the last, major event during the coup, from my point of view. The coup leaders fled to Cambodia, leaving from the Saigon airport, including a fellow who later became a "ward," if not close friend of mine, Col Nguyen chanh Thi, the paratroop battalion commander, who was later a general. I left the Colby residence at about 2:00 PM on November 12. I asked my superiors, jokingly, whether I was going to be charged with annual leave for the day and a half that I was absent.

Q: You did a fine job, John, and contributed a great deal to the Embassy. I mention an additional point to complete the story. As I mentioned, I was at the Embassy during this episode. We learned from CIA sources that there were contacts between the coup leaders and President Diem going on more or less throughout this whole period. Diem had been taken by surprise by the coup, but the negotiations continued. I think that Diem was probably "stalling," waiting until some of the divisions outside of Saigon would come to his rescue, as they finally did.

Anyhow, by about 5:00 AM, or just as light was breaking on November 12, the word that we had, through various CIA sources, was that things had been worked out and that Diem was going to be compelled to leave office. So we thought that it was all over. Several of us who were at the Embassy trooped up onto the roof of the building. We watched the firefight in front of the Palace which you just described.

HELBLE: I was in the "fire zone."

Q: Several rifle shots flew right over our heads, and we decided that we had better get down into

cover. As we went downstairs into cover, right about that time, Ed Barbier, who was the Deputy to Bill Colby in the CIA Station, came into the Ambassador's office on the fifth floor. He had been observing the same fire fight from the parapet outside the Ambassador's office. When the stray rounds came over our heads when we were on the Embassy roof, he must have heard the same rounds and came inside the building to take cover. I remember that he had a curious expression on his face but he didn't say anything. Then, about five minutes later, I happened to notice that Ed was stretched out on a couch. Bill Colby was bending over him and had a big towel, which he was pressing to Ed's back. Evidently, one spent round buried itself in his back, in the muscle on one side or the other of his backbone. I can't remember which side. Later on, at the pool at the Cercle Sportif, I saw the scar from this wound. Bill Colby didn't know whether this was a serious wound or not. They were checking to see whether they could get medical treatment for Ed, which was finally arranged.

Going back to the negotiations between the two sides, at one point it appeared that Ambassador Durbrow might get involved in the discussions. He asked me if I would be his interpreter. Well, my Vietnamese wasn't up to that, and I had to tell him that, though I said that I'd be glad to go along with him. If we could conduct any negotiations in French, I could handle them, but not in Vietnamese. Well, in the event Ambassador didn't get involved in any negotiations between Diem and the coup group.

HELBLE: You, of course, wrote the definitive Embassy analysis of that coup which, as I recall, took you about three months to complete. Wasn't it done in February, 1961?

Q: Well, I don't recall. It took some time to put the whole thing together. I did what I could.

HELBLE: That was the definitive account.

Q: I thought that I'd done a very careful job in this report. Then I sent it up to Ambassador Durbrow in draft. He was usually pretty considerate of his staff, but he just didn't like this draft at all. He was puzzled by its organizational structure, which was a little different, but it was a complex sequence of events that I was trying to describe. I had to recast parts of it, and it finally went out. As you say, it was the basic Embassy report on the coup.

The problem for the Diem government was that, in effect, it had been "warned" that there was non-communist opposition to it, but Diem just didn't pay much attention to it. He didn't take it seriously and continued to operate in the same fashion as before. This led directly to a second coup in February, 1962, involving rebel Vietnamese Air Force officers who attacked the Palace. Finally, the third coup on November 2-3, 1963 was the one which finally deposed Diem, who was killed in the process.

John, is there anything else that you want to say about your first tour in Saigon?

HELBLE: There are several generalizations which I have reflected on over the years. These are things which that 10-month experience in Saigon brought to my attention, in one fashion or another, either at the time or subsequently.

Certainly, I witnessed the failure of a government which was confronted with a very experienced, organized, and essentially highly motivated enemy force, the Viet Cong, which was seeking to displace it. The Saigon Government's attributes were just the opposite, in a sense. It was not effectively organized, in my judgment. It lacked a political ideology, structure, and organization which would inspire people to confront successfully the type of enemy that they faced. It became increasingly evident in Saigon during the time we have just covered and subsequent years that the U. S. role was a very difficult one for us to play in a meaningful and effective way. We had very good intentions and a lot of power, but our influence was much less than one might have thought.

Q: You mentioned that the U. S. role was very difficult for us. We had trouble understanding and appreciating the situation and articulating policies to deal with it.

HELBLE: Our influence was very much affected by our inability to grasp many of the subtleties and intricacies of the Vietnamese psyche and their cultural and political thought processes. Even for myself, I would say -- and probably this applied to many others -- that I had the opportunity to become a Vietnamese language officer and thereby presumably had the opportunity to gain valuable, additional insight into some of these cultural and political modes of behavior. However, I know that I was a long way from understanding the Vietnamese situation adequately to make a major difference in my interpretation of things, much less provide my superiors with advice that would be ultimately successful, if followed, in addressing this complex situation.

This conclusion was only reinforced, as the years went by. Certainly, I saw it as a big problem for me, as well as for our Embassy and our foreign policy -- by the time that I had finished the 10 months in Saigon. I had the opportunity to observe first hand, as did Tom Conlon and others who were in the Embassy in May, 1961, when Vice President Johnson and his fairly large entourage descended upon Saigon. The opportunity to observe the insensitivity of American politicians operating in a very different culture was certainly, at a minimum, annoying to me at the time. I think, perhaps, that this insensitivity was an element in our ultimate failure to come up with political and policy decisions which would have contributed to a consequently different outcome.

Certainly, on the other side of that coin, while the hours were very long and the work was very intense, it was an inspiring environment for a young political officer. I had the sense that I was doing, or trying to do, something for our country and I had an almost missionary type zeal to do the best I could. That meant a lot in terms of my own gratification. It stimulated me for future years in the Foreign Service. That about wraps up the things that occurred to me for that 10 month period. It was a hell of a good training ground -- no question about that.

Q: So then in June, 1961, you went up to Hue. How large was the Consulate in Hue at the time and how large a consular district did it cover?

HELBLE: Actually, I went up to Hue toward the end of May -- around Memorial Day weekend - - 1961. I relieved Tom Barnes, who had been the Acting Consul for the previous nine months. The Consulate and the official American community consisted of a Consul; a Vice Consul who was a CIA officer operating under consular "cover"; an American administrative assistant; and two American USOM [United States Operations Mission] employees, as they were known in

those days. One of them was a nurse...

Q: USOM was the predecessor of AID Agency for International Development.

HELBLE: AID in today's terms. The nurse worked with the School of Nursing affiliated with the University of Hue. She helped to develop and improve the School of Nursing, its curriculum, and so forth. The other USOM employee was a Public Safety Officer who worked with the Vietnamese police on public safety activity, training, and so forth. There was also a small detachment of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group [MAAG] of six officers and one enlisted man.

Q: Were they stationed out at the Hue airport?

HELBLE: No, they were in the city of Hue. Their residence was near the headquarters of the First Division of the Vietnamese Army, or ARVN. They were an advisory detachment to the First ARVN Division. I should add that there was a USIS [United States Information Service] officer. There was an American associated with the Vietnamese-American Association. He was an employee of USIS. He attempted to develop cultural activities and programs on behalf of the United States, in the Vietnamese community. There were also a couple of American missionaries or Summer Institute of Linguistics personnel who were working in rural areas outside of, but fairly close to, Hue. That was the American community. There was one Frenchman who ran the electricity power plant. There was one other officer in the Consular Corps, the Republic of China or Nationalist Chinese Consul. He did not have anything to do, as far as I could determine. He was a pleasant fellow. He was senior to me and was Dean of the Consular Corps, because he had been in Hue before I got there. We had a good but non-substantive relationship.

The Consular District consisted of the seven Northern provinces of Central Vietnam at that time. Starting south from the 17th parallel of latitude and what was known as the Demilitarized Zone [DMZ], drawn under the Geneva Accords of 1954, were the provinces of Quang Tri, along the DMZ; Thua Thien, where Hue was located; Quang Nam, with its capital in Da Nang, Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon, and Pleiku and Kontum -- two provinces on the High Plateau of Central Vietnam. At one point, while I was in Hue, the province of Quang Nam was split into two provinces, so it became an eight-province consular district.

Geographically, those provinces were large, compared to many of the provinces farther South and in the Mekong River Delta area. So the consular district covered a fairly large area in territorial terms. It had a comparatively narrow, coastal plain, through which ran Route 1 from Saigon to Hanoi, often within sight of the South China Sea. However, you were rarely out of sight of the mountains of the Annamite Chain, on the western side of that highway.

Q: So it was a narrow, coastal plain.

HELBLE: Very narrow, with vast, thinly populated mountain areas. In many places there was no population at all. Where there were people, they mostly belonged to ethnic tribes, also known as "montagnards" in French. The area was economically poor. The basis for economic activity was a modest level of agriculture. Along the coastal plain the rice fields were not nearly productive

enough to sustain even the limited population that lived there. These rice fields were not as fertile and productive as the fields were in the Mekong Delta area, South of Saigon. Along the coastal plain there was no industry to speak of. There were small shops engaged in bicycle repairs and that sort of thing. There was nothing in the way of industry. The intellectual part of Central Vietnam was the city of Hue, which had been the old, imperial capital of the Vietnamese emperors. As a political center that was the source of Hue's authority throughout much of Central Vietnam. The University of Hue, the most important university in South Vietnam apart from the University of Saigon, contributed to Hue's importance as an intellectual center.

As a group, people were very different in Central Vietnam than they were in Saigon and in the Mekong Delta or in the South, in general. The people of Hue took great pride in their ancestry. As Hue was the center of the emperors' power for several centuries, they regarded themselves as morally "cleaner," if you will, than the people in the South. Certainly, for example, dance halls and that sort of thing were strictly prohibited in Hue. One, small bar was tolerated, which would not have succeeded for 24 hours in Saigon against the competition in the national capital.

Tourism in Hue was certainly a factor because of the presence or replication, if you will, of the "great, walled city" of Peking, which had been built by the emperors. Then, after five of the emperors died, their imperial tombs were built on the western outskirts of Hue. These were architecturally, historically, and culturally very interesting structures which naturally drew a certain amount of tourism. However, Hue was in an out of the way location, and air service was relatively infrequent. The alternative, a nearly 300 mile drive up from Saigon on Route 1, took a long time. Furthermore, over the years driving up or taking the train to Hue to visit the tombs became less and less advisable from a security point of view. Tourism in Hue was limited under the circumstances.

Q: The Ngo family, the family of President Diem, was from Hue, if I recall.

HELBLE: That's right. I'll go into the presence of Diem's aged mother in Hue, which ultimately contributed to the "political environment." It is worth recalling. As a result, Diem himself had an attachment to Hue and came to Hue relatively frequently to see his mother.

The Central Vietnam area -- and here I'm speaking of the northern 17 provinces -- was politically "controlled" by Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Can, of whom we will speak later. Can ran a very authoritarian and "tight" ship. No political dissent of any sort was permitted. Most people wouldn't even consider trying to express political dissent in the environment which emanated from Can's authority.

Q: Did you ever have much direct contact with Can?

HELBLE: Maybe we should get right into that. I would like to share with you some of my experiences with Can. I only saw Ngo Dinh Can once. I had been warned by my predecessor, Tom Barnes, that Can didn't receive American Consuls. So I waited, with as much patience as I could, for about three months after my arrival. By September, 1961, I had identified a person who was Can's top adviser and whom I could contact directly. I sought his advice and said to him that I would like to pay a call on Mr. Can. I said that I would enjoy having the opportunity to

discuss with him some of the problems of the area, the local situation, and so on. In due time this intermediary got back in touch with me and said that Mr. Can would not be able to see me. However, he suggested that if I had some questions which I would like to write down, Can would be happy to send me written answers. I decided that that would not be a very useful or productive approach, so I did not follow through on that suggestion.

I will say that Can, who was notorious for his alleged antipathy toward foreigners in general, made several gestures, or what I took as gestures, of my "acceptance" in the community, at least as far as he was concerned. Therefore, I concluded that I hadn't done anything egregiously "wrong" as yet. For example, at Christmas he would send me a large basket of a Vietnamese delicacy consisting of round, raw pork balls with spices in them, wrapped in banana leaves. They were generally eaten with the well-known Vietnamese "nuoc mam" or fish sauce.

Q: Was that supposed to be cooked or not?

HELBLE: No, it was intended to be eaten raw. I was somewhat puzzled, as was my wife Joan, as to how we were going to dispose of this quantity of the delicacy which, I would guess, weighed at least 10 kilograms [22 pounds]. We found that if we fried the pork balls like sausages, they were passable as a sausage with eggs for breakfast in the morning. We were not terribly keen about the idea of eating raw pork, even though there wasn't much evidence of trichinosis among the swine population in the area. However, conditioned as we had been against eating raw pork, we did not like the idea. We discreetly gave small amounts of the pork balls to our servant staff at Christmas or at "Tet."

Q: Vietnamese New Year.

HELBLE: We froze what we couldn't consume in short order when we cooked it as sausage. We were concerned that the word might get out that we were giving away Mr. Can's gift to the American Consul. However, nothing adverse ever happened. The balance of it we would use at our annual reception on July 4. We would thaw it out and put it on a buffet table. We were able to use up what was an annual presentation in this manner. I took the gift of the raw pork balls as a modest gesture of acceptance from Mr. Can, at least.

The only other, direct contact with Mr. Can before the other occasion which we will discuss later on was a personal favor that he did for me and my wife. It was, indeed, an act of generosity. This involved the death of our daughter in Vietnam. When she died, we thought of an ideal place to bury her, on a hillside in front of Emperor Tu Duc's tomb, overlooking the Huong or Perfume River, with a sensational view looking West toward the Annamite Chain of mountains, over the forest and over this placid and beautiful river. I learned that the land I proposed to use for our daughter's grave was owned by Ngo Dinh Can. With the exception of an old French bunker, which still lay in the general area, there were no other structures there. It was basically bare land, covered by a few scrub pine trees. My Vice Consul, a CIA officer, was able to obtain Can's approval for our burying our daughter on that site. It was certainly something he did not have to do.

It might be interesting to mention right at this point that in November, 1994, our daughter Mona,

who was born after Cindy Lee had died, traveled on her own to Vietnam. She had never been there, as she was born after we left Vietnam. She flew into Hanoi, in North Vietnam and took the train from Hanoi to Hue. Using directions I gave her and through a contact which I had indirectly arranged for her in Hue, she was able to locate the site of Cindy Lee's grave, which had a marble marker on it. I had learned, over the years, that the grave site was being maintained. What I did not know and what she found when she located the grave was that the entire hillside has now become a Vietnamese cemetery. What her contact told her was that the Vietnamese had concluded that if that was a good enough place for the American Consul to bury his daughter, it was a good enough place for the Vietnamese to bury their dead. This was, of course, after Can had lost his authority and his land...

Q: And lost his life, too.

HELBLE: And lost his life, as well. In any case, that is a personal anecdote which takes us way ahead of our story, but since you asked about my contacts with Can, I'll save the only direct, personal contact for later on.

Q: What kind of work were you doing in this small Consulate? Did it generate some of its own, administrative requirements? What about political or economic reporting? Did you do any consular work?

HELBLE: It was described as a "special purpose" post, which was exempted from normal, consular functions, such as protection and welfare, although, certainly, I had to be prepared to render what assistance I could if I were called on to do so. There was no substantial American community to be concerned about, in that respect. There was no passport, visa, or notarial work of any sort -- in short, none of the traditional functions of a Consulate. It was there strictly as a "political listening post" to monitor events, security conditions, and the political and economic situation in Central Vietnam. It constituted an official, U. S. "presence."

Q: Did you get instructions from the Embassy about things to follow in general or in specific terms?

HELBLE: No, I got very little guidance in that respect. I approached my job by reviewing the files containing the reports sent in by my predecessors. From my time in Saigon I was certainly familiar with the types of things that would be of general interest, whether in Saigon or in Washington. I will say that the Consulate, throughout the time that I was there, enjoyed something which was lost to it within a week after I left the post in 1964. That is, I had authority for direct communications with the Department of State in Washington. If I reported telegraphically, my reports would go to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, be relayed on to Washington, and "bounced back" to the Embassy in Saigon from Clark.

In terms of substantive reporting, by and large, I did not do much reporting telegraphically in the early period of my tour in Hue because we had only the "One Time Pad" system of encryption. This system was terribly time consuming. However, if I were reporting telegraphically, I would report to both Washington and Saigon. As I learned and came to appreciate, it was to the advantage of the Consul, as will be made clear later, to have a "direct line" to Washington. Other

than the Ambassador, nobody else had that arrangement. Some time later in the course of my three years in Hue it was rather important to have this arrangement from several points of view. As I said, that direct reporting channel was "lifted" as a prerogative of the Consul in Hue a week after I left Hue -- as a direct result of things that I had done the week before.

Q: Did many people from the Embassy visit you up in Hue?

HELBLER: We had a steady stream of visitors. As I said, there were some tourist attractions in Hue. We had both official and unofficial visits from literally hundreds of people from the Embassy during the three years that we were in Hue. People from the Embassy in particular, but sometimes diplomats from other countries. I came to realize, when I was up in Hue, that while I looked forward to the opportunity to host some of the friends I had met in Saigon and have them come up and spend the weekend with us, for many of the people in Saigon it really didn't matter whether I was a friend of theirs or even knew them. They would simply contact me and ask for my assistance in Hue. There was no real hotel in Hue. What had passed as the hotel in Hue had been taken over by the MAAG detachment.

Q: Military Assistance and Advisory Group.

HELBLER: Exactly. That was no longer available to tourists coming to Hue. So each of us in the official American community tended to host visitors from Saigon on a regular basis, just about every weekend, or certainly a majority of weekends. The visitors might be a single person, a couple, a family, or whatever.

Q: Was this primarily recreational travel, or was it really official business?

HELBLER: I'm restricting myself to tourist visits. The USIS fellow would tend to host his USIA colleagues, and the USOM people, their own people, although sometimes I would end up with some of the "other agency" people. It was a steady "drum beat" of visitors which, after a while, became a considerable burden. In most cases I simply had to offer our house, which was fairly large, as a place for them to stay and give them a consular vehicle and driver to take them to the Imperial City of Hue or to the imperial tombs. However, on the other hand, we were very isolated in terms of social contacts with other Americans outside of our little community. So there were always new perspectives and things to learn from our visitors. It never became so burdensome that we were really "annoyed" about it.

On the official side, visits also expanded. The military detachment would take care of their military visitors. It grew in size as the years wore on because of the expansion of U. S. programs and activities throughout the area. We had a wide range of official visitors coming. In 1963 and 1964 I had people coming from the NSC [National Security Council] in Washington, as well as from other Washington agencies. There was any number of visitors.

Q: Did they have any real "business" there, or were they just "slumming," as it were?

HELBLER: Well, of course, you would run into situations where people just wanted to say that they had visited Hue or had come for a meeting with the Rector of the University of Hue. That

took a couple of hours. Then they would want to spend the next day and a half touring Hue, and so on. That's an understandable phenomenon, and we've all seen that.

Q: The Rector of the University, as I recall, was Father Luan. I remember meeting him once -- I think that it was before you went up to Hue. I'd gone up there on a visit. He was telling me about the delights of eating "dog." He said that yellow dogs are the best dogs to eat. I never really followed up on this.

In Saigon there were Vietnamese restaurants which specialized in serving dog meat. They never used to say what it was. They would advertise "Mon An Dac Biet," or "special dish." That meant dog, and all the Vietnamese knew this. A lot of Vietnamese didn't want to eat dog, but there it was.

HELBLE: Of course, Father Luan -- Cao van Luan was his full name -- was a legend in his own time and a very interesting character.

Q: He was a Jesuit priest, as I recall.

HELBLE: Yes. He was born in North Vietnam and had been trained for the priesthood there. Of course, North Vietnam is more the venue for dog eaters than South Vietnam. There was a lot of North Vietnamese influence in Hue. Father Luan certainly advanced the cause of serving dog to American guests!

Q: Did he tell them in advance?

HELBLE: On a number of occasions, when an American visitor was being hosted for dinner by Father Luan, I had occasion to be present. Of course, I was well aware of what the entree was likely to be. I certainly wasn't going to be the one to tell the American visitor. However, Father Luan took some sort of perverse delight in allowing the visitor to finish the entire meal. If the visitor made the mistake of saying, "Father, that was a delicious dish. What was that?" Then Father Luan would slyly smile and say, "Dog." The visitor sometimes didn't catch what he said the first time or couldn't believe it. In any event, on several occasions I saw the visitor from Saigon or directly from the U. S. leave the table immediately and go out on the front porch. There were certain sounds which suggested that he'd had enough dog -- and maybe a little bit too much. Yes, that was a local curiosity. I didn't mind eating dog. It's not something I would have ordered myself in a restaurant. I lost four pet dogs during the first six or eight months that I was in Hue.

Q: Were they yellow dogs?

HELBLE: They were all yellow dogs. But there was one other refinement, if I might say so. Dogs with black, speckled tongues were considered better to eat than dogs with pink tongues.

Q: I never heard that.

HELBLE: If there were a few black speckles on that tongue, it was going to be better to eat than

dogs with pink tongues.

Q: Well, as you said earlier on, there was so much about Vietnamese society that we knew very little about. I always thought that a lot of it had to do with the language. I had my own problems with Vietnamese and never was able to speak it well. I think that you were a lot more fluent, because you were exposed to it a lot more.

HELBLE: I had the opportunity, indeed the requirement, to speak Vietnamese.

Q: I spent a week up in Hue in 1961. Tom Barnes had left, and it was before you went up there. I paid some calls, just going through the motions. I called on the Province Chief and so on, doing as well as I could in Vietnamese. The Province Chief said, "Oh, you have a good foundation in Vietnamese. You ought to stay up here longer and work on it." Well, that was not the way it was going to be, but I think that it was important to have the opportunity to speak Vietnamese. I'm glad that you had it.

In the larger sense there were only a few people in our Embassy in Vietnam, over the years, whose Vietnamese was adequate to conduct any serious discussion. One was John Negroponte, now Ambassador to Mexico; Dave Lambertson, just retired after serving as Ambassador to Thailand; Dave Engel, perhaps the best of our interpreters; Spence Richardson later on; and Hal Colebaugh, also.

HELBLE: That's right. There were some later on. From our generation of language officers we suffered from an inadequate course. I was the only one who was really thrust into a situation where I had to use Vietnamese. My grounding in Vietnamese, plus my lack of a high aptitude for languages, limited my ability in the language, but I had a functional knowledge of it.

Q: You mentioned a knowledge of Vietnamese culture. I thought that Hal Colebaugh was certainly the most impressive in this respect. I think that he not only could speak Vietnamese very well, but he really liked Vietnam. He liked participating in this culture -- and he did, in a very broad sense. He was quite unique in this respect. However, as it happened, he did not stay on long in the Foreign Service.

HELBLE: You mentioned Tom Barnes. When I arrived in Hue -- I'm not quite sure of when you went up there -- Tom Barnes was still there.

Q: That's right. I went up to Hue in about April, 1961. You had not yet arrived.

HELBLE: I came up in May, 1961. Tom immediately took me on a five day trip through the consular district, which was an excellent introduction to it. This schedule was a little bit "heavy" for me. I hadn't done a long day's drive down the dusty roads of Vietnam, traveling in the June heat from one village conversation to the next one, to the next province chief, etc. It was certainly a good exposure. The only fault I found with the trip is that we took the "improved" Route 9, which was then still under construction from Qui Nhon up to Kontum. In the normal way you took Route 9 to Pleiku and then went directly North from Pleiku to Kontum. When we got to the top of a mountain going up onto the High Plateau of Central Vietnam, Tom said,

"There's a road here called Route 9B. It's a short cut to Kontum."

Of course, I didn't know anything about the area. So we took the "short cut," which was little more than a mud track. We went along on that. We stopped at a Montagnard community after about a half hour. We met a very informative French priest who had been living with the montagnards for many years up there. We reviewed the security situation with him, the VC [Viet Cong, or communist] presence, and so forth. From the description that the French priest gave, it sounded to me as if there were a fair amount of VC activity in the area. We continued on the mud track. There was no other sign of "civilization" in evidence on this dirt trail winding through the mountains and forest. The track was very, very isolated.

We arrived after dark in Kontum and went to the MAAG detachment to spend the night. We joined the MAAG people at the bar. They had already had dinner by that time. Of course, I had no idea where I was or what was going on. Anyway, they asked us why we were coming in from Pleiku so late. I said, "Well, we didn't come in from Pleiku. We took Route 9B to Kontum." Total silence descended on the MAAG officers at the bar. One of them said, "You did WHAT? Nobody's been down that track for years. It's totally insecure." [Laughter] Anyway, that was my introduction to Tom Barnes.

Q: That was Tom Barnes, all right. I've mentioned Hal Colebaugh as being well acquainted with Vietnamese culture. I think that Tom Barnes probably spoke good Vietnamese. He also had learned a good deal about Vietnamese culture. He ultimately married a Vietnamese woman. So those two Foreign Service Officers went further into this area. You may remember another translator or interpreter, Paul Vogle...

HELBLE: He was an American I failed to mention. He served as an adviser to the University of Hue.

Q: But generally speaking, your earlier point was absolutely correct. We just never, as a nation, had any very good appreciation of what Vietnamese culture was or how it would function under critical conditions. This greatly limited our ability to help the Republic of Vietnam to defend itself. This is really what it came down to.

HELBLE: One of the only cautionary notes that I received, when I went to Hue, was some advice that I received from Ambassador Durbrow or Political Counselor Mendenhall -- I don't recall which one it was. They told me of several incidents that had led them to summon Tom Barnes down from Hue while he was acting as Consul. In effect, they "chewed him out" for having done things that were totally inappropriate in the Embassy's view. They cautioned me not to emulate my predecessor in that regard. One of the things that Barnes had done was to go to the center of the bridge that connected North and South Vietnam in the center of the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. Under the terms of the Geneva Accords of 1954 we were not allowed to go into the DMZ, much less go as far as the center of the bridge in full view of the North Vietnamese guards on the other side.

The other thing that he was criticized for was that there was a report that he had gone into Laos. He reportedly took the road from Quang Tri South of the DMZ, in the narrow, coastal plain area,

west to the Laotian border, roughly paralleling the DMZ, and up into the mountains.

Q: This road would have been about 20 miles South of the DMZ.

HELBLER: Yes, probably a little less than that. He went past the outpost of Khe Sanh, which gained considerable notoriety later on, in the mid 1960's, when U. S. Marines were posted there and fought a long, bloody battle to defend it. It gained notoriety during the French days as well. The Laotian border was a few kilometers past Khe Sanh. There was a small village at the border on the Vietnamese side, which I visited once. I never crossed the border, as Tom Barnes had done. He had gone well into Laos, which was outside his consular district. This was not a wise thing to do, as far as the Embassy was concerned.

Q: Tom was always a "free wheeler." He always felt that he was the best judge of what he should do.

HELBLER: He had a judgment problem, in the minds of many people, including his supervisors in Saigon.

That was an introductory trip to the consular district which Tom Barnes took me on. He left a day or two after we returned to Hue, and we were on our own.

I've already said that we had a very spacious, French colonial style house, with a staff of four servants. The position of American Consul in Hue enjoyed considerable prestige in the community. That was pleasurable, of course. There was only minimal guidance and slight oversight from Saigon on what I was doing. This is not a bad situation, in many respects. Within the American community in Hue, small as it was, there was a lot of internal antipathy and hostility when I arrived. I was overwhelmed with a succession of confidential "gripes" presented to me by virtually every member of the community about somebody else or several other people. This was an unpleasant aspect of the situation. The USIS officer and the USIA officer assigned to the Vietnamese-American Association were fighting with each other over everything. Each of them sought my support in making decisions on their behalf.

Q: I think that this is called a "turf battle."

HELBLER: Yes. The USOM nurse "hated" the colonel in charge of the MAAG detachment. The MAAG colonel didn't get along with the CIA fellow, who, in turn, wasn't much liked by other people in the community. And so it went. It was a small post, and the environment was conducive to having these conflicts develop. It required a fair amount of my time and effort to try to keep it under control. Ultimately, I concluded that I would never be able to resolve these things which, by then, were deeply ingrained. However, people "move on" to other posts, and that's an advantage in the Foreign Service. They would be reassigned and then, one by one, the problems would disappear.

Q: I've been in places which were quite small. I was assigned as Vice Consul in the Consulate in Surabaya, Indonesia. We got along very well. Then we all left, more or less at the same time, and were replaced by people who didn't get along at all. They fought about everything. It was

ridiculous. I realized then how lucky we had been, in that we had been able to get along. It was instinctive. There was never any serious argument.

HELBLE: The situation in the American community in Hue was just the opposite. It started very poorly and then deteriorated. However, it was much better after a year or so, when a couple of the people were reassigned elsewhere.

Q: We were talking about the reporting which you did from Hue. I take it that you more or less identified your own reporting requirements, as you had done, in a way, in Puerto La Cruz.

HELBLE: Right. But at least by now I had some background in proper reporting and standards that were acceptable to Washington.

Q: Did you have professional courier service to the Consulate?

HELBLE: There was a regular military supply flight to Hue using a U. S. military cargo plane C-47. It brought to us and to others in the official American community, including the MAAG detachment, food and other products from the MAAG PX and Commissary in Saigon and Cholon. The diplomatic pouch traveled on that flight.

Q: I was wondering to what extent you were able to follow how the Embassy was reporting various aspects of the whole situation.

HELBLE: That was very difficult, because I did not receive copies of telegrams, at least electronically. I did not receive copies of the bulk of the reporting from the Embassy in Saigon.

Q: Even despatch and pouch reporting?

HELBLE: Sometimes, I would get a copy of some of the reporting. I certainly didn't spend much of my time reading Saigon reports, because there wasn't much to read, as I remember. However, I knew that there was a lot being generated.

From DCM Francis Cunningham and then from his successor, Bill Trueheart, I would get periodic letters, perhaps once every three or four weeks, in which there would be some comment -- perhaps on something which I had reported. There might be some information of a background nature that they thought I should be aware of regarding things going on in Saigon. Once in a while there would be a request for follow-up reporting on something which I had heard and reported. Or I would be asked to keep an eye on a given Vietnamese Government program. That was more on an occasional basis than as a matter of routine.

Q: In this context didn't this situation change with the onset of the "Buddhist crisis"?

HELBLE: Well, I'd like to divide my experiences in Hue into two, chronological segments. I might call them "Hue 1," which was the 15 months that I was in Hue from my arrival in May, 1961, until home leave, in September, 1962. Then I would like to describe "Hue 2," which covered the period from January, 1963, until my departure from the post in early July, 1964.

During the first 15 months of "Hue 1" I developed pretty much of a routine. I traveled about 50% of the time -- and that was true of most of the time I was in Hue. I would be in Hue for a week and then out of Hue for a week. Or I might take a shorter trip of three days or so, just going to Quang Nam and maybe Quang Ngai provinces. Visiting Quang Tri province would be, generally speaking, a one-day trip, because it was only a couple of hours away from Hue. As I recall, the city of Hue was 50 kilometers South of the DMZ. Quang Tri city was just a few kilometers South of the DMZ. So driving up to Quang Tri took a little over an hour. Generally speaking, Quang Tri was the least interesting of the seven provinces in the consular district and the least troublesome in terms of the time devoted to it.

When I traveled South of Hue, I might just have to go to Da Nang [capital of Quang Nam province] for a day. That would require an overnight trip. It was about a two and one-half hour drive to Da Nang. While occasionally I handled a trip to Da Nang on a one-day basis, it was generally worthwhile if I spent a little more time in Quang Nam province. Da Nang was the headquarters of the ARVN I Corps. There was a more sizable American military detachment there. The ARVN I Corps was responsible for everything from Quang Tri through Quang Ngai province. The ARVN II Corps was responsible for the two highland provinces of Kontum and Pleiku, which I mentioned, as well as Binh Dinh province with its capital in the town of Qui Nhon. II Corps Headquarters were in the town of Pleiku. So Pleiku and Da Nang were important stops for me as I monitored and reported on the security situation and shared some of the things which I had learned with the U. S. military advisers and other people. The bulk of the information "flow" was the other way. The U. S. military people were sharing with me information which they had available, not all of which was being reported through their channels. They did not always look at political information from the same viewpoint that a political officer would consider it.

As I say, travel was essentially a 50% component of my time. The travel was by Willys jeep...

Q: If you were going to Da Nang, would you go by yourself?

HELBLE: I did it both ways. I had a driver. On very long trips, when I was going down to Qui Nhon or up to the Central Vietnam highlands, I would take the driver. If I were just going to Quang Nam or a little bit South of there, I might go by myself.

Q: Did you take Route 1, which was reasonably well traveled?

HELBLE: I took Route 1, which was a somewhat narrow, paved road. You had to compete with ARVN 2 ½ ton trucks, which considered the two lanes of the road an artificial barrier which should not impede an ARVN truck. So if you were stuck behind one of those or encountered one coming toward you in the middle of the road, you took the position that you kept out of their way if you wanted to see another sunrise. Of course, there was a large number of narrow, "Bailey" type bridges, the old World War II steel frame and wooden surface bridge, which was easy to assemble. Those bridges were all "one way," so you had to know where your bridges were. There was usually a steep climb up onto the surface of the bridge from the roadway, and the same thing going down.

Q: So you needed to know what was coming from the other direction.

HELBLE: That's right. There were other driving hazards. One day I was driving from Qui Nhon to Quang Ngai. It was late afternoon, and I was in southern Quang Ngai province.

This was a province which, at the time of the signature of the Geneva Accords in 1954, had a residual group of about 40,000 Viet Cong left behind who stayed in Quang Ngai. It had been a stronghold of the "Viet Minh" during the Indochina War against the French. It remained so after the French left as a stronghold of the Viet Cong opposing the Vietnamese Government. Security in Quang Ngai province was always a question. That figure of 40,000 Viet Cong, as I understood it, represented about half of all of the Viet Cong who remained active in South Vietnam after the French departed. It was really a "hot spot."

Q: Remind me of this. Where was My Lai village?

HELBLE: It was in Quang Nam province. I was never in My Lai to my knowledge but I went to so many villages that I don't recall all of their names.

On this occasion I was on my way up from Qui Nhon to Quang Nam. It was late afternoon. I was traveling with my driver, but I was doing the driving. I had assumed, after several years of experience, one of the "defensive" measures available to me from the point of view of security out on the highway was to travel fast. So I was traveling fast when I came to one of the Bailey bridges in southern Quang Ngai. I deliberately went up on the bridge at a considerable speed. Just as I went down on the far side of the bridge, I heard a loud noise. I looked back in the mirror, and the Bailey bridge was disappearing in pieces flying in different directions behind me. I had gotten off the bridge by the time...

Q: Wow! By the time the bomb went off.

HELBLE: I was saved by the fact that this was an electronically detonated or "command detonated" mine...

Q: But the VC cadre didn't hit the switch in time.

HELBLE: It had not been a "contact" or "pressure" mine. My speed threw his timing off just enough so that I escaped. But that was life, traveling through Central Vietnam. It was the only time that I encountered a bridge explosion of that kind. Now, where was I?

Q: You were talking about the "bridge" problem, but...

HELBLE: You wanted to know where I spent the night. I stayed at a variety of places. In several places there would be a missionary whom I knew well, and he would put me up. Occasionally, a province chief would offer me his guest quarters. I stayed in virtually every kind of "flea bag" hotel that existed. Quang Ngai city, for example, was a "disaster area" in terms of hotels. In fact, the very night after the bridge incident I didn't get into Quang Ngai city until 6:00 PM. Because a

number of traveling salesmen "worked" the Route 1 corridor, the "best" hotel, which I would normally have stayed in, was filled up. The next best hotel, which I had used on occasion, was also filled up. It wasn't as good as the "Number 1" hotel. I had run out of known options, so I inquired around and was given the name of a "hotel" which had three or four rooms. That was fully occupied, as was the "Number 4" hotel. I finally got to the "Number 5" hotel, which was as bad a place as I can ever recall having stayed in. For one thing, there was no mosquito netting and no mattress. The room was a little cubicle which had about a 5' high, lightly built, plywood divider between it and other such cubicles. The bathroom facilities, for all intents and purposes, were non-existent. However, I was tired after a long, hot day out on the road. I learned how to find a shower, or something resembling that. These arrangements were something I could survive for the night.

At other times I stayed at the MAAG detachment. In Kontum, for example...

Q: Wasn't the MAAG detachment in Kontum in a former hunting lodge of Emperor Bao Dai -- or was that the MAAG detachment in Pleiku?

HELBLE: I believe that was in Pleiku. I recall...

Q: Jim Montgomery and I stayed at one of them. In conversation between the two of us Montgomery referred to the ARVN guard there as Tran Hung Dao, one of the great soldiers of Vietnamese history. It was a beautiful lodge, as I recall it, and quite comfortable. But you think that that was in Pleiku.

HELBLE: Yes. I know that the MAAG detachment headquarters in Kontum was not a luxurious place.

As a security measure I never deliberately gave my schedule to anybody in advance. I would just arrive in a place and then "make do" with whatever I could locate. I did not want anybody to know when I was coming or when I was going.

The road trips were fascinating. I would remember when I saw something new. I would stop my vehicle and talk to a farmer working in the paddy fields. Sometimes, I would stroll over and talk to him -- not that he had any great insights to offer, but every once in a while he would give me a little clue on security conditions in that particular village or area. Or he might make some comment about the strategic hamlet program in his village. As I say, I would usually call on the province chief and perhaps a couple of other government officials. When I would go into a town which was the headquarters of a District, I would stop and see whether the District Chief was there and talk to him, if possible. I'd go into a village and ask who was the head of the village, in other words, the village chief. If I could find him, I would talk to him. Sometimes, he would call in his Village Council members, and we'd have a real conversation.

Q: Did you encounter any hostility?

HELBLE: A lot of times there would be consternation. The people I met would be thinking, "What's this 'pale face' doing, running around the country by himself?" However, generally

speaking, the receptions were warm, as was the beer and orange soda that they served me. You never found ice in these villages. Their favorite drink for service to visitors was a bottle of "Ba Muoi Ba" or "33" beer or a glass of highly carbonated orange soda. You could mix the two and get a nice, warm drink. On the other hand, I was inevitably thirsty by the time I would reach a village, so I learned to adjust to something less than my usual drink.

Sometimes, when I would call on a province chief, I would mention to him that, after calling on him, I was going to drive out to such and such a district, frequently in the foothills of the Annamite Chain of mountains. I wasn't trying to be secretive about my movements, because that was hopeless, anyway. If I went to a place, he was bound to learn of it. If this was Quang Ngai or Qui Nhon province, the province chief might say, "Well, if you're going out to such a district, let me send a truck load of my Civil Guards along with you. That's a rather bad area." I never declined such an offer of someone to go with me. I never asked for an escort but I didn't want to decline because I thought that if he thought that...

Q: He didn't want to have any "trouble" with your visit there. That was a sensible precaution.

HELBLE: That's right.

Q: You mentioned "33" beer. I think that the beer brewery must have been partly owned by the French. You know, you can get "33" beer in the U. S. It's called "Rolling Rock" beer. If you look at the rear side of the label, through the glass of the bottle, you can see the same "33" sign there.

HELBLE: Really!

Q: Yes. Have a look for that. Our daughter Celia, who is an analyst at CIA, made a copy of an UNCLASSIFIED trip report which somebody had recently made in Vietnam. This was someone who had been there about the time that we were there. He said that "33" beer is still available. It is now called "333" beer. It's the same otherwise -- and probably using the same facilities.

HELBLE: After completing such a trip, I would write a trip report on whatever I thought was of interest and value. I routinely did consular district security reports on a quarterly basis. These reports considered the security situation in all of the provinces in the consular district. Prior to writing that report, I would make sure that I had covered all of the ground mentioned in it during the previous week or two.

In addition to traveling by road I traveled by helicopter when U. S. helicopters became more available. I never had any problem getting access to a helicopter. Ultimately, in about 1962 or 1963, CIA had a small, contract fleet of what they called "helio-couriers." These were small, two passenger, single engine planes which had very short takeoff and landing VSTOL capability. Whenever I needed to use one, I had the opportunity to schedule one of them whenever I wanted to go from Hue to Kontum or Pleiku directly.

Q: They were pretty fast?

HELBLE: That's right. Some of those flights were "exciting," I might say. One day we were landing in Quang Ngai on a dirt strip. There was no control tower. The pilots of these aircraft

were Turkish. They had come out on the wrong side of a coup d'etat in 1960 in Turkey and had to leave the country. The CIA employed them as pilots. They had been flying F-80's or F-101's in Turkey. They were rather "sporty" in their "aerobatics," which I found interesting as a young man, if not always comfortable. On this occasion we were just touching down. We both saw just ahead of us a C-123 transport aircraft landing in the opposite direction. Of course, a C-123 has a very high tail. The Turkish pilot reacted immediately because, as this was a short strip, the two aircraft were "closing" on each other very fast. It was clear that the C-123 couldn't move much, let alone whether it could move at all. My pilot turned the "wheel" in the "right" direction, and we veered past the C-123's vertical stabilizer with I don't know how many feet of clearance. Certainly there were just a few feet of clearance between our wingtip and the tail of the C-123.

On another occasion we got lost, flying out of Da Nang, in Quang Nam province, to Kontum. The weather was very bad. Shortly after our departure from Da Nang we were flying over mountains. We didn't really know where we were. The pilot finally had to acknowledge this to me. He handed me a road map of the area of Central Vietnam! He said, "I'm going to go down. We've got to find a road."

Q: That's how he navigated.

HELBLE: Yeah, that's right. He said, "And then we'll follow that road." He put the plane in a tight, descending spiral, not knowing whether we were descending on the top of a mountain or into a valley. I thought that this was certainly "curtains" for us. I didn't think that there was a chance of getting out of this -- going down into those mountains. Well, we got down to a point where, every once in a while, we were very close to the ground. The clouds would part just enough to let us see the ground. It was all just mountainous terrain down there -- unpopulated. The pilot just kept going down in this same spiral, in the hope we were in some kind of open area...

Q: Or that you were going down into a valley.

HELBLE: Ultimately, we spotted a mountainside not far off the starboard wingtip.

Q: How far off? 20-30 feet?

HELBLE: We couldn't see because it was largely cloudy and it was raining. Certainly, the ground didn't look as if it was very far away. That's all I can say. We finally got down under the cloud cover and in the rain. We could see where the mountains went up until they were buried in the clouds. We worked our way along and, sure enough, we found a road. It was the only road anywhere in the area, so we knew that this had to be the road we were looking for. We had the compass, so we took a southwesterly course and flew along that road. Every once in a while a gap in the mountains would appear. Because of the clouds, at times we didn't see these gaps with much warning. However, we continued to work our way through the gaps into an area of flat terrain. We were then able to follow the road into Kontum city.

Travel by air was terribly convenient, and sometimes quite "exciting." Sometimes I would come back from a trip on one of those "helio-couriers" and land in Hue on that small landing strip

within the Imperial City, which is only a couple of miles from my house. Since I never knew when I was coming back, if it was late afternoon on Friday and the Consulate was still open, I would ask the Turkish pilot to "buzz" the Consulate. My driver was used to this signal and would jump in the Consulate vehicle and go over and pick us up. However, if the Consulate was closed, then I'd ask the pilot to "buzz" my house, which was a block away from the Consulate. In that case my wife would jump in the car and come and pick us up.

Q: You didn't have a cellular telephone.

HELBLER: No. Air travel was another mode of transportation. During the 1963-1964 period I used air travel increasingly, because I'd done so much road travel and because security conditions were getting worse and worse. My time was constrained because of the events of 1963 and 1964 that we'll get into. So I did more and more travel by air.

Q: Let's break at this point. We'll pick this up to cover the latter period when you were in Hue.

HELBLER: On the subject of security I should say that the episode that I mentioned, the explosion of a bridge just after I crossed it, was not the only unfortunate encounter that I had on the highways and byways of Central Vietnam.

The first incident occurred about six weeks after I had arrived in Hue. I was traveling with two of the U. S. military advisory officers and an enlisted man, going from Quang Tri city west toward Khe Sanh in western Quang Tri province. We were well into the "bush" area of the hills and came around a corner and saw three men in ragged clothing, walking along the road, each carrying a rifle of some sort. As you will hear later, these were evidently pretty old rifles. As soon as they saw us, they jumped into the "bush." We sped by the point where they had disappeared from sight, and nothing happened. On the way back, several hours later, the U. S. Army major with whom I was traveling handed me his .45 cal. automatic as we left the Khe Sanh region. He said, "John, if there's any trouble, just shoot this." I said, "But I've never fired a .45. I don't know how to handle it." He replied, "Well, here's the safety. Push that and then pull the trigger." I said, "Well, I understand that .45's are notoriously erratic and have a heavy 'kick' and so forth." He said, "Yeah, but it's not what you're going to hit. It's the noise that you're going to make. Maybe that will discourage them."

When we reached the same, general area, within a kilometer or so of where we had seen the three men earlier in the day, we saw the same three guys again. They jumped off the road, but this time we could hear some shots being fired at us. They were old rifles and weren't automatics. So I "engaged" the enemy. [Laughter] I fired out of the side of the open jeep with the .45 and plunked a few rounds into the bush. We relied more on the speed and the agility of the driver than on my marksmanship.

Q: But you'd fired the gun, though.

HELBLER: Yes. It caused me to reconsider the option the Embassy had suggested to me. The

Embassy Security Officer had asked me, before I went to Hue, whether I wanted a gun. I said, "No, why would I need a weapon? After all, I have a diplomatic passport." [Laughter] So after this episode in Quang Tri province, I thought, "Well, I guess that I do need a weapon." So I wrote to the Security Officer in the Embassy in Saigon. He shipped me a .38 cal. pistol which someone had left behind in Saigon, as well as some ammunition to fit it. I started carrying that.

Well, one day in Quang Ngai province I ran into an ambush on the road. I couldn't get by, so I jumped into the ditch by the side of the road. The ambush had been sprung on a small, Civil Guard unit, which was firing back. The Civil Guards were being attacked from both sides of the road by some Viet Cong. It was too late for me to turn around, and it was impossible to drive through the ambush site -- or at least it didn't seem prudent to try. So I jumped out of the jeep with my trusty .38, joined the Civil Guards and, every once in a while, reached over the top of the ditch I was lying in and fired in the general direction of the enemy. However, I felt a certain sense of helplessness, not to mention uselessness under the circumstances.

When the fire fight ended and the VC unit, which may have consisted of only a few people off in the bush, drew off, I reconsidered my situation again. I told the CIA Vice Consul with whom I was serving about the incident when I got back to Hue. He said, "Well, I think that I can help you with that."

A couple of days later one of his colleagues came to the Consulate and gave me what was called a "Swedish K." This was a folding stock, paratroop type weapon, Swedish made, which fired 720 rounds a minute. He gave me several clips and extra ammunition for it. He said, "Let's go out to the firing range this weekend and we'll do a little practice with this." So we did, and I learned how to handle this weapon. I got so that I could take a tin can and, in the classic demonstration, throw it out 20 or 30 feet and then "bounce it along" with that kind of firepower. Of course, at a rate of fire of 720 rounds a minute, it doesn't take long for a clip to empty. So the question is really just how fast can you reload the clip. If I didn't become proficient with this weapon, I at least knew what I was dealing with and basically how to handle it.

From that point on, and this was probably about October or November, 1961, I carried that "Swedish K" with me just about every time that I went out on the road. I kept it close by me in the vehicle. It usefully served its purpose on a number of occasions. A couple of times I was totally alone. One time I was out on a very isolated stretch of Route 1 between Quang Ngai and Da Nang, in southern Quang Nam province -- another area of considerable insecurity. I had a flat tire. It was fairly late in the afternoon. I got out to change the flat tire. Suddenly, a shot rang out, and a bullet hit the ground near me. My weapon was on the other side of the Willys jeep which I was driving. I had to run around and get the gun. When I came back up over the hood, and a couple of other rounds were fired in my direction, I fired a short burst with the "Swedish K" without knowing exactly where the enemy was. It was probably a single guy lying there, waiting to pick off a single person, who would be "easy pickings" for him. I certainly fell into that category, until I reappeared with the "Swedish K." After my short burst I waited patiently for a couple of minutes. Nothing else happened. I did not wait to change the tire. I hadn't gotten the punctured tire off yet. I got into the jeep and drove on for about a mile before I stopped again to change the tire.

In one fashion or another I had several parallels to that event. The "Swedish K" became more valuable to me than my diplomatic passport. [Laughter] That was life in the Foreign Service for a young officer. I didn't think a lot about it. I took sensible precautions that I could think of which still allowed me to do the job which I was there to do, which required a lot of travel.

Q: This reminds me of the story of David McMeans. Did you know him? He was in the Provincial Reporting Unit of the Political Section in Saigon with me in 1967-68. He was working in III Corps, North of Saigon.

HELBLER: No.

Q: Every day he was going out into very "hairy" areas all alone. I thought, "First of all, nobody is really reading these reports." Every time someone would come out from Washington, I would say, "Do you really read these reports?" They would say, "Oh, they're very important." Then I would say, "But did you read it yourself?" They would say, "No." I was unable to find anybody who had actually read them! [Laughter] So I thought, "Here I am supposed to be watching out for those guys. I know that they're risking their lives every day, without asking me about it." I thought that this was a terrible business. McMeans made it even worse. He told me, "Oh, when I travel on such and such a stretch of road, I bring along this M-79, a grenade launcher." He said, "I have a couple of rounds and I fire them off as I drive along the road!" [Laughter]

HELBLER: I'll bet that there was a lot of cattle damage on that stretch of road!

Q: It's a serious problem, and I hope we never get involved in an insurgency of this kind again. I think that there is a real question as to whether what you're going to get in the way of worthwhile information is worth the risk that you run. I think that the answer is, "Probably not." I've taken risks that I should not have taken. I think about them occasionally and I think that I can't justify the risks that I ran. I've never told my wife about them. You may not have mentioned these episodes to your Joan.

HELBLER: Well, my Joan would occasionally catch me on Friday afternoon or Friday evening, when I'd come back from a trip, reloading clips for my "Swedish K" in the bedroom. She knew that if I was reloading clips, that meant that I had fired the gun during the trip.

I once was involved in an incident in Kontum. About a month later a MAAG guy from Kontum came by my house and said in my livingroom, with Joan present, "Oh, I understand you had a real 'dust-up' during your last trip up there." Joan would say, "What's this?" However, there was no need to go into details. She was a real "trooper." She knew that every time that I went out on the road I was in jeopardy. But she never said anything about it at the time.

Did you know a Foreign Service Officer who later was an Ambassador but was a POW Prisoner of War for five years in Hanoi.

Q: You mean Phil Manhard?

HELBLER: Yes.

Q: Did you know that Phil Manhard was captured by the communists in your house in Hue?

HELBLE: I was going to mention that.

Q: Go ahead. I'm telling your story, but you were living in what was going to be "my" house in Hue, and I really felt that. As soon as I saw the report of his capture, I thought, "Where was he hiding?" He was hiding under the stairs. But it's your story.

HELBLE: That's correct. We were blessed, however, living in Hue, because Hue was basically very quiet. In terms of the security threat, the back of the house was adjacent to a wide stretch of paddy fields which extended to Route 1 on the South edge of town. Periodically, there would be fire fights at a Police guard post on Route 1 in that area. Those would be very audible and sometimes even visible to us at night from our livingroom. Sometimes there would be sabotage of a bridge on Route 1 or a mortar attack on nearby facilities, and we could hear all of that going on. Essentially, we felt pretty secure. Perhaps not justifiably, but at least the city of Hue had virtually nothing in the way of incidents, during the time that we were there. So I was reassured that Joan was basically safe in Hue, whether I was there or not.

On the other hand, just hearing gunfire periodically and being aware of the threat would not have been everybody's "cup of tea." To go back to a point earlier in this interview, Joan's background during World War II in the Philippines made her far more conscious, I think, of what could happen. However, perhaps she'd achieved a certain degree of equanimity and peace of mind, that "whatever was going to happen was going to happen." She never showed any sign that she was anxious to leave Hue or that she wanted me to "abort" this assignment at an earlier stage.

I came away from my experiences during "Hue 1," if you will, with a number of impressions.

The "Strategic Hamlet Program" was getting under way, but I thought that it was really an ill-conceived approach to the problem of security and a waste of resources. More importantly, as long as it was accorded policy and resource priority, it detracted from reaching any more logical, better conceived and potentially more effective type effort. There was such an effort which Ngo Dinh Can had initiated in Central Vietnam which I thought was conceptually a much better approach to the counterinsurgency effort. This program used small groups of ordinary people from the local area who had been particularly well-trained. They were lightly but well armed with weapons like the "Swedish K." These small groups consisted of 10 to 12 young men who would take up residence in a village in a threatened area, where the Viet Cong presence was known to be frequent. They lived with the villagers and worked with them during the daytime, assisting in their field work and small construction projects. In general, they tried to do things that would be useful for the village. At night they patrolled and worked the outskirts of the village. They did not just sit in the village but moved outside of it, trying to intercept any VC that were threatening the village.

I thought that the concept was much sounder than the relatively static strategic hamlets which had very artificial, security barriers. The strategic hamlets really did nothing significant to enhance the government's image with the people as a whole. Generally, the strategic hamlet

program was more restrictive for the people. It denied them access to their fields because they were "stockaded in." They would have to break up the stockades so that they could get to work in their fields. The whole purpose of the strategic hamlets was defeated by that simple act, if nothing else.

I thought that Ngo Dinh Can's "Forces Populaires," as they were known, offered some hope, but it did not enjoy the policy or resource status that the strategic hamlet program did, nationwide. The "Forces Populaires" were limited to the immediate area of northern Central Vietnam, as Can tried to get this operation moving forward. This program was assisted by the CIA in terms of both training and arms. However, in my view it never really had a chance to prove itself because of the lack of national emphasis on it.

Q: This whole problem of "defended villages" is a difficult one. The British undertook resettlement of the population in Malaya to "defended areas." The problem was easier in Malaya because the communists were much weaker in every respect.

When the Soviets went into Afghanistan in 1979, I thought that this would really show what the communists can do to deal with guerrillas. I thought that they'd go into a village, kill all the men, rape all the women, and burn the village to the ground. Well, that's what they did in Afghanistan, and it didn't do them much good! I don't think that anybody really has a solution to this whole problem.

In Malaya the reason that "resettlement" worked was that the British started off with the unflinching support of about half of the population -- the Malays. The Malays weren't doing this to please the British. They were doing it to "save their own skins."

HELBLER: And the threat was a Chinese ethnic communist movement.

Q: That's it! It was a palpable, observable threat. The Malays knew exactly what it was. They didn't have to be convinced. They were the source of the police forces, the irregulars, and all the rest of it -- plus the Malays who joined the various battalions of the Federation Regiment and the Malay Regiment. And, of course, there were the British battalions to support them. The British went at the problem in a very different way. We were never the government in Vietnam. They WERE the government in Malaya. They could make the decisions. We could never do anything more than suggest.

HELBLER: That's right. You would get frustrated when nothing happened.

Q: That's right.

HELBLER: I want to set the background for one of the major, if not THE major episode during the "Hue 2" period. I would like to mention things that were evident but whose meaning was muted in evaluating the significance of the shreds of evidence available. There were indications of some increased tension and antipathy between the Catholic and the non-Catholic communities in Hue in particular and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in Central Vietnam.

One of the first things I observed when I got up to Hue in the summer of 1961 was the dedication of a minor, Catholic basilica in Quang Tri province. This was a heavily advertised and promoted event. I heard, right from the outset, "grumbles" from some of the non-Catholics in Hue that it seemed that every cabinet minister and every key general had to come up for the dedication, whether they were Catholic or non-Catholic. Large resources had been put into the construction of the basilica, and great attention was being paid to it. That was probably the first thing I heard of a specific development which was aggravating some people. However, I didn't attach a great deal of significance to that, in isolation, at the time.

Much more enduring, in terms of sensitivities, and literally visible to me from my own house, was the construction of a large, new church. It was not a Cathedral, because there already was a Cathedral in Hue. This was a very, very large church. It was located on the other side of these paddy fields which I mentioned a few minutes ago. As a number of people pointed out to me, this large church was being constructed with bags of cement which had the U. S. "hand clasp" sign on it, with U. S.-provided Vietnamese Army trucks hauling things, and other supplies that were a reflection of U. S. aid to Vietnam. I felt that these supplies were being diverted from the purposes they had been intended to serve by the U. S. Government.

This put me in a somewhat awkward position, but I was not really the enforcer of the disposition of aid "goodies" in the countryside. Indeed, such activities were common in many different ways. You only had to go to the Central Market in Hue on any morning and see U. S. aid commodities which were being resold, in presumed violation of the rules for their disposition. There were real limits as to what you could be expected to do about such "diversion" of aid supplies, and so on. More acutely, in the longer term, political sense, these complaints were inevitably made by non-Catholics. You had this very visible symbol of the pro-Catholic orientation of President Diem; his brother, Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc; another brother, Ngo Dinh Can; and, I suppose, of his other brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, as well.

Nevertheless, these incidents were not "major flags," at least to me, at that point in time. While I was aware of these "sensitivities" between the Catholic and non-Catholic communities, there did not seem to be a shred of Buddhist opposition emerging or being coordinated in any formal or informal sense. There was nothing very concrete to suggest the type of events that could and, in fact, did happen subsequently in Hue and elsewhere.

I mention this because there were things that I saw. I mentioned previously the mother of the four Ngo brothers, who lived in Hue. Each year, on her birthday, there would be a big celebration. President Diem, the Prime Minister at the time, cabinet ministers, and so on, would come up to Hue to celebrate it. The principal event was a very high profile Mass in the Cathedral, near where the Ngo brothers' mother lived. All of the local government officials were "required" to attend this Mass. I was also "expected" to attend. While this could be shrugged off as "obedience" to the maternal element of the family, it was frequently interpreted as further evidence of the importance of Catholicism in what was basically a non-Catholic community. So there were complaints regarding the overtones of that religious issue, in the context of "mother's" birthday.

Overall, by the end of 1962, when I left Hue on home leave, it was obvious to me how

"different" Central Vietnam was from southern Vietnam. The people, the economy, the culture, and the thought processes were different. There was a broader incidence of poverty, generally, in Central Vietnam. Life was more difficult for people in that area than in Southern Vietnam. Certainly, there was an absence of any political opposition of any sort, although I am not suggesting that there was a high degree of organized opposition to the Diem Government in Saigon. But in Saigon there were "dissident" elements which were somewhat more prominent and had relatively greater freedom to move about and do things than they would have had, if they had lived in Central Vietnam.

When I went to the Montagnard areas of the Central Vietnam highlands, it was frequently clear that the montagnards were not being "cultivated" in any meaningful manner by the government. It was equally clear that most of the montagnards were not in favor of the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese. They basically wanted to be left alone. No significant number of montagnards were converted to the cause of the Viet Cong. However, it was very evident that the montagnards did not appreciate the very paltry efforts of the government on their behalf to improve their economic or social well-being. The montagnards' encounters with Vietnamese government soldiers generally led to unpleasantness from their point of view. So I did not have the feeling that the Government of the Republic of Vietnam was enhancing its status among the montagnards and advancing its cause in that particular area.

That generally brings me to the end of my comments on the "Hue 1" period. My next topic would not be to go directly into the "Hue 2" period but rather to give a little description of the brief home leave that I had in Washington in September, 1962. Do you have any other questions, Tom?

Q: No, I think that this is coming along very nicely.

HELBLER: In late September or the first week of October, 1962, I arrived in Washington for one week of consultations prior to beginning three months of home leave.

I reported, as expected, to Ben Wood (Chalmers B. Wood), the Director of the Vietnam Working Group at that point. I talked with him and some members of his staff, as well as with a couple of officers from INR [Bureau of Intelligence Research]. Ben asked me to accompany him to the weekly staff meeting of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, which was chaired by Governor Averell Harriman, the Assistant Secretary at the time. Ben said to me, "I want you to give just five minutes, not more than five minutes, on your observations in Hue, after two years in Vietnam, including a year in Hue." He said, "I'll introduce you to the Governor after the Deputy Assistant Secretaries and the other Country Directors have given their reports. But you must keep it limited to five minutes and you must speak very loudly, because the Governor has a severe hearing impairment and has a hearing aid."

So I attended the staff meeting and, for 45 minutes, the other people attending raised various issues. The Governor remarked on nothing that anybody said. Some of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries commented on their subordinates' work or asked questions.

After 45 minutes it was my turn. I was introduced and stood up, relatively close to where the

Governor was sitting. I started my remarks. After about two minutes the Governor reached into his pocket, pulled out the earpiece of his hearing aid, and put it into his ear. I saw this and realized that I had been speaking louder than anybody else had done. Nobody else stood up and spoke right at him, as loud as I was speaking. Right there, I could only conclude that he hadn't heard a thing from his staff during the entire 45 minutes of the meeting up to that point. He may have been thinking, "Who is this guy whom I've never seen before?" Maybe he picked up a couple of words because of the volume at which I was speaking. He listened intently for the next couple of minutes. I stopped at the end of my allocated five minutes.

I asked if I could answer any questions, and the Governor had some questions. The long and the short of it was that the rest of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs senior staff had to sit there for 45 minutes more while the Governor asked me about Vietnam. I'm sure this bored them to tears, but the Governor seemed genuinely interested.

At the end of the meeting I returned with Ben Woods to his office and was chatting with him. A few minutes later the phone rang. Governor Harriman was on the phone to Ben and said, "Ben, I want that young man that you brought to the staff meeting to go and see Roger Hilsman. I've just talked to him, and Roger will see him today if that is convenient to that young man." Roger Hilsman was then the Director of INR [Bureau of Intelligence Research].

So I went and talked to Roger Hilsman. We had about an hour's conversation. He was very interested. Then he said, "I'm going to call Walt Rostow." Rostow was then the head of Policy Planning in the Department of State. He said, "I want Walt to talk to you." So some time within the next day or so I was in Rostow's office. When I finished, Rostow said, "I want you to talk to Mike Forrestal." Mike Forrestal was then a Special Assistant to the President with responsibility for Vietnam. Rostow said, "I'm going to tell Mike that President Kennedy should see you." So I said, "OK, I'll stand by." So Forrestal called back shortly. We set up an appointment for the following day. He said, "I'll talk to you first, and then we're going in to see the President." He said, "It's going to be an 'off schedule' thing, and there will just be the three of us."

Now I was starting to take things seriously. I had no expectation of talking directly to the President of the United States in my entire career. Then I started getting nervous and wondered, "What am I going to say?" I told myself, "The only thing you can say is what you told the other people." In any event, I went over to the White House and was taken into Mike Forrestal's office. We spent an hour or so talking and were getting ready to go into the Oval Office of the President. Then Mike's phone rang. The President had had something else come up and had to cancel the meeting. So I was "saved." I missed the opportunity of a lifetime.

It was a rather interesting home leave. I had had no reason to anticipate that it would involve appointments with officials at such high levels. It certainly conveyed to me that there was an interest in Vietnam. The only thing that I could figure out which attracted each of those very serious officials to hearing from me was that I was, at that point, the only Foreign Service Officer who was serving full-time outside of Saigon. I lived under very different circumstances, had drawn somewhat different conclusions, and was reporting somewhat differently than the reporting coming out of the Embassy in Saigon. Indeed, it was subsequently confirmed to me that there was a feeling that I was somebody who had been out in the countryside and saw a very

different scene. Perhaps, more importantly, this scene was more important, in some respects, than the Saigon political scene. Whatever it was, it was treatment which I had never anticipated. It was educational to me.

I then went off on home leave, interrupted only by a couple of phone calls during the Cuban "Missile Crisis" of October, 1962. Somebody had learned that there was a Foreign Service Officer not otherwise assigned at this point who could speak Spanish. I was told that I was probably going to have to report back to Washington within 24 to 48 hours for duty on the Cuban Task Force. This did not please me at all. I very much needed a break from my first two years of intense activity in Vietnam. However, the second phone call 24 or 48 hours later told me what I already knew from television, essentially, that the crisis was over. I was told, "We won't need you."

From there we'll just go into "Hue 2," which started on or about January 4, 1963.

Upon my return to Hue, I relieved Jim Rosenthal, my capable "stand in." He had "held the fort" in Hue for three months. I found that nothing very dramatic had happened during my absence from Hue. Nothing seemed fundamentally different. I had a new Vice Consul, Jerry Greiner, who had arrived in Hue just a few days before we did with his new bride, who had been an experienced White House correspondent for a women's magazine. They brought a new element of fresh blood and energy to the local scene.

The months of January, February, and March, 1963, were pretty much routine. Of course, I started traveling again right away. Nothing of any consequence came to my attention during that time, at least that I can recall.

April, 1963, brought a family tragedy. We had had a daughter born in Hue less than four months after we arrived there in September, 1961. Her name was Cindy Lee Helble. My wife, Joan, had stayed in Hue to have the baby, contrary to the practice of many American women in the "out stations" of Vietnam, who went to Saigon to have their babies. However, Joan preferred to stay in Hue. It had not been an "easy" birth, but it eventually was successful in all respects. In April, 1963, when the tragedy occurred, Cindy Lee was 18 months old. I had been gone on a road trip during the entire week when it happened. Prior to my departure I had requested our gardener at the consular residence to dig a small "duck pond." I had in mind getting some ducks for my son who, at the time, was six years old.

Q: This was Stuart.

HELBLE: This was Stuart.

Q: "Chau Stewart."

HELBLE: "Chau Stewart," in Vietnamese. Easter was coming the following weekend. So I left on my trip. When I returned late Friday afternoon, the gardener, Giam, was awaiting my arrival and proudly and immediately took me to the "duck pond" which he had dug and filled with water. I looked at it and immediately said, "No, Giam, it's too deep. It must be only about 18 inches deep." I gave him a hand signal to show how deep I wanted it. The loose dirt was on the

side of the pond, and I said, "You must fill that in and make it just 18 inches deep instead of about three feet deep."

Q: Was it lined with concrete or was it...

HELBLE: No, it just had an earthen bottom. There was no investment in it, other than his labor during some portion of that week. The next morning I went to the airport to greet the usual weekend visitors from Saigon. In this case the visitor was Gil Kinney, a Second Secretary in the Economic Section, I believe, a relatively younger officer, and his wife, Anne Kinney. From the airport I took them to stop at the home of Jim and Bernadette Asher, the USIA couple. The Asher's had replaced another USIA couple who had been in Hue earlier. The Kinneys knew the Ashers from a previous post.

While I was at Asher's house, one of my household staff came over on his bicycle to this house, which was only a block away from my house. He told me that something very "bad" had happened to "Chau Cindy," our daughter. I jumped into the car, drove home, and found Cindy in the house on the floor. Joan was crying and said, "We found Cindy in the 'duck pond.'" I had had Boy Scout training in artificial respiration, and that's all that I knew how to do, except to make sure that the MAAG doctor had been called, which had been done. I applied artificial respiration far too late. It was obvious by the time that the doctor came that she was dead. So we lost our daughter under those tragic circumstances.

I mentioned earlier where we buried her and where her remains still are to this day, on the banks of the "Perfume" River Song Huong. Despite this very tragic experience, it did not raise any question in our mind as to whether we should leave Hue. It was just something that any parent who has lost a child knows is difficult to go through and to overcome. It is never totally overcome, but you just have to cope with it in your own, personal way. We did so as well as we could.

A month later, in May, 1963, I was seized with an abdominal pain. I had to be medically evacuated by helicopter to Nha Trang, on the coast in Central Vietnam, where there was a U. S. Army Field Hospital. That was on May 7, 1963. The pain was acute, but it turned out that the problem was minor. Once it was diagnosed, the treatment was simple, and I was released from the hospital on the following day.

I was able to obtain a flight back up to Da Nang. I had called the Consulate in Hue and asked them to send the Consulate car down to Da Nang to pick me up on the following morning. I spent the night of May 8 in Da Nang. Before I started early on the morning of May 9 to return to Hue, I was called by the Duty Officer at the I Corps U. S. Military Advisory Detachment and was told that a serious incident had occurred the previous day May 8, 1963 in Hue. Reportedly, at least several people were dead. I immediately returned to Hue by road and found all sorts of people waiting to see me at my home. I gathered whatever information I could on the incident, which was the spark which led in turn to the long and difficult series of events covering the spring, summer, and fall of 1963 in Vietnam.

In my view the essential facts of the matter were satisfactorily established fairly early on. By and

large this is the view of these events in most books and articles written on the subject, although there were many different versions of the same events at an earlier stage. The facts, as I could best determine them, and which I still believe to be true, were that there was a demonstration by a group of Buddhists. Here I use the term "Buddhist" deliberately, yet advisedly, because in any large group of people on the streets of Hue or any other city there would be some Buddhists and some non-Catholics. However, many were not "Buddhists" in any strong, religious sense. It was a Buddhist organized demonstration which had approached the radio station demanding that a message be broadcast on the occasion of Buddha's birthday. The same group of Buddhists had previously been refused authorization to conduct a public celebration of Buddha's birthday. This refusal "annoyed" them, because they had always been able to celebrate Buddha's birthday in some public fashion. No one had ever taken political or other offense to such a celebration as far as I was aware or anybody could tell me. This was essentially another holiday type activity.

For whatever reason they were refused permission to hold the public celebration of Buddha's birthday. So they wanted a message broadcast over the radio station in celebration of Buddha's birthday. Local security forces -- not Army troops -- including Civil Guard forces under the command of the Deputy Province Chief for Security, a Major Dang Sy, were informed of the demonstration and went to the radio station to prevent any outbreak of real trouble or violence. The arrival of the Civil Guard forces apparently precipitated growing unhappiness among the people gathered at the radio station. Somehow, somebody in a wheeled, armored personnel carrier of the Civil Guard force seems to have "panicked." He reportedly drove through a part of the crowd, killing several people at least, under the wheels of the vehicle.

The government version immediately made public regarding what happened was that the Viet Cong had provoked this incident. This was a not uncommon example of the government's treatment of difficulties on the streets. It was always stated that it was the Viet Cong who inspired these things. I don't think that there was a shred of evidence to sustain that theory -- and most people did not believe that version of events. The government alleged that somebody in the crowd threw a grenade toward the Civil Guard vehicle. To my knowledge, there were never any grenade fragments found at the scene. That story increasingly appeared to be untrue.

These allegations made by the government added to the sense of outrage felt by the people in Hue. Here I am speaking of the views of many Catholics as well as non-Catholics who were friends of mine and who were quite incensed at the behavior of the Civil Guard troops. But beyond the effect of the incident itself, the government's "cover up," which was regarded as totally unbelievable by the people of Hue, only aggravated the government's position and jeopardized it even further. There was a feeling that there would never be any punishment of those responsible or an apology to the Buddhist community. During the succeeding days things went from bad to worse in terms of popular attitudes.

It seemed clear, even at that early stage and after the first week or so, that a "watershed" had been passed in terms of the government's position and stability. Reverberations from this event extended beyond the confines of Hue. Well, as history shows, they certainly did, in due time. There were several demonstrations in Hue -- peaceful marches with banners -- to protest what had happened. There was no violence. The speakers were carefully monitored by the authorities. A number of these speeches were authorized by the authorities to soften the criticism of the

government. However, the banners were very critical of the government, which was an unheard of indication of opposition in Hue, during the years when Ngo dinh Can controlled the area.

In the Consulate we monitored these events as closely as we could. While I went to one of the first parades or demonstrations, I decided that it would be prudent not to go personally to other demonstrations. I was well known to the security forces and others in Hue.

I did not realize for several days that Jerry Greiner, my Vice Consul who worked for CIA, was attending these demonstrations. He had been a 6' 3" linebacker for the Los Angeles Rams, was a physical "brute" of a fellow, and would be terribly imposing in any crowd of Vietnamese, who averaged 5' 4" in height. In other words, he would "stand out" in such surroundings. I have a marvelous photo that one of my local employees took of him at one of these demonstrations. In the picture he is peering around a 4" thick, concrete lamp post. A 4" lamp post did not disguise much of Jerry Greiner! I saw that picture only after we had decided not to attend the demonstrations. Our USIS officer, Jim Asher, was 6' 3" tall; and we had the Public Safety Adviser from USOM, who was 6' 3". All of them were going down to watch the demonstrations. In a community such as Hue, where there were virtually no foreigners, they stood out like "very sore thumbs." So I called them all in and said, "From now on, we will cover these events with one of our local employees," whom I immediately showed how to use a simple, "Rolleiflex" camera. He would take shots of anything of interest but particularly of banners, as we wanted to know what the banners were saying. In other words we Americans would have a much less visible presence. Of course, the information was shared with the others. So we got our "giant" Americans off the street in that situation. It was an amusing sidelight, but this is something you really have to be sensitive to in such a political environment.

Most of the attacks made orally and in the signs against the GVN were very indirect. However, they were made and were visible to the people of Hue, which made them very unusual. Of course, there was a lot of ferment on the scene.

There was immediate U. S. media attention to these events. After the initial incident there was no follow-on violence, and media attention naturally waned. A number of reporters for U. S. media came to Hue during the first 24 hours after the first incident, but within 72 hours, as I recall it, they had all gone away. A street parade wasn't a terribly newsworthy event, unless it ended in some confrontation and violence. That was not happening.

However, at least there was an awareness in the U. S. media of this incident and of the problem involved in it. I had "feedback" from the Embassy on the reporting that was being done in the U. S. on the subject.

Some of the demonstrations resulted in "sit downs" on a major thoroughfare on the southern side of the city of Hue, where the University of Hue and the two principal high schools, a boys' high school and a girls' high school, were located. Certainly, there were students involved in these activities. "Bonzes" - Buddhist monks - from the Tu Dam Pagoda, the central and most prestigious pagoda, participated in the demonstrations, gave speeches, and so on.

On several occasions the authorities tried to remove the demonstrators from their "sit downs"

which blocked traffic. Tear gas was used. I think that the tear gas was reliably reported to have been "poured" on people's heads on some occasions, instead of being sprayed in a gaseous form. There were some reports that the tear gas supply of the police force in Hue was so outdated that it had deteriorated and could not be spread in the normal manner. I can't comment on that. I really don't know if that was true or not. I certainly had a number of reports from several of the doctors at the local hospital, whom I knew, regarding the casualties that they were treating. Some of those who required treatment had severe eye irritations or possible damage to the eyes, skin burns, and that sort of thing. As I recall it, there were no fatalities during those episodes. However, since so many of the demonstrators in the crowd were young people, their involvement further inflamed the attitudes of the local people.

Essentially, as I recall it, and this is without any recent review of the history, documentation, or books that pertain to this period, for several weeks or maybe as much as a month this situation festered and was of great concern. However, it had not yet exploded as the major political and international media issue that it became until the first "immolation" suicide by fire of a bonze in Saigon.

Q: That was the next, principal development. It received media attention. However awkwardly the government had been handling the matter up to this point, the issue was fading.

HELBLE: Yes. It had been restricted in its emotional impact essentially to Central Vietnam -- primarily Hue and, secondarily, Da Nang. There were just minor demonstrations in several other, small towns in Central Vietnam -- more in sympathy than anything else. These generated no sense of even local excitement in most cases.

It was when events led to Saigon that it became a truly national and critical issue. It was one which, I think, created many of the subsequent images and perceptions in the American mind. Americans saw images on television which depicted the situation in Vietnam as being chaotic. The country was depicted by the media as having an unpopular government, and it was stated that U. S. assistance was propping up this unpopular government. I think that it contributed, in a significant manner, to many of the perceptions that were widely accepted about Vietnam in subsequent years. The U. S. had a very unpopular government as an ally. Even when President Diem himself was overthrown, there were still images of mass confusion which persisted and undermined much of the political support in the United States eventually for our policies in Vietnam. All of these things flowed together and eventually caused a "tidal wave" of attitudes in this respect. The suicide by fire of the bonze was probably the first major impact on the American psyche. People saw bonzes burning...

Q: I think that there were about seven or eight such incidents of bonzes "immolating" themselves. These all happened in Saigon.

HELBLE: We had one in Hue. I cannot recall when it was -- it may have been in late June or early July of 1963. However, the "immolation" in Hue didn't attract that much attention, once Saigon "got into the act."

Q: Then, of course, there were other problems that came up. There was a clear attempt by the

Buddhist leaders to exploit the matter as much as they could. They were running more or less continuous agitation meetings outside of certain pagodas -- especially Xa Loi Pagoda in Saigon. This kept the issue aflame, and the American press, I think, fanned it. There is no doubt that the GVN mishandled this issue in every way.

HELBLER: Of course, there was considerable concern among the official American community in Central Vietnam, flowing out of that incident. It was evident that there had been a considerable loss of public support for the government in that area. There was concern that the Viet Cong would exploit this opportunity. We kept waiting for signs of increased VC military activity in the surrounding area or the activities of "agents provocateurs" in Hue or Da Nang. However, I think that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were caught off guard by these events and were not in a position or were not prepared to strike in such a situation. It seemed plausible that that kind of activity could develop literally "overnight."

The security situation in the provinces continued to deteriorate, but at no greater a rate than in the past several years. We watched the security situation very closely, as we always did, but particularly in relation to the May 8, 1963, incident. Nothing really dramatic occurred in that respect. There was concern that the government was being distracted by these events, that there was dissidence within the military services, and that sort of thing. However, nothing really happened in that respect, in my view, certainly in Central Vietnam. Nothing happened that would indicate that "the worst" was occurring or that the conflict between the government and the communists was increasing in scale.

Because it was the venue for the May 8 incident, Hue was a more interesting place to live, in certain respects [Laughter] for succeeding months.

I had an unfortunate staff situation develop at that time. The American administrative assistant I had, George Clee, had been diagnosed by the American MAAG doctor as suffering from hepatitis, shortly before the May 8 event. This diagnosis was confirmed by the head doctor at the hospital of the University of Hue, as well as the head German doctor of the German aid team which was teaching Vietnamese medical students at the university. They confirmed the diagnosis and concurred that he would have to take life very easy for a while, as he recovered from this. He could still work a limited schedule, but certainly not in excess of six hours a day.

Well the events in Hue were driving us at a frenetic pace. George was a most dedicated and serious fellow. He and his lovely German wife lived in a house directly adjacent to the Consulate. George had been handling our classified, telegraphic communications. When I was traveling and out of the office, George had to handle whatever came up. It was really impossible to restrict him to six hours a day, no matter how much I ordered him. He just couldn't observe such a limit. I really had problems trying to enforce this limit. As a result, his physical condition continued to deteriorate throughout the month of May, 1963, following the incident. By early June I knew that we had to "medevac" him. I was in contact with the Embassy on this issue. The Embassy told me that they had no more travel funds for that fiscal year. On July 1, 1963, a new allocation of funds would be available, and I could then evacuate him!

Q: To suit everybody's convenience.

HELBLE: Yes. In any event, the MAAG doctor said, "He just cannot wait. You've got to get him out of here. He isn't going to rest and isn't going to get the medical treatment that he needs. He's deteriorating rapidly." So I said to him, "George, you and Ingrid are leaving Hue on tomorrow morning's flight." He said, "But we don't have travel orders." I said, "There aren't going to be travel orders for this trip. We'll worry about that some other fiscal year." So I went to the Consulate's Petty Cash Fund and scraped up enough from it, bought two Air Vietnam tickets, took them to the airport the next morning, put them on board the plane, went back to the Consulate, called the Embassy Administrative Counselor, and told him that Air Vietnam Flight such and such was arriving at Tan Son Nhut airport in one hour and 45 minutes. George and Ingrid Clee were on board. George would probably need an ambulance to transport him to some sort of medical facility. However, in any event, in one hour and 45 minutes he would be in the hands of the Embassy's consular district.

Q: Who was the Administrative Counselor?

HELBLE: I cannot remember for certain, but I am fairly sure that it was Bill Bradford. In fact, Bradford may have been the GSO General Services Officer -- I don't recall. I told him that George Clee was no longer in the Hue consular district. I subsequently sought and received reimbursement for the Petty Cash Fund.

It was a damned good thing that we got George out because he was in very serious condition. He was flown immediately to the hospital at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. He spent a substantial amount of time there being treated for hepatitis. He was eventually evacuated to the States and spent a total of one year undergoing hospital treatment, recovering from what turned out to be severe damage to his liver. His doctors told him that he just barely got to them in time.

I've always thought of that as the worst example that I've encountered in the Foreign Service of a "no can do" administrative attitude. They were prepared to let a valued member of our team die because they could not muster \$200 in travel funds.

Q: This reminds me of a different situation, but the same mentality. This goes back about 10 years ago in Chicago in the winter. There had been terribly heavy snow, so much so that the City of Chicago had used up all of its allocation in the budget for snow removal. Then there was another heavy snow. The Mayor took off for Florida and said, "I'm sorry that we can't plow the streets because we don't have any money left!" He was promptly voted out of office at the next election.

HELBLE: The summer of 1963 continued, with the principal, political events occurring in Saigon. Maneuvers and efforts continued to be made, to the extent that they were genuine, to reach some accommodation between the government and the Buddhists. The Buddhists continued to capitalize on their new-found fame and attention from the media and, I might say, from the Consulate and Embassy staffs as well. After all, I had gone off to see Thich Tri Quang, the chief leader or instigator of the Buddhist movement, once it emerged as some sort of political movement. I talked to him, and Embassy Political Officers went off to talk to the key "bonzes" in the Saigon pagodas. This function was part of their duties, and I don't want to appear to be

criticizing them in this regard. However, the point is that the Buddhists had found a number of sympathetic audiences, including that particular one, and tried to promote their cause through them.

I might say that a telegram which I wrote on the interview with Thich Tri Quang has been publicly released and quoted in more than one book. A book which I have in my library cites the essence of my conversation with Tri Quang. I had to arrange the appointment with him clandestinely, although it was to be at his pagoda and was in his private cell. In setting up the appointment I could not call him directly. I had to work through an intermediary who was "close" to Tu Dam Pagoda to set up the meeting. I knew that my telephone lines were being monitored by the Vietnamese authorities. I was able to observe that I was fairly frequently under "surveillance." My house and the Consulate were under surveillance. This was prior to the subsequent August 21, 1963, "crack down" by the government on the Buddhists, to which we will shortly refer.

I called on Tri Quang. Just the two of us were present. It was very difficult to extract from him any useful information on what his objectives were, what his intentions might be, and what his feelings were about the government's handling of the situation. It was clear that he was critical of the government. When I asked him whether he thought that there would be more "trouble" in the weeks and months ahead, he gazed out of his little, monk-like cell, which was probably about eight feet long and five feet wide, and had a cot in it...

Q: Just like our Vietnamese language classroom at the FSI!

HELBLE: Yes. A single chair had been brought in for me to sit on. He sat on his cot. The small window looking outside had bars on it. I felt that I was more in a prison cell than in somebody's bedroom. In any event, he looked out his window, when I asked about future "trouble." It was basically a sunny day, but with some white clouds in the sky and a little breeze blowing. He said, "Well, the sky is blue, but the clouds are drifting by." That was about the extent of his answer on that particular subject. It was not uncommon to receive an answer of that sort. I will say that the book to which I just referred quotes that line, but more for the sake of demonstrating how little American officials understood Buddhist culture. However, the author of the book does not go on to explain what Tri Quang meant by this remark. Whatever the result, this was a meeting which I had to try to make. I felt better about it but I didn't learn a hell of a lot. I guess that I shouldn't have expected to learn a great deal from meeting with him.

The summer of 1963 passed with events really focusing on Saigon and statements coming out of Saigon. The street demonstrations in Hue had stopped. As I said, I think that there was a single case of "immolation" of a bonze in Hue after there had been a number of such incidents in Saigon. The next major event occurred on August 21, 1963. The new U. S. Ambassador to Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, was en route to Saigon to take up his post. The GVN undertook raids on the major pagodas in Saigon and in Hue. Martial law and a strict curfew were proclaimed in Hue and in Saigon. They were probably enforced more thoroughly in Hue than in Saigon, because Hue was more controllable, in the sense of physical security.

Q: Did the government raid pagodas in Hue? How many, do you remember?

HELBLER: They raided at least two pagodas in Hue, Tu Dam Pagoda being the focal point. I would have to review the record to recall the figure more precisely than that.

Q: I was working in the Vietnam Working Group in the Department of State in Washington at the time. We made a list of the pagodas that had been raided. There were about 20 in the whole country, out of a total of about 5,000 pagodas in the whole country. The representation that this was a "crackdown" on all pagodas was quite mistaken.

HELBLER: No, it was not.

Q: However, I'm afraid that this was the point where matters had gone beyond rational discussion.

HELBLER: A "fine point" such as you are making was irrelevant.

Q: Furthermore, this had its impact in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. I remember a staff meeting with our friend, Roger Hilsman, the Assistant Secretary, presiding. This was shortly after the pagoda raids. He said, "Well, the pagodas were raided by Vietnamese Special Forces under Ngo Dinh Nhu Counselor of the GVN and brother of President Diem. We just can't stand for this." I said, "Roger, it isn't clear who was responsible for this. This is all preliminary information." Then he said, with a "shit-eating" smile on his face, "If it isn't true, then let's make it true." To me this man Hilsman was just so shallow. He was a person with no personal integrity at all. That really is what happened at that point.

HELBLER: Right. Well, in Hue I could hear gunshots in the night. Tu Dam Pagoda was some distance away, but it was within the city limits of Hue. The pagoda and the Consulate were both on the South side of the Perfume River. I believe that I may have gotten my first, official indication of what was happening in Saigon from the Voice of America, if I recall correctly, when I heard one of their early morning broadcasts. I was quickly able to confirm that there had been some violence at Tu Dam Pagoda which resulted in a number of injuries to bonzes and their supporters, many of whom had been camping on the grounds of the pagoda for some weeks. There was a large number of arrests, although I do not recall the exact number. As I mentioned above, martial law was imposed. There wasn't a single person walking around on the streets. I know this because early in the morning, probably around 8:00 AM, I had gotten into my official vehicle and drove through the city. I crossed the bridge across the Perfume River into the old city. The bridge was under heavy guard, but my vehicle was allowed to pass. I had no other passengers in it. The police could see that I had consular plates on the car. I was probably known by a number of them by sight. American-provided armored personnel carriers were guarding certain key points. Nobody was going anywhere.

To be perfectly candid, I was "enraged" because, once again, I saw what I regarded as a clearly visible "misuse" of American equipment. I felt that this equipment was being used in a manner which, I considered, would cause us enormous "grief." Certainly, this didn't enhance our image with the Vietnamese in Hue, at least as far as I was concerned. I saw American-provided APC's Armored Personnel Carriers rattling around the town, blocking bridges, and that sort of thing. I

recognized that my emotional response to this, which I had to "internalize" and not allow to be seen, was something that I just had to get under control. However, it was certainly my first reaction to what I was seeing.

Martial law continued in effect for some time. Things were really "clamped down." I was now under 24-hour a day surveillance, and anywhere I went there was a black Citroen in the rear view mirror. There was always one such vehicle parked outside my house -- and not very discreetly hidden.

Perhaps several days after August 21, 1963, a young man with whom I had had a number of contacts, a man whom I would describe as basically an "intellectual" and who was basically a "political dissident," came to my house. He wanted to discuss recent events and share information with me. We talked for a time. Then he said, "You know, I am concerned about my security." He asked, "Can you give me something that I can send back to you in the event that I am arrested -- something that you will recognize?" I said, "Well, I'll give you a book." I reached among my paperback books. I did not choose this book deliberately, but it was somewhat ironic when I realized that the book I was handing him was Dostoevski's "Crime and Punishment." In any event, the book never came back to me. However, on the following day his wife called me and said that she knew that her husband had been coming to see me and that he had not returned home since the previous morning. I asked my gate guard if he had observed anything unusual, when this fellow had left the house on the previous day. He said, "Yes, when he walked out the gate, the black Citroen that parks over there pulled over to him and put him in it."

I never heard from him again. I don't know what happened to him, but that was the type of environment that we were now operating under. I knew that I had to be very discreet in approaching my very best contacts. When I did, some of them would say, "Look, I want to talk with you, but I just can't, under these circumstances. I have a family," and so forth. Others would say that we could meet, but it would have to be under some kind of cover, where "I would have a legitimate reason to be." Others wouldn't answer my attempts to contact them at all. It became very evident to me that I was de facto "PNG" persona non grata in this environment. It was simply a situation that I had to live with.

The situation continued unchanged throughout September. In mid-October of 1963 we decided that we would take our annual vacation and go to Baguio in the Philippines, which we had become rather fond of. So Joan, our son Stuart, and I went off to Baguio. We were planning to spend two weeks there.

While I was there, the DCM from the Embassy in Saigon, Bill Trueheart, also came over to stay in Baguio, at the Country Club, which is adjacent to Camp John Hay. We both had bungalows in that area. Trueheart asked me, in an aside and not in Joan's presence, "When are you getting back to Hue?" I said, "October 28." He said, "When you get back, I want you to pack one bag containing what you would need immediately for you and your family. Not more than one bag. We have intelligence reports that the Vietnamese Government is going to issue a massive 'White Paper' about the whole Buddhist episode. The blame is going to be placed very directly on the United States. Specifically, it's going to fall on you as the Consul in Hue, whom they will accuse of having created the problem, agitating about it, exacerbating it, and directing it." I said, "I

couldn't direct something like that in my wildest dreams." He said, "Well, we know that, but they are looking for a 'goat,' and you're going to be the 'goat' in this white paper, backed up, in effect, by the U. S. Government." He said, "At that point, when that is issued, you and your family are going to be in serious danger up there. You'll have to clear out. As soon as that happens, we'll send a plane up to Hue, pick up you and your family, and get you out of there."

I said, "When in hell is this going to happen?" He said, "Well, it's going to happen as soon as Madame Ngo dinh Nhu leaves the United States." You may recall that she was on a trip through the United States, moving from East to West. At that moment she was in Honolulu. She was spending several days in Hawaii, her last stop in U. S. territory. Trueheart said, "They do not want to embarrass her with this until she has left the United States." Trueheart said, "We are expecting the issuance of this White Paper about three days after you return to Vietnam."

So I went back to Hue with that "cheerful" news, after two pleasant weeks in Baguio. I said nothing to Joan about this. Before the White Paper was issued, the final coup against President Ngo dinh Diem took place.

Q: Was the paper ever issued?

HELBLE: It was never issued. It would be interesting to know if there is a copy of it.

Q: I really wonder if there ever was such a White Paper. Trueheart may have had a report about this, but, following the coup, I never saw such a paper or any further reference to it.

HELBLE: I wouldn't have seen it up there in Hue.

Q: But it would have been issued, or we would have gotten hold of a copy of it, if it ever existed. I really wonder if it did exist. But it may be that Trueheart very much believed this.

Trueheart had some other problems, too. A friendship of virtually a lifetime -- a long friendship with Ambassador Fritz Nolting Ambassador to Vietnam -- went "blooey" over this whole business. I liked Ambassador Nolting. However, for some reason, which I never could quite understand, right in the middle of all of this -- I think that it was in July, 1963, Nolting decided that it was time for him to take leave. He went to Greece and was having a vacation down in the Greek islands. Well, I was never an Ambassador, but I would think that in a situation like that, I would not leave a country that was possibly on the verge of an explosion. Would you?

HELBLE: Well, as a matter of fact, I had an opportunity to address that very issue when I was DCM to Ambassador David Schneider in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1981. Dave was scheduled to depart from the Embassy transfer in early July 1981. He had said all of his farewells, his household goods had been packed, and he was leaving less than 48 hours later, on a Monday. On the previous Saturday morning President Zia of Bangladesh was assassinated. I was the first person in the Embassy to learn of this through a contact who called me. As soon as I got into contact with Ambassador Schneider, we went to the Embassy to discuss the situation with his key advisers. I said to him, "David, the nature of this country is such that the United States runs the risk of being blamed in any event, because we are blamed for all kinds of things that we had

nothing to do with. However, given the peculiar twists of minds in this country and in India, which regards Bangladesh as virtually its own, there is going to be a widespread conviction that your departure was an admission that we did it and that you were getting out of the country before they could get the goods on you." I said that it was my strong recommendation that for that, as well as for other, obvious reasons, e.g., if we have to take some position with the Bangladeshi government, that he should advise Washington that he plans to stay in Dhaka for at least another week.

Q: I think that that was sound advice.

HELBLE: Ambassador Schneider agreed. He wired Washington that he was going to stay for at least another week, and the Department approved.

I think that that's the end of where we are in terms of the coup against Ngo dinh Diem. That's perhaps a good point to break.

Q: Good.

HELBLE: November 1, 1963, brought the coup d'etat against Diem by the military junta.

In Hue martial law was imposed. However, as the coup succeeded rather rapidly, martial law did not endure in any meaningful way. There was widespread jubilation over the success of the coup among most groups in Hue. The security situation was all right. There was no violence or untoward incidents. With the "liberation," if you will -- as many people saw it -- from the regime and the relaxation which immediately followed, in terms of the atmosphere in general, people were primarily concerned about freeing whatever political prisoners could be located. There were some of these, but I cannot give any estimate in terms of numbers. One of the more dramatic things that occurred late in the afternoon after the coup on November 3, 1963, was the discovery of the rather horrific prison about a mile or two west of Hue, in the general direction of the imperial tombs. It turned out that there had been a number of people incarcerated in an area which had been a former French ammunition depot. This was discovered, and a number of people were released from it. The people of Hue moved in large numbers to the site of this prison to look at it. I had the opportunity to do so myself. The bunkers in which ammunition had been stored were driven into a hillside and were later converted into prison cells. They were about 5-6 feet long, perhaps 3 ½ feet wide, and perhaps 3 ½ feet high. They had bare floors and no furniture -- nothing in them, except human excrement and other trash that had accumulated in the cells. Each cell had a barred gate on it. These cells would have been rather uncomfortable.

Q: Even Vietnamese couldn't stand in them.

HELBLE: Yeah. Even Vietnamese couldn't stand up. This, of course, provoked further outrage against the excesses of the previous regime. The military coup authorities had detained or placed under house arrest officials from the previous government whose movements they wanted to restrict. However, there were no large-scale arrests. Some people were arrested, but not many.

There was concern that there might be residual elements of the former government within the military who might undertake some counteraction. However, these concerns turned out to be unwarranted.

There was an intelligence report which indicated that the "Forces Populaires" of Ngo dinh Can, which we discussed previously, would seek retribution and had already determined in their minds that the Americans were responsible for the coup against Diem. The American community in Hue was allegedly under some threat. I felt that this was very unlikely, although the U. S. military senior adviser to the ARVN 1st Division, Colonel Ed Markey, thought it prudent, acting on his own, to ask the new military authority, General Do cao Tri, the I Corps commander who was present in Hue, to post guards around all of the American residences and facilities. When I saw a squad of ARVN soldiers being deployed in my yard for this purpose, and I learned from a lieutenant on the scene that this was in accordance with orders from headquarters, I went over to talk to Colonel Markey and told him in no uncertain terms that he did not have the authority to request the Vietnamese military to post these guards around U. S. civilian residences or installations. Then I went to General Do cao Tri and asked him to remove these security guards immediately. General Tri agreed to my request. This caused an unpleasant scene with Colonel Markey. After the matter was thrashed out in Saigon, within about a week Colonel Markey was relieved and reassigned in the Mekong Delta area.

Little of great note happened in the next 24 hours. Then I was approached by three individuals, separately, who requested that Ngo dinh Can, who had not been located or arrested but was in hiding, be granted "asylum" at our Consulate. I responded to each request that I would take the matter under advisement. I immediately communicated these approaches to the Department of State in Washington. In my report I informed the Department, first of all, that I could not be certain of the "bona fides" of any of these three individuals. Although I knew all three of them to varying degrees, I could not be sure whether one or more than one of them might be an "agent provocateur" or be misrepresenting their concerns. Aside from that, I pointed out to the Department that, under the "Foreign Affairs Manual" [FAM], a Consulate was not to accord asylum, and that we did not have such authority under international law as well. Under the FAM, the nature of asylum in a diplomatic mission was very narrowly restricted to circumstances in which the individual seeking asylum was in immediate, life threatening danger. An example given was that an individual might be hotly pursued by an angry mob. However, even under those circumstances, it would be required that, as soon as the immediate threat passed, the individual must be removed from the premises -- in effect, put out of the door.

I also pointed out that, from a political point of view, people in Hue were certainly relieved, as were people elsewhere, at the removal of the Diem regime. They had a great deal of dislike for Mr. Can and his authoritarian rule over a number of years. Granting him asylum would not improve the U. S. "image" in the immediate area around Hue. Furthermore, as an extension of that, I pointed out that if Mr. Can were installed in the Consulate under condition of asylum, and this became known, the news would spread like wildfire in Hue. Given the attitudes among the people of Hue, who had just observed the harsh prison conditions that I have described and who had many other grievances against Mr. Can, the people of Hue might decide to take Mr. Can into their own hands. The consular status of the Consulate building would hardly guarantee the security of the building, its occupants, or, indeed, anybody in the American community at that

point.

There was an exchange of messages. I received a response from the Department, which was not definitive. It asked a few more questions. I answered those questions and reiterated my strong view that we should not grant this request, even if one or more of these requests were made in a bona fide way. Within 36 hours I was instructed to give Mr. Can asylum. Upon his arrival at the Consulate, I was asked to inquire as to what country he would like to go to for more permanent asylum. I was asked to inform both the Department and the Embassy when he arrived at the Consulate and what his choice of asylum was. Once that instruction was received from the Department, I was also in touch with the Embassy in Saigon. Some of that was handled over the telephone on a non-secure line. Efforts made to speak in "guarded" terms were probably useless, but I tried to do so. The Embassy advised me that they would send a C-46 transport plane, a CIA aircraft, to Phu Bai airport South of Hue as soon as Mr. Can arrived in the Consulate.

I then got in touch with the person whom I regarded as the most reliable of the three contacts I mentioned before.. I informed him that I would be prepared to accept Mr. Can at the Consulate. He got back in touch with me fairly shortly thereafter and said that Mr. Can would arrive at the Consulate in disguise and in the company of a Catholic priest, who would be driving the vehicle, at 11:00 AM, if I remember the time correctly, on Tuesday, which would have been, I believe, November 5, 1963. This time was approximately an hour before he actually arrived at the Consulate. Mr. Can did, indeed, arrive at the Consulate. He was lying on the floor of the back seat of an old Citroen. The chauffeur was a Vietnamese priest.

I greeted Can in the driveway in front of the porch of the Consulate and invited him to go upstairs, trying to shield him from observation by several of my local employees. These Vietnamese employees were working in an office to the right, as I led him up the stairs. Whether my attempt to shield him from observation succeeded or not, I do not know. I immediately raised with Mr. Can the question of where he would like to be sent for his "safe-haven" overseas. He promptly told me, "Tokyo."

At about this time I received a phone call from one of my local employees, telling me that General Do cao Tri, the previously mentioned I Corps Commander, was downstairs and wanted to see me. I left Jerry Greiner, the CIA Vice Consul, with Mr. Can and went downstairs to see General Tri in our small reception room. General Tri started by saying quite bluntly, as was his practice, that I "had" Ngo dinh Can in the building and that he, General Tri, "wanted" him. I told General Tri that, whether I had Ngo dinh Can or not, was a matter of my concern and not his. He then indicated that, given the atmosphere in Hue, in view of the hostility toward Can, should the people of Hue become aware of his presence in the Consulate, he could not ensure the security of the Consulate or of the American community in Hue in general. I immediately replied that it was clearly General Tri's responsibility to ensure the security of the Consulate, of American facilities, and of American personnel in Hue. I was at this point formally requesting that he provide such assurances and that I would immediately report this conversation to the Embassy in Saigon and his response. He gave no such assurances. I repeated that it was his responsibility, that I expected him to do so, and that this was a formal communication to that effect.

General Tri then left the Consulate. I returned to discuss the situation with Mr Can, but there was

little more that I needed to discuss with him, once we had established that Tokyo was his preferred destination. I immediately called the Embassy in Saigon and informed them that "I had the bird in the cage." They advised me that within two hours the C-46 would arrive at Phu Bai airport, and I was to be there with Mr Can. I immediately sent a message to the Department saying that Can was in the Consulate. I called in the senior U. S. military adviser to the ARVN 1st Division, his deputy, and my CIA colleague Vice Consul Greiner. We developed a scenario for a small convoy to transport Can to Phu Bai airport, a distance of 14 kilometers. The convoy consisted of a jeep with an Enlisted Man and an Officer in the front, followed by my official vehicle containing the senior U. S. military adviser, the CIA Vice Consul, myself, and Mr Can, and another U. S. military jeep containing an officer and an enlisted man, following us.

We left the Consulate with just enough time to get to Phu Bai airport, in terms of the ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival) of the C-46 aircraft. The trip to the airport was uneventful. We did not encounter any difficulties. We placed Mr Can on the plane. I had arranged with Vice Consul Jerry Greiner to accompany him, and I instructed Jerry to turn Mr Can over to the Embassy and the Embassy only.

Greiner and Can flew to Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon. When the door was opened, Greiner found that the plane had been parked on the military side of Tan Son Nhut airport and that there was a sizable contingent of ARVN troops surrounding the plane, with a couple of ARVN 2 ½ ton trucks with canvas covering the rear of the trucks, off to one side. Greiner was greeted by Lucien Conein, a well known CIA officer, who informed him, "All right, Jerry. I will take it from here." Jerry took the position that Conein was not the Embassy and told him that the Consul's orders had been to turn Can over to the Embassy. Conein said, "Well, have it your way, but here's your transportation." So Greiner and Can boarded the back of one of the 2 ½ ton trucks. The canvas flap was closed, and they rumbled off. After a drive of 15-20 minutes the truck stopped, the canvas was pulled back, and Greiner saw that he was in the midst of the better part of a battalion of ARVN troops in a large, ARVN installation, somewhere in Saigon. Conein appeared again and said, "This is the end of the road." Greiner had no alternative but to yield to the situation.

That was the extent of my direct involvement and that of the Consulate in Hue in the Can episode. As history will show, Can eventually was tried by the Vietnamese military authorities, was sentenced to death, and was executed.

Q: Was this by firing squad?

HELBLE: By firing squad. These events all occurred in Saigon, and I had no further involvement with them -- with one exception.

Shortly after the execution of Ngo dinh Can, there was a great deal of unhappiness expressed in the United States, primarily from the Catholic community, but from others as well, who felt that the Ngo family had suffered enough from the coup, with Diem and his brother, Ngo dinh Nhu, killed. It was felt that the U. S. was involved in this by taking Can, turning him over to the new Vietnamese authorities, and then "standing by" while he was sentenced and executed. This was felt by these Americans to have been an improper course of action for the U. S. -- or a combination of action and inaction.

A friend of mine, Larry Pezzulo, the Assistant General Services Officer in Saigon, subsequently told me of an incident that occurred about two days after the execution of Ngo dinh Can. Pezzulo was involved in this incident, to the extent that he was the Embassy Duty Officer at the time. An "Urgent" priority message arrived at the Embassy, while he was Embassy Duty Officer, which had to be delivered to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. Pezzulo took the message, I believe, to Ambassador Lodge's residence. Wherever it was, Ambassador Lodge and the DCM, Bill Trueheart, were both at dinner. Pezzulo called them out of the dinner, showed them the telegram, and the two of them read it. Ambassador Lodge and DCM Trueheart appeared to be deeply concerned because they were in some political "trouble." According to Pezzulo's account of this to me, Ambassador Lodge inquired of Bill Trueheart, "What do you think we ought to do about this?" Trueheart indicated, in Pezzulo's presence, that it was clear that we needed some scapegoat -- somebody to pin the blame on. Trueheart reportedly said, "Obviously, our Consul in Hue is the likely possibility for this."

Pezzulo was horrified at this, because he knew the circumstances very well. We had discussed the Ngo dinh Can affair in Saigon during a trip that I made to Saigon after the coup but before the events of this particular evening. In any event, nothing really came of that. It was another indication to me that one had to have a lot of luck, in addition to being careful, to escape some of the problems which can jeopardize your Foreign Service career.

Q: Did you ever find out what that message contained? Did you ever see it?

HELBLE: I never saw it.

Q: Any idea of what its substance was?

HELBLE: It was a message from the Department reporting the "uproar" in the United States over the handling of the Ngo dinh Can case. The Embassy was being asked by the Department to make recommendations to Washington as to how to handle this "uproar." I will say that, in subsequent years, in the mid 1960's, after I had returned to the United States and was working on Vietnamese affairs, I had occasion to draft answers to a lot of public correspondence and Congressional inquiries. On a number of occasions one of the issues that I had to address was this incident involving Ngo dinh Can because there were people in the U. S. who continued to refer to what they regarded as a "perfidious action" on the part of the United States and were still complaining about it. Because my name had appeared associated with the episode, in various articles at the time, I was frequently answering mail, not for my signature, but for the signatures of persons well above me, addressing the very issue in which I was being accused. This was never something that I worried a great deal about, but it is just a footnote to this incident.

Q: It doesn't seem to have hurt you very much, John. Your recommendation was in accordance with the Foreign Affairs Manual and was the right one, in terms of our whole history and tradition. I think that the decision first to grant asylum to Thich Tri Quang in the Embassy after the pagoda raids of August 21 was a mistake. The decision to grant asylum to Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary in our Legation in Budapest after the 1956 Hungarian uprising was also a mistake. I think that the decision to give Ngo dinh Can asylum in the Consulate in Hue was a

mistake. That is just no way to operate. It is not in our tradition and not in our custom. John, is there anything else that you want to go into?

HELBLE: As one other aftermath of the coup which overthrew the Diem government in 1963, one of the officials arrested after the coup by the incoming military junta was Major Dang Sy. You will recall that Major Dang Sy was the Deputy Province Chief in Thua Thien province in charge of security. He was responsible for the Civil Guard forces which became involved in the "Buddhist" incident at the radio station in Hue on May 8, 1963. Dang Sy was charged with responsibility for that incident. He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be executed by firing squad. I did not attend the trial but I had followed it.

The sentence was handed down, and the date for execution was set for approximately three to four months after the coup. It may have been February, March, or early April, 1964. However, for whatever reason, I was instructed by the Embassy to attend Dang Sy's execution by firing squad, which was slated to take place in the modest stadium in Hue. I never understood why it was necessary for the U. S. Consul to observe the execution, but I did as I was instructed. It was a solemn occasion. The general public was invited, and I suppose that there were several thousand people in attendance. Dang Sy was, indeed, executed before my very eyes. This caused me some personal distress because I had worked closely with Dang Sy, when he was in his security position in Thua Thien province. I had found him a very candid, likeable, and, as far as I could tell, a quite honest official. I thought that he was one of the brighter, young military officers that I had met during my time in Hue. It was clear to me that this was another "scapegoat" exercise and that, in point of fact, it was considered essential, in the atmosphere after the coup that somebody should be blamed for the incident and some action taken that would mollify the people of Hue. I believe that Dang Sy was unjustly "pinned" with that responsibility. In any event, he did not deserve the fate that he received.

The rest of the spring and early summer of 1964 was marked largely by a continuation of the political turmoil, a lack of governmental direction, firm policies, and clear lines of authority. There was a lot of maneuvering on the political front, which was occurring primarily in Saigon and in the military high command. I had little to contribute in terms of direct observation of any of this, but it was an environment which affected the entire country in terms of a lack of direction and coherent policy, as well as political maneuvering. This had its impact in that government programs in the countryside floundered, and little progress was made in the major struggle against the Viet Cong. Security conditions continued to deteriorate -- not dramatically, but there was a steady erosion of the situation, as had been going on for several years.

I will now go to what was the final significant event in my experience in Hue. In some respects, perhaps, it was the most significant. I was scheduled to leave Hue immediately after our "Fourth of July reception" on July 4, 1964, for reassignment. By now I had completed four years in Vietnam.

A few days before I was scheduled to leave Hue I gave a farewell dinner, to which I invited the senior Vietnamese officials. General Do cao Tri, the I Corps Commander; the ARVN 1st Division commander; the chief of Thua Thien province; and the senior U. S. military adviser to the ARVN 1st Division were all there. The senior U. S. military adviser was the only other

American present. During the course of the dinner several "runners" came in from ARVN 1st Division headquarters, which was located in The Citadel of the Imperial City of Hue. They delivered messages to General Tri and to the ARVN 1st Division commander, who promptly shared them with us. There apparently was an upsurge of Viet Cong incidents occurring in the area. Reports were coming in from a number of outposts in the northern part of the I Corps area - that is, Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. Finally, before we had dessert, another "runner" came. The message was so dramatic that we broke up the dinner and went on to the ARVN 1st Division headquarters, in the Imperial City.

One of the things that had triggered the breakup of the dinner was the report that two enemy soldiers had just been brought into headquarters. They had been captured East of Route 1 and North of Hue, along the Thua Thien-Quang Tri provincial border. There was a very narrow strip of land between Route 1 and the coast of the South China Sea at that point -- an area probably no more than three or four kilometers wide. Indeed, this was the precise area that was known during the Indochina War Against the French as "the street without joy," a reference to the numerous bloody ambushes the Viet Minh inflicted on the French in the early 1950s. The two prisoners were members of regular North Vietnamese Army units -- PAVN or the People's Army of Vietnam. When we got to ARVN 1st Division headquarters, we were given a quick briefing from the officers in charge at headquarters. General Tri asked if I would like to talk to the prisoners. I said that I would welcome the opportunity. We interviewed them. The first prisoner clearly spoke the North Vietnamese dialect. The second prisoner indicated that they had been captured because they had become disoriented in a battle that was still going on. They had lost their way and couldn't find their units. They had been picked up as "stragglers" by ARVN troops. They had never been to the area before, were unfamiliar with it, and didn't know where to go. Each of them -- and we talked to them individually -- acknowledged that about 90 days previously they had arrived in the A Shau Valley, which was in western Thua Thien province, and was, for all intents and purposes, enemy territory. ARVN occasionally had small outposts there but did not control the territory.

They had entered South Vietnam with their respective battalions as regular units of North Vietnamese divisions. One was the 324th Division, and I forget the designations of their regiments and battalions. I now forget the number of the other division, but it was one which the other prisoner had been assigned to. Each of them said that they had come down the Ho Chi Minh trail with their units intact. They had rested for about 90 days in the A Shau Valley area, were trained and resupplied there, and then launched their attack earlier that day before they were separated from their main units. It was already dark when they were captured.

This was the first time that there was evidence of integral North Vietnamese Army units operating South of the DMZ. There had long been North Vietnamese cadres in South Vietnam. Small groups had come in, operated most often in conjunction with some of the local Viet Cong forces...

Q: John, what was the date of this incident and therefore of your dinner party?

HELBLE: If I recall correctly, it was July 2, 1964. I could be "off" by a day, but I think it was July 2, 1964. In any event, I was totally convinced that we now had on our hands a real "smoking

gun" in terms of a change in North Vietnamese activity and tactics. They were now sending into South Vietnam large bodies of troops, organized and directed entirely in North Vietnamese Army fashion, and using strictly North Vietnamese Army personnel instead of Viet Cong cadres who had been born in South Vietnam.

At the same time that we were learning this at the division headquarters, we also learned that there had been something like 40 bridges blown up in the previous 12 hours in northern Quang Nam, Thua Thien, and Quang Tri provinces. A number of ARVN outposts had been attacked, some of which had been overrun. One or two South Vietnamese "Special Forces" camps in the western part of this area were undergoing heavy attack and were in danger of being overrun. There was a report that as much as a battalion-sized unit had made an incursion directly across the DMZ from North Vietnam into South Vietnam, although there was no follow-up report on that. Indeed, the incident in which the two PAVN soldiers were captured occurred in an area East of Route 1, which had been virtually "incident free" during the three years that I had been in Hue.

Furthermore, an ARVN outpost located at what was known as PK (Kilometer Post) 17, 17 kilometers North of Hue on Route 1, had despatched all of its fighting troops into the various battles going on in the area. The North Vietnamese were in the immediate proximity of PK 17 which, at that point, was in no position to hold anything. There were no security forces between Hue and PK 17. ARVN troops were widely deployed throughout the area and had been reinforced by most of the reserves available to the 1st Division. As a result, I Corps had nothing left to deal immediately with the situation. General Tri sent a "Flash" message to his headquarters in Saigon, describing the situation and calling for the immediate despatch of Airborne troops to assist in handling the situation.

The entire situation was clearly one which, from a security and military point of view, was unprecedented at any time since the end of the Indochina War Against the French, in that particular area. It might not have been that uncommon in other areas in the Mekong Delta, Tay Ninh province northwest of Saigon, or in certain areas around Saigon. It was unprecedented in the Hue and Quang Tri area.

Q: I think that it was unprecedented in terms of regular, PAVN units.

HELBLE: That was definitely unprecedented. In any event, I returned to the Consulate and immediately drafted a report containing this information because, if a North Vietnamese incursion had occurred across the DMZ, that could really open up a "can of worms." If, in fact, the PAVN units marched 17 kilometers down Route 1 from PK 17 to Hue, there was nothing to stop them in the Hue area at that point.

I sent this message, detailing all of the above, including the account of the capture and interview of the two PAVN stragglers, via "Flash" message to the Department in Washington. The message, of course, was repeated to the Embassy in Saigon, via the Clark Field Philippines communications facility. My message went off at approximately midnight. A parallel message was being prepared by the U. S. Military Senior Adviser to the ARVN 1st Division. My message was "cleared" with the adviser, since he was present during most of these events.

Q: What was the name of the adviser?

HELBLE: This I cannot recall, because Col Markey, whom I referred to earlier, had been relieved. I do not recall the name of his replacement, but he was a very steady fellow. He reported through his channels, which went through the I Corps Advisory Detachment in Da Nang. The duty officer at this detachment was awakened, digested this, and then proceeded to ask further questions before forwarding his report to MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] headquarters in Saigon. This took some time, which was not necessary in my situation. I understand that some time around 3:00-4:00 AM the duty officer at MACV was awakened, not by a message from Da Nang, but rather by a message from the National Military Command Center [NMCC] in Washington, which had received a copy of my report to the State Department. The NMCC, of course, in effect, said to MACV, "What the hell's going on out there?" They had heard nothing from MACV. Well, the reaction to this in Saigon was rather classic and ultimately, as we will see, extremely ironic. General Paul Harkins was still in command of MACV.

General William Westmoreland, his ultimate replacement, had arrived in Vietnam and was "reading in" on the job. I myself had spent five hours alone with him at Ambassador Lodge's residence in Saigon, briefing him several weeks prior to this on security matters that we're now discussing. However, Westmoreland was not in command.

General Harkins was still in command, getting ready to leave in a short time. General Maxwell Taylor had arrived in Saigon as the new Ambassador. General Harkins and his staff were outraged that they had no information with which to respond immediately to the NMCC in Washington. They were annoyed that they should have been informed about all of this "frenetic" activity up in the northern part of South Vietnam by Washington and not by their own subordinate echelons. Shortly after this reports were coming in from the Senior Advisory Detachment in I Corps in Da Nang. I don't have the foggiest idea what MACV reported to Washington.

However, I learned directly from the Embassy on the following day that MACV, in effect, was "discounting" most of what I had reported. Perhaps 36 hours after my initial report, the Embassy summarized to me a MACV report to Washington for my comment. The MACV report said, more or less, "Well, yes, there were 48 bridges or so blown up, but 24 of them have been restored. Yes, a Vietnamese Special Forces camp was almost overrun, but with one-third of the camp still intact, the enemy was finally repulsed. Yes, there had been these widespread incidents, but they had now ceased." It was that sort of a message. Regarding the capture of the two PAVN soldiers, MACV said, "In the absence of a thorough debriefing, there was no evidence to conclude" that my report was valid.

At that point I only had another day or two left in Hue. I had continued with follow-up reports, some of which reflected the same type of things that MACV was now saying, "Yes, but." The heavy action had ceased by the next day, the Vietnamese Special Forces camp was still holding out and relief was on the way, and so forth. I continued to submit updated reports on the situation until I left, and then I went to Saigon.

When I got to the Embassy in Saigon, I was told that my successor, Sam Thomsen, would be receiving an instruction on the following day that all of his reporting was to be sent to the Embassy in Saigon, which would decide what, if anything, should be forwarded to Washington. It was indicated very clearly that this was the result of MACV's insistence, which was very unhappy at having been caught "with their drawers around their knees." They convinced General Maxwell Taylor that the Consul in Hue should no longer have an independent reporting channel to Washington. I felt badly about that, but there wasn't much that I could do about it. I still believed that I had done the right thing in this respect.

A footnote to that is really the most important thing. In February, 1965, I was blissfully attending the University of Chicago on a program of university training. I picked up the morning paper, having heard briefly on the news the previous night of the introduction of U. S. ground combat forces into Vietnam. Marines had landed near Da Nang and so forth. I read with great care and interest the full text of the MACV press conference, at which the introduction of these forces was announced. This provided the rationale for this very dramatic change in the level of U. S. participation in the Vietnam war. Until then, while we had had a number of U. S. military involved in the war, to the extent that they were being shot at and we were taking casualties, we did not have regular, ground combat units being dispatched to secure areas and to take on the enemy.

The key rationale used, as far as I could see, was that this action was taken in response to a change by the North Vietnamese in their conduct of the war. That is, the North Vietnamese were now sending regular army units into combat in South Vietnam. The first evidence of this was the capture of two North Vietnamese regular soldiers in an incident in early July, 1964, which I have previously described here. Yet this rationale came from the very same command, MACV which, seven and a half months earlier, had "pooh-poohed" the whole thing and had been very critical of the report. They were now utilizing it, and I think properly so, as justification for the change in the nature of American involvement in South Vietnam. However, this was an ironic development from my point of view. Finally, it should be noted that the July '64 MACV-Max Taylor action to cut off Consulate Hue's direct communication link to Washington was a classic bureaucratic response to embarrassment: Don't address the substantive issue - just kill the messenger!

Q: John, what assignment did you go to in Washington?

HELBLE: Let me make one more point about Vietnam. I referred to a long discussion which I had had with General Westmoreland when he arrived in Vietnam to become the commander of MACV. As I recall, this discussion occurred about the first week of June, 1964. At the time I was in Saigon on consultation. Ambassador Lodge had asked me to set aside an hour during which I would just talk with General Westmoreland and give him my observations after four years in Vietnam and before General Westmoreland assumed charge of his command. Ambassador Lodge suggested that this discussion might be held in Lodge's livingroom.

We met at 4:00 PM that afternoon, and the two of us talked for about five hours. General Westmoreland was very interested and asked a lot of questions. It was more of a briefing than a conversation. At about 8:00 PM the Ambassador's staff brought us a bite to eat. We kept going

and finished at about 9:00 PM. As I said, I hoped that General Westmoreland would prove to be a more worthy commander of the U. S. military forces in Vietnam than General Harkins had been. I had had no regard for General Harkins' understanding of the situation he was dealing with. I thought that General Harkins had been just short of a disaster as the commander of MACV. I thought that General Westmoreland was very promising. He certainly was interested and asked a lot of the right questions. I was very optimistic that he was going to be a significant improvement, at a minimum.

One of the key points that I focused on in our discussion was my view that U. S. military forces could not do the "on the ground job" in Vietnam. The nature of the conflict was too "gray" and not "black and white" enough. The complexities of how to deal with it were too great for an outside force, such as the American military, to understand and deal effectively with. I had heard many American military advisers say, "Just give me one U. S. division. We'll start at the tip of Ca Mau the peninsula (the Southernmost part of South Vietnam) and we'll march north. We'll have this place cleaned out in six months." Unfortunately, that view, which reflected a great deal of confidence, which one may admire up to a point, demonstrated a total lack of understanding of the nature of the conflict. I told General Westmoreland that Vietnamese forces had to do most of the fighting. U. S. forces had the capability and could effectively provide logistical support, possibly including artillery and air support. However, "on the ground" fighting really, I thought, could only be done by the Vietnamese. If they couldn't do it, then it couldn't be done.

I kept coming back to that point, in one form or another during this session. I thought that General Westmoreland understood it quite well. However, history will show, of course, that, whether he understood it or not, that position was not followed.

HELBLE: I was aware that I was being assigned to the Vietnam Working Group. So I left Chicago on June 15, the day after Ramona was born, and reported a couple of days later to the Vietnam Working Group. That began another assignment, another chapter in the story.

Q: Is there anything more that you would like to record about your time at the University of Chicago?

HELBLE: It was an exhilarating year in many respects. It was broadening and challenging. It was certainly different from active duty in the Department or overseas. It was humbling, as I had to acknowledge the tremendous range of human knowledge of which, at least in my case, I was totally unaware. [Laughter] That's always a good perspective to have instilled in you.

The assignment to the Vietnam Working Group started in late June, 1965. It ran for just about exactly two years.

Q: Say something about the organization of the Vietnam Working Group. This was an unusual arrangement in the Department, at least at the time. I had served on the Vietnam Working Group a year or two before then, in 1963 and early 1964. At that time we had about five people assigned to the Group. Paul Kattenburg was the Director. I was the Deputy Director. How was it

organized during your time there?

HELBLER: Well, when I arrived there, we had seven officers and three secretaries. As the next two years unfolded, we built up to nine officers and three secretaries. At one point during that time frame I became very incensed because for months other officers and I had been pleading to get at least some additional secretarial help. We had to do our own filing. There was a horrendous amount of telegraphic traffic and other reports coming into our office. The place was a shambles of paper. Often you couldn't find a telegraphic reference from the previous day because nothing was in any particular order. Frequently, I would spend a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday morning, just filing stuff that was related to my own work. We couldn't get help.

Q: You had a specific assignment on the desk. What was that?

HELBLER: I was working on internal political developments in Vietnam. We had an officer who was working on the political-military aspects.

Q: Who was that?

HELBLER: Chuck Flowerree. We had another officer working on the peace negotiations, which were all very hush-hush at that time, using various channels -- the Poles, the Chinese Communists, and others.

Q: Who was doing that?

HELBLER: Hayward Isham did most of it. Dick Smyser was also involved in some of that. George Roberts was in charge of following Vietnamese external affairs. This frequently meant "Third Country assistance." We were trying to encourage the European countries, the Japanese, and others to provide economic and/or military assistance to the Republic of Vietnam.

I had one assistant on my side. This was Tony Lake, who eventually became the National Security Adviser to President Clinton at the NSC [National Security Council]. Bill Marsh was my assistant at another stage on the internal political side. Bob Miller, or Robert H. Miller, was the Director of the Working Group. He had arrived about a week before I did. He was there throughout my two-year stint.

Q: He'd been in the Embassy in Saigon?

HELBLER: He's been the number two in the Political Section in the Embassy in Saigon from about 1962 to 1965, if I recall correctly. He was a very competent, calm officer, under whom I served later on, when he was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, and I was Country Director for Thailand and Burma in 1976. Interestingly enough, he now works with me at the State Department as a retiree, handling requests from the public for State Department documents under the Freedom of Information program. He has become one of my closest friends.

In any event it was a pressure cauldron of the first water. The nature of the pressure was very

different from what I had experienced in the field. There were constant demands from Congress, the White House, the "Seventh Floor" of the State Department, and the Pentagon.

Q: The Seventh Floor is where the Secretary and the senior officers of the Department have their offices.

HELBLER: Yes. There were also demands for information from the press and so on. There was a relentless cascade of demands, all of them urgent. Of course, we were fully aware that we were involved in a major war, with thousands of casualties accruing as the months went by.

To return to your question about organization and staffing, at one point I became increasingly incensed at the shortage of secretarial assistance. I had tried to work through Bob Miller, but nothing got done. So one day I wrote a memorandum. I made several copies of it. I said that, with 540,000 U. S. troops in Vietnam the least the State Department could do was to provide an adequate secretarial staff for a small office that was dealing with issues affecting those troops. The memorandum was directed to the Executive Director of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, who was in charge of the administration of the bureau. I left a copy on Bob Miller's desk. He was not in. I left another copy with the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Leonard Unger, who was responsible for supervising our office.

This was late on a Friday afternoon. Within a half hour the proverbial fecal material hit the fan. Everybody wanted to know what I thought I was doing, "jumping channels" and this kind of thing. I made clear that my sense of outrage had reached the point where I was determined to do something. [Laughter]

Q: You'd gotten attention, anyhow.

HELBLER: On the following Monday morning we had another secretary. That was probably my greatest accomplishment during my two years on this desk because, certainly, I didn't resolve the internal political problems of Vietnam. In any event it was a very different scene from work in the field in Vietnam. It was a madhouse every day.

In the midst of all this pressure I was charged with following the internal politics of Vietnam, including the struggle for power and influence between President Nguyen van Thieu and Prime Minister Nguyen cao Ky and the machinations of the Vietnamese generals, which was a feature of Vietnam's political life during our years of association with it. There was the Buddhist influence in it, which I referred to in an earlier part of this interview in connection with my time in Hue. There was the breakdown in ARVN solidarity.

Q: ARVN was the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

HELBLER: That's right. That occurred in particular during 1966. This involved General Nguyen chanh Thi, in particular, whom we referred to earlier in connection with the abortive coup d'etat in Saigon in 1960. In 1966 General Thi was the commander of the ARVN I Corps, with his residence in Da Nang. He had the ARVN First and Second Divisions assigned to I Corps, plus ancillary units. In that region, of course, there was still a very strong Buddhist movement. It had

become an anti-government movement. Soldiers of those divisions were largely drawn from that region. General Thi had become identified as a friend of the Buddhists. I should say that in 1965, I guess it was, the Buddhists burned down our Consulate in Hue. Anticipating this development by one day Tom Corcoran, our Consul in Hue at the time, arranged to move the office to Da Nang, where it became a Consulate General.

In any event General Thi broke with his Saigon superiors. This was a political move, but it split ARVN -- not down the middle, because I Corps didn't include the mass of the troops. However, it was a pretty isolated geographic area, and General Thi wasn't taking any orders from Saigon. The Americans were in the middle with a really tough nut to crack. Of course, we were totally opposed, from the policy point of view, to the actions which General Thi was taking and the divisiveness which he was causing in this connection.

The outcome of that finally was a negotiated settlement. General Thi couldn't hold out too long. Our greatest fear was that this conflict would end up in combat between ARVN units, and there would be blood shed which would get beyond the point of no return in terms of reconciliation between the two factions. Meanwhile, the war against the Communists was going on, and we were pouring in more and more American troops. This was a terribly bad time to have such a conflict. In any event, General Thi was finally pressured into giving up his command of I Corps on a temporary basis to receive medical treatment in the United States. He had some sort of minor problem with his nose, but it was hardly something that you would leave your duty station in the midst of a war to take care of.

Q: This was a sort of excuse ...

HELBLE: It was an arrangement to get him out of Vietnam and make him comfortable here in the United States. He was treated at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, DC. I was tasked with being his companion, his guide, his controller, his handler, or whatever you called it -- once he arrived in the United States. So I set up his medical appointments. I got him lodging in a hotel.

Q: Where did he stay?

HELBLE: He stayed at a sort of apartment hotel on Connecticut Avenue at the junction with Columbia Road, North West. It was a few blocks South of Calvert Street. Joan and I had him over for dinner a number of times.

The Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, of course, didn't want to touch him with a 10 foot pole because of his political differences with Generals Thieu and Ky. The point of all of this was to keep him from feeling that he had to return to Vietnam and get back into this political tension. Finally, we kept him away long enough and made him comfortable enough that he was never a political factor again.

Q: The problem faded away. I'd like to go back to one point that you raised earlier in this interview. Shortly before you left Hue, a couple of days before that, you had learned at a dinner party which you had given in Hue, and where General Do cao Tri, then commanding general of I

Corps, was present, that two North Vietnamese, from a formed North Vietnamese Army unit, had been captured some 18 or 20 miles North of Hue. Did the North Vietnamese Army presence in South Vietnam build up from that point in that area?

HELBLE: Of course, I left Vietnam at that point. However, the answer is, "Yes," the North Vietnamese Army presence built up steadily throughout the country. That's why, in February, 1965, as I think we mentioned earlier, when we introduced U. S. troops, not only were those two North Vietnamese soldiers cited as justification for a change in the nature of the war which had been started by the North Vietnamese. Indeed, there was a laundry list of additional North Vietnamese Army units and personnel who had arrived in the South.

Of course, the conflict that was going on in 1966 and 1967 with the mass of U. S. troops, including combat in the Ia Drang Valley, Khe Sanh again, and so forth, involved North Vietnamese Army troops. They weren't indigenous southern Vietnamese at all.

If I may just return to the crisis involving General Thi in I Corps, that became a major crisis. As people who knew something about the internal politics of that area, David Engel and I were tasked with providing off hour coverage of these ongoing developments in the Operations Center of the State Department. David Engel was younger than I but had also had experience on Vietnamese matters. He was working in the Bureau of Intelligence Research [INR] at the time.

This extra assignment meant that, during office hours, from about 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, we did our regular jobs. Then one of us worked in the Operations Center throughout that night and went back to his regular job the following morning. At least I did. I'm not sure that David did. In any case, I would work all night and then go back to my daily job.

Q: Did you get any sleep at all? They had a bedroom in the Operations Center.

HELBLE: Once in a while you could get an hour's sleep, but most of the time the phone was ringing, you had to prepare two or three situation reports for the White House or send long-distance fax reports if President Johnson was down in Austin, Texas, or at his Texas ranch. We would have to collect all of the information coming in and prepare these updates perhaps twice a night. Secretary of State Dean Rusk would call personally, perhaps at 11:00 PM or midnight, and want to know what was going on.

At 7:30 AM I would go to the office of Bill Bundy, the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, and give him an early morning briefing on the situation in Vietnam, when he arrived at the Department. Then I would go to the Department cafeteria and get a bite to eat. At about 8:00 or 8:15 AM I would be at my desk and work until 8:00 or 9:00 PM that evening. Then I'd go home. I would get perhaps seven or eight hours of sleep. Then, on the following morning, I would start that same cycle again -- all day, all night, all day. That went on for three months. It was a real test of stamina if you ever saw it.

Meanwhile, my workload on the Vietnam Working Group was not altered or lightened. It was just the normal routine. So this was a very intense experience, but it was mainly a test of endurance. During the three months or so that I was doing this I saw almost nothing of my

family because this process went on through the weekends. We didn't get off on Saturday or Sunday, although we might be off during a part of those days. That was it.

Of course, the United States was engaged at that point in trying to promote political development in Vietnam. We were trying to assist the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese authorities and politicians to find some sort of identity, some sort of cohesion in the developing political situation. Once again, I think that the United States was trying to do something which I don't think we had the capacity to do. Even if you have a fairly good knowledge of a country, this is difficult to do -- and we did not have enough people with that kind of knowledge about Vietnamese motivations, philosophies, and so forth.

Q: You were talking earlier about yourself and Dave Engel, switching on and off, spending nights at the Operations Center, plus your daytime work. You mentioned that there were nine officers on the desk. Couldn't some of the other people relieve you on that?

HELBLE: All I know is that the decision was made that Engel and I were considered to have an in depth understanding of the politics of Vietnam, and we were chosen to do this. It was an honor...

Q: But an honor that, in some respects, you could have done without.

HELBLE: I kept wondering about some relief, but there was never any relief. That's the way things were done in those days.

Q: The Political Section in Saigon would be the logical place to get some additional people on the desk. How large was the Political Section at that point, say, in 1965?

HELBLE: I really don't know but I would guess that there were, perhaps, 10 officers assigned there. However, it didn't work that way. You didn't tap the field for people to come back and work in the Department. Twice, during my two-year stint on the Working Group, I was tasked to go out to Saigon and fill in for some officer in the Political Section who was going on home leave! So I went out to Saigon for two periods of three months -- one in the fall of 1965 and the other in the fall of 1966.

Q: That was your rest stint.

HELBLE: Yes, that's right. You see, it was the responsibility of the Department to fill in the gaps in Saigon because Phil Habib, the Political Counselor at the time, was complaining that he couldn't get along without this or that person, who was doing such a critical job in the Political Section. So the Department would tap the desk, and off I went on those two periods of temporary duty at the Embassy. This was all right, though I wasn't anxious to do it. It kept me in touch with Saigon, at any rate.

As I said, the U. S. was pushing the democratic processes, elections, and a new constitution. I became quite involved in assisting the Embassy in Saigon, obtaining materials for them for the constitutional convention which the Vietnamese were organizing at our instigation to discuss the

terms of a new constitution. We brought in a number of experts on constitutions in various countries, picked their brains, and encouraged them to prepare studies and so on. That occupied several months in the summer of 1966, as I recall.

Ultimately, a new constitution was adopted, the details of which I have long since forgotten. The constitution was unique to Vietnam but drew heavily on various other constitutional provisions around the world. It was certainly not a mirror image of the U. S. Constitution, in any respect, although there were several elements in the two constitutions which resembled each other.

The constitutional convention was followed by an election campaign.

Q: We were talking about your activity on the Vietnam Working Group. In addition to this, as I recall, you had the opportunity to go out and talk to all kinds of academic audiences and had varying experiences. Would you like to touch on that?

HELBLER: I had wonderful and very numerous opportunities to do this.

During that two-year period 1965-1967 on the Vietnam Working Group, excepting such things as the temporary duty details to the Embassy in Saigon and my stint in the Operations Center for three months, the rest of the time I averaged three to four speeches a week on Vietnam. Some of them were made to Foreign Service Institute classes for AID [Agency for International Development] officers training to go to Vietnam. However, most of these speeches were made in public forums. Some of them were in the Washington area. I spoke at a Unitarian Church in Rockville, MD, which Ambassador Unger was supposed to have spoken to. It was his church, but at the last moment he asked me to go out and cover for him. I found a representative of The Women's Strike for Peace movement already on the platform when I arrived at this church. She was typically knowledgeable about Vietnam, a self-styled expert, as we've mentioned before, somewhat facetiously.

I spoke to another group in Arlington, VA. I don't recall the name of the group. In any event there was an ex-POW [Prisoner of War] from the Korean War who was the other speaker. It was not until I had finished my speech, he gave his, and the questions started, that I came to realize that I was in the midst of a John Birch Society ultra-conservative group. While at least 90 percent of the groups that I spoke to were hostile, about 5 percent were objectively interested, and 5 percent involved the buzz saw of the Extreme Right.

When I would speak to a liberal group, the question was, for example, "Why are you napalming babies?" In the Extreme Right groups the question would be, "Why aren't you bombing Haiphong or, better yet, Communist China?"

By and large the Bureau of Public Affairs in the Department did a lousy job of identifying in advance what the nature of the group was.

Q: They made the arrangements for these talks? They really set you up.

HELBLER: Yes. I was feeling set up all the time. I would run into situations where I was the only speaker. Other times, it was one against one. Or it might be a panel situation where I gave the speech and then there would be, perhaps, three panel members who spoke for 10 minutes each and critiqued or criticized what I had said.

I went to Northeastern University, to Pittsburgh, to Salt Lake City, to South Carolina, Chicago, Milwaukee, and all around the country. Usually, I would leave late in the afternoon, catch a flight that would take me to wherever I was going, and make the speech. Then, if it was possible, I would take a flight back that same night, perhaps at 11:00 PM, get home very late at night, get a few hours of sleep, and then back to the mines at the Vietnam Working Group the next morning. This, too, was pretty exhausting because the Working Group was a full time job in itself.

Q: I think that the Department has always been weak on the Public Affairs side. It tries to draw on officers at the working level to handle these issues. It really doesn't take very good care of them. Some of them should be taken off other duties for a week or a month and given time to prepare more carefully for these public appearances, so that you could get a decent night's sleep. This arrangement you had was quite unreasonable.

HELBLER: Well, I think that the Bureau of Public Affairs was not well organized at the time. Also, the circumstances were something that they had never encountered. The demands on the Department for speakers on Vietnam, as the period 1965-67 wore on, were enormous.

Q: I know they were. You've spoken of the other officers on the Working Group. Did they handle any of these speaking engagements?

HELBLER: Yes -- at least some of them. I don't recall how much some of them did this, but I think that all of them made speeches, at least to some extent. I think that I may have been tapped more than anybody else, but all of them shared the work in that respect.

Q: During the period from 1963 to 1966 I was assigned to the Department, first on the Vietnam Working Group, then on the Indonesian desk, and finally on the Australian desk. Even after I was assigned away from Vietnam affairs, I was still asked by the Bureau of Public Affairs to handle some of these speaking assignments. I was kind of amused because my immediate supervisor when I was working on the Australian desk, Dave Cuthell, told me that he had been instructed from on high not to interfere with my going out on these speaking engagements on Vietnam. He never identified who it was, and I never really pressed him. I could handle this on the Australian desk. Cuthell used to refer to this as my social program. [Laughter] But I never tried to go out and get back on the same evening, unless it was to some place that was very close to Washington. I handled a speaking engagement in Wilmington, DE, in one evening. However, for the rest of it, I made sure that I got a night's sleep. You couldn't control this situation nearly as easily as I could. On the whole, I was struck with how poor the Department's response was to a major crisis in the public affairs field, where there was so much public interest in the subject.

HELBLER: The printed materials, the canned language for letters, and the handouts were always out of date, weak in content, and hardly persuasive. That was a problem. There were problems of

Congressional demands and Congressmen not only requesting direct answers to questions which they were posing. There was a heavy flow of their constituent mail, which was simply buck slipped over to the State Department for response to the Congressman's office, so that he could send out the letter to his constituent. That flow was very heavy, and we had a lot of that. Frequently, the questions to the Congressmen were of such nature that they did not have the necessary expertise to answer them, and the correspondence had to be referred to the desk in the State Department to answer.

I think that the best introduction that I could have had to this particular situation happened during the first week that I was on the Vietnam Working Group. I had just come from the University of Chicago. I was told by Bob Miller, my boss, to go out to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, which is only a journey of a little more than an hour from Chicago, to what was basically a "Civil Rights Week" set up by the Chicago civil rights community. They had decided to have a discussion on Vietnam as a second subject in that particular year 1965. So I was to go out and represent the Department on that occasion. I took a plane out to O'Hare Airport in Chicago, somebody from this civil rights camp met me, and we drove up to Lake Geneva. We had dinner, and then I went on the platform.

This was a panel situation with three other panel members. There was a professor from the University of California at Berkeley, an American Friends Service Quaker official, and the deputy chief of the Hungarian delegation to the United Nations. After I'd finished my speech and each of them spoke for a bit, I concluded that, of those three other panel members, the Hungarian was closest to my position, which was saying something. [Laughter]

Q: *May we pause for a moment.*

Q: *All right, John, you were up at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. You may want to continue with your experience with this particular program.*

HELBLE: Well, as I said, the panel critiqued me, and then the program was open for questions. The heavy artillery questions came from this audience of about 200 civil rights activists. Virtually all of the questions were hostile in nature to the U.S. Government, the State Department, and John Helble. On this occasion, as was often the case, somebody would say, "Well, Mr. Helble, regarding what you have said, is that the State Department position or are those your own views?" Of course, I was speaking as a State Department official. A favorite question was, "Do you really believe in all of this, yourself?" And I would say, "Sure. I'm working on the problem. I understand it."

Q: *Well, Lake Geneva is close to Madison, Wisconsin, which was a big center for opposition to U. S. Government policies. In May, 1965, more or less contemporaneous with this, I appeared in a State Department program called, "Community Meetings in Foreign Policy," at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. There the hostility of the audience to our government's policy was unmistakable. There was an element of about 200 that was very tough. However, there were about 1,000 people in the audience, and I think that we got a fair hearing from the audience as a*

whole. When we get to it, I'll go into another experience which was quite different, about a year later. But anyway, please continue.

HELBLER: In any event the questioning went on. By now it was about 10:30 PM. The moderator, having observed that each time a question was due, a number of hands went up in the audience. He cited the example of all night sessions, called teach-in's. He said, "If it's all right with Mr. Helble," as though I had any choice under the circumstances, "...we'll just continue as long as there are any questions." I groaned to myself but bit my tongue, and we went on. The long and the short of it was that we didn't finish until 4:00 AM. Of course, I was always the target of the questions, with the panelists jumping in periodically to throw another spear in my back after a nasty question was asked by a member of the audience.

Q: Were the questions different, or were they repetitive?

HELBLER: No, they wandered all over the place. The questions were often variations on the theme of "Why are you napalming babies?" In any event, when it was over, I went back to my quarters, which was a cabin with four bedrooms in it, one of which I occupied. There was a central livingroom. I went into my room and got into a bathrobe. I was so wrought up after my experience with this audience that I couldn't get to sleep, so I went out to the livingroom and sat down to read something. People came out of two of the bedrooms. They had been to the late show with me and they wanted to continue the discussion then.

At 5:30 AM I excused myself and said, "I've got to take a shower because I have to be in the breakfast hall by 6:30 AM." So I did that. At 6:30 AM I walked into the breakfast hall. Someone at the first table I walked past said, "Here, you come here and sit down and talk to us. We have some questions for you." The result was that I didn't have any breakfast because I was answering questions. At that point the organizer said to me, "Mr. Helble, there are so many people with so many questions. What we've decided to do is to change our morning program. We'll postpone our 8:00 AM program. We'd like you to appear again at 8:00 AM." This was right after breakfast. So I was back on stage again.

Q: Were you alone on the stage?

HELBLER: Yes. On this occasion the other panelists were no longer present.

Q: Maybe they were catching up on their sleep, which they had missed the night before.

HELBLER: Maybe. However, the principal figure at this civil rights program was Jesse Jackson. So he was placed on the stage with me. Then it became a back and forth, open ended debate between the two of us, with questions from the audience, 99 percent directed toward me. Finally, at 11:00 AM, with no break since this program began at 8:00 AM, I told the organizer that I had a 1:30 PM flight back to Washington, leaving from O'Hare Airport in Chicago. I said, "I've got to leave right now." I was finally off the hook, but it was the kind of experience that really conditioned me quite well for what was to follow for the next couple of years on the public speaking trail.

Q: John, one question that has always puzzled me -- and I don't have any very good answer for it. You mentioned Jesse Jackson, who was on this platform with you at this morning session. Somehow, and for reasons that I have never understood, the whole question of Vietnam, in all of its manifestations, became inextricably involved with the whole issue of civil rights in the United States. There was no logic in this, because the communists were oppressing the people of South Vietnam, whom we were trying to help. This had nothing to do with the civil rights movement in the United States, except that obviously it did, in the minds of the people that were in your audience. Do you have any views on this?

HELBLE: Well, I think that there were two factors. This perception had developed through the material carried in the media, and, of course, with the Buddhist uprising in South Vietnam, the immolations of Buddhist monks, and the attention devoted to them. There was a perception that the Saigon government was authoritarian and oppressive. The U. S. Government was providing aid to the Saigon Government, and we were now taking casualties in support of it. I think that there was a perception which offended the civil rights sympathizers. More than that, I think that at the core of this issue was the view that LBJ's President Johnson's Great Society programs which he had started a year or so after President Kennedy's death were supported by the same community that the civil rights activists represented, in large measure. It was perceived that the war effort in Vietnam was detracting from the available resources to support these civil rights programs. I think that that was a factor.

Still, I would agree with you that the extent of the hostility displayed toward our Vietnam policies by the civil rights community is not fully explicable by either of those points I just made.

Q: Later on, I ran into a curious experience in terms of the situation in Israel and its difficulties with its Arab neighbors. A prominent American Jewish leader visited Canberra, Australia, when I was there in the early 1970's. He was talking about the Vietnam War, which was still going on, although it was toward the end of this period. He said, to the extent that the United States spends resources on Vietnam it is less likely to be in a position to help Israel if Israel should be under attack. He made that point very explicitly. I don't think that he cared anything about the merits of the Vietnam War, as such. He cared about the impact our efforts might have on U. S. aid to Israel in case of need. I hadn't thought about this aspect previously. I think that what you say has a lot to it, but there still is something more to it than that. Here's something for one of those busy, Ph. D. candidates to study carefully.

HELBLE: Going back briefly to my time following internal political developments in Vietnam, one or another of the tasks which I received on the Vietnam desk related to the efforts to develop democratic processes and a culture of democracy in Vietnam. For example, there was the assignment of General Ed Lansdale to Vietnam.

Lansdale, of course, was the renowned hero, if you will, of the book, *The Ugly American*. The name of the character in the novel assigned to him was Col Hillandale, but many people associated this character with Ed Lansdale. Lansdale was sent out to Vietnam to work on all kinds of crazy projects which he dreamed up. They were indeed crazy. He was working with music, poetry, and other groups in Vietnam, trying to develop democratic, political instincts and some sort of political motivation in Vietnamese society and culture. Various innocent, senior

American officials thought that this was something that was going to turn the tide in Vietnam. I was assigned as his Washington backup. However, essentially he communicated directly to people at very senior levels. My job was to get the resources to back him up on the various activities and projects he dreamed up.

All of these projects were absolute examples of pie in the sky. He didn't know what he was doing and he wasn't doing anything that was relevant or useful. However, he had a marvelous facility for self-promotion. He wrote one extensive report after another about the great success of some musical group that he had persuaded to get together and sing patriotic, Vietnamese songs, write stirring prose or poetry, or whatever.

Q: He was in Vietnam for most of this time, wasn't he?

HELBLE: I think that General Lansdale went to Vietnam in 1966, although he had been there much earlier, in the 1950's. It could have been in late 1965 -- I've forgotten exactly. In any event, he was just a footnote on the things that we were doing in Vietnam. Essentially, Lansdale was a joke, as far as I was concerned. It was an ego trip for Lansdale but it was another sign of how desperate we were to get things going, develop some political motivation, and so forth. Again, we were working essentially in an abyss of ignorance about Vietnamese thought processes, how they interrelated, and so on. We never grasped their mentality, and Lansdale was certainly not attuned to it in any sense, despite his self-promotion.

In February, 1967, we had a massive snowstorm in the Washington area. In fact, for all intents and purposes the U. S. Government was virtually closed down for three days. I lived in Falls Church, VA. I could not get out of my street and get to the office. On the third morning after the storm our furnace went out, and the house started to chill down. I was able to get out that day and I went off to work. It was a Friday. Late that afternoon, at about 4:30 PM, I was briefing a Dutch Parliamentarian in my office at the Department. I had called home a couple of times and learned that the furnace repairman hadn't come yet. Joan was in the kitchen with the two children, with the gas burners on, trying to stay warm. I had my heaviest wool suit on.

At about 4:30 PM I got a phone call, interrupting my briefing of the Dutch Parliamentarian. I was told that in 30 minutes a car would arrive at the front entrance of the State Department to pick me up to go to Andrews Air Force Base, where I would catch an Air Force plane going to Honolulu. Of course, I said, "What for?" I was told that it was very hush-hush, but President Johnson had decided to meet with President Thieu and Prime Minister Ky of Vietnam in Honolulu, together with their cabinet, on the following day, Saturday.

This was the first I'd heard about it. My boss, Bob Miller, hadn't heard anything about it. We were just working on Vietnam, and this dropped down out of the blue. So I called home and asked Joan if the furnace was working yet. She said, "No, they're not here yet." I said, "Well, that does it. I'm going to Honolulu." [Laughter] She thought that I was kidding. I said, "Well, the car's down here at the State Department. I don't know how you're going to make arrangements. You've got a spare key to the car and somehow you'll have to get down to the State Department and pick up the car. I'm leaving at 5:00 PM for Andrews Air Force Base."

So I did, in my heavy wool suit, was put on this Air Force plane with other, lower level, working type officials, and left for Honolulu. I tried to find out why I was being assigned to this duty. Nobody on the plane could answer the question. We got into Honolulu. On the next morning I asked again what I was doing there. Finally, somebody said at that point that President Johnson was arriving in Honolulu early that afternoon, and Thieu and Ky were due late that Saturday afternoon, with their party. I was told that my job would be to serve as liaison between the U. S. Secret Service and the security people who would be accompanying the Thieu-Ky party.

Q: At this point Thieu was the President...

HELBLE: And Ky was the Prime Minister. By this time the dimensions of the representation from the two sides had become enormous. Not only was President Johnson coming but Vice President Humphrey, Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and the Secretaries of Agriculture and of Housing and Urban Development, or whatever it was known at that time, as well. And all of their counterparts were coming from Vietnam -- not the Vice President of Vietnam, but the Prime Minister. The top generals on both sides were to be present. Senior officials came from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, including our military people. It was the greatest assembly of high ranking officials that I ever saw in one place.

Q: Who was the American Ambassador in Saigon then?

HELBLE: The Ambassador was Ellsworth Bunker. In any event the Vietnamese party arrived at around 5:00 or 5:30 PM on the Saturday afternoon. I had tried to help the Protocol people arrange the motorcade, because nobody had done any advance planning, nobody knew what the relative ranks of the Vietnamese were, and so on. I was the closest thing to an authority there but I had to guess on some of them. I saw that nobody was assisting the Vietnamese Foreign Minister to his car, so I went up to him and told him that I knew where his car was and said, "Let me take you to it."

Q: Who was this?

HELBLE: Mau, I believe. As you know, Vietnamese Foreign Ministers were never very high profile figures. While I was walking with the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, I heard my name called, and there was the U. S. Presidential limousine. Some Secret Service guy was gesturing to me and saying, "Come over here." He and he pushed me into the car, where I found myself sitting on a jump seat, opposite President Johnson! Thieu and Ky were already in the car. On the other jump seat was Governor Burns of Hawaii. I said, "What am I doing here?" I was told, "You're to interpret." I was stunned. It had been almost two years since I had actively used my Vietnamese to any extent. In any event, there was nothing to be done but to struggle on through it.

So the conversation in the car started off with President Johnson saying, "Tell the President and Prime Minister that I am delighted to have them here." Well, I could handle that. Incidentally, when I got in the car President Thieu recognized me. We had met each other when I arrived in Hue in 1961. At the time he was the commanding general of the ARVN First Division. I had last seen him in 1964 at a cocktail party when I was leaving Vietnam. He was the Chairman of the

Joint General Staff at that time and totally ignored by everybody at this cocktail party because this was a pretty meaningless position, even though it had a fancy title. The conversation went on in a very stilted fashion, with long pauses. Then President Johnson thought that he would pull out his Texas charm. He slapped me on the knee and said, "You tell the President that I've got to go back to Washington on Monday, but I want them to stay here, be my guest, and enjoy Honolulu and the beaches for as long as they want to stay." Then he slapped me some more on the knee.

So I told Thieu and Ky that. They looked at each other with a very puzzled expression on their faces. They were clearly not at ease.

Q: *With each other, I suppose.*

HELBLER: No, with the situation. Yes, they were not the best of friends. However, both of them had only learned on Thursday night, Washington time -- Friday, Saigon time -- that they were to turn up with all of their officials in Honolulu.

Q: *They were summoned to Honolulu.*

HELBLER: They were summoned to Honolulu. President Johnson had only made this decision on Thursday night, Washington time. Here it was late afternoon on Saturday in Honolulu. This is not the way Presidential trips and summit meetings are arranged, as every Foreign Service Officer knows. In any event, Thieu and Ky didn't know why they were there. Quite frankly, I believe that they thought that maybe they were going to be fired, that Lyndon Johnson was going to tell them that it was time for General Somebody or Other to take over, or whatever. [Laughter] They really were uneasy and totally befuddled as to what was going on. They didn't respond to President Johnson in any specific way to the invitation to stay on in Honolulu. They just said, "Thank you."

Q: *They just said, "Chung toi phai ve Vietnam" -- We have to return home.*

HELBLER: Right. Then there was a long pause. Finally, Thieu looked at me and said something to me personally and directly in Vietnamese. He asked me how my family and my wife were. He explained in Vietnamese to Ky how we had known each other, because I did not know Ky. Then we exchanged a few other, personal comments.

Q: *At this point, had LBJ left the car?*

HELBLER: No. We were driving into Honolulu from the airport. I finally had to say to Thieu that I would have to explain to President Johnson what we had been talking about, because several minutes had gone by while we were going back and forth in Vietnamese. President Johnson wasn't clued in as to what was going on, so I told him that we were renewing old acquaintances. He wasn't much interested in this and so we talked a little bit more. Thieu and Ky became a little bit more relaxed. Governor Burns, of course, never said anything during the entire ride into Honolulu.

The conversation on personal subjects flowed a little bit more smoothly after the ice was broken,

but there was nothing of substance transacted during the course of that 25 or 30 minute ride in from the airport. But I felt something like sheer terror to have been thrown into this situation without any preparation. Then, of course, as soon as I got to the hotel where we were staying, I went around and tried to find somebody who could tell me what was expected of me, since the conference on the next day Sunday was going to be a very intensive, all-day meeting covering the full range of economic and political developments, military affairs, assistance programs, agricultural activities, and so forth. I wondered who was going to interpret for this program. I was, of course, just horrified to think that I might be expected to do that. I was thinking of jumping into the first outrigger canoe and paddling out to one of the outer Hawaiian islands immediately, if they expected me to do simultaneous translations in a conference setting over a range of detailed, technical topics. I was certainly not up to that. Nobody could answer the question about translation arrangements.

Q: They might not have thought about it, John. That's the long and the short of it.

HELBLE: That's very possible. So the next morning I went to the conference. I thought, "What am I doing here? I don't have to be here." The only thing that I found in the way of a Vietnamese security officer to interface with was one major on President Thieu's personal staff, who was responsible for his personal security. That constituted the entire security apparatus for the Vietnamese delegation -- at least that the Vietnamese had brought. There was nothing to liaison about, for all intents and purposes, as I was supposed to be doing. That is, liaising between the two security services.

So there really wasn't much to do, from that point of view. I helped the protocol people and chipped in wherever I thought I could be of some value.

Q: Did you attend the meeting?

HELBLE: I attended the meeting, but I thought, "Why am I here? If they grab me and throw me up there in the translation booth, I'm a 'goner.'" In any event, at the last moment I found out that the White House had brought in a couple of people from the Office of Language Services in the State Department. They were French speakers.

Q: They were going to interpret from French to English and vice versa.

HELBLE: Right, and this worked out. So I was let off the hook. Well, here was this enormous show of American support, at which hundreds of millions of dollars worth of aid programs, more military effort, and so forth, were discussed, all of it on the spur of the moment. Thieu and Ky did not stay on in Hawaii. President Johnson left Hawaii on the Monday morning, and I believe that the Vietnamese party left for Vietnam on Monday afternoon.

Q: How did they travel? Did they go commercially, or...

HELBLE: They had an Air Vietnam aircraft. I'm sure that it was chartered by the Vietnamese Government. As I say, the Vietnamese Delegation was very large. They had all of the members of their cabinet and their principal military leaders, as well as Thieu and Ky.

Q: Well, this simply illustrates the point that you made earlier on, that we never were really serious about Vietnam in so many ways. It's amazing.

HELBLER: And the bottom line was that, as far as I could tell, it didn't change a single thing. It was a great show. Then, of course, Vice President Humphrey, Secretary of State Rusk, and Secretary of Defense McNamara were dispatched to the far corners of East Asia to explain what went on at this meeting and to try to pump up more assistance.

Q: What about the furnace at your house? Was that fixed?

HELBLER: Well, at one point I called Joan after I'd been in Honolulu six or eight hours. I told her that I had made the trip safely. I asked if the furnace had been repaired, and she said, "Yes." I said, "Well, it may go out again, so I'm going to stay for a while." I stayed for two days after the conference was over and after the Vietnamese Delegation had left. I didn't return to Washington until the following Wednesday. By that time, of course, and in fact it was on the first morning after I arrived in Honolulu, I had bought a light weight summer sport coat and slacks, which was my wardrobe. I also bought a toothbrush and a couple of other things. I got out of that heavy weight, wool suit within hours after arriving in Honolulu.

That was one vignette and an interesting experience. However, as I say, I doubt that this meeting had any lasting significance in substantive terms.

Q: I'm afraid that there were lots of cases like that.

HELBLER: It was a big show, a lot of dough was spent, but there was no good, bottom line.

Well, I think I've finished what I can recall from that two year stint on the Vietnam Working Group, from 1965 to 1967. I finished this assignment, still hopeful that U. S. troops could somehow find the handle with which to deal militarily and politically with the conflict in which they were engaged. I was not optimistic but I was hopeful that some good would come out of this and that this huge effort would eventually pay off. But I certainly didn't see a great deal of evidence that the North Vietnamese effort was sagging, that the U. S. bombing campaign of North Vietnam, which was in full swing at that point...

Q: That began, if I recall correctly, in about February, 1965...

HELBLER: That's correct, and it was mid 1967 when I left the Vietnam Working Group. I couldn't see that that was creating any meaningful, morale problems for the North Vietnamese, despite the evidence of what I thought were poorly founded, intelligence reports to the contrary. Certainly, the bombing campaign wasn't affecting the flow of their logistics, as far as we could tell, down the famed Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Vietnamese Communist forces were still very combat worthy. There were instances, in certain areas, that some limited progress had occurred in what was known as pacification. However, given the level of commitment and the casualties that we had taken, in such dramatic battles as that in the Ia Drang Valley and, on a daily basis, in other, smaller conflicts, it was difficult to see what real progress was being made. But there were great body counts that showed that we must be making progress. The body counts were very

suspect, as we all knew.

Q: Well, I think that we did kill an awful lot of North Vietnamese.

HELBLE: We killed a lot of people, including a lot of North Vietnamese. However, one thing was evident, and had always been evident. That is, the North Vietnamese had a very determined, well organized, basically highly motivated group of troops at their disposal. They put up with a hell of a lot and endured a hell of a lot. Ultimately, of course, they prevailed. We had to learn the hard way. Still, to this day, I go back to what I said earlier in this interview, and I thought that this point was still valid at that point. That is, if you couldn't get the South Vietnamese Army and Vietnamese politics up to snuff, we were not going to be able to do it.

Q: Certainly, it was their war to win. It was their country. We could help them substantially and we did so. However, we could do no more than provide them with military and economic assistance, which was not very decisive, in many respects.

HELBLE: We were never able to ensure a coherent, cohesive, motivated political effort.

Q: John, you were giving some general impressions of your time in Vietnam, as seen from the Vietnam Working Group, as well as your previous time in Saigon and Hue. What came next after that? You were still in Washington.

HELBLE: At that point, in mid 1967, it was clear that anti-war sentiment in the United States was growing. Still, major elements of the media, such as *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* continued editorially and otherwise to back the U. S. effort in Vietnam. They were not critical of our efforts in policy terms. They backed our policy. However, it was evident in mid-1967 that widespread questioning of the war was becoming more acute. It was fed, as we've alluded to several times earlier, by several years of nightly TV news programs of live action, U. S. casualties, political disturbances in Saigon, and other developments which clearly confused our people.

The audiences to which I had been speaking over the previous two years certainly revealed some of the more angry discontent. I must confess that few things in my life have stunned me as much as the announcement on March 29, 1968, by President Johnson that he would not be a candidate for reelection. This was simply an old politician, if you will, recognizing that he had gotten himself into such a box on one issue, Vietnam. He could not win it and he could not extract the United States from it. He was going to be defeated.

Q: Do you really think that he would have been defeated in the 1968 elections?

HELBLE: I didn't think so at the time, but that was his conclusion, and I would honor his judgment of his prospects, more than my estimate of them. But the announcement was absolutely stunning to me.

Q: It certainly was. I was in the Embassy in Saigon at the time. We heard it and we just couldn't believe it. I felt that he had abandoned Vietnam. He had ratted on us. That was and still is my view. I think that his problem was that he came into office really intending to carry on the war against poverty. He really meant that. He was quite sincere about that. He did quite a lot. Of course, he also set us on a course in terms of programs which have almost bankrupted us. He regarded Vietnam as a distraction. It was not a distraction. It had its own momentum, causes, and concerns. Your mention of that meeting in Honolulu is simply a further example of how unserious he was in dealing with it.

HELBLER: It was a window-dressing occasion. That concludes my observations after two years in the Washington end of the Vietnam pressure cooker.

Q: Well, part of that time you spent up at the Embassy in Saigon on temporary assignment. Tell us about that. How did that happen?

What did you do there, and so on?

HELBLER: We're referring here to January, 1973, when the Paris Accords on Vietnam were signed with the North Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese, and the "National Liberation Front" -- the latter a "phony" organization that North Vietnam had created as a supposedly South Vietnamese political movement. The South Vietnamese Government in Saigon, and the U. S. Government also signed these agreements. The Soviet Union was a co-chairman, as I recall.

Q: Of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Vietnam.

HELBLER: No, they were also involved in the 1973 Accord, weren't they?

Q: They had the responsibility -- jointly with the British -- of calling the Paris Conference in 1968. Neither they nor the British took part in the negotiations, which lasted until 1973. Lots of American Foreign Service Officers, including Phil Habib, spent a long time in Paris. Phil spent a couple years in Paris. Ambassador Marshall Green was there for a time, along with a lot of our old pals, who were involved in the negotiations at one time or another. Bob Miller, too.

HELBLER: Dave Lambertson, Dave Engel, too.

Q: And John Negroponte.

HELBLER: Well, the Paris Agreements were signed on January 27, 1973. While I was aware that the Department was going to assign back to Vietnam a number of Foreign Service Officers with prior Vietnam experience for temporary duty at the Embassy and that I was on the list, it was uncertain as to when the command would come. In fact, the list of officers to be called back varied as to numbers and composition for some weeks in advance of the actual implementation of the plan to send these Foreign Service Officers back to Vietnam. I remember having something less than 72 hours' notice that I was to report immediately to the Embassy in Saigon. Since I was close to Saigon, in Kuala Lumpur, I left on January 28, 1973, and arrived in Saigon the same day. I think that I was about the first one to come in from outside of Vietnam. I wasn't

particularly overjoyed to do this, but my wife Joan understood -- not too happily, but she understood. I had no excuse after three and one-half pleasant years in Kuala Lumpur. I had had a respite from Vietnam, and the country was "calling me."

At that time there were 44 Foreign Service Officers brought back. I should say, 43 were brought back, plus one other Foreign Service Officer who had not had prior Vietnam service. When I arrived in Saigon, I found that my own job was to head the unit in the Political Section of the Embassy responsible for trying to get the International Control Commission...

Q: International Commission for Supervision and Control, ICSC, wasn't it?

HELBLE: ICCS -- International Commission for Control and Supervision. My job was to help to get the ICCS deployed into the field. The ICCS was a body tasked with observing or monitoring but not enforcing the various provisions of the Paris Agreement. The ICCS consisted of four nations, including the Poles, who had been on the old ICC (International Control Commission). We talked briefly about the old ICC in an earlier part of this interview. The Canadians had also served on the old ICC and were on the ICCS. There were the Hungarians, who were new to the scene, and the Indonesians, who were also new to the scene. In all, these four countries were to bring in a total of 1140 officers and men. They were to be assigned to the headquarters of the ICCS in Saigon, to regional headquarters in the four major, military regions in South Vietnam, and then in a variety of small posts within those regions throughout the country. The ICCS was to observe whether the Paris Accord were implemented correctly or whether they were being violated and, if so, by whom. It was to investigate allegations regarding incidents and so on.

I had three other Foreign Service Officers on my staff, plus an American secretary on TDY [Temporary Duty]. They included Steve Johnson, son of U. Alexis Johnson, previously Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. He was, in effect, my "Canadian speaker," as he had served in Canada. There was Bill Shepard, who was a Hungarian language officer. He had previously served in Saigon as a staff aide to the Ambassador. Bill ultimately left the Foreign Service. He ran, unsuccessfully, as Republican candidate for Governor in Maryland. Steve Johnson had also previously served in Saigon. Vern Penner was the only one of the 44 FSO's involved in this temporary duty who had not previously served in Vietnam. However, he was a Polish language officer and was the Polish speaker on my staff. I was, of course, the Indonesian speaker, and chief of the unit.

There were others, as you may recall with greater precision than I, who were assigned to other functions in connection with the implementation of the Paris Accord to beef up the Embassy and the Consulates General in these regional areas which paralleled where the ICCS had its regional headquarters. So a number of Foreign Service Officers were farmed out to the respective Consulates General. Others, such as you, stayed in Saigon and worked on...

Q: The Four Party Joint Military Commission.

HELBLE: Yes, the Four Party Joint Military Commission.

When I arrived in Saigon, I met briefly with Ambassador Bunker and then with Ambassador

Whitehouse, who was the Deputy Ambassador. They really couldn't tell me what I was going to do, except in general terms of getting the ICCS deployed into the field. They gave me a copy of the Paris Agreement and suggested that I read that and go to work.

At that point there were no representatives from the four countries on the ICCS in Saigon. It took a while for them to start arriving in Vietnam. Certainly, they were not ready to deploy outside of Saigon until proper facilities were established for them to live and work. So the days dragged on and, in effect, there was no ICCS presence in operation as yet. Gradually, in came planeloads of military people from the various countries, as well as Political Advisers with them, and so on.

Meanwhile, my job was to provide support which would sustain these ICCS troops spread out over I forget how many small posts. I would say that there were several dozen.

Q: You're right. There were four regional headquarters paralleling the South Vietnamese corps structure. Then there was supposed to be an ICCS setup in each of the 44 provinces in South Vietnam. The four regional headquarters of the ICCS were set up. I think that two or three, as I recall, of the provincial headquarters of the ICCS were set up, but the rest were not.

HELBLE: More than a few of the provincial headquarters of the ICCS were eventually deployed, but I'm not sure that they were deployed to all 44 provinces. There were at least a couple of dozen ICCS teams deployed to the provinces within about three or four months, but I can't remember the exact number. Certainly, a number of small ICCS detachments were deployed outside of the regional headquarters. In any event the ICCS took the position that they weren't going anywhere unless: a) they had a place to go, including proper housing and office space; b) until they had proper ground transportation where they were going; c) that they had proper communications, both base camp to vehicles, base camp to headquarters in Saigon, and base camp to whatever regional headquarters was involved; d) that they had proper assurance of supplies. Here I'm not talking about ammunition and so on, since they weren't expending that, but food, medical supplies, medical assistance, and so on. They wanted access to a hospital in Saigon. The best hospital available was the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital; e) that they had air transportation, including both fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft, that is, helicopters; f) that they had ground vehicles of all sorts, including heavy duty trucks, jeeps (lots of them), and so on.

The ICCS requirements for logistical support were endless. New demands popped up every day from every quarter. Generally, these demands, or requests, were passed through the ICCS Secretariat, which was run by the Indonesian Delegation to the ICCS. While we, in our small unit in the Embassy, had liaison with each of the Delegations, and therefore had a need for language officers to deal with them, we also dealt a great deal with the Indonesian Secretary General of the ICCS as the head of the Secretariat.

I found that there were no ground rules in the Embassy to guide me. The simple job description was, "Get the ICCS operational in the field." A Major General, Jim Fairfield, who is still a good friend of mine and now retired and living in Tucson, AZ, was assigned by MACV, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. This was the overall U. S. military command in Vietnam during the period from 1962 to 1973. General Fairfield was my liaison with the military command.

However, there was a clock ticking, because under the Paris Agreement, U. S. military had to leave Vietnam within 60 days after the Agreement was signed on January 27, 1973. This meant that the U. S. military had to leave Vietnam by about March 28, 1973. Most of the wherewithal that I could lay my hands on to transfer to the ICCS and get it operational was materiel controlled by MACV. Most of this equipment would have been turned over to the Vietnamese Army if I didn't get to it first. Of course, the U. S. military was in a big hurry to get out of the country, in order to comply with the Paris Agreement. It was trying to disengage itself from its holdings and assets and organize itself for timely departure from Vietnam by D+60 or March 28, 1973. The U. S. military did meet that schedule, incidentally.

Q: They did better than that. They left shortly after the middle of March, 1973.

HELBLE: Yes, but that was 60 days. I saw General Jim Fairfield off at the airport on D+59, the day before the last commanding general of MACV left Vietnam. Jim had served as the MACV liaison with our ICCS Embassy unit, and had arranged many of the material and facilities transfers we requested from MACV to the ICCS.

Q: There were a couple of exceptions, and that caused some problems later on. There were 200 Marines serving as Embassy security guards. Then there were 50 U. S. military personnel assigned to the Military Attaché office, which is a very unusual arrangement. They were considered to be part of the Embassy and not part of MACV. So there were a couple of little details...

HELBLE: But there was nothing resembling a combat unit or anything like that.

Q: No.

HELBLE: The second source of support items for the ICCS was the U. S. Agency for International Development, an organization that came under USAID, which was terminating projects in some areas and so forth. One could get furniture, refrigerators, stoves, and even housing, in some areas.

Q: Automobiles, too.

HELBLE: Yes, although most of the vehicles had belonged to the U. S. military. The U. S. military had a lot of vehicles. They were just going to give them to the Vietnamese Army, which had more vehicles than it could use, anyway.

Q: Wasn't Pacific Architects & Engineers involved in this?

HELBLE: That's right. PA&E, as it was known, signed an agreement as a contractor for the ICCS Secretariat. Of course, PA&E had had many U. S. military and civilian contracts in Vietnam for years. They were well-established and had the capacity to do a lot of things which one couldn't have done through the local economy. We worked with PA&E personnel on a number of these activities. We were trying to establish, upgrade, and rehabilitate facilities for the ICCS, as well as maintenance contracts for the aircraft, communications equipment, and so forth

which was being transferred to the ICCS.

However, to me this was really a wild scene, because there were no rules. For a couple of weeks, if I dutifully got the U. S. military to agree to transfer something to the Embassy for the ICCS, I would take some sort of receipt up to Ernie Colantonio, the Administrative Counselor of the Embassy, and get him to sign it.

Q: *Ernie would sign anything. [Laughter]*

HELBLE: That's right. He would sign anything. However, after a week or 10 days of my bothering him with these receipts, and he was frequently inaccessible because he was so busy, he said, "John, there's no need for you to bring these receipts up to me. Just sign them yourself." I realized, as time went on, that I was signing for millions and millions of dollars worth of equipment.

Q: *That's OK, John, as long as it's millions of dollars. You see, if it's \$200, they may hope to get it from you. But millions of dollars -- they're never going to get it from you and they know it.*

HELBLE: The day that the Embassy fell in Saigon April 30, 1975 to the North Vietnamese, I said to myself, "The Inspector General of the State Department will never get me now" [Laughter] "on those receipts for materiel which I long since lost control and track of."

It was a crazy scene. Gradually, very gradually, the ICCS had less and less excuse not to deploy to the countryside. We were constantly prodding and pushing them to get on with it. However, it was weeks before they started doing any effective observing of anything and really several months before the ICCS was fairly well deployed and we were reading a fair number of observer reports from ICCS detachments.

Q: *John, there's one story that I think we should put down here. I don't know the name of the Canadian Army Captain involved. You mentioned that contracts were entered into to provide air support for movement of ICCS personnel to these various provincial detachments.*

Let me back up a bit. Air America was the only organization in Vietnam that had pilots, aircraft, and maintenance facilities that could provide this air support for the ICCS. Air America had had a considerable CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] involvement. At first the Poles and the Hungarians said, "Oh, no, we can't have that." The alternative was, "Then what are you going to have? There is no other way." Finally, you may recall, they went through the business of painting out the Air America logo on the helicopters and other aircraft, replacing it with ICCS. That seemed to do the job, because they were dealing with ICCS Air instead of Air America.

One of these ICCS Air flights took various ICCS personnel, including Canadians, up to Quang Tri province, if I remember correctly, just South of the 17th parallel. By that time the North Vietnamese Army was all around there and totally controlled it. They obviously intended to take the American pilots from this aircraft as prisoners. A big Canadian Army Captain, whose name I never knew, didn't say anything. He just knelt down, put his arms around these two pilots, and held them there. It was obvious that there was going to be a terrible fight to get them free for

capture, so the North Vietnamese Army obviously felt, "Oh, to hell with it," and abandoned their effort to take them. Those two pilots owe their freedom to this Canadian.

HELBLE: I have heard that story, yes. By D+60, of course, the U. S. military was gone. I was fond of saying that the 44 Foreign Service Officers were an appropriate balance to replace the 540,000 American troops that had been taken out of Vietnam. I thought that this was a pretty good calculation.

After the last U. S. military left, we continued to get pressing demands from the ICCS for more support. I had warned them in the weeks leading up to D+60 that we needed to get everything arranged before our last access to U. S. military assets was gone. However, I remember a couple of incidents that occurred after D+60.

Vern Penner was, and is an extraordinary fellow. He is still on active duty in the State Department. He is a diamond in the rough if there ever was one. He is a Brooklyn boy who spoke Brooklynesse, was something of a street fighter by nature, energetic, and had a totally can do attitude. In fact, in the evaluation report I wrote on him I considered very carefully how to frame it. I had to say that this officer was straight out of *Catch 22*. He knew how to get things done.

One day, after the U. S. military had left Vietnam, the ICCS insisted that they must have a fire engine for their headquarters. They said that they couldn't afford not to have a fire engine on the site. I said, "Well, I don't have any access to fire engines."

Q: *That was all over.*

HELBLE: That's right. To this day I still don't know how it was done. The day after I got this request I called together my three officers and posed the problem to them. I said, "Is there any way that we could get hold of a fire engine?"

The next day Vern Penner came to me and said, "John, about the fire engine. Don't worry. One is coming down from Nha Trang to Saigon and will report to ICCS Headquarters." I really knew better than to ask about it.

Q: *[Laughter] Or where it came from.*

HELBLE: On the following day I received a phone call from the Secretary General of the ICCS, thanking me for the fire engine.

Q: *Don't ask.*

HELBLE: I said, "Think nothing of it." In any event there was an even stranger affair, probably a week or two after the fire engine, and again after the U. S. military had left. The Secretary General of the ICCS called me one morning at 8:00 AM and said, "John, last night, in downtown Can Tho, in the Mekong Delta, a Vietnamese Army unit and a Civil Guard unit got into a firefight, apparently over some girl. Two members of the Indonesian ICCS detachment there,

including the head of the detachment, a Colonel, happened to be driving through the town square as shooting broke out. The Colonel was hit in the forehead with a round from one side or another. Actually, he was all right. It didn't penetrate his skull, but it caused quite a scalp wound. He had to be medevaced last night. He got to Tan Son Nhut Saigon airport about 12:30 or 12:45 AM. Unfortunately, we didn't have an ambulance to pick him up. All we had was a jeep to take him to the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital. It was very uncomfortable for him to ride in the jeep and could have been dangerous for his health, if the wound had been critical. We've got to have an ambulance."

I replied, "Look, I don't know where we could get an ambulance at this point. If you'd asked me this a month ago, I could have gotten one through the U. S. military, but we'll look into the problem."

So I assembled my staff again and asked how we could get an ambulance. Vern Penner said, "I'll take care of it." At 8:30 AM we broke up the staff meeting. At 9:30 AM I got a call from the Indonesian ICCS Secretary General, who said, "John, thanks very much for the ambulance. It's here, parked in front of ICCS Headquarters. We really appreciate it." I said, "That's fine. I'm glad you're happy about it. We do what we can do." I hung up and called, "Penner, come here." He came in and said, "Yes, boss." I said, "All right, I've got to know. How in the hell did you get an ambulance within an hour?" He said, "Well, I called my friend at PA&E. Penner continued, "I said to him, 'Look, take two of your biggest, brawniest Americans and park them down on the corner of Cong Ly Boulevard coming in from the airport, just before the Presidential Palace, and Hong Thap Tu Avenue,'" a street which crosses Cong Ly. There was a stoplight there. As you know, there was a Red Cross Hospital on Hong Thap Tu, and there was always a lot of ambulance traffic going down busy Cong Ly Boulevard and turning right at Hong Thap Tu to go to the Red Cross Hospital. Penner continued, "I told my friend at PA&E, 'The first ARVN ambulance that comes by and stops at the stoplight, haul the ARVN driver out of the ambulance and take it over to ICCS Headquarters.'"

Q: This was not a moonlight requisition but a daytime...

HELBLE: Right in the middle of heavy morning traffic. Penner said, "Obviously, that worked. The PA&E people said, 'OK, we'll do that.'" They went out and did it, and in less than an hour, there it was at ICCS Headquarters. I said to Vern, "I suppose you don't know whether there was a litter patient in the back of the ambulance." He said, "I don't know, but I'll call the PA&E guy." [Laughter] Anyway, as it turned out, there was no litter patient in the back of the ambulance, but there was no doubt one ARVN private, the driver of the ambulance, decided that he had better go over the hill, rather than explain to his superiors how he lost his ambulance. Whatever, the ICCS had an ambulance. That was Vern Penner at his best.

Q: If there's nothing else you want to say about this period of temporary duty in Vietnam, I might mention that we had the pleasure of sharing each other's company in an apartment in Saigon during this time. It was helpful to me to compare notes with you and keep in touch this way, building on a lifetime friendship.

HELBLE: I think that it was very helpful to both of us to have the comfort of each other's

company, because neither one of us was very happy about being away from our families. You'd been yanked out of Canberra, Australia, and I'd been yanked out of Kuala Lumpur, leaving our spouses behind. We've both done that previously during assignments to Vietnam. It wasn't something that one looked forward to doing. I have a couple of other things to mention.

Vern Penner and I found that the Polish Political Adviser, a civilian, loved to play bridge. He said that there were some other bridge players in his delegation. So we decided to set up weekly bridge games. We would play at our place or at their place. If it was at our place, we would fix a small dinner for them. They really enjoyed it. They were good bridge players. We had a good time, with lots of jokes. We found that we could take any of the so-called standard Polish jokes, or ethnic jokes of any sort, and just make them Russian jokes, and the Poles thought that they were absolutely hilarious! It was rather evident that there was no love lost in that crowd for the Russians. But it kind of lightened the day for the Poles, and it was pleasant.

I should say that in dealing with the Communist Delegations, I ran afoul of our own Security people on one occasion. I was at a reception given by the Polish Ambassador for the ICCS, the Four Party Joint Military Commission, and so on. When it came time to go home, one of these Polish friends offered me a ride in his chauffeur-driven car, which, of course, had been provided by the South Vietnamese Government, with a South Vietnamese Government Intelligence Service driver. The Pole dropped me off at our apartment.

A week or two later one of the Security Officers in the Embassy made an appointment, came down to see me, and said that on such and such a night he understood that I was riding with the Political Adviser to the Polish Delegation to the ICCS and that this fellow took me to my apartment. He said, "Tell me, have you written up a report on that contact with that Communist official?" I said, "Well, in a sense, I have, as a matter of fact. That evening there was some information that I picked up in the course of the reception. I reported this in a telegram which Mr. Josiah Bennett, the Political Counselor, signed off on. In fact, Bennett was at the same reception I was at. He was talking to Poles and Hungarians, too. Have you asked him whether he has reported his contacts?"

I said, "You realize that my job requires me to deal with Poles and Hungarians every day of the week, in my office, in their offices, and on social occasions." He said, "Well, you're required to write up every contact." I said, "Like hell I will! I'd spend all my time writing up useless contact reports." Well, he was insistent. I asked him to go talk to Joe Bennett and ask him if he was willing to write up his contacts with Communist officials. If Joe was willing to do this, I would do what he does, if he tells me to do it. But he doesn't have to deal with the Poles and Hungarians every day as I do, and as do my officers here. I said, "We've been doing this for three months, and this is the first time that you've become aware of the fact that we're dealing with Communist officials?" This was one of those examples of the ridiculousness of some of our security regulations. He couldn't understand why I wasn't going through proper procedures in reporting contacts with Communist officials.

Q: What came next after June, 1973, when your period of temporary duty at the Embassy in Saigon came to an end?

HELBLER: Well, that was at the end of July, 1973. At the end of June, 1973, I was given orders to report immediately back to Washington, where I would be Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Q: *This was Phil Habib?*

HELBLER: No, at this point it was to be Mac Godley, George McMurtrie Godley.

DOUGLAS EUGENE PIKE
Assistant Motion Picture Officer, USIS
Saigon (1960-1962)

Information Officer, USIS
Saigon (1962-1964)

Assistant Chief Planning Division, USIS
Saigon (1965-1967)

Regional Information Specialist, USIS
Saigon (1968-1975)

Douglas Eugene Pike was born in Castlelight, Minnesota, July 27th, 1924. He joined the Army at the age of 17 and served in the last two years of war in the Pacific Theater. In 1950, he was recruited as an Army Civilian Employee and was assigned to Okinawa, where he worked in the Public Information Office. Later, after returning to the United States, he attended the University of California, where he received his AB. Pike joined USIA in 1966, and served in Vietnam, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan. He was interviewed in February 1989 by Jack O'Brien.

PIKE: When I finally was sworn in as an FSO I was offered three posts, Seoul, Vientiane or Saigon. I had been in Asia, of course. I'd lived in Japan. I'd lived in the Philippines and lived in Korea. My memory of Korea -- this was ten years later -- was of a very pitiful place, broken by the war, which it was. I remember the winter I spent in Pusan as one of the coldest in my life. And I was born in Minnesota. So the idea of going back to Korea -- I should have gone back to Korea looking back at it in terms of career -- didn't seem a good idea at the time. Vientiane in Laos -- I had a vague idea of where it was -- didn't sound very interesting. Saigon sounded exotic.

Anyway, I went to Saigon -- again one of those roads taken and not taken thing -- it turned out to be very fortuitous for me. I arrived in Saigon at the time working for a communication agency with a very definite interest in how ideas are communicated in a society like Vietnam.

Q: *What year was this?*

PIKE: 1960.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: The month I arrived, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam or the Viet Cong was formed. I became immediately interested in it in terms of how it communicates its ideas. What were the techniques they used? How do they use their agit -- prop cadres? How do they mobilize people? How do they organize them? How do they motivate them? What is their strategic communication process?

I began to collect materials, propaganda leaflets, did interviews with defectors, etc. I got a reputation in Saigon -- there was only about 400 Americans there at the time -- as a person who was working on the Viet Cong. The CIA did not have anybody assigned to this. The Embassy did not have anybody assigned to it. It wasn't until four years later that they had anybody working full time on the National Liberation Front.

Q: It's astonishing how we --

PIKE: Right. It's vincible ignorance, as we used to say. Anyway, the CIA people and others would send me over things, briefings, and propaganda leaflets they'd pick up in the field. And I'd do an analysis of these -- analyze them for them, for content, subliminal messages and so on. You work backwards with this sort of thing, to try to determine what the operational code and the value system is from the appeals used.

Q: Were you supplying some of this material or analyses and guidance to the Agency for instance?

PIKE: Well, I'd give it to anybody I could. But nobody was --

Q: USIA?

PIKE: Yeah, I was tried to press it on them is what it amounted to.

Q: Yeah.

PIKE: Nobody was particularly interested.

Q: Yeah.

PIKE: I was writing speeches for the Ambassador -- Nolting and Durbrow were the early ones. And I would bring up the subject of what the V.C. were saying and they would be mildly interested, saying, "If you have a report on this send it along". And I would.

Q: We're backing into the swamp.

PIKE: I don't think the early Ambassadors paid any attention to this. It was a syndrome we suffered from all through the Vietnam War. It's what Aldous Huxley calls vincible ignorance. Vincible ignorance is something that you don't know; you know that you don't know it; but you don't think it makes any difference. These people did not know anything about the Viet Cong or their strategy or their political mobilization techniques. They knew they didn't know but it didn't make any difference. All of us do not know a lot of things. For instance, I don't know anything about the polar icecap and the greenhouse effect, but if the ice- cap melts, this office is about ten feet above sea level. So, if the Pacific ocean goes up twenty feet, as I'm going down for the third time, I'll say that's an example of vincible ignorance. I wasn't all that certain myself about the war. I was interested chiefly in the career terms. Still I wanted to do a doctorate on this communication process.

Q: Sort of academic to you.

PIKE: Right. I didn't see the full meaning of it.

My first assignment in USIA was in the motion picture section -- a commentary, I would say, on USIA. Consider its many activities: I had worked on newspapers. I had worked on radio. I had worked in the cultural field -- very strong on Great Books of the Western World Adult Education Program. I had led Great Books discussions, had taken training in this, my wife and I. So what do they put me into?! The motion picture section. It was the biggest agency motion picture operation in the world, at that time, run by a guy named Dave Sheppard who was a Hollywood-trained motion picture maker and very good. I realized later the reason he worked to get me assigned was because he wanted somebody who didn't know motion pictures, because he had a lot of trouble with assistant motion picture officers who thought they knew the business.

Q: That makes a certain sense.

PIKE: I found it very interesting. I made movies. We made the newsreels that went into all the theaters across Vietnam. We made documentaries on highway building and a hundred other subjects. I went out shooting. I would sit for hours at the moviola. I wrote scripts. I wrote a series on the enemy. I did research on the Viet Cong. Did one on the Montagnards -- the highland people. We made a series of documentary shorts on them.

Q: It also sent you out into the field.

PIKE: Right. I spent a lot of time in the hills. Again, I collected a lot of material on the Montagnards that I used in the scripts. I thought it was worth publishing, for the USIA to publish. So I wrote this short monograph. We published it. And it was at the time the USIS buildup was beginning in Vietnam. There was lots of interest in the Montagnards. I think they published something like 150,000 copies. I became identified for the time as an authority on the Montagnards. People would come in and say "You're an authority on the Montagnards". I'd say, "No, I'm not. I spent ten days up there, skimmed a little cream, came back and put it into a report that's all. I'm not an authority on the Montagnards."

Q: Compared to what else was available, you were.

PIKE: This would irritate them. They would think I was being modest.

Q: Yeah.

PIKE: So finally I say, "Okay, I'm an expert. What do you want to know?" For years I had to live down what to me was a false reputation. All they knew was that I had published this monograph. I would say look at it. It's nothing. It's like a long news- paper article. There's no depth in it. There's no research. Anyway, it's an example of the fact that Americans went to Vietnam ignorant of the country and the culture. Later they did a lot of work quickly. I mean, we got smart in Vietnam. We had people there who in four years or five years became genuine authorities. They knew Confucianism. They knew the Hoa Hao. They knew the Mountainmen. They knew the Viet Cong. There was an absence of knowledge. We were not ignorant in that sense. It was vincible ignorance. The first ambassador that ever really took us seriously was Ellsworth Bunker.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: He would call me in for periodic chats about the other side. None of the other ambassadors before him did that. They knew me. They would mention my experience at a cocktail party. But there just wasn't the interest on their part. I think this was even worse back in Washington. I had one session with Lyndon Johnson earlier in Washington when I was in school and my wife, after she left the AP became an administrative aide to Quentin Burdick, Senator from North Dakota. He was in the House at the time. He was a good friend of Hubert Humphrey's and we were from Minnesota. We were with the Hill crowd. We got to know Humphrey quite well.

Anyway, one of the times I was back in Washington and I was calling around on the Hill and Quentin Burdick called Humphrey and said, "Would you like to talk to Doug Pike?" He said, "Better than that I'm going to the White House to talk to Lyndon. I'll take him with me." So the two of us went in. I had about five minutes with Lyndon Johnson. He said, "All of you are doing great things out there. We're proud of you. Anything that we can give you we will. All you need to do is ask. Is there anything you need?" And I said, "Yes, we need time." His fist came down on the coffee table and he said, "That's the one god- damn thing I cannot give you." I understood his problem.

Q: Sure.

PIKE: But our view was that this was a protracted conflict. We had to have the determination to last. I knew that that was not the perception in Washington. They wanted victory quickly. The enemy knew we wanted it quickly. So that's why they fought their 50 year war as they called it. They dragged the thing out, protracted conflict.

The point of all this is that there is always this problem in the foreign service and in government in general of people who know things that the principals do not know. Either they know they

don't know it and it doesn't make any difference, or they genuinely do not know it and should be told. But there is the difficulty -- no mechanism to get knowledge across. I mean, with our peers or even with people slightly above you, you can press these ideas on them. But you cannot grab the President of the United States by the lapels and say, now, you're going to sit down here and listen to something you need to know.

Q: Of course, he has his own priorities which are pressing, he thinks pressing him much harder.

PIKE: Often the person winds up telling him what he does know. Woodrow Wilson once observed that the worst thing about being President is you have to spend so much time listening to people tell you something you already know. And I didn't know what Johnson really knew. And it didn't really occur to me that I should take on the mission of educating the President of the United States or the ambassador or anyone else. Looking back on it, I think I should have tried more. I should have been an advocate -- because I was one of the few people that understood the National Liberation Front (NLF), the Viet Cong. Evidence from things that have been written subsequently, even by some of our top generals, shows they never did understand the other side. To this day they still do not understand it; the major reason why we lost the war.

Anyway, I had gathered all this material on the NLF. And I was still thinking about a doctorate. So I asked for a sabbatical. They had in those days, they may still have it, a sabbatical setup which offered three persons a year at a university as an assignment.

Q: Sort of scholarship.

PIKE: Kind of a scholarship. It was a sabbatical to go and study or to go and write. It was competitive. You put in a proposal and the committee picked the top three. So I proposed that I go to Stanford and do a study on the communication process of the National Liberation Front, the Viet Cong. At that moment, Dan Lerner who was a very famous figure in the field of communication of ideas from MIT came through Saigon. His book "Passing of the Traditional Society" on Iran is still probably the greatest book on communication of ideas in a developing society ever written. He's dead now. Anyway, we got along very well. And he said, listen, you should come to MIT. Don't go to Stanford. We've got the best setup here, etc. So I changed the proposal. When I got to MIT I reported to Max Milliken, head of the Center for International Studies. Lucien Pye was my mentor, as were Ithiel Pool and Harold Isaacs. They had some very good people. These were my informal advisors. And all of them said, "Why are you monkeying around with a Ph.D.? What you should do is write a book on the Viet Cong." And I said, "Well, I just thought I would be interested in getting a doctorate and ending my career at a university eventually."

Q: Why couldn't a book of --

PIKE: You couldn't do both. There wasn't time to do both -- a book and a doctorate.

Q: Oh, I see.

PIKE: You couldn't do all the course work and do the dissertation. In fact, regulations stipulate

you have to spend 2 1/2 years on campus. So I thought maybe I would quite the government and continue my doctorate. But they argued I should stay in the foreign service, that it's a good career. A Ph.D. isn't all that much an advantage in the foreign service. But it is the union card in education. You've got to have it or you're not hired by a university.

Q: Academics are a little bit suspect in USIA or used to be.

PIKE: Well, they were. My advisors saw me as a person who knew a great deal about the Viet Cong, who should write what he knows. The second argument, I said, was that the Agency expected me to do a book on the communication process, not a book on the Viet Cong. Actually, the people who sent me there were a committee and nobody in Washington cared what I was writing.

Q: The committee had been disbanded long ago.

PIKE: Right. And by the time the book was out 2 1/2 years later, nobody remembered. Lucien Pye was a very famous Asian scholar, missionary's son born in China and raised in China. He thinks like a Chinese. He said, "Look, isn't it true that everything the Viet Cong does is an act of communication? I mean, an ambush, an assassination, are messages they're trying to deliver. Okay, so you define everything they do as an act of communication. Then you write a book on everything they do. And then you say, 'I've written a book on their communications process.'" As I say, he thinks like a Chinese.

Well, the question was get a doctorate or do a book. So my adviser persuaded me to write a book -- that really was the right way to go. A Ph.D. doesn't do you a great deal of good in government. It probably gets you a little better start at least in the civil service. The thing about a successful book like this is that it makes you overnight. I mean, this came out at exactly the right --

Q: You are an authority.

PIKE: And I got front page reviews in the New York Times and the Washington Post. That impresses people who never read the book. I've had one ambassador who said, "you've written this book on Vietnam." And I said, "yes." He said, "would you mind sending me the reviews of it?" Not the book, just the reviews. I thought he at least was more honest than some of the others.

Q: The blurb on the jacket.

PIKE: People have said, you know, I've read your book. It was very interesting. And in talking to them I realize they have read only the dust jacket.

Anyway, the book labeled me within the Agency as an authority on Vietnam. It meant that I was stuck in Vietnam for the duration of the war. Actually, I was assigned to Vietnam from 1960 until 1975 with the exception of the nine months at MIT. There were what were called regional information assignments which involved traveling and lecturing and attending conferences. I had this assignment for seven years. I was out of Vietnam for long periods, on the road. I think I must have circled the world at least 25 times. I've made about 2,000 lectures on Vietnam in 40

countries. I've heard every question on Vietnam that's conceivable and some that are inconceivable.

Q: Like what?

PIKE: Well, what is the relationship of Vietnam to the Maldives -- which I heard in Argentina. Or in Ankara, how do you compare the Vietnam war with Cyprus? What is the connection? It's wrong to say I don't think there is any connection. Because they say, well, I will tell you the connection. And they go on at great length about the Maldives or the Falklands or Cyprus.

The point is that in these travels and lectures what I encountered was not hostility for the American involvement in Vietnam, but a puzzlement as to what we were doing there; why the war went on for so long; why it's so indecisive; what it's all about. It's was tinged with hostility sometimes, but essentially most foreigners, unlike most Americans who are either very pro war or very anti, were simply puzzled by what the war was all about.

The reason for this I realized later was that the Vietnam war was a new war in kind. It was not a kind of war we'd experienced before. It was a culmination of a development of warfare that began with Napoleon. This blurring the line between combatants and non-combatants. It's an unlimited war in which all people are involved. Not even children are excluded, particularly not even children you might say. This is people's war. This is what Ho Chi Minh and General Giap and before him Mao Zedong had developed. Where we saw it fielded really for the first time was Vietnam.

Since then we've come to understand this phenomenon -- hence what's happening today in Beirut, or in Belfast, or in Afghanistan or Cambodia. It's the new face of war. The downing of the airplane, 707, over Scotland or kidnaping people on cruise ships or the militants in Beirut. That's the future face of war. We call it terrorism. It is terroristic. But it is also a strategy. I think the world has come to understand this better than during Vietnam.

Q: Extension of war into terrorism.

PIKE: It's blurring the line between war and politics, the gray area where you're talking about politics with guns. Whether that's warfare or politics with guns as Kissinger used to say a distinction without a difference, particularly if you're on the receiving end of it -- you're not being killed in war, you're being killed because of politics. Anyway, it was a phenomenon.

Q: It should be considered that these things weren't fair.

PIKE: So we said -- you just didn't do this, there were rules of engagement and so on. Anyway, that was the phenomenon that we didn't understand. In these lecture tours I was trying to express it. I didn't have a great deal of difficulty because I focused on the other side -- I did not talk a great deal about the American side of the war although I would answer questions about it.

There were a couple of time when it got sticky. I was barred from Delhi University by a demonstration of young girls in saris blocking the road. They canceled a meeting at Monash

University in Australia when demonstrators denounced me as a war criminal. Those were the only two times that I ever ran into any serious trouble. Of course I did not speak in the United States because as a USIA person I was prohibited from "propagandizing" the American people. I did do interviews. I mean, there is a limit to such censorship -- the First Amendment to the Constitution does apply to foreign service officers and FSIOs as well.

Q: There was always that row about distributing any film.

PIKE: That's right.

Q: Or publication.

PIKE: Of course it was gotten around very easily because the White House would order materials from USIA which the Agency was obliged to send. Then the White House would send the stuff out. I don't know whether that was legal or not. But you couldn't blame USIA, although they weren't, I don't think, against the idea. It's a little silly, you know; one of the crosses that we had to bear.

Anyway, where was I? I was working out of Vietnam traveling, lecturing. This was right up until the end. After my MOPIX assignment in Vietnam I ran a propaganda analysis operation for JUSPAO, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office. We had a team of American military and Vietnamese. We were analyzing propaganda. We were doing studies. We were doing in-depth interviews. We were doing public opinion research work, what we called barometer opinion surveys, in-depth studies of anti-Americanism -- essentially research work.

Serious interest in the other side was shown when Graham Martin arrived. The nature of the war had changed considerably and that was one of the reasons.

Q: Did Martin replace Bunker?

PIKE: Yes, right.

Q: He had been in Bangkok I think.

PIKE: Right. He had been ambassador in Bangkok. He had me setup an interagency organization, an ad hoc committee. I was the chairman. Members came from throughout the mission: the military; CIA; Frank Snepp, the famous Frank Snepp was our USIS representative on this; the embassy and so on and so on.

Q: AID Program?

PIKE: Yes, AID people. Let me think of who else was there. Several branches of the military and MACV, Military Assistance Command Vietnam. If we had had an embassy in Hanoi we would have been the political section. We were the equivalent. Our job was to read cables and radio broadcast transcripts and write reports. And Frank Snepp would go off periodically to Hong Kong to debrief Third World diplomats stationed in Hanoi and so on. We were simply trying to

understand the politics of the politburo, know the operational code of the politburo -- how do Hanoi's leaders decide things? What is their attitudes on the Paris talks? What are they likely to do, etc.?

Q: Sure.

PIKE: That which political officers do. That was my last job in Saigon. I liked it and I was very interested in it. One day I got a cable from the Agency saying you are hereby informed that you must return home immediately because there is a regulation in the foreign service that says in the first 15 years you must spend two years in Washington. You've been out 15 years and you've never been back once. I took the cable to Graham Martin and he said, "Don't worry, I'll fix it up." The next thing I know I get my orders to come home. So Martin called me in and said, "I really thought I could fix it." You understand I was an Indian way down the totem pole. If the ambassador in a major post -- the biggest post in the world, we had 1,100 people in that embassy, if he wants something from Washington he's going to get it normally. Martin had gone to Kissinger on this. I couldn't imagine the Agency bucking Kissinger on something like this. Martin showed me a letter from Kissinger. It said this two-year business is not a regulation, it is a law. It's in the law -- the enabling legislation for the foreign service law says that you must serve two years of your first fifteen in Washington.

Q: This I didn't realize.

PIKE: Therefore the Kissinger letter said what you're asking us to do is to bend the law. And with Watergate and all we got into a lot of trouble bending the law. We just cannot do it anymore. So Martin said, I'm very sorry. He was apologetic.

The irony is I left at the beginning of 1975 taking with me all of the material that became the University of California's Indochina Archive, some three million pages of documents, 50,000 maps and graphics and photos and 12,000 books.

Q: Let me insert a little comment to sort of set the place we're talking here. We're surrounded by, I suppose, hundreds of volumes, books, pertinent to Vietnam's history.

PIKE: All of them on Vietnam.

Q: The war and so on. And a great many souvenirs that you, Doug, have collected.

PIKE: Yes.

Q: I can see looking up here coins and paper currency and an old --

PIKE: AK-47.

Q: That's an AK-47 on the wall, a dark pistol.

PIKE: Viet Cong. Supposedly Viet Cong.

Q: A great many scrolls and paintings and watercolors, pieces of ceramic, both ancient and modern I assume.

PIKE: Right.

Q: You're immersed in this lore.

PIKE: Right. So all of this I had in Vietnam and all of it I got out in good fashion. Because this was before anybody expected anything except a routine return to the United States.

Q: Before the collapse.

PIKE: I had gone out in 1960 with what was known as a full household shipment. In those days everyone took all his furniture with him including their grand pianos and so on. We didn't take much with us. But what that meant was we had a big weight allocation. It was still in effect, because we'd never gone home since 1960. If we'd gone home and come back it would --

Q: Limited shipment.

PIKE: Exactly. So we bought furniture in Hong Kong, rosewood furniture and so on, but not too much. I used my weight allocation to ship home all of this research material.

Q: The weight must have been enormous.

PIKE: Yes.

Q: Books.

PIKE: That's right. Dozens of lift vans. Anyway, the point is that I got out of Vietnam in good order. I was one of the last people who did get out in routine fashion. Most Vietnamese I know today believe that I saw the end coming and that I quietly slipped out. Actually, I didn't. I didn't see the end coming.

Q: You were ordered out.

PIKE: Yes. But I can't get any Vietnamese to believe this. Anyway, the point is that all of this material did get out.

At the end we couldn't even get 20 tons of gold out of Vietnam. It was left sitting there on the tarmac at the airport. I was back in Washington at the time in Policy Planning trying to get Swiss Air to fly the gold out. There was the question of insurance, in case the plane went down. We waived that but by then it was too late. And the communists overran Than Son Nhut and captured the 20 tons of gold.

Q: What's that worth today?

PIKE: About \$100 million. Maybe. It was \$80 million at the time.

Q: Three hundred and some dollars an ounce.

PIKE: Yeah, times 16 times --

Q: Two thousand.

PIKE: It was 20 tons of gold. About a month later in Nhan Dan newspaper in Hanoi there was an article saying among the great victories that we achieved in the south is when we captured Tan Son Nhut, we captured 15 tons of gold. And I read that and I said, but it was 20 tons. So the next thing you know gold starts showing up in the refugee camps, in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand. This is GVN gold, with the GVN stamp on it. It's gold out of that shipment. We send word back through CIA asking are these people coming out with this gold? They say you can't believe this, but it appears to be North Vietnam security officers. No surprise. If you get your hands on five tons of gold or even a half a ton, it's too big a temptation.

Q: Gold is extremely important to the Asians too.

PIKE: That's right. It certainly is. Well, anyway, to return to me, coming back to Washington. I didn't have an assignment, the prospect was I would be, as they say, walking the corridors looking for a job, an assignment. But when I got back there was a message that Henry Kissinger had called and asked me to join the Policy Planning Council which was run by Winston Lord, which as you know is a think tank or advisory group to serve the Secretary of State. I really think he did it because it would have been a kind of double insult to Ambassador Martin to order me home, and have him later told I was walking around looking for a job. I don't know. Maybe they needed somebody. This was near the end of the Vietnam War.

Q: What year was it?

PIKE: It was 1975.

Q: You came out in '75.

PIKE: The war ended April 30, 1975. It was that five month period.

Q: You came out earlier in that year.

PIKE: I came out just before Christmas -- actually in 1974.

Q: Oh, I see.

PIKE: My first assignment in Policy Planning was on what was called the Ingersoll Committee. Ingersoll was the Deputy at State, Under Secretary of State. Kissinger would attend cabinet

meetings in an overall policy role; Ingersoll would attend this same council meeting, an expanded cabinet meeting, as the State representative. Our committee was the highest level within the State Department with the job of backstopping Vietnam.

Q: It was seconded from USIA.

PIKE: Yes, we met every afternoon at five o'clock. Originally we met at nine o'clock in the morning. Then the meeting went on all morning. So Ingersoll very wisely scheduled it at five in the afternoon which tends to reduce the amount of talking. We were supposedly to backstop the effort in Vietnam, to do whatever was necessary to try to shore up and prevent a debacle. But by the time the committee was set up -- this was after the Battle of Phuoc Long which was really the decisive beginning of the end in Vietnam. That was in December of '74, which in a sense was the last battle of the Vietnam War. The war strung out for another three or four months. But after Ban Me Thuot it was obvious that the war was lost, that nothing we could do that was politically realistic could save it. The presidency had been badly debilitated by the Watergate scandal. The understanding that we had with them about supporting the South Vietnamese in case of North Vietnam invasion went out the window. I would argue that the North Vietnamese would not have resumed the war if our credibility would have remained, if the threat that the B-52s would come back if they had to. In Hanoi, the so-called dove faction, which was predominant at the time had argued against new war because the B-52s would come back with the same devastating attack as in December of 1972, the so-called Christmas bombings -- with smart bombs and laser guided bombs and which gave them a taste of all out warfare which was worse than what they thought possible. Once the presidency was debilitated the Hanoi hawks could say, we can guarantee you the B-52s won't come back. In a way the Vietnamese were the ultimate victim of Watergate.

Anyway, our committee met, and read cables in disgust, but there wasn't much we could do. As Ingersoll said at one point, "We're on the river of no return, we're just going down this river without a paddle, just riding the current."

After the war I stayed in Policy Planning following Vietnam. I was in effect Kissinger's advisor or thinker on Vietnam. Of course, he wasn't interested in thinking about Vietnam -- he was psychologically shaken. All the principals were. I don't think many people realize that.

I remember one time when Kissinger came into the Ingersoll Committee. He would sometimes come in and sit and listen, usually not say anything. But this time he suddenly got up and everybody stopped. This was in February, 1975, the point when we still could have decided if we had the will to send in the B-52s or even troops. But we all knew this was not possible. This was the moment when either you had to decide to do something or not. So he stood up and everybody stopped. And he said, "What kind of people are we? That's what I want to know? What kind of people are we?" Then he walked out. Nobody said anything. His was not a rhetorical question. It was a genuine question genuinely seeking an answer. Here was this German Jewish immigrant to the United States who thinks of America as a certain kind of country. It stands for certain things, believes certain things. Suddenly he wonders what kind of a people are we? Am I wrong in what I've been thinking about America or what? That's what I think he meant. Maybe it was a rhetorical question. But I didn't feel so because I thought the same thing.

The outcome of the war did not tear me up as much as it did some people who spent a lot of time there and had gotten emotionally committed. I got emotionally committed very early. But soon I realized that this was a serious mistake on my part, to get emotionally involved. I wasn't doing myself any good. I wasn't doing the service any good, nor the U.S. So I deliberately steered myself, but a lot of people didn't. That's why one of them wound up living in Paraguay. Another lives in a hut outside of Las Vegas in the desert. A brilliant Ph.D. historian quit all intellectual activity and runs a motel in northern New Hampshire. People were psychologically destroyed by the war. It came close to me but I didn't go over the edge.

Q: Westmoreland must -- reports a lot of this, the thrashing around the NSC.

PIKE: I think most rationalize it.

Q: I suppose so, but --

PIKE: It depends on how introspective you are. When I first went to Vietnam I cultivated Vietnamese to find some that spoke English particularly. Some I could consult and talk to about Vietnamese culture, society history. One was the last mayor of free Hanoi, named Do Quang Giai, a very devout Confucianist. We had long discussions, I was struck by how many times, he would talk about the mandate of Heaven -- the ideal that if the emperor is a good emperor he rules by mandate of heaven. If he's a bad emperor the mandate is withdrawn and the people have the right to depose it. That's pure Jeffersonian democracy.

Q: Yes, it sure is.

PIKE: The words are different but the concept is the same. In another case, it was with Dinh Thuc, the wisest Vietnamese I ever knew. He was Dinh of the faculty of law at the University of Saigon. I remember clearly our conversation when I was just a young arrival and he was a prominent scholar. He was telling me that the history of Vietnam is full of duplicity and double dealing and betrayal. We have a 1500 year history of betrayal he said -- at the national level and betrayal at the personal level. You could write the history of Vietnam in terms of the double cross he said. Every one betrays us. Sooner or later you Americans will betray us. This was 1962. I said no, we are different, we do not betray people. He didn't say anything, just nodded. Well, we did betray them.

Q: Yes, we did.

PIKE: Years later, about four or five years ago, I met him again in Paris.

Q: Oh.

PIKE: I don't suppose he remembered our conversation. He was an important figure and I was just one of many visitors. Maybe he did remember, but was too polite to say, I told you so.

Q: Yes.

PIKE: I didn't bring it up, naturally.

Q: They're an extremely tactful race.

PIKE: Well, I don't know. You have a conversation with some young person who doesn't mean much to you. But he may remember what you say all his life. Because when you are young you are impressionable. The things you hear, the books you read stick with you as they don't later. That's what a teacher can do -- touch eternity.

Anyway, I think that's important. Here is the mindset of the Vietnamese. They see duplicity. It comes right down to the present. They do not trust the Russians. They don't believe the Russians would back them up if they got into serious trouble. They don't trust anybody -- they have a singular inability to trust.

Q: Well, they've been so bruised through the centuries. And, of course, this applies to some other Asian countries.

PIKE: That's right.

Q: I suppose it applies to Central America in many instances.

PIKE: It's true I suppose of every culture to some extent. It's a matter of degree. If you study Vietnamese history you find negativism, pessimism.

Q: They call it realism.

PIKE: They're aware of this cultural influence, or a heritage determined by history and their personal experience as well as national experience.

Then the Carter Administration came in. Policy planning jobs are what are called Schedule C assignments. They are political appointments, part of the 600 jobs that the President has to pass out. Policy Planning is not considered a permanent assignment anyway. The idea is that people rotate through. So I was to go back to the Agency for assignment. I was FSO-2 at the time. I was afraid I would be socked into some place in Africa as a PAO. I didn't want that. I wanted to stay in my field. But there was no field left.

William Whitson was then running the Library of Congress Congressional Research Service (CRS). I met him at a cocktail party and he said, "There is a way in which we can get you into CRS on reimbursable detail -- that you can be detailed to us and we'll pay your salary back to the Agency. We'd be willing to have you come up here for a year or two to follow Vietnam, write, and deal with Congressmen on Vietnam." Congressmen get letters on Vietnam and if they require some research they buck them over to CRS to answer. So, I agreed and the job was set up. It was a good job.

The major project in those two years was with Senator John Glenn and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He had me testify a couple of times, then asked me to do a general study

for the committee on Vietnam foreign relations which I did. It was a 200 page study which his committee published. Then I did some work testifying, writing for Representative Stephen Solarz and his House subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific. But most of the work was routine, they left me alone. The idea was that I would be free to read and study FBIS, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, talk to people, go to conferences and so on. It was a very good deal. It lasted for about two years, was set up to last for only two years.

Then my problem was what to do? Do I go back to the Agency and wind up in Africa? At that point Mike Armacost was in the Pentagon in what's called ISA, International Security Affairs, which later became --

Q: Went to State, didn't he?

PIKE: Went to State as the number two man and is now going to Tokyo as Ambassador. Anyway, he heard that I was looking for a job and called me and asked me if I would be interested in coming over there.

Q: To State?

PIKE: No, to ISA -- he was at the Pentagon.

Q: Oh, I see.

PIKE: At the same time Mort Abramowitz was Ambassador in Bangkok and wrote me asking if I was interested in coming out to an embassy job --

Q: Political officer.

PIKE: As a watcher of Hanoi. There was some static about this at State because of the feeling that Abramowitz was Ambassador to Thailand but acting like the Ambassador to Vietnam. So State did not like the proposal. But the deal offered by the Pentagon was too good to refuse. I had a free hand to do what I wanted in watching Vietnam -- could write what I wanted, send it to whoever I wanted in government. All my life it's been this way -- phone calls out of the blue. At the time I was beginning to wonder what I should do, up comes ISA, a so-called little state department in the Pentagon.

Q: Did it have State Department people?

PIKE: About half the people were foreign service. There were some USIA people.

Q: Sort of a little security council.

PIKE: Well, actually the way we thought of it was we were foreign service people keeping an eye on the military. Over in the State Department was a military officer keeping an eye on the civilians. But we got along very well. And it was a very good assignment.

Q: I still exchange Christmas cards with Otis Hayes.

PIKE: Right. Well, very famous people went through ISA. Dan Ellsberg. Then came a phone call from Robert Scalopino, my old professor [from California]. I don't know if he remembered me from then, but I had known him for years. Also others -- professors from California -- Chalmers Johnson, Carl Jackson, people working in my field -- had come through there from time to time.

Anyway, the university people asked me if I was interested in taking early retirement -- you can do this when you're 50 with 20 years service -- and coming to the University of California in Berkeley to set up a study center on Indochina. I wasn't sure they were talking to the right person. I said, this is Berkeley calling? They said, yes. We know what you're thinking, that there's a big anti-war movement here, but they've moved on. The atmosphere here is now very good. Berkeley is a funky place.

Q: But students or young people these days can't even point in the direction of Vietnam.

PIKE: Right. There's little anti-war sentiment left. Radicals were into other things, animal rights and so on. Anyway, my original anxieties were not fulfilled. When I first got here we did have the campus security people show up because there had been an article about us in the San Francisco Chronicle.

Q: When was this?

PIKE: This was 1980.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: It was a very favorable article. But the headline -- because the reporter had seen all of the Viet Cong flags, the Vietnam war posters and so on -- the headline said, "A Little Bit of Viet Cong Territory in Berkeley." The story itself was straight forward description. But the next morning the security people had shown up and said, we're a little worried that you might be the victim of some kind of anti-war action by some of the Vietnamese emigres. They said, we're glad that you're on the fourth floor here because I don't think you can throw a fire bomb up this high - - it would take a very good arm. And I said, well, I get along with the Vietnamese emigres very well. Actually, I get along with the anti-war types around here. There aren't many of them left but they are at least people I can talk to about the Vietnam War. We had that interest. And there aren't many of us around who want to talk about it one way or the other.

So we set up the archive and it is now operating. We're probably the largest research facility on Indochina, on historical or contemporary Indochina, anywhere in the world.

Q: Now, is this open to scholars?

PIKE: Open to everybody. We have about three million pages of documents, some 50,000 graphics, maps and photographs and about 10,000 books. Many people use it -- we get novelists who come in an playwrights as well as students, writers and academics.

To complete this description which is a little outside of my post-USIA career, I set up the Indochina studies program for the university. It runs this archive. We also publish books. And we publish a quarterly called "Indochina Chronology" which is meant for specialists in the field. We published long works. We're publishing Ellsworth Bunker's papers.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIKE: On Vietnam.

Q: How long was he there?

PIKE: He was there through the key years in the late '60s. He made a deal with Lyndon Johnson before he went out to Saigon that he would have direct communication, what we used to call back channel. He would send the President a telegram each week telling him what had happened, telling him what he thought he should know about Vietnam the previous week.

Q: He went to Panama after that didn't he?

PIKE: Yes, I believe so. Anyway, these messages are very good. Bunker was a very careful reporter. This was a very valuable contribution to scholarship. There were 96 cables all together. His wife helped us get them declassified. We got a grant from the Asia Foundation to publish. That's our major publishing project of the moment.

Q: I want to interrupt you for a minute. What is your position here?

PIKE: I'm the Director of the Indochina Studies Program. As I say, that's the kind of umbrella --

Q: For the University of California.

PIKE: For the University of California at Berkeley. And we are part of the Institute of East Asian Studies in academic jargon its called an ORU or Organized Research Unit. There are about 50 or these on campus -- in science and technology, area studies, etc. And the East Asia Institute is an ORU with a China Center, a Japan Center, a Korea Center and an Indochina Center.

Q: Do you teach?

PIKE: Well, I teach but I'm not tenured faculty. I've been teaching government and politics of Southeast Asia in the Political Science Department to fill in for professors who are on sabbatical or leave or something. And next year I'll teach the history of the Vietnam War in the History Department. I also have taught history at San Jose State.

Q: San Jose State?

PIKE: San Jose State University. To take the place of the fellow who's on sabbatical in China. Mostly, what the university expects me to do is research. They consider this a research university

and that's why the emphasis on this.

Q: We're talking here about the University of California at Berkeley.

PIKE: That's right.

Q: Not San Jose State.

PIKE: Yes, Berkeley. So the ORUs do the usual things the research units do. They publish. They stage conferences, they facilitate research. They try to bring along the scholars, not through teaching but encouraging them and facilitating their dissertations, finding them jobs and that sort of thing.

Q: How many people would you say this serves?

PIKE: Well, it depends. We get on an average I would say of about ten or twelve people a week coming in here using the archives. We have visiting scholars also who are here full time, mostly from Asia, from Thailand and Australia and so on. Then we get a lot of phone calls and we get requests for materials. Quite a few people are what we call walk ins. We get novelists from across the United States. Sam Zaferi who just published a novel, a Chicago novelist has been here several times. A woman comes in who's writing a play on Viet Cong women. We get a lot of military. The Army and the Navy historians office in Washington will send people out looking for graphics and photographs. It's a vague job assignment in a way. My marching orders are to do whatever is necessary and whatever I can to encourage research, writing, teaching, publishing, on contemporary or historical Indochina which is Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. I go to a lot of conferences. In the last summer and fall I have been to nine international conferences - - Moscow, Beijing, Bangkok, Taiwan, Singapore, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur. And I do a lot of conferences held in the United States. There is about one a month I would say somewhere in the world.

Again, the purpose of this and my purpose is to try to encourage people that I meet at these conferences -- establish a network of these people who do serious work on Indochina. I try to do whatever I can to help them. We don't have a great deal of money. That's one thing I can't help very much, although I some- times endorse their proposals to foundations and so on.

THOMAS L. HUGHES
Administrative Assistant to the Under Secretary
Washington, DC (1961)

Mr. Hughes was born and raised in Minnesota and was educated at Carleton College, Oxford University and Yale University. After service with the US Air Force he worked on Capitol Hill and became active in Democratic Party politics. He later joined the Department of State, first as Assistant to Under Secretary Chester Bowles and subsequently as Deputy Director, then as Director of the

Bureau of Intelligence and Research, where he served during the event filled period 1961 to 1969. His assignments brought him in close contact with the major political figures of that era. His final government assignment was to Embassy London as Deputy Chief of Mission. Mr. Hughes was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: While you were helping put the administration together did Vietnam come up on your radar?

HUGHES: Not really in 1961. In the mid-to-late 50's, however, in a curious way Vietnam had already become a kind of liberal-Catholic alliance. The American Friends of Vietnam had been organized then in support of Diem, and it contained a roster of prominent American Catholics on its board including Jack Kennedy and various generals. Cardinal Spellman was the self-appointed "Vicar of Vietnam". Mike Mansfield was a champion of Diem in the 50's before he jumped ship in the 60's. But in the '50's, land reform and economic development in Vietnam were issues that appealed to liberals. This was a tie to people like Bowles. He realized that this wasn't exactly his crowd. On the other hand there were hopeful things to say about Diem in the early years.

When Kennedy entered the White House, Laos was the big issue in southeast Asia. Eisenhower had warned about dominoes there. Ultimately under Kennedy there was a trade off between Laos and Vietnam. He went for neutrality in Laos, giving it to Averell Harriman to see what he could work out, while he authorized 16,000 military advisers to bolster Vietnam.

Q: Was this balance between Laos and South Vietnam - fortify one-neutralize the other - was that made explicit? Was this coming from Kennedy?

HUGHES: No, but it was implicit. No one knew what the outcome in either place would be. Kennedy was going to be doing both at the same time-- satisfying the hawks on Vietnam and satisfying the doves on Laos. The two policies were meant to be mutually reinforcing.

ROBERT E. BARBOUR

**Political Officer
Saigon (1961-1963)**

Robert E. Barbour was born in Ohio in 1927 and educated at the University of Tennessee and George Washington University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1949. His career included posts in Basra, Tokyo, Saigon, Hue, Paris, Rome and Madrid and in 1984 he was named ambassador to Surinam. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: Then you left Paris and went back to Vietnam? Reluctantly?

BARBOUR: Reluctantly and involuntarily, but I went. Anecdotally, after the Kennedy visit, General Gavin, who was then Ambassador, wanted to move me up to his office. But while that

was in the process of developing I was summarily sent back to Vietnam, and I do mean summarily. One telegram--you are transferred, go. I don't think this sort of thing happens anymore. I didn't want to go, especially since between the Ambassador's front office and Vietnam there had emerged that fact that I was not to go to the Ambassador's office but would go back to be the French desk officer. Another reason we didn't want to go back to Vietnam; moreover we had two children by then and the war had started. So for these reasons we did not want to go back. My boss, the Political Counselor, made one telephone check and was told, "Yes, it's real," so I saluted and reversed course and we went back to Vietnam in September of 1961.

Q: What were you doing there?

BARBOUR: I was nominally deputy chief of the political section, internal affairs. Political counselor was Joe Mendenhall, another very good writer. One cannot overemphasize the importance of one's superiors as far as one's own development, both personal and professional. Given the situation at that time, he was involved with the Ambassador who was Fritz Nolting, a distinguished gentleman who, I think, had a clear set of instructions to think positively. Bill Trueheart was the DCM and tried very hard to be loyal. At that time the war was going on, our presence had greatly expanded in every area, civilian, military. The government was increasingly in trouble because of its own internal problems and weaknesses. It was a very different situation; one didn't move around the country the way we had before. So my job was essentially was to pick up and do the internal political reporting. It was not a happy time; although I have great respect for Ambassador Nolting as a person, it was quite clear that he wanted everyone to think positively and it was no longer possible to think positively about Vietnam.

I was involved in various provincial, pacification, community development programs and things like that, but there was throughout a kind of air of--oh, what is the term. We were dogged and determined but the optimism we experienced the first time we were there was long a thing of the past. We were there to do a job, we were fighting a war, a real war--and it was, there was no question about what was going on in the country. We were there to put the best light on it we could; put the best light on it through our work, in the things we were trying to accomplish, that we did, but put the best light on it in the evaluation and analysis of what we were accomplishing, that was much more difficult. We tried, but it was not easy.

Q: You came back after having been there in the "golden age," you must have known people since you spoke Vietnamese and you must have been asking these people, both professionally and personally, what had turned the situation around. What answers were you getting?

BARBOUR: On two major areas, internal and external. The external being the Viet Cong, the North Vietnamese insurrection and it was all, of course, "They are doing it to us." By and large that is true. On the internal one, the weaknesses of the government and its self-generated problems, people were reluctant to talk. It was almost impossible to get anyone who could shed light on the situation to do so; there was just no willingness to do so because everyone was afraid. The tentacles of Ngo Dinh Nhu and the government extended throughout the official *apparatus* and people were very wary of being caught up by them. We had a large military presence enmeshed at the working level of the Vietnamese Air Force; we were providing planes,

instructors, etc.; we trained them, we flew with them, and I think it was in February of 1962, we woke up at dawn in Saigon to loud explosions and the noise of airplanes. Two Vietnamese Air Force pilots were bombing the Presidential Palace. Despite our involvement with them, and people in the MAAG knew them, no one had the slightest idea of this kind of feeling being there. There were people who would complain and voice their feelings, but they were not people who would shed light on why specifically they were afraid, what specifically had gone wrong in a particular operation. The Vietnamese are great complainers; they will complain about everything and everybody and you have to factor a lot of that out. It is the problem of finding out why on such and such a date were you told, and what exactly were you told and what did you do. We had a very difficult time getting that.

Q: You were up against the dilemma of the foreign service officer, which goes on all the time, of having to report accurately and yet be optimistic about the situation. How did this play out as far as you were concerned.

BARBOUR: Fortunately this is the only time I have experienced it. In everyday ways. You write a telegram, it is sent up for clearance and it comes back with lots of changes. Never a reversal, saying yes means no, never that. It would just come back with a different tone, a different slant; it is very vitiating of one's enthusiasm. This applied also to the rank and file of the CIA station. They had the same problem and we had a good deal of--I can't say collusion--sympathizing back and forth as to what each of us thought should be said and of what in fact was going out. Of course, at this time we were building up more and more; troops were arriving, this was the real period of the arrival of the troops.

Q: What was your impression of the CIA intelligence that they were getting that you were able to sample?

BARBOUR: What they were getting from the Vietnamese was, as I recall, not very good for the reasons I just gave you. They told you what they wanted to tell you or they didn't tell you at all. We harvested lots of lies; some of them we knew were lies, some we didn't. This is a trait, as I told you, that went back even to the very early days; people would rather tell you something untrue than something bad. Now we had this additional element of fear.

Q: You mentioned Mendenhall being a good writer. What difference does it make if an Ambassador or a head of section is a good writer?

BARBOUR: It is whether you are able to convey to your readers what you want them to know and understand. Mendenhall's position was quite difficult. He shared, I think, the general doubts and skepticism but he tried very hard to be loyal, and succeeded. He wasn't the one who marked things up, they would be marked up farther down the line. He thought we should report things as we saw them, while all the time in there fighting trying to do it. You know what life is like in Washington, but people read that which is easy to read and deals with something that interests them; the shorter the better, the more communicative the better, the easier to understand the better. That is why writing makes all the difference in the world.

Q: Were you getting any feedback from Washington, either from people coming through or

personal letters?

BARBOUR: Two kinds, as I recall from my experience. Averell Harriman was the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs at that time. He was very skeptical, and I used to see the nasty telegrams, and I am sure there were many more, questioning telegrams from Averell Harriman. "Tell me why this..." "Is it true that..." "How can you say that..." I found them very amusing but I am sure the Ambassador didn't. From the desk we got--the desk was like Joe Mendenhall, in between, they were trying to be intellectually honest but at the same time play the bureaucratic game. If the bureaucratic game was to think positive, then by George they would think positive.

Q: If you had Averell Harriman as the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs skeptical and dubious, where was this positive policy emanating from?

BARBOUR: I am sure it started with the Vietnamese and it started from such things as--and this was after infiltration was evident--"What we really need is tactical air support. If we just had tactical air support then we wouldn't have..," whatever. So we provided some tactical air support aircraft, like the two that were used to bomb the Presidential palace; we brought in advisors, we camouflaged our military presence, which we doubled from 350 to 700, by pretending that we were there to recover equipment. Anyhow--"If we just had air support." "Okay, we will give you air support." "That is not good enough; we need communications, if we just had tactical communications." "Okay, we will provide them." So we started sending in more people; then we abandoned the limitation in the Geneva agreement entirely and brought in our own jet aircraft. Now our aircraft, our pilots have to be protected, that means Marines. I remember these episodes--I think it just went on from there, on and on. "We must have more men, more men, more men," and so it went; we got up to 500,000. When we left in the beginning of 1963, I think we were up to something under 50,000.

Q: The real push came in 1964, as I recall, when Johnson said, "Okay, let's do it." What was your impression of the military men, particularly the captains and the majors, who were out in the field? Did you get to talk to them at all?

BARBOUR: Americans?

Q: Americans.

BARBOUR: They were there to do a job, and in the first instance they wanted good relations with their Vietnamese counterparts. They were there to do a job that was training and advisory. It started out to be training and very few of them, I think, saw anything political. I don't want to be unfair to them; my impression was that very few of them raised political questions because they were too concentrated on working with the unit, the region, or the province to which they were assigned and on doing their specific things which they did extremely well. And they didn't stay very long, I think they only stayed a year.

Q: How did you look at such things as the "protected hamlet" and "revolutionary cadres" programs of Diem?

BARBOUR: We all, people in the Embassy like me, people in the CIA station, and probably in USIS, looked at them very skeptically. What was it, the "defensive hamlet?" Something like that. We armed, we trained, and they kept being overrun. We were all very skeptical but we didn't have anything better to offer, I confess. My own feeling when I left there was that we were in deep enough and I did not believe that the security of the United States was really dependent on the security of South Vietnam. We had put in, I guess, ten thousand people and if they couldn't do it then, we couldn't do it for them. And it became clear they couldn't do it.

Q: I realize you were mid-career level and all.

BARBOUR: I was quite junior; I felt as though I were quite junior.

Q: Later on, I was there in 1969, I was the only consul general and I realized that I was just, by about one person, on the upper half of the diplomatic list. I was an FSO 3 at the time and that gives you an idea of how it just got bigger and bigger. What did you feel were American interests? Why were we there?

BARBOUR: We were there to fight the North Vietnamese and to try and create the kind of country we visualized in 1955; to do two things at once. There was a third element which was to deal with the internal weaknesses, the self-created, almost willful weaknesses of the Vietnamese government, which were far more pronounced the second time around than they had been the first time. It was really pernicious and pervasive; it was everywhere, the reason people wouldn't talk to us. It was discouraging. I remember we had a provincial development campaign up in south central Vietnam, we worked very hard on it; we drew up the plans, we provided the economic wherewithal, we trained the cadres to go in. "Operation Seaswallow" it was called. We were really going to make the people in the lowlands happy that they were living in this potentially good society. When we got up there we saw that it wasn't really working. Why wasn't it working? Well, it was hard to say; deadlines were not being met, villages were not getting the equipment, the wells or the machinery that had been promised--which we had been promised, which we had been told we would have. Some were delivered and then there was a big incident up there, a military incident, and the whole thing was right back where it was. It was evident that the weakness was in Saigon.

Q: Were you and others at your level thinking that Diem and his family were the problem or were you thinking beyond that to the possibility that it was the Vietnamese way of doing things and putting someone else in wouldn't change things?

BARBOUR: The Nhu problem became evident and acute before long before then. Ambassador Durbrow, Elbridge Durbrow, who left there while we were in Paris, about 1960 and 1961, in his last meeting with Diem told him, diplomatically, that he had to get rid of his brother if he expected to salvage things. Durbrow never saw Diem again. The problem emerged well before the trouble really started.

Q: Were we transmitting this, that Diem and the Nhus were the trouble?

BARBOUR: No, No. Certainly not at my level. It was obvious--Madame Nhu was called the

"Dragon Lady." He had his fuzzy, woolly-headed philosophy that he wanted everyone to live by, and the corruption both intellectual and pecuniary, were just destroying the basis of everything that we were trying to do.

Q: Was there a feeling that if you got rid of them that the situation would turn around? Or was it maybe that the system would recreate the same trouble?

BARBOUR: The first part of your question came later. As far as what we felt, at my level, was that you have to give the people a feeling that they had a stake in the country and its development, that they had a stake in its democratization, for that is the only way they had to find some economic fulfillment of their own. That is the way we felt and that was the sort of thing that both inspired us and caused us to be so frustrated because so much of what was happening in Saigon was the kind of thing that would take away the incentive.

Q: Were you looking to anyplace else--Korea, the Philippines--for a model as to what should be done?

BARBOUR: I am not sure that we did at that time. Earlier I mentioned General Lansdale and I think he was trying to emulate Magsaysay. I don't recall any at that time.

Q: Did you have much contact with the Vietnamese military, or was it sort of out of bounds for you?

BARBOUR: No, it was not out of bounds; I had a lot of contact with them during the course of these various civilian-military socio-economic programs that we had. My wife taught English to Lieutenants and Captains and we used to see them. So we had a fair amount of dealings with the military.

Q: Were they feeling under wraps so that you weren't getting any discontent from them?

BARBOUR: I don't recall any dissidence and I think my feeling probably was that if I try to talk about it with him, he would make it very uncomfortable or he might complain.

Q: Or you might be sending a message.

BARBOUR: Yes, or I might be sending a message. So we were interested, eager to hear, but I didn't from my position try to incite messages of dissidence. They were very impressive; I remember going out to visit one unit, having lunch with them, and there were some paratrooper officers there. I asked them whether they had made any combat jumps, thinking of our own World War II experiences when they made one or two, and one of them said he had had twenty-one operational jumps. I remember it vividly; and that was 1962 and many of them were at night.

Q: Nothing was there the entire time that you were there?

BARBOUR: Yes.

Q: How about Trueheart? These were two men who were University of Virginia pals, this was supposed to be an Ambassador-DCM combination made in heaven, but it didn't work.

BARBOUR: Well because Trueheart developed the kinds of impressions that everyone else was living with. "It isn't working, boss, and we have to recognize certain basic weaknesses in our policy and what we are doing." Nolting, I guess, just didn't want to hear it from his best friend. Their friendship, I don't know that it was totally destroyed...

Q: Well, I think it was.

BARBOUR: Certainly it ended. Trueheart became very disaffected.

Q: He wasn't doing as much to support the team...

BARBOUR: Trueheart was very loyal when he arrived; he is very perceptive and I think after a while it all got to his intellect, he reached some very profound personal conclusions, and I think also things came to a head--I don't know if you are talking to Bill Trueheart.

Q: We did earlier but he has been interviewed so much on that that I didn't interview him on it.

BARBOUR: I think something happened when he was chargé while Nolting was away.

Q: Yes, I think there was something then. He was reporting as he saw it.

BARBOUR: I am happy to say that was long after I left.

WILLIAM C. TRUEHEART
Deputy Chief of Mission
Saigon (1961-1963)

Ambassador William C. Trueheart was born in Chester, Virginia in 1918. He graduated from the University of Virginia with a B.S. degree in 1939, and earned his M.A. in philosophy from the University of Virginia in 1941. He served in the United States Army from 1943 to 1946. Ambassador Trueheart joined the Foreign Service in 1949. In addition to serving in Vietnam, he served in Paris, Ankara, London, and Washington D.C. He served as United States Ambassador to Nigeria, from 1969 to 1971. This interview was conducted on March 17, 1989.

Q: Ambassador Trueheart, can you recall the circumstances of your assignment to the embassy in Saigon?

TRUEHEART: Oh, very well. I was, at the time, in London; I was the political-military affairs officer in the embassy in London. Actually the word came to me when I happened to be in Paris, going over for just a couple of days for some talks with the embassy there, and someone called

me -- I think it was my wife -- from London saying that this message had come through asking if I would accept assignment to Saigon as DCM. Of course, I was very pleased at the offer because it meant becoming a deputy chief of mission, which was regarded as a key sort of promotion in the substantive sense. Of course, it was a relatively big embassy. I hadn't any qualifications for it in terms of knowledge of the area; I'd never served in the Far East. In fact, my last six or seven years had all been in European affairs, largely related to NATO and a little bit of time on the Baghdad Pact. And of course the reason for my assignment was that the Ambassador, [Frederick] Nolting, had specifically requested me. I knew this, too, from the message, although I had not had any private communication from Nolting about it.

Q: Had you known Ambassador Nolting before?

TRUEHEART: I'd known him all my life, just about. Actually, my father worked for his father around 1900 or something, briefly. But then we were at Charlottesville at the same time. He was somewhat older than I, but he'd come back to work on his master's degree in philosophy at the same time that I was completing my bachelor's degree in philosophy. And I saw a great deal of him during that period. As a matter of fact, I was in his wedding, which took place about 1940 or something like that, maybe 1939. Also, he had been in Paris and had been my superior in the NATO delegation. So I presume he asked for me because he thought I could do this sort of a job. I think he probably thought of it more as an executive or management job than, as I say, because I knew anything about Vietnam, which I didn't. Of course, he hadn't either when he went out there. This is of course hearsay, but I believe that he had been urged by others to get a new deputy. There was a general feeling that they ought to have a sort of a new leaf in Saigon.

Q: Who had been his deputy before you?

TRUEHEART: A man named Cunningham. I'm not suggesting there was anything unsatisfactory about his performance or with [Eibridge] Durbrow, who had preceded Nolting. But I think the feeling was that many of the people who were there might have in effect blotted their copybook with [Ngo Dinh] Diem, and a conscious decision had been made that the best policy for the United States was to make a new effort to get along with Diem and to make the best of what we had. There wasn't anything else in sight that would be better.

So that was the background. Then the timing was that they let me stay on until I had completed two years in London, which was I think in August. Technically I needed to do this in order to be qualified for some home leave. So I did that, and then I came back to Washington and had a couple of weeks of orientation course and a couple of weeks of leave and went out.

Q: What kind of preparation did they give you in that orientation?

TRUEHEART: Well, it was very general. I mean, the Foreign Service Institute had a two-week course at that time on Southeast Asia, not simply Vietnam. It was quite general. I can't remember details of it, but obviously it was a very rough cut in terms of orientation. It covered, as I say, not simply Vietnam, but it covered Indonesia, the whole area that was then regarded as Southeast Asia, including the island parts.

Q: Now, there are stories that Ambassador Durbrow had had his problems, as you have hinted at, with President Diem. Was there any kind of a consensus in the State Department concerning Diem? Was what you just said the consensus, that he was all that was in sight and we had to -- ?

TRUEHEART: I'll tell you, I don't think I could say for sure because I didn't have any feeling that there were violent disagreements. There were certainly some people who were very dubious about Diem. In addition to this particular course, I went around and talked to various individuals who were thought to be especially knowledgeable. For example, I called on [Edward] Lansdale, but he was really quite noncommittal in talking to me and did not tell me anything that would have reflected the negative report he had made.

Q: I was going to ask about that --

TRUEHEART: Well, that reminded me of it, because he gave me several papers that he had written and speeches that he'd made on the subject, but he didn't really tell me much of anything. Now, whether he felt that in effect his comments had been overridden, a decision had been taken, and therefore he'd drop his positions, I don't know. But in fact it was a pretty uninformative kind of a meeting.

Q: You're smiling because I suspect is it you didn't get what you expected to get from General Lansdale?

TRUEHEART: No, I'm smiling because I didn't realize at the time, or until long after, anything about this report. Nothing he said to me would have suggested that he had real reservations about what we were doing. I didn't know that he did, really. I still have never seen this report. I'm trying to think whether any of the other interviews I had-

Q: Did you talk to any of the military people who had been out there with MAAG?

TRUEHEART: If I did, I don't recall at the moment, but I must have done [so]. I just don't remember who it was. But I'm pretty sure I talked to several people in the Pentagon, I would think.

Q: I was thinking perhaps General Williams, Hanging Sam Williams.

TRUEHEART: No, no, I did not talk to him. He's a name I know, but I never met him. Of course, I had meetings with lots of people in Pearl Harbor on the way out. I don't know whether this is the place to throw it in, but it was also during this period that I had my one meeting with LBJ. Is this a good place to throw this in?

Q: Proceed, please.

TRUEHEART: Again, it's not much of it to tell except the circumstances might be of some interest. I was back here, bear in mind, scheduled to go to Vietnam to fill a job that needed to be filled and so forth. And in the midst of getting ready to go, I was informed that the State Department had decided that the Vice President really ought to have a State Department adviser.

Chester Bowles, who was then the under secretary of state, had specifically been talking to him about it and urging him to do this and had, he thought, pretty well persuaded him to take on somebody with this role. The Vice President was statutorily a member of the NSC and he didn't have a staff that had any background for this sort of role. So they asked me if I would be willing to go and be interviewed for this job. Well, I had really mixed feelings about it because I was keen to go on to Saigon because I thought it fitted in with my career development more than anything else. Yet of course I was tempted by this idea of working for the Vice President.

So, in short, I went over. He had two offices, of course, one in the Capitol and one in the Executive Office Building, I guess, but in any case, he was in his Capitol office. I remember going into a waiting room -- there were two or three assistants and secretaries in the outer office--and waiting a very long time, because he had other people with him. I must have waited forty-five minutes or more. [I remember] finally being ushered into the inner room, where much to my surprise, not only was the Vice President but his secretary sitting in the same room with him and not too far away. It was a very dark room.

I sat down. As I say, it's the only time I ever spoke to him and I'm sure -- he was in his country boy mood. He was acting the simple country boy. I know from what I've been told by many other people who knew him, including Henry Cabot Lodge, that he was a man of enormous mental capacity, a brilliant man. But in this, with me, he simply adopted this country boy approach. He said he was having to go to these NSC meetings and read all these papers about foreign affairs and things and he really couldn't follow them. He needed somebody who could help him to understand what these were all about and so on. But this was the gist of it all. He, of course, asked me about whether I would be interested in something like this, and I said, well, I was, [but] on the other hand I was torn. I had been currently assigned to go to Vietnam, and that it was a job that I was very keen to do and I really didn't know. I had mixed feelings. And he said that he thought he really wouldn't want to do anything to disadvantage the mission in Vietnam, which he thought was so important.

This went on for maybe ten, fifteen minutes, but that was the gist of it. And we parted without anything being said about what was going to happen. When I left, the people in the outer office said, "Don't call us, we'll call you." Well, unfortunately they didn't call me and I was supposed to leave momentarily for Saigon, but until this matter had been resolved, the State Department was not going to let me go. So I sat around for perhaps ten days waiting to hear what the Vice President wanted, and he said neither yea nor nay. I was getting very uncomfortable, and finally someone, I think it was [U.] Alexis Johnson, the deputy under secretary for political affairs, who somehow finally got a release from the Vice President's office and out I went.

The job in question I think was not filled for a good many months later. Anyway, that's the LBJ story. We've taken a lot of time on that.

Q: Oh, that's quite all right.

TRUEHEART: But anyway, I went to Saigon by way of Pearl Harbor.

Q: This was your first trip to the Far East, was it?

TRUEHEART: The truth is I had never been west of Chicago until I'd made this trip.

Q: Well, were you prepared for the sights and smells and sounds and the rest of it?

TRUEHEART: Well, Saigon itself was a pretty peaceful city when I got there. This was what, October 1961. This was, of course, after the Johnson visit early in the year and after the [Eugene] Staley mission and so on. When I got there the [Walt] Rostow-[Maxwell] Taylor mission was there. I think they'd arrived a couple of days before, and they were going through their exercise while I was there. The place was peaceful enough. I had two children, one an infant at the time, ten months old, and one about ten years old. We were very comfortably set up in a house that had belonged to my predecessor and there were excellent servants. I've never had a pleasanter arrival at a new post in a physical sense than there.

There was a big flood at the time; the Mekong was covering most of the Delta. This figured in the Taylor-Rostow mission in the sense that one of the thoughts they had was that perhaps they could bring in a couple of battalions of U.S. engineers to deal with the flood problems that would arise, and this might be a way of getting American forces into Vietnam, which was one of the options, of course, they were thinking about. In that connection, although I had just gotten there, I remember flying out with a brigadier general who was the number two, I guess, or three in the MAAG and flying over this area to see just whether this made any sense, because the general was himself an engineer. [We] came back and concluded -- really his conclusion because I wasn't qualified to conclude on the subject -- that this was nothing like a flood on the Mississippi or anything in that the water just came up and the people moved up into the trees or whatever. They even moved their cattle up into the trees somehow, and they patiently waited for the water to go down. And it didn't go down rapidly, it didn't come up rapidly. There was not much hardship at all, and in that part of Vietnam they grew a variety of rice which in fact could grow almost as fast as the waters rose. It wasn't the best rice, but it wouldn't flood out. And that proved to be the case. So the conclusion was there was nothing to be done?

It didn't make any military or engineering sense to do it. I think that the whole idea of bringing troops in was one that was rejected, although I didn't realize at the time, I realize now, that the Taylor-Rostow recommendations included a definite recommendation for bringing in U.S. ground forces, which the President just passed.

Q: I wonder why that recommendation was included when the general of engineers rather -- ?

TRUEHEART: Well, one of the questions you had in mind was whether I had ever seen this report at the time. I did not. I'm not sure anybody in the mission saw it. I think they may have written it on the way home. But the recommendation to bring in troops was a more fundamental recommendation that would involve, as I understand it, the bringing in of troops who would somehow sort of seal the borders or fight off any major incursions from the North, leaving it to the Vietnamese forces to deal with the guerrilla threat. The idea of taking advantage of the flood and bringing in engineers was more of a subterfuge, I mean an idea of whether this might provide a way of doing this, providing an excuse for bringing them in without announcing exactly what the ultimate objective was.

Q: They would be combat engineers, in short.

TRUEHEART: Oh, sure, they would have been that.

(Interruption)

Q: Let's talk about President Diem for a few minutes. What was the state of relations between Diem and the embassy when you arrived? You said there had been some friction, some trouble?

TRUEHEART: I think that it was really quite good. There had been a conscious decision with Kennedy to try to work with him and not try to exert great pressures on him and to encourage him rather than to leverage him. So that I suspect relations were never better or hadn't been better in a long time. On the other hand, the situation had been getting worse and that's why the Taylor mission came out. As I recall it, the VC had captured a province capital for the first time, killed the province chief. But there were obviously differences of opinion about Diem still within the mission, as you mentioned. I think the people who had been there for a long time contained a number who were quite skeptical of the ability of Diem to govern the country or I guess really to win the war, which is what we were all talking about or after. But I felt that I had no way of judging this and I never even tried to form a judgment on that myself for a long time. I accepted that I wasn't sent out there to make judgments about this, I was sent out to help with organizing the embassy and the mission.

Q: Were you chiefly concerned with the internal operation of the mission?

TRUEHEART: Well, the mission of course, at least at this point, included everything, including MAAG and their very big USOM or AID mission. As DCM I had purview of the whole business in that sense. And we must come back to this when we talk about the MACV business, which you wanted to go into. But certainly there were definite people in the CIA -- not [William] Colby I think, but under him -- and in the political section -- incidentally, the head of the political section at the time was Joe Mendenhall who later came out with [Victor] Krulak on that thing. He had been there a long time and he had really worked very hard on trying to develop a counterinsurgency plan of action, which had never been implemented. And I think he was very skeptical of the ability of the government to do anything along the lines that we were thinking about. I don't really recall much about what [Lionel] McGarr's feeling was. He left not too long afterwards. He was ill really at the end of the year.

Q: This was General McGarr, the chief of MAAG, right?

TRUEHEART: Yes. He was the head of MAAG at the time. I believe [Charles] Timmes was his -- was he his number two at that time?

Q: Yes.

TRUEHEART: He was fairly new. And the third officer, a brigadier who went with me on this trip -- suddenly his name has gone out of my head, but he was a very fine officer. I remember

Timmes and him; they were able men. But I didn't have any real feel, at that point, that we had any real plan of action. I don't think we did, frankly. They had certainly in the past pursued -- the military approach of building up these divisions and so on had been I think badly conceived. I'm not sure any of our programs were, in retrospect, well conceived. Anyway, at the time there were certainly doubting Thomases in the mission, in all parts of it.

Q: The popular picture is that the top officials in the mission made an effort to get along with Diem, and that the second and third echelon officials, field men, tended to be very critical and skeptical. Is that too simple a picture?

TRUEHEART: Well, of course the only people dealing with Diem were the top people. I don't think it would be fair to say that the people lower down were trying to undercut what we were doing; they simply intellectually had doubts about whether it was going to work or not, on the basis of their own experiences. And what they were hearing, I think many of them had different contacts from the top people and maybe wider, but for that matter there was no shortage of Vietnamese who were ready to tell you that the Diem administration was hopeless. In fact, it was very hard to find anybody who wasn't a member of the regime, or employed by the government, who would have anything good to say about it. The point was that nobody had much respect for these people either. There was plenty of freedom of speech, all right, in this period, and people were busily buttonholing Americans to tell them what was wrong with the government.

Q: How long did it take you to form some kind of coherent picture of all this?

TRUEHEART: Well, I don't know that I ever formed a coherent picture, but I didn't really come to firm negative conclusions about Diem until the Buddhist crisis long after.

Q: That's later. I don't want to --

TRUEHEART: I think I kept an open mind on this right on through until it seemed to me that we get to that point, which we can deal with later.

Q: Was the strategic hamlet program getting underway about the time that you arrived?

TRUEHEART: A little later. It was the only really you might say strategic concept for dealing with the problem that we ever had, at least during my time there. The credit for it really belongs to the British mission, the Thompson mission.

Q: That's R. K. G. Thompson?

TRUEHEART: Yes. Who I knew very well and was a very close personal friend as well at the time. He had a small group there and they had a concept, which was of course really closely modeled on what they had done in Malaysia. He was an adviser to Diem or to the government, just as we were, in this matter. Of course, he knew that we had all the material ability to carry out anything that might be decided and that his advice would be worthless if it wasn't also agreeable to us. So he spent a lot of time with us, and I have vivid recollections of a meeting that Nolting and I had with him in which he laid out the whole idea of the strategic hamlet program, which he

had, I believe, already presented to Diem. We were very favorably impressed with it. Subsequently we reported this to Washington, and I think people from Washington came out and they were also briefed directly by Thompson. I think there was fairly quickly agreement that this was a sound approach in counterinsurgency. The U.S. military supported it, too. Not to the exclusion of everything else, I think they clearly thought of it as an adjunct to more -- it wasn't our main goal, but they were prepared to do what was necessary, [what] they could do with it, but it wasn't the center of their focus as it was, say, USAID's or as it was in at least my own mind.

Q: Did someone on the mission have particular responsibility for liaison on this program?

TRUEHEART: Well, eventually. In fact, fairly soon, and I think fairly early in 1962 we set up a committee which was actually called the Trueheart Committee, of all things, and I was the chairman of it and we met weekly, or sometimes twice a week, with all agencies, with the idea of reviewing progress in this program. And supposedly, although I never saw the minutes of any of its meetings, there was a parallel committee in the Vietnamese government headed by [Ngo Dinh] Nhu, which was supposedly looking after their side of it. But the connection between these two groups was very tenuous, if it existed at all. But we gradually -- and I'm sure by the time you were there it was much more of this -- were getting USOM advisers in each province and military advisers in each province.

A typical meeting of this committee would be, we'd begin probably by having these two guys up from one province or another and have them report on what the situation was and the problems and how things were going, freely questioning them and so on. Heads of each agency would report how much barbed wire did we get last, all this sort of thing. We never had the kind of statistics that were later developed by [Robert] Komer and all that sort of thing, but we were trying to get some feel for it. We hadn't anything we could really put numbers to very confidently, more or less. But this was perhaps my main job, in a way, was trying to do this. I must say, in 1962 I thought we made a fair amount of progress on this; we reported as much. But it's a pretty subjective feeling, very hard to judge, and I'm not sure in retrospect that we weren't just encouraged by what we were doing, because we were certainly doing a lot. There were a lot of fences being built and all sort of -- I made quite a few trips to the countryside, as did many others. We may have been primarily judging the fact that we were getting on with our program rather than what real effect it was having on cutting off the Viet Cong from the population, which is what we were trying to do. Certainly it collapsed very rapidly in 1963 [inaudible].

Q: Didn't Rufus Phillips become involved in this once?

TRUEHEART: Rufus Phillips was one of the people in the USAID who always attended these meetings. Have you interviewed him?

Q: Not yet.

TRUEHEART: Well, I would. He'd be a very good one to interview and had a lot more knowledge of the country. I would urge you not to skip him. But within AID he was the guy who was primarily responsible for the strategic hamlet program.

Q: He was an old China hand, wasn't he?

TRUEHEART: Well, not so much a China hand I think, but he had been a Lansdale man in the 1954 period and in close contact not only with Diem but with lots of people who were still around, either in the government or outside the government. So he had that sort of rapport that some other people like -- well, another, of course, key man who was not on this committee but with whom I had a lot of dealings was Lucien Conein from the CIA. But he had even longer contacts with the Vietnamese.

Q: He's around town somewhere, isn't he?

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes. He's done a lot of testifying on the coup and whatnot. I suppose that stuff is available in the minutes of the intelligence [committee], the [Frank] Church Committee.

But in any case, this committee had representatives from each agency, and it was a kind of an effort to coordinate the U.S. support for the strategic hamlet program.

Q: Is it fair to say then that the hamlet program as a whole satisfied your committee as to its rate of progress?

TRUEHEART: It did I'd say right on through 1962. We thought we were making real headway. As I say, just what was really happening, I'm not so sure, in retrospect. But at the time, we felt that we were on sound ground in reporting that it was making progress.

Q: What kind of yardstick did you have? You have said so many fences built, so much barbed wire laid and so forth.

TRUEHEART: Well, as I say, it was pretty subjective. It was going out and getting briefed by a province chief and the American advisers and being shown and seeing some of the local dignitaries and whatnot. But what we always thought would be a real test would be if you could say, "Well, okay, here's a province which is pacified, clear, where you can go out day and night and feel safe." Well, I always felt until we could have one of those, we really couldn't be quite sure. We never got anybody ready to say that about any province. Then, as I say, things I think really began to fall apart in 1963. To what extent this was related to the Buddhist matter, I wouldn't say. I doubt if it was. I doubt it.

Q: Now, you've said that 1962, at least from all you could tell, was a pretty good year for the strategic hamlet program. I think that year there were also some developments in the military area; some new equipment had arrived, I think, helicopters in substantial numbers.

TRUEHEART: Yes.

Q: Were you up to date at the time on the impact of this on the military situation?

TRUEHEART: Well, to some degree. There weren't very many battalion-size engagements in

1962 if I remember right. My main recollections of the military side were the problems we had in large measure with the press and so on connected with the introduction of all this equipment, which came in, I recall, on board these converted aircraft carriers which would anchor at the foot of Tu Do Street and unload these things. We were stopped from confirming that they were there because -- this is something, incidentally, which I don't think you've mentioned in your questions but maybe it's worth mentioning here.

In carrying out the Taylor-Rostow recommendations and bringing in this new equipment and bringing in additional people, we were clearly exceeding the limits agreed upon in the Geneva accords and subsequently. Of course, so was the other side. But it was the position of the U.S. government that we were not going to be convicted out of our own mouths of having violated this agreement. We were going to violate it and not make much bones about it, but we were not going to confirm this so that we could later be in effect convicted out of our own mouths in the United Nations or whatever. And for that reason, when a newspaperman would ask, "What's that down at the foot of the street here?" the general answer was "No comment." This was interpreted by them as an effort to conceal from the American public what we were doing. It was in general a very unforthcoming way with the press. But I was certainly very conscious, because it had this political angle, of what we were bringing in and what some of the problems were. I'm bound to say, at least my memory is not good as to what, if anything, I knew about what they were doing with the equipment as they turned it over to the Vietnamese. I knew we were also, of course, flying the Farm Gate airplanes. There were many questions about whether in fact there was always a Vietnamese in the back seat or the front seat or whichever seat he was supposed to be in.

Q: This was a hot political question, was it not?

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That was more than just a technical question. It could have been in terms of the

Q: Didn't they sometimes call the Vietnamese aboard a sandbag?

TRUEHEART: Yes. I think that certainly there were claims that the Vietnamese copilot often had never been off the ground before, much less not being a pilot. That sort of thing arose. This Ap Bac battle which you mentioned, I remember that rather vividly because at the time what's-his-name was out there from the [State Department], Roger Hilsman, and he went on this operation and is an ex-West Pointer. He thought it was just the worst operation he had ever seen.

Q: I didn't know that he observed the Ap Bac battle.

TRUEHEART: He did. Oh, yes.

Q: I see.

TRUEHEART: I'm pretty sure he did. You could look it up in his book but I have an idea he did observe it. In fact I think he may have been even staying with me at my house while he was there. But in any case, this seemed to show that the Vietnamese military operations were not all

they might be, but I don't recall it being -- it was a sort of a flash in the pan as far as I was concerned. I didn't think much more about it.

Q: It got an awfully big play in the press, I think.

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes. But as much as anything I think it got a play because [Paul] Harkins made statements that it was really a victory or something, and this was so patently not the case that it just infuriated the press. So many things that were going on infuriated them. But in any case, I didn't really have a close knowledge of what was going on in terms of training troops and that sort of thing.

Q: I see.

TRUEHEART: When certain operations such as we were talking about were involved that had political angles, things like the use of defoliants and that sort of thing, I was involved with this and have rather vivid recollections of some of it.

Q: Would you tell us about that? What were the questions involved when the proposal for use of defoliants came up, for example?

TRUEHEART: Well, there were two aspects of it: one, clearing ground to make ambushes more difficult, clearing the area around the military installations and so on, which didn't, at least in my mind, raise any serious problems, although I gather that it raised lots of questions back here more about whether this might be interpreted as chemical warfare or something. But it seemed to me on the spot to be a perfectly sensible thing to do, if in fact it was effective in preventing ambushes. I think in practice there was some question whether it was very useful. But the other point on crop destruction, I had very strong views on this against it, again on practical grounds, that it was not effective. If you destroyed crops, the only people that would be hurt would be the non-VC, because you could be sure the VC would get any food that was around to be eaten, and that you were simply going to be alienating the people that you were hoping to have on your side. With no better control over the countryside than you had, there was no way of, in effect, targeting these operations against the VC themselves. And this was I think basically also the view of the Thompson mission.

We once had a meeting on this, because this was something that Diem was very much in favor of doing. I remember one meeting we had with I suppose it would have been Harkins and Nolting and several people perhaps from MACV, and I was along and Diem and I don't know who else on the Vietnamese side. In this meeting Nolting encouraged me to express my view. He didn't agree with me but he urged me to make it known, and I did but it didn't have any effect. Diem, at a very early point, had heard that this was a possibility and was keen to use it. You may have heard there is a new air force historical study on this whole thing. I went down the other day to look at this study to see whether it took my name in vain and found that it didn't.

(Laughter) But I just glanced at the first parts of it; it was that thick, you know.

Q: You mean, they didn't use your name at all or they used it the way it should be used?

TRUEHEART: Didn't use it at all. (Laughter) Well, that's understandable because I think they're working from records of --

Q: Operational --

TRUEHEART: -- official communications of various kinds and I don't think my views were ever recorded anywhere unless they were-

Q: Your dissent went unnoticed as far as the air force is concerned?

TRUEHEART: Yes. But anyway, now I have it on the record.

Q: Good. Well, were there other problems of a similar nature? What about gas, the use of riot control gas?

TRUEHEART: I don't recall that as being an issue that we ever got involved with in the mission itself. The only thing, there was some kind of use of tear gas that burned somebody in Hue or something in this Buddhist business, but that wasn't even American tear gas, as I recall, but some French stuff that the Vietnamese had had on hand. But I don't recall it as being a major issue during the time I was there, nor am I aware that there was much use of it. Bear in mind, I left at the beginning of 1964, and the fighting war was pretty slight up [to that point].

Q: How about Laos? How did the situation in Laos affect the situation in Vietnam? What was their relationship?

TRUEHEART: Well, go back to my first -- this was terra incognita to me. As far as we were concerned in Vietnam, the peace agreement in Laos we felt in effect sort of freed up Laos as a corridor for the VC to move into Vietnam. So that looked at from our rather worm's eye view, we couldn't see anything good about what had happened in Laos. We of course wondered if the thought was for some sort of similar neutralization of Vietnam, in Washington, whether that was contemplated. But these were not things that I thought a lot about; I don't know to what extent Nolting did.

Q: Did the word neutralization have a special meaning where Laos was concerned then? Was it another name for a communist takeover?

TRUEHEART: Well, I think we sort of assumed that would be the end result of it, yes. But I think the conventional wisdom, or some of the conventional wisdom, was that President Kennedy had in effect taken this decision in Laos, but that in having done so and having taken a lot of criticism for having done this, that he was all the more determined not to make similar concessions in Vietnam. Nothing that was going on at that time led us to believe that in fact a similar policy was envisaged for Vietnam. But again, I don't recall that as being a very major topic of conversation.

Q: I had heard from several sources that Diem was very disturbed by the settlement in Laos

because he thought it might be a harbinger of what his fate would be.

TRUEHEART: Well, he may have been, but I don't recall his saying anything about this. But let me say a word about Diem in this, my general impressions of him in the early part of my tour there. I would go along oftentimes with the Ambassador. Sometimes when he was not there or sometimes even when he was there and a distinguished visitor would come through, [we would] take him over to visit Diem. I must say, most of these visits were more or less courtesy calls, but they were unlike any courtesy calls I've ever seen anywhere else. They lasted four hours and more and were always a monologue by Diem, nobody else ever got a word in, and they were always almost the same thing: a long lecture on the history of Vietnam and the history of Ngo Dinh Diem. You literally could go through -- you'd come out of one of these meetings with the chief of state and have absolutely nothing to report, because nothing new had been said. I must have gone to dozens of such meetings and that was all that ever transpired.

Q: Did you develop a kind of a shorthand to describe -- ?

TRUEHEART: We didn't even bother to report them, which I think says more than anything else, considering normally you would make the most extensive kind of a telegram or whatever. But [we had] long since stopped trying to report these meetings.

Q: How did you stay awake?

TRUEHEART: Well, there was a lot of tea provided, and he was always speaking French, which tended to keep me awake trying to make sure I was following him. Of course, this doesn't apply to a few meetings I had with him when I was in charge in the time of the Buddhist crisis.

Q: Did Diem have any English?

TRUEHEART: I think he did understand English quite well, but he never used it. But I think he understood it all right. Of course you know he spent more than a year in this country.

Q: Yes. Now, the military side of the mission was reorganized into MACV --

TRUEHEART: Yes.

Q: -- early in 1962, I believe. What was involved there? What was behind that?

TRUEHEART: Well, let me say first, I think we in the embassy, Nolting himself and I, were very concerned at this, for two reasons, really. One, we thought it tended to overemphasize the military aspects of the problem, which we thought was fundamentally a political problem. Secondly, it meant something very clear in bureaucratic terms about the control of the U.S. operations in Vietnam. Under existing presidential directives, an ambassador had supervisory authority over all U.S. agencies and elements in the country except military commands, which reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the secretary of defense directly. So that one couldn't help feeling that this was in fact a move by the military to get out from under any formal control by the mission. So this, in a fairly simplistic way but I think this is really the guts of it, was very

worrisome to Nolting and he fought it to the extent of coming back to Washington and protesting it. But he did not get any support from the Secretary of State in this, and I think he seriously considered resigning over this issue but in the end decided not to.

But the actual relationship between the Ambassador and MACV was never, as I recall, formally clarified. In fact, Harkins certainly deferred in every sort of protocol way to the Ambassador, and I think they in fact got on very well together and so forth. But I don't think there was ever really during this period -- and perhaps not ever, but certainly not in this period -- the clear authority that the chief of mission had let's say in the time of [Ellsworth] Bunker. Although I'm bound to say, when Lodge came there was no question at all about who was in charge. This was a matter of his own-

Q: So there was worry in the mission?

TRUEHEART: Yes, worry that this was in effect going to militarize this problem and seek a military solution, which we felt was not the way to go.

Q: Did that happen to any extent during your tenure there?

TRUEHEART: Well, no, because -- well, yes, to some extent because, after all, the military became much more numerous and so on. And I have a feeling that in the 1963 period, when the military clearly did not agree with what we were doing in terms of -- by the military I mean Harkins and so on -- the kind of pressures we were putting on Diem about the Buddhist business, there was a lot of effort to undermine what the civilian mission was doing.

Q: In what way?

TRUEHEART: Well, I don't think I can document this very well. I think you'll find, though, that in the coup period, about the first of September to the first of November, there were back-channel things going on. Perhaps in that way we were not giving a clear-cut signal to the Vietnamese as to whether we were all together. But I can't really document this; it's more of a suspicion than anything else.

Q: Okay. As I recall, there was an attempt on Diem's life early in 1962, in February.

TRUEHEART: Yes.

Q: Should we attach a lot of importance to that subsequently?

TRUEHEART: No, I don't think so. It happens that I was in Bangkok when this happened. But we thought of it at the time, since nothing else happened, as a sort of isolated act. And nothing else occurred. There it was, sort of in between two different things. There had been the real coup attempt in what, 1960, and then you had the 1963 period when something seemingly more minor than this occurred and had lots of repercussions. So it just didn't seem to have any connection with anything else and didn't provoke anything else. So I didn't at the time and don't now attach any significance. Never heard anybody else make much of it.

Q: I'd heard that Diem forbade any airplane to take off carrying bombs for a time.

TRUEHEART: Well, yes, I think that's true, that no five-hundred-pound bombs could take off without written permission from him. But I don't think I knew that at the time. I suspect that somebody in MACV knew about it.

Q: I think the press got wind of it.

TRUEHEART: Yes. But I didn't know it and I don't to this day know whether it's true or not. But it certainly would have been in character I think.

Q: Now, in July there was one of many conferences in Honolulu.

TRUEHEART: July 1962?

Q: July 1962, right.

TRUEHEART: I think I went to that.

Q: Okay. I was going to ask you.

TRUEHEART: Did I, do you know?

Q: Well, I have here that Secretary [Robert] McNamara went, General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting. I haven't been able to establish whether you went to that one or not.

TRUEHEART: I think I did, but I don't think I took any active part in it, but I think I was there.

Q: Well, I know that they announced that there had been considerable progress made, that the strategic hamlet program was going great guns. And I just wondered if you had participated in it.

TRUEHEART: Well, I might have said a word or two, but I don't recall it. But certainly, as I've told you, that would have been my feeling at the time.

Q: Okay. Then General Taylor came over in September, I believe, and visited and he made a similar assessment. The point I'm coming to is that Senator [Michael] Mansfield came over late in 1962 -- I don't have an exact date -- and he reported that the situation was worse than it had been in 1955, which on the face of it sounds rather contradictory. But I'm not sure if that had any repercussions in the mission.

TRUEHEART: I remember the Mansfield visit very well but for somewhat peculiar reasons.

Q: Well, tell us about that.

TRUEHEART: We had this meeting with his group, which included a number of people from the Foreign Relations Committee, including, as I remember, Senator [Claiborne] Pell, who is incidentally, you may know, an ex-Foreign Service officer and somebody I had known before he was in the Senate. At some point in this sort of go-around; rather informal session, although Mansfield tended to be pretty formal in any meeting of this kind, Pell said, "Well, look, what about this?" We were talking about support for Diem rather than talking about the progress of the strategic hamlet program or whatever, and Pell said, "What about this? What do you think, if there were an election in Vietnam today, how would Diem come out?" And for some reason Fritz, Ambassador Nolting, said, "Why don't you answer that, Bill?" (Laughter) I said, "Well, you know, I'm not sure that's a meaningful question because I honestly think that if you really went out in the boondocks of this country I'm not sure that half the people know who Diem is, if you really mean the peasants." This was not said in levity, but I think that Mansfield may have thought I was making light of this and he was rather irritated by this. I think Pell was maybe more so, but anyway, he said, "Well, I don't take that. Diem has been head of this country for a long time" and so forth, and we went on to other subjects.

But why I mention this is because I recall then that we saw them all off at the airport a few days later. Meanwhile, of course, Mansfield has been talking to a lot of other people, including, I'm sure, a lot of the press there. We were all standing around in a big circle there, and Mansfield walked all the way across the room, came up, shook my hand, and he said, "I think you're right." (Laughter)

Q: You mean he had confirmed your view?

TRUEHEART: He had come to the same conclusion but it was -- and maybe he was thinking I was going to vote for him sometime, but I don't think [so]. But I think what happened with Mansfield was that he had talked to a lot of people in the lower ranks of the mission probably, and above all I think he'd talked to a lot of the press. Of course, he was a very astute man and he had been following this situation a very long time. I don't know if -- did he say compared with 1955?

Q: He said it was worse than 1955, yes.

TRUEHEART: Yes. Well, in many senses it obviously was. I mean, if you took it in terms of the VC situation in the country, it was much worse then. I think that the popular support for Diem was certainly markedly less by this time than it had been in 1955.

Q: To what would you ascribe that in general?

TRUEHEART: Well, two things: one, of course, the real Hanoi effort to reactivate the VC and so on didn't really get under way until about 1960. Certainly in 1955, when there hadn't even been the 1956 proposed election there [?]. So that's one thing, there hadn't been the time. In 1955 they might even have thought they would have an election or something. And then the other thing, of course, was that Diem had just been around in effect mismanaging things for a long time by this [time], and even if he had been doing better than he had been, I think he would still have -- any leader is likely to have lost a lot of support, [even] if he's been doing anything useful,

in that length of time.

Q: There's a lot of controversy over the useful things that Diem had been doing. Was there any flavor of that left over, his supposedly oppressive methods and techniques for consolidating his power?

TRUEHEART: You mean like the treatment of the Cao Dai and that sort of thing?

Q: Yes.

TRUEHEART: I wasn't aware of it. It wasn't a major thing that I could detect, but I wasn't very knowledgeable about the situation. But those particular sects were pretty well confined to two provinces, really, in the Delta area. They weren't nationwide groups and I don't know that they had much following in Saigon at all. Of course the Binh Xuyen, or whatever they were, were more of a criminal group.

Q: What about dissent in general? How did Diem handle dissent?

TRUEHEART: Well, he just didn't tolerate it. And to what extent -- you know, we later discovered that there were a lot of political prisoners in the country, but this was not an active issue until the Buddhist thing when a lot of students and so on got arrested. But I remember after the coup, some people sort of came up out of the ground; they had been in prison for years and there were some real horror tales on this. But this had not somehow -- at least it doesn't stick in my memory that it was a major issue during my time there.

Q: Okay. In 1963, now you've talked about Ap Bac somewhat.

TRUEHEART: Yes, and I've told you all I really have on that.

Q: General Harkins used to call it Oh, My Aching Back.

TRUEHEART: Oh, really?

Q: Yes.

TRUEHEART: But you know, at the end he said that, well, it was a success because the Vietnamese --

Q: Retook the village.

TRUEHEART: -- had reached their objective.

Q: Now in 1963, let me go to April, because I believe it was in that month that Diem announced that he would like the number of Americans in Vietnam reduced. Was there anything significant to that?

TRUEHEART: Well, I saw that [in your questions]. I don't really recall that as something coming directly from Diem. Perhaps it's not worth our discussing, because I don't remember that. I wonder, was it simply one of these stories in the Times of Vietnam that might have been just planted by Nhu or something?

Q: Well, that's conceivable, of course. I think it was a newspaper headline.

TRUEHEART: Because I certainly don't recall that we had an official request at that time. This is early 1963?

Q: Yes, about April, I think.

TRUEHEART: I don't recall we had such a request. I don't have enough -- I could be mistaken.

Q: Okay. I believe it is correct that later in May, about the twenty-second, that President Kennedy announced that we would withdraw some Americans if the South Vietnamese suggested that we did, and I thought that these two things might be related.

TRUEHEART: Yes, as I say, I thought about the same things when I read your questions. But I wonder myself if he was responding to some, in a press conference, question, and that he would naturally say if they want, we [will withdraw Americans]. I just don't recall. I recall a later time when Nhu made some more direct statements of this kind, and for much greater reduction, but that one is one that I don't ring a bell on.

Q: That's fine. It's also about this time that the Buddhist demonstrations I think begin. What's behind that? There was a lot of confusion in the newspapers about what was going on.

TRUEHEART: Well, you know, this has all been written up over and over again and I don't know to what extent I can add anything to it. But you remember they were going to have a celebration of Buddha's birthday. It was forbidden by the local authorities in Hue and they did it anyway, and there was an effort to break it up and shooting and several people were killed and so on. It came as a great surprise to us. I'm not sure we had been aware in the mission that there was to be a [demonstration]. We had a consul in Hue, he may well have reported it, but I don't at this time remember whether we knew that this march was scheduled, had been forbidden, and whatnot. The first we heard about it was when we heard that these people had been killed and there had been quite a to-do. I know that Nolting was quite concerned about it at the time and he made the first approach, as I recall, to Diem about it, urging him to damp it down by doing what you would normally think of doing: investigate, punish the guilty, recompense the injured and whatnot. But he was about to go on his leave and I think he may have feared that this would get out of hand, but I don't think anybody seriously thought that the odds were great that we would develop into anything very serious. The whole idea of the Buddhists was something that had never occurred to us, frankly, that they were a force to be reckoned with or that they even had a position. And I don't think they did. I mean, this simply became a handy umbrella under which all the latent opposition to Diem could gather. Of course, the great majority of the people in Vietnam were nominally Buddhists, all right, but it wasn't a religious matter at all, it was a political matter and dealt with by Diem in a very inept way.

Q: Were we urging him to be conciliatory then?

TRUEHEART: Yes, from the very beginning, I mean, in the sense I'm talking about. And of course more and more urging, because it was undermining, we felt, his position in the country and undermining our support for him. I don't know where you were at the time this was all going on, but the position in this country, as I understood at least from a distance, just made it impossible for Kennedy and the government here to continue to support this kind of oppression of people burning themselves up in the streets. For whatever reason, Diem would simply not do anything -- it was always too little and too late.

Q: When did the Ambassador go on his leave?

TRUEHEART: Well, it must have been in May, late May, I can't remember. But it must not have been too long after this event. I would guess it was -- it was the eighth of May, wasn't it, the big affair in Hue? I would have thought he left two or three weeks after that.

Q: [We were] just beginning to talk about what I take is a very crucial period and very eventful summer of 1963 when Ambassador Nolting went on leave and left you with your hands full in Saigon. Were you dealing directly then with Diem in the manner more or less that Nolting had been?

TRUEHEART: Yes, although I don't think I actually saw Diem more than two or three times directly on this matter. There is something in a piece that came out some time ago, there's something in this book of Mecklin's about seeing him almost daily and all that.

Q: That's John Mecklin's book [Mission In Torment]?

TRUEHEART: Yes. This is a gross exaggeration. I didn't see him more than, as I say, I think probably two or three times. [They were] always rather crucial meetings but they were very short meetings in which I tried to deliver -- I was delivering really on instructions -- rather ominous sort of warnings that he must do something to bring this matter under control because it was undermining our ability to support him. And what we were recommending, really, was the same things we always were, [which] was some acknowledgment that the government had done wrong and offer to compensate and so on. And this was the kind of thing that they would never do.

Q: How did he react to that sort of advice?

TRUEHEART: Just blank.

Q: Stonewall?

TRUEHEART: No argument, no nothing.

Q: What did this do to you in your state of mind and your evaluation of the situation?

TRUEHEART: I concluded, in the course of this, that we couldn't win with Diem because it was clear to me that he was rapidly losing the support of his own people because of this and the way he was handling this. These demonstrations were just growing all over the country. It was also -- I guess I was trying to see it from the Washington point of view, that it was making it impossible for us to support him. You asked in your written questions whether it would have been different if Nolting had been there. Well, it might have been. I don't really think, though, that he would have been able to persuade Diem to do anything about this. He wasn't [able], when he did come back, [to do] anything significant on it.

Q: Let me ask you about the demonstrations. Now, the picture that we got at home was that the big cities were full of unrest and so on.

TRUEHEART: It got worse and worse. The students got involved at a later point and this was particularly alarming, it always is, because these students all have parents and they're usually parents in high positions. But the Buddhists themselves were simply conducting these sort of peaceful sit-downs in the city, in Saigon. Those are the only ones I saw; they were conducting them in other [cities].

Q: How was this affecting the countryside?

TRUEHEART: Well, in terms of the strategic hamlet programs, I'm not sure it affected it much at all. I don't think that there's any showing at all that the communists were involved in this thing. If you mean by the countryside, not Danang and Nha Trang or bigger, My Tho or whatever, but really the real boondocks, again, I'm not sure how much they knew about this or were involved. I think it was primarily an urban business. But the point was that it was affecting the ability of Diem to govern and to conduct any kind of effective operation against the VC, But we know in retrospect that the hamlet situation was deteriorating badly in the Delta particularly during this period, but I don't myself tend to relate this directly to the Buddhist thing. I think it probably relates to defects in the way in which the program was carried out. I mean, it was too many; they were just building hamlets. You didn't go into this, incidentally, but that was our main problem with the Vietnamese side of the hamlet program was that they were not conducted in a systematic ink spot method or whatever, moving from secure areas outward, but just trying to build hamlets willy-nilly, wherever, all over. Nhu never would listen to any advice on this point.

Q: I think you refer to the oil blot concept of spreading security out from a secure area.

TRUEHEART: Yes. Yes. That's what. I think the fact that this began to come apart in 1963, as we think we know now it did, was primarily the result of that rather than being a part and parcel of the Buddhist crisis.

Q: You don't think they're related then?

TRUEHEART: Well, I don't. Perhaps they are, but I don't think so.

Q: Well, that's interesting, because some people do find that a rather facile connection to make.

TRUEHEART: It could be, but I don't see it that way.

Q: Were you getting any feedback from MACV as to what the effect of all this was on the army?

TRUEHEART: Well, we were getting reports from province military people and military province advisers about serious deterioration in the security situation in their areas, particularly in the Delta. And we were also getting, for the first time, efforts by MACV not to let these people report what they were seeing.

Q: How were you getting it if MACV was trying to block it?

TRUEHEART: We were getting it through -- there were other people down there in the provinces as well as [the military]. You'd get it from, say, the AID adviser. I think by this time we had a number of State Department language officers out in the field and [we were] getting it through them. The military people, their counterparts, were talking to them, but they really were not reporting through channels because it wasn't upbeat.

Q: I see.

TRUEHEART: You know how -- you were in the army.

Q: I was, yes, sir.

TRUEHEART: There was very strong pressure at that time in Vietnam on the younger officers to be positive.

Q: Yes. Was John Paul Vann a good example of the dilemma involved?

TRUEHEART: He was one that wasn't as positive as he might have been. But there were some others, and as I say, I know of a couple, but I think there were probably quite a few whose careers were blighted by some really specific efforts to do them in the eye on their reports because they didn't follow the right kind of [line].

Q: Did you ever know a Colonel Daniel Boone Porter? Did he cross your trail at some time in this connection?

TRUEHEART: I think so. Where would he -- ?

Q: He was a senior adviser; he was a corps adviser I believe in what was then III Corps, which was the Delta. He was the boss of John Paul Vann and another lieutenant colonel named [Jonathan] Ladd, I believe.

TRUEHEART: I think I did know him; I must have known him. There were several others that I knew better but -- when did I see that? I think I probably knew him but I don't have any vivid recollection. I'm pretty poor about names.

Q: Well, I thought he might be interesting because he was between General Harkins and Vann, and I understand that he thought a good deal of Vann, which would put him in a very difficult position indeed.

TRUEHEART: Well, Vann was kind of untouchable in a way, partly because I think he was ready to turn in his suit and did do so. But for someone who wanted to make his career in the army, I thought -- the independent approach, as you know, is more difficult.

Q: What dealings did you have with the press during that rather difficult summer?

TRUEHEART: Well, I had a lot of dealings with them, and some rather unpleasant ones, because of course they didn't know what we were doing and always assumed we were not doing enough or not putting enough heat on Diem from their point of view. And there were a couple of physical dustups with the press where I made protests, but not always making them to their satisfaction, at a high enough level or whatever.

Q: Are you referring to a confrontation between [Neil] Sheehan and [David] Halberstam and some of Diem's police?

TRUEHEART: I'm not sure whether I'm thinking about that one or not. I don't think it's [on] that one that this arose. There were quite a few of these things. But as a general observation, I concluded sometime during this same period that these guys' reporting over the time had been a lot more accurate than ours had been, and that's my judgment now. There are a lot of reasons for this, I'm sure, but I don't think that -- and they were certainly a constant problem for the embassy because they made it more difficult for us in our dealings with the government.

Q: The government resented this?

TRUEHEART: Yes. But in fact I think their information and reporting on what was going on in the countryside and in the country was on the whole more accurate than what we were reporting from the embassy.

Q: Does that include both the State Department and the military side?

TRUEHEART: Well, yes. But I don't know to what extent -- I don't feel I know as much about what the military reporting was in any detail, purely military point, but I suspect that it would also apply there. When you're carrying out an operation you're inevitably much more aware of what you're doing than you are of anything else. You're preoccupied with your own actions and the things that are [happening]. And I'm sure you're predisposed to think it's working, if you have any choice in the matter. I think that because their position was what it was, and where they didn't have this same preoccupation, in practice they had a broader view and a better view of what the real situation was than we did.

Q: Now, you said that sometime that summer you concluded that Diem was not the answer, that we couldn't win with him.

TRUEHEART: Yes, I had concluded this long before Nolting came back. And I never changed; I still feel that.

Q: Were there alternatives? That was always the question, of course: yes, Diem is not very good but who else is there?

TRUEHEART: We didn't have any real basis -- there was nobody we could point to and say this guy will do a better job. In fact, most of the people we knew, we'd always said, and even at this point I still would have said, I don't have any guarantee that anybody else will do better but we can be sure that this man will lose. It was that sort of reasoning only and recognizing that it was a chance that you would be moving to something even worse. But if it's not going to work, you don't start putting more money on the table. Of course, I felt this even more strongly in, say, 1965; [I was] bitterly opposed, but wasn't then in any direct involvement. I was bitterly opposed to sending any sort of ground forces into the country, because by that time it seemed to me pretty clear that there wasn't anybody that was going to do a better job than Diem.

Fundamentally the problem was that -- and I came to these conclusions; I don't want to say I felt these when I was there because I don't know just when some of these ideas developed. But I think the problem was that every head of government in Vietnam, starting with Bao Dai and going through Diem and so on, not one of these leaders right on up to [Nguyen Van] Thieu ever really regarded himself as the governor of Vietnam. He regarded himself as administering the country for somebody else. Let me go on. Not one of these people looked for his support, his ultimate support in office, to the people of the country. They all looked to France or to us as the source of their power, and they were administering the country. This is certainly not something that I felt early on; I'm not sure when I came to this conclusion.

But I think this was the basic problem. That being the case, the more we did, in a way, the more that we made this even more true. The more involved the United States became, the more it became impossible for whoever was the nominal ruler of the country to be a real ruler, in fact and in the eyes of the people of the country. So it was a true dilemma. There never was any chance of this thing working, in my opinion now, unless you mean that we were prepared to occupy the country, which I never conceived the United States would support politically, doing something of this kind. Even that might not have worked.

But as I say, I think I was always opposed to any further involvement from the time I left there. By the time I got home -- I took a long way home -- Big [Duong Van] Minh had already been overthrown.

Q: Yes, and [Nguyen] Khanh had --

TRUEHEART: Khanh had taken over. So that I always wondered just how that particular coup took place. I always wondered if in fact our military had any hand in this. But be that as it may, if anybody had any popular support in the country, it was probably Big Minh. But certainly none of the others did.

Q: It sounds like you're saying the trouble with the leaders of Vietnam was that they weren't

politicians.

TRUEHEART: Sure.

Q: In the true sense of the word.

TRUEHEART: That's right. The whole conception of getting their support from the governed which, whatever you may say about the VC, that's where they got it from, by whatever means. This was not something that Diem ever understood. Nhu had some sort of charades that he played with organizations of various kinds, and Madame Nhu had some of hers, but these were shams.

Q: A lot of people who have written on this subject seem to think that the raids on the pagodas in August of 1963 were a sort of a climax, a breaking point of some kind.

TRUEHEART: Oh, well, that's true, that's true. That really cut it as far as we were concerned, because it was obviously trying to pre-empt the situation. It was done between the departure of Nolting and the arrival of Lodge. It was a clear violation of the kind of at least public and private assurances they had been giving within Vietnam and to us. It made it impossible for almost anybody to support [Diem]. It undermined any possibilities of support within this country.

Q: You mentioned that they had been giving us some private assurances. Had they given them to Nolting when he came back?

TRUEHEART: Well, I think before he left that he had been given assurances that they would not do anything of this kind. I can't document that, but I think it is documented somewhere that he was assured that they would not take any violent measures against the Buddhist religion or the movement or whatever. You know, he [Diem] made his public statement about the same time to Maggie Higgins, [which] was something to the effect that his policy of reconciliation with the Buddhists was irreversible, which is kind of an ambiguous, cryptic statement, or so I regarded it, but others took it as meaning this was a great concession on his part. But that was certainly a benchmark in all this. I think that from that point on there was not really any serious effort to get behind Diem again. I mean, we were, from that point on, ready to at least acquiesce in his departure.

Q: What was Ambassador Nolting's frame of mind when he came back into this unsettling situation?

TRUEHEART: Well, he was very upset. I know that he was upset with me, although he never directly said this to me. I've never complained in any way about anything he may have done with me for my career, and I don't want to say anything now about it. It's a very painful thing to me, because we were friends for so many years. He's godfather to both of my children, and I don't have any ill will against him, but I'm sure he's very disappointed. I think he felt that my responsibility during his absence was to him, whereas I felt my responsibility was to Washington when I was in charge during his absence. I did not think that I should be guided during his absence by doing what I supposed he would do. I'm not sure what he would have done. He might

well have done what I did, but I don't know that. In any case, that's about all I want to say on that unless there's something --

Beyond this, the months that followed were months that really were involved with wondering how on earth the U.S. could carry out a policy there.

Q: Now, we have I think a sequence here of three events which go together. The first were the raids on the pagodas, then the departure of Ambassador Nolting.

TRUEHEART: He had departed.

Q: Yes, that's right, he had departed before the raids. Then the arrival of Ambassador Lodge. There's a famous quote I think by Madame Nhu. When she found that Lodge was coming, she was supposed to have said, "They have sent us a proconsul," very distressed at the fact apparently. What changed when Ambassador Lodge arrived? Did the style of ambassadorship change?

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes. It grossly changed. He came out and met in Honolulu with Nolting. He was on his way out. I think he had been planning a sort of leisurely trip from there on. He did stop briefly in Tokyo, but I think he was going to stop longer in Tokyo and maybe elsewhere on the way in. But just at that moment the pagoda raids took place, so he then just flew straight in. Now at this point we had martial law in Saigon and a curfew and so forth and did in fact -- I don't know, perhaps martial law, maybe just a curfew. But in any case, it was a very excited situation indeed, and his plane came in the middle of the night from Tokyo and I guess we went out to meet him.

I must say, I have never seen anybody take over so thoroughly and so well as he did. I was just full of admiration. I have never in all my career seen anybody move into such a complicated, messy situation and take charge so quickly and so effectively. I don't know anything about his later tour out there, but this one was really very remarkable to my recollection.
(Interruption)

Q: [You were saying] Ambassador Lodge took charge very thoroughly.

TRUEHEART: Well, he simply hit the ground running. He made decisions and moved ahead, and he had certainly been well briefed and I think knew what he wanted to do and I think he also had full confidence that he was in charge of everything and he was not going to tolerate any sort of suggestion that he was not in charge. I think he also had a real experience and gift for dealing with the press. He never had any trouble with the press from the time he arrived. Of course, he was always carrying out a policy which was of really extreme pressure on the government, which suited the book of the correspondents for the most part. Furthermore, he saw them regularly. He once was a newspaperman himself and he knew that a newspaperman must have a story to write and he helped them write stories. So that problem sort of disappeared. Then he did other things which really made it very clear that he was the man to deal with.

Q: Did your duties or position or operation change at all?

TRUEHEART: Not really. He was very good with me throughout and seemed to -- from what I've said, I think we were fully in agreement about Diem, for example, so that there was no real problem there. I think he put full faith in me. We can talk about my leaving and so on at some point if you want, and how that came about, but it didn't come about, as far as I know, because of any difficulty with Lodge.

He, in general, adopted the view that having made all these courtesy calls and so forth, and having let the government know what we wanted in general, [that is], about the same concessions we've been talking about, that he didn't have any leverage with Diem or rather he didn't get anywhere with Diem by making demands. He just sat back and said, "I'll wait for him to come to me." And that was the policy which he followed right up to the end. There is some suggestion that Diem may have been just about to get the point when the coup took place on the first of November. You're familiar with that?

Q: Yes. We're going to come to that. I wanted to ask you about the famous telegram of August 24. Were you privy to that when that came in?

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes. This was not long after he got there, of course. The telegram was clear enough and not too surprising, or certainly not unwelcome to Lodge or to me. What was troublesome was this simultaneous radio broadcast on USIA, on the VOA, which was very upsetting because it in effect disclosed what was in the message. I mean, what the broadcast said was that the United States now knew that the army had not been involved in the pagoda raids. It could be read as an open invitation to the army to take over. There were other things in the message that added to that impression. Well, that wasn't the kind of thing you wanted to have happen when you were instructed in this telegram to start making moves covertly which would in effect encourage something like this.

Q: You were quite afraid that VOA had tipped your hand then?

TRUEHEART: Well, yes. And worse than that, this all happened on the morning we were all going to go over to the palace to present his credentials. I think I'm not wrong about this. I think it was I who suggested to Lodge that he leave Harkins -- not just Harkins but [John] Richardson as well -- home. Their presence wasn't required for such a thing. I was certainly sufficiently concerned that these things might lead Diem to hold us or something in the palace. So he did this -- this has been reported; I don't think they usually mention that Richardson was also left behind. In fact, of course, nothing like that happened. The fact that there were differences of opinion back here about the clearance of the message, I have no firsthand knowledge of that. In the end, of course, nothing happened as a result of this particular episode. But in the end, it just sort of petered out. The military never felt I guess they had themselves organized well enough to move.

Q: Although I think one of them had contacted Conein already.

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes, we had been in touch with them all right. If I'm not mistaken, at this point Harkins also had a meeting with [Tran Thien] Khiem in which this thing was touched on. But in fact nothing happened. I don't know why. I think it's conceivable that the generals were

not -- if it wasn't that they were not ready to act, maybe they were not sure enough that we were really behind this, that this wasn't in some way perhaps a trap. In any case, nothing did come of it.

Q: There were two fact-finding missions to Vietnam that fall, two notable ones that I remember.

TRUEHEART: This is after the coup?

Q: No, this was between August and the coup, I think September and October. Now, one of them was one that you've alluded to previously. This is the Krulak-Mendenhall mission. Were you involved in the fact-finding and opinion-gathering that went on then?

TRUEHEART: Well, you know, Mendenhall stayed with me while he was in Saigon. We talked and I'm sure I told him everything I knew, what I thought, and he talked to as many people as he could talk to in the time allotted. He had many contacts there, having been in the country for, I don't know, I think he did a three or four-year tour there. He went and talked to people whose opinion he judged, but he didn't -- he wrote his own report, I think, on his way home. But from what I know of it, his report would have been very much what I would have reported.

Q: Well, I think it was, and I think then General Krulak gave such a contradictory report one wonders who was General Krulak getting his information from.

TRUEHEART: I think he said at the time he'd talked only to the advisers.

Q: But if the advisers had been sending or wanting to send discouraging reports, how do we account for that? How do we account for -- ?

TRUEHEART: Well, they wouldn't tell Krulak. I think on another one of these visits out there, at one point McNamara came. I think this is one of the things that Lodge did was to get him aside and talk to him. He had him stay with him. I think this is true. He said, "You can't possibly imagine" -- Lodge, after all, was a reserve major general -- "You don't know the army, Bob, if you think that these people are going to tell or say in front of Harkins or anybody on Harkins' staff what they really think unless it's what they think Harkins thinks. You just don't know your army." Now, maybe that's unfair to the army -- I hope it is -- but that was the problem. Plus the fact that I think it's very hard for somebody who's doing something not to tend to think, well, it's working. You naturally feel this way, whatever you do yourself.

Q: Were we making a mistake in having the people who were responsible for the program also measure the progress of the program?

TRUEHEART: Well, yes, always to some degree, sure. But this kind of visit, you know, I think that so much of this was just wheel-spinning anyway. I mean, when you couldn't make up your mind what to do, you'd always send another team out to Vietnam to talk to the same people, ask the same questions, and go back.

Q: Have you read the account of Krulak and Mendenhall reporting to President Kennedy?

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes, I've read about it and his asking "Were you two gentlemen in the same country?" and so on. Of course, I can't remember, I think Mecklin was back on this same trip, wasn't he, and maybe Rufus Phillips.

Q: I think that was --

TRUEHEART: Was that a little later on?

Q: They brought them back I think, yes, to report.

TRUEHEART: I think they brought back people to report. Anyway, that's about all I know on that.

Q: Were you aware of what Mecklin and Phillips were going to say when they got back?

TRUEHEART: No, no, I wasn't. But I could guess. Mecklin I think reported that he recommended we be prepared to send in the marines or something, or send in troops. I don't think I knew he felt that. But I knew very well what Phillips thought was happening.

Q: And of course he'd be talking about the same countryside that General Krulak had been talking about.

TRUEHEART: Sure. And I think he probably said that these people would not tell Krulak what was really going on. I'm not sure, too, whether Krulak didn't spend more time in the north than in the Delta where the situation was, we thought, the worst.

Q: All this time, of course, we know now that the Vietnamese generals were gradually getting their act together to do the deed. Were we able to stay abreast of that in any way or only at intervals?

TRUEHEART: Well, we were very close to the generals through particularly Conein but also through a guy named Speera and-

Q: How do you spell that?

TRUEHEART: Speera, S-P-E-E-R-A. He was also with the agency. And of course one or two of them were close friends of Rufus Phillips, Le Van Kim for example. And of course people like Dick Stilwell were close to them, too, but just to what degree he would ever go outside the military sort of a discussion, I'm not sure. But of course Dick certainly knew all about what was going on in this area and what reports we were getting,

Q: Doesn't this put you in a rather delicate position here, to be aware of a coup, or the possibility of a coup, and at the same time supposed to be maintaining relations with Diem? It seems to me that questions of loyalty and ethics become very difficult to deal with about what is your duty in a situation like this.

TRUEHEART: Well, I think so. I think there's no doubt about that and I have not only a lot of questions nowadays about the basic ethics of it, so to speak, as I do about the efficacy of it. My general judgment, not just on Vietnam but I've had lots of experience in this area, having been involved with State Department approval of covert operations in a very broad way, I'm inclined to think that over time these operations have cost this country far more than we have ever achieved from them. But I think in this case and by this time, the kind of concerns you mentioned were greatly offset by the feeling that we had been had by these people. So that I think we felt we had maybe a broader commitment than to Diem, we had a commitment in effect to the Vietnamese people obviously, and to do anything to perpetuate this Diem regime was not in the interests of Vietnam or the United States.

Of course once we had listened to these generals, then we had a commitment to them in the sense that -- well, I think at one point the question was raised. I think Lodge said we couldn't stop this thing; it had gone beyond the point where it could be stopped. Washington didn't want to accept this. Basically the only way to have stopped it might have been to tell Diem and that could perhaps have stopped it, but it would have been to undermine any possibilities.

Q: Where did John Richardson, what was his position in the middle of all this?

TRUEHEART: Well, first of all, I think Richardson, to begin with, was inclined to support Diem and Nhu, and he had closed a definite deal with Nhu. I mean, over the years the CIA station chief had had a regular meeting with Nhu. Colby had them and Richardson had them, and they reported fully to us as well as to Washington on what was transpiring at these meetings. The agency also supported, in a technical way and financially, these special forces of Nhu's. Now, I think that long before we got to the final chapter of this thing, Richardson had concluded that there was no real turning back and we had to go through with the support of a coup. The reason he was removed, and I don't know this by Lodge's having told me in so many words, but I think the reason Richardson was removed was simply to make it very clear really to Diem and Nhu as well as, maybe even more importantly, to the military, that Lodge was speaking for the government. This close relationship between the chief of station and Nhu, which was sanctioned and had a long history, was bound to lead people on the Vietnamese side to wonder if we had two policies out there. I'm sure a lot of Americans may have felt the same thing. I don't; I'm confident that Richardson was an absolutely 200 per cent loyal follower of policy and was not double-crossing anybody. I don't believe Lodge thought he was. But I think Lodge did it for this reason: this was a clear signal, the only kind of really believable signal he could give. But this, as I say, is conjecture; Lodge never told me this.

Q: The press, of course, conjectured that Richardson was sent home because there was a disagreement over policy toward Diem.

TRUEHEART: I don't believe that's the case. There may have been at one time, but Richardson was not only a man who carried out his instructions, but I think if he -- he might well have thought to handle it differently, but by the time he was sent home he was not arguing we should be doing something different, and his own people were the key players in the whole affair.

Q: Right. Right. Did you have any indication to back up the rumor that Nhu, or maybe Diem,

was in touch with the other side during the fall?

TRUEHEART: No, and I really think that was a lot of horseshit, frankly. Correct that in the transcript.

Q: (Laughter) We'll let you remake that one.

TRUEHEART: No, I never took that seriously. I am doubtful that he would try, but I don't think the VC would have given him the time of day.

Q: Shall we just ascribe that to the Saigon rumor mill then?

TRUEHEART: Well, no, I think it's very likely something he would put out, you know.

Q: Disinformation.

TRUEHEART: Yes, or something. Like demanding withdrawal of Americans and this kind of thing. It's a --

Q: A bluff, perhaps?

TRUEHEART: Well, you know, we had this other famous meeting, which I was present at, not very long before the coup, and he was sounding off about how weak his brother was and so forth. I think he was quite ready to confuse people, do anything, say anything.

Q: Let's talk about the coup. Of course it's been widely written about and so on, but I was wondering if you had any special personal recollections that you would like to get into the record here.

TRUEHEART: One thing, I went to the Philippines for about eight days, I think, just before the coup for a physical and a little bit of R&R and got back two or three days before the coup. And there were a number of things that went on in those days between the mission and the generals and so on that I've only -- I wasn't around when they were going on. In general I think I was kept cut in on everything that was happening and did a lot of the intermediary work myself.

But as far as the coup is concerned, my recollection is that we were sort of expecting something, but I remember going home for lunch, as we did every day. My driver dropped me off and went on to have lunch himself, and he lived near the police station, I think it was. Instead of having lunch, he came straight back and said that the army or soldiers were taking over the police station. Well, it was clear to me what this meant, so I then didn't finish my lunch and went over to Lodge's house, which was a half a block away. He was having lunch. And I told him it would seem to me the coup had started. No other explanation for it. He was slightly skeptical. I said I thought I'd go on back to the office. We had at that time very good communications between the residence and the chancery. I suggested maybe the best thing to do would be for him to stay there and I would go to the embassy and we'd keep in touch on the phone, or if one of us got cut off,

the other one could -- and he did and that's what happened.

So I went to the office and we then set up a system of reporting. By this time there were a lot of other reports of the same kind. And we set up a system of sending single channel messages. We actually used the CIA communications channel, but they were all distributed throughout Washington, one series of flash messages. [There was] only one break as I recall in the whole time; the air attaché sent a message about he'd gotten a report from somebody that a division sympathetic to Diem was moving up from somewhere. I think it was an erroneous report, but he sent it through his channel and it created sort of a flurry back here. But otherwise we had I thought a very good thing. This went on for twenty-four hours practically, because the coup wasn't over until noon the next day.

At some point in the afternoon Diem called, or somebody was calling for Diem, to speak to Lodge. I referred them and gave them the number of the residence, and he [Lodge] talked to them. And that message, that conversation, has been -- where after talking to him, he telephoned to me and dictated the telegram of what he had said to him.

Of course, there was a lot of shooting during the coup and some bombing. A lot of the trajectories, a lot of the artillery was right over the chancery into the palace yard, which was a sound I was not unfamiliar with, but I was pretty sure they weren't shooting at us. (Laughter) Someone said during that -- and this has been reported, too -- particularly when they finally brought some infantry up to move into the palace grounds, "I wish they would fight like this against the VC." (Laughter)

Of course, we were very lucky as a mission there because we had people scattered all over the city. My own wife was at home with the baby, and the other son happened to be at a friend's house and he stayed there. We had lots of discussions about whether we ought to try to assemble people or move them to a safe place, and in the end we didn't do anything because we didn't think we could improve on their safety. But I daresay if anybody had been hurt we would have been blamed for it.

As I say, my recollection was about that except that of course after the coup was over, you asked in your questionnaire what was the reaction. Well, the reaction was just Mardi Gras practically, tremendous excitement and a celebration in the streets, people marching around, the usual -- as quite often that happens. But there was great jubilation amongst the people. Whether they knew that Nhu and Diem had been killed, I don't know.

Q: Could Lodge have been elected president of Vietnam? He said he could have been elected that day if he had run for office.

TRUEHEART: Well, I think in Saigon, yes.

Q: How did you react to the news of the assassinations of the two brothers?

TRUEHEART: Well, I was sorry to hear it, but I wasn't awfully shocked and I certainly wasn't too surprised.

Q: Was that because this is a relatively common ending for a coup?

TRUEHEART: No, I mean I think we had always thought, and I think maybe reported long before, that it would be a very likely concomitant of a coup in Vietnam, particularly because of what had happened in 1960 when the coup had half succeeded. [If Diem and Nhu were killed] then they wouldn't be able to rally other forces and so on. And I think these people would have all feared that even if they got out of the country or something, that they would be a threat. So I think we were asked at one time what we thought would -- I guess it was long before there was any idea of any involvement of the U.S. -- but in the event of a coup, what would be the fate of [Diem and Nhu]. I think we said that we thought that it would have to be considered a very strong possibility that they would be killed just for the reasons I've just given.

Q: There were some reports that President Kennedy was shocked.

TRUEHEART: Well, I dare say he was, but I don't know. I'm sure that everybody had different feelings about it.

Q: Who did it, do you think?

TRUEHEART: I don't [know]. I've read all these things that you've read. I don't have any knowledge of them. I suppose one of those people who were on the APC did it, but whether he did it under orders, I just don't know. I think Conein thinks that -- he's been told various things and he's reported them -- you've probably seen him -- but I have never had any independent information about it.

Q: Did we have any way of knowing what effect the coup would have on the conduct of the war and the insurgency and conditions in the countryside? Was there any way to prognosticate that?

TRUEHEART: Well, I didn't know of any. It was more that you could figure they couldn't get any worse. Or maybe that they were not likely to get any worse. I certainly didn't have -- there was nobody out there that you had great faith would be a better administrator or anything like that. You did have the feeling that, by this time at any rate, the Ngo family had really only one objective, [that] is to stay in power.

Q: Now, the picture that I have been able to form between the time of the coup and the time of the next coup, if you will, is rather confused. It's very hard to tell what's going on from this end. Was it pretty much that way in Saigon, too, when the new regime is attempting to take the reins?

TRUEHEART: You mean after the coup? After the overthrow of Diem?

Q: Right. Right. When Minh and his crew came in.

TRUEHEART: I'm not sure what they were doing, but I think they were trying to get organized to do something. But I don't think, first of all, that they had ever had any faith in the strategic hamlet program.

Q: Why do you say that?

TRUEHEART: Well, because at least during the few months that remained while I was there, I don't think they tried to pick it up or carry it forward. After all, they were military people, and the military had never been very much involved with this program, and I don't believe they were convinced that it was a -- I think they thought it was some toy of Nhu's. And I think also they were very reluctant even to use that name for it, if it was going to be continued, because the name was associated, they thought, in the minds of the people with Diem and Nhu.

So I don't think they had any particular strategic conception of how to deal with the problem of the VC. I remember one of the things they wanted to do was a reconciliation with the Cao Dai, for example. I remember going down on a trip, all the way in a Vietnamese helicopter, from Saigon to whatever the capital of that province was. There was a big welcoming ceremony by the local Cao Dai, and they considered this a big political step, reconciliation of the government with the Cao Dai. They were saying in effect that the Cao Dai can really control this province and there won't be any problem with the VC because of this. So I don't think they had any central conception of what to do about the problem, but I think they certainly weren't ready to pick up and carry forward with the program that we had thought was central to the whole thing.

Bear in mind, I'm talking about -- I was there in November, December, and I left in January, so I don't -- and then they had a coup at the end of January or something. So it's a confused picture to me, too, but I think in general it was a confused situation. Also I think they were trying to sort out how they were going to organize the government and who was going to do what to whom and so on.

Q: Now, in the middle of this, in December, Secretary McNamara came back-

TRUEHEART: Yes.

Q: -- obviously trying to figure out what is going on in fact, is that it?

TRUEHEART: Well, I guess. I have an idea that he came out also to talk, at that point, about maybe some actions against the North, bombing or something. I may be mistaken about this but I seem to recall that this was at least one of the subjects discussed. My recollection is that at one point I expressed the opinion I thought that we might be more vulnerable to this in a way than the North was because I was thinking about our oil supply dumps and whatnot, which I thought might be very vulnerable to VC action and that sort of thing, and that before we moved up we ought to be pretty sure we could protect ourselves. Bear in mind, we had nothing but advisers in Vietnam at this time and I'm sure our own supply lines and so on were much more vulnerable and limited than they later became. But it's just my rather vague recollection of how this brief exchange with McNamara leads me to believe that this topic came up during that visit. It certainly would have been the last chance I ever had to say anything to him on that subject.

But by that time I was really packing up to go. You asked that question, let me fill that in and make sure you get it. What had happened was that sometime in the fall at about the time that

Lodge arrived or a little after Lodge arrived, I had a letter from Hilsman asking me if I would come back to Washington and be the officer in charge of Vietnam affairs, or the deputy assistant secretary for Vietnam, in his office. I had had my two years there and it would have been normal tour, and I asked Lodge and he said, "If you want to, if it's a step up, why, yes, I'll agree to it," and we then talked about who might replace me. In fact, I helped him pick out somebody that he asked to come, David Nes.

But of course this all was laid on before the coup and before the assassination of Kennedy. I think it's clear that Johnson had opposed, to what degree I don't know, the whole business of unseating Diem and so forth. I think he was, and I think the military were clearly anxious to see me out of there. So that I believe while the thing developed in the way I said, I think by the time I left there were various people who were keen for me to go sooner rather than later. Lodge wanted to take a brief holiday up in Hong Kong and didn't want me to leave until after he had had that and came back. This was agreed to but it meant my staying on for another two or three weeks. Anyway, by the time I got back to Washington they had reorganized the State Department in such a way that I took over not Vietnam, but Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma. What I used to say [was that] I got the dominoes. But I never had anything to do with Vietnam except in an indirect way in trying to avoid encroachments into Cambodia or Laos, or whatever, after I came back.

Q: It's alleged that that was done on purpose, that --

TRUEHEART: As I say, I assume it was done on purpose. Are you saying I'm -- ?

Q: No, no, that they took Vietnam out of the Southeast Asia thing because you were taking over Southeast Asia.

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes, I assumed that.

Q: Oh, I see, all right.

TRUEHEART: I'm sure they did, although you could make out a case that it had become such a busy job that it would make sense to leave it in one, but they could have put me in charge of the Vietnam task force rather than [the rest of Southeast Asia]. No, I think it was very clear what they were trying to do. I never was under any misapprehensions about that.

Q: I see. Were you able to brief your successor, David Nes?

TRUEHEART: Yes, because he came out -- actually, now that you mention it, he came out with McNamara on that December trip. I think David was then -- was he in Paris? In any case, McNamara I think maybe had flown out from Europe. Anyway, David got on that plane and he came with him. So, yes, I was able to brief him and he was able to see the house and things like this and we made all sorts of arrangements about his sending my dog back and getting my -- I brought back my number-one boy and so on. So, yes, I was able [to brief him], but he did not hit it off with Lodge and only lasted about six months, I think. Of course, Lodge himself came back for the campaign in the next year.

Q: What happened to Nes? I haven't been able to find his tracks.

TRUEHEART: He lives in Baltimore. He later went to Cairo as number two. He was there when the embassy was evacuated. He was quoted by a newspaperman, I've forgotten now exactly what he said, but it was something rather contrary to policy, and he left the service not long after. He was very unhappy about our Middle Eastern policy. That's more of his area, incidentally, than again the Southeast Asia business. But Lodge had met him once when he was in the United Nations and I knew Nes.

Q: The conventional wisdom, if you will, is that Nes tried to do too much and that Lodge didn't want an activist deputy chief of mission.

TRUEHEART: Well, I've heard something of the same thing. I think perhaps that there were people in Washington who thought that somebody needed to keep an eye on Lodge. Nes may have had some sort of a hidden brief and this would be certainly -- if Lodge even thought something like this he would --

Q: Somebody in the White House thought this, perhaps, that -- ?

TRUEHEART: Or somewhere, I don't know. But in any case, Nes had an introduction to the job which was unprecedented; he had a laying on of hands at the White House from LBJ. You might want to talk to Nes. I can tell you how to get hold of him. But in any case, I have heard that, for example, the committee, the so-called Trueheart Committee, which is what they used to call it, I believe he was never allowed to have such a committee. There may have been other problems, but I don't know what they are. I dare say he'd be glad to talk to you.

Have we covered our thing?

FREDERICK ERNEST NOLTING, JR.
Ambassador
Vietnam (1961-1963)

Ambassador Frederick Ernest Nolting, Jr. was born in Virginia in 1911. He graduated from the University of Virginia in 1933 with a B.A. In 1940 he earned his M.A. from Harvard University and two years later he earned his Ph.D. He served in the United States Navy from 1942 to 1946. He joined the Foreign Service in 1946, and worked closely with NATO. He served in Washington, DC, Paris and Vietnam. Ambassador Nolting was interviewed for the LBJ library by Ted Gittinger in 1982.

Q: Ambassador Nolting, would you begin by telling me if there was anything that could be considered a legacy that Ambassador [Eibridge] Durbrow had left for you to inherit?

NOLTING: Yes. I think the legacy was one of some tension and misunderstanding between the American mission and the government of South Vietnam under President [Ngo Dinh] Diem. There had been pressure on Diem to get rid of his brother [Ngo Dinh] Nhu-

Q: Oh, that early?

NOLTING: That early, before I got there. There had been disagreements on other matters, but for the most part Ambassador Durbrow, who is a friend of mine and helped me a great deal in our brief meeting in Honolulu on my way out there to succeed him, felt, I believe, that these disagreements were minor compared to the over-all question of trying to establish stability in South Vietnam. So that one of the things that I was instructed to do was to try through conciliation to gain the confidence of the government in the intentions of the United States to stick with them. That, of course, was greatly reinforced within two weeks of my arrival by Vice President Johnson's strong stand and strong statements in the communique that came out of his visit there.

Q: That was the visit when he referred to President Diem as the Churchill of Asia I think, wasn't it?

NOLTING: Yes, and in several toasts as the Franklin Roosevelt, referring as he did in context to the recent elections of Diem, which were in April of 1961, in which he got about 90 per cent of the votes.

Q: That's fairly usual in that part of the world, isn't it? I think --

NOLTING: Well, yes. Yes. But the charge which was leveled -- these were United Nations supervised elections, whatever that might mean; it surely doesn't mean everything that it implies. But [it means] at least certain supervision of the fairness of the elections. Nevertheless, most of the press interpreted the elections as another indication of an undemocratic system on grounds that no other democracy and no other candidate for president had ever gotten that percentage of the vote.

Q: Who was chief of MAAG when you arrived? Was that General -- ?

NOLTING: General Lionel McGarr.

Q: McGarr, right.

NOLTING: A very fine man in my opinion. He was a military person and perhaps, how shall I say, not as diplomatically inclined as some military men. But I liked General McGarr very much; I have a high regard for him. He was, however, transferred and I remember General [Maxwell] Taylor telling him so in rather brutal terms.

Q: Do you recall the occasion for that?

NOLTING: Yes, it was at the time of the Taylor-Rostow mission.

Q: That would have been the fall of 1961.

NOLTING: Fall of 1961 or late summer. It was a question of visiting, of having an appointment with President Diem. General Taylor was staying with us and Walt Rostow was, too. General McGarr was there when the cars were going to the President's office, and as I recall, General Taylor turned to General McGarr and said, "General, we won't be needing you here," which was rather abrupt.

Q: Do you have any insight as to what was behind that?

NOLTING: Well, I'm sure the decision had been made that General McGarr would be transferred, but so far as I know he hadn't been previously notified.

Q: It seems to me that he would not have served what would be considered a normal tour of duty in his station at that time. He came in late 1960 I believe, so he would have been there just over a year.

NOLTING: I've forgotten when he [came]. Yes. He had a very good record and experience in Korea. I believe at the time his second-in-command -- (Interruption) -- was then Charles Timmes, who was I believe major general at that time. Wonderful person, very good, had an excellent touch with the Vietnamese, both military and civilian, and did a great deal in the training field particularly. Charlie was himself a man of all trades in the military and was excellent. He and General McGarr overlapped. When MACV was created and Paul Harkins came in, General McGarr left, was succeeded in effect by Harkins at a more elevated level, and Charlie Timmes stayed on as the head of the MAAG.

Q: The advisory effort, is that accurate?

NOLTING: Yes. Military Advisory Group. You see, we had had a MAAG there since 1954, and then it was elevated to MACV in 1962.

Q: Right. Of the many stories that appeared in the press and in books and various sources about alleged dissension within the U.S. Mission over the Diem regime, its viability, Diem's suitability, have any struck you as being particularly meritorious or with substance, or are they all, to your mind, meretricious?

NOLTING: You mean the criticisms?

Q: Yes, sir.

NOLTING: Well, I hate to brand everything, including stuff I haven't read, as being wrong and incorrect, but I can answer that question in general terms. In my opinion the criticisms were for the most part 90 per cent unfounded and incorrect. Does that answer your question?

Q: I think it does, especially when combined with what you've said in your Kennedy interviews, yes, I think it does.

The Taylor-Rostow mission, which came in the fall of 1961 -- and there has been much commentary about that particular thing -- they recommended a number of steps, two of which seem to have aroused more controversy even though they were not adopted. One of them was that a contingent of U.S. combat troops, I think combat engineers, be introduced into the Delta under the rather transparent cover of flood relief.

NOLTING: Right.

Q: But everybody knows that combat engineers are also infantrymen.

NOLTING: And they were supposed to be a self-contained unit.

Q: Right. The other was that we should look more closely at military punishment or retribution against the North for its support of the insurgency in the South. Now, these were not adopted at the time. The President did not accept those.

NOLTING: President Kennedy --

Q: That's correct.

NOLTING: -- turned them down, yes.

Q: Were you consulted about these two measures?

NOLTING: Not on the force, the engineers battalion in the Delta. That was added after Max Taylor and Walt Rostow left Saigon. We had conferred on many, many things to be in their report in Saigon or elsewhere in Vietnam, because we toured the country. In Saigon, as I recall -- excuse me, in Honolulu, they stopped to write up all of this for their report to the President.

Q: Or was it Baguio? Wasn't it Baguio?

NOLTING: Maybe it was Baguio, yes. They added this provision for the self-contained American combat-engineering force. I was not consulted on that. When the word got back after they'd gotten to Washington, I was very dubious about it. I cannot recall whether I commented directly to Washington on it, but I think I did. My general comment was that the parts of the report that had been discussed in Vietnam I was in thorough accord with, this new addition I was not. And I'll tell you the reasons for that. It stemmed back to a conviction which I had reinforced often with other people and particularly with President Diem, that American combat forces would lead to a shuffling off of responsibility by the Vietnamese Army and by the Vietnamese people onto the much stronger, better equipped Americans. Diem didn't want that. He said often to me, "If we can't win this struggle on our own with our own manpower, but with your valuable support in materiel and advice, it won't be a viable victory." He did not want American combat forces. That was one reason.

The other reason I think was because it was a thin cover. After all, as you know as a veteran of Vietnam, there was a flood in the Mekong practically every year, and this wasn't anything unusual. To try to bring in American combat forces contrary to the agreements, Geneva Accords of 1954, was to me to invite an international argument on just who had violated what and so forth. Up to that time it was clear that the violations of the 1954 Accords on Vietnam were principally, if not altogether, on the side of the North Vietnamese. It didn't seem to me to make sense to do this.

The other question about -- what was that?

Q: Retribution against the North.

NOLTING: Retribution against the North I took an equally dim view of, although there were plenty of reasons for wanting to do it. But there were operations that were going on, sponsored mostly by the CIA, to bomb or to drop saboteurs, Vietnamese saboteurs, in installations of the North which were being used against the South. Most of those had been unsuccessful, most of them had been counterproductive. Instead of stepping them up, for the most part we tried to weed out those that were not working and left some that seemed to be working. But there were more losses really on the part of brave South Vietnamese people going up and being dropped and being captured before they had been able to accomplish their missions than the reverse. In other words, the weight of the thing seemed to be against continuing some of those operations.

Q: What about bombing? Was that discussed?

NOLTING: Bombing of the North was not discussed, so far as I recall, at that time.

Q: Okay. Did you see Colonel Lansdale at this time? I understand he accompanied --

NOLTING: Ed Lansdale?

Q: Well, it would have been Brigadier General Lansdale I guess by that time.

NOLTING: Yes. I saw him once in Vietnam, but I had many conversations with him before going to Vietnam. That was in April 1961. I was very much impressed with Ed's knowledge of the country and his subtle touch with respect to this kind of situation. I know that President Diem was very admiring of him and on occasion he would say, "I wish I could have a conversation with Colonel Lansdale on this subject," on one subject or another.

Q: He did accompany the Taylor-Rostow mission. He was part of that. (Interruption) -- Lansdale's feel for the situation when you talked to him? Was he optimistic, pessimistic? How would you describe it?

NOLTING: I would describe it as being fifty-fifty between optimism and pessimism, rather enigmatic about means, but supportive, very supportive. This was important in the task force in Washington of which he was member.

Q: This is Mr. [Roswell] Gilpatric's task force?

NOLTING: Gilpatric's chairmanship. Very strong on supporting the constitutional elected government. Lansdale had faith in President Diem and was one of those I think who was most influential in persuading the task force that the United States was taking good risk in our own interests in supporting the South Vietnamese cause under the elected government.

Q: He had visited Vietnam for President Kennedy I think in early 1961. Did you have any knowledge of that one? It was in the spring.

NOLTING: Yes, I did. Do you want to cut this?
(Interruption)

Q: Do you remember any of the points that General Lansdale was pessimistic about?

NOLTING: Not specifically. I think he was optimistic about the government, relative to other Southeast Asian governments. I remember his saying once, "Sure, there are a lot of criticisms that can be leveled against this government in South Vietnam, but compared to the others in Southeast Asia, it's a beaut," or words to that effect. I think he was probably pessimistic on the grounds of the staying power of the United States, on grounds of the persistence, absolute implacability of the communist movement in Southeast Asia, not only in Vietnam but throughout Southeast Asia. I think he felt that there was a political aspect, as there was in the French war, that had to be carefully surveyed so that we would not enter into a situation where we wouldn't stay the course and other factors of that sort. My impression was that he felt that in a divided Southeast Asia, and particularly in South Vietnam, the sentiments of the people were anti-communist. They hated the Viet Cong. But it was a situation in which you couldn't expect a clear-cut victory or even a clear-cut decision in a short while and that this was the kind of situation which the impatient American public and the volatile American political situation was ill-equipped to cope with.

Q: Let me address one of the points you just made.

NOLTING: I am not trying to put words in his mouth, but that's my impression. I'm not quoting him.

Q: Fine. It was his impression then that the South Vietnamese people on balance were anti-communist. If I do not misjudge you, that was your opinion also after you had been in country for a time.

NOLTING: Yes, after traveling over some forty provinces. I spent six months just going all over the country when I first got there. It was my strong impression that the majority of people, by far the majority -- I'm talking about the peasants who were the majority of the people -- were anti-communist, some of them extremely so, most of them anti-communist firmly. Some of them because of family divisions [were] on the fence, but certainly by far the majority were anti-communist.

Q: Now the obvious question which follows from that is from where did the Viet Cong derive what everyone admits was their astonishing staying power and tenacity, if this was true?

NOLTING: The Viet Cong you're talking about?

Q: Yes.

NOLTING: Well, I think it was partly fear of reprisals. I think it was partly dyed-in-the-wool training in North Vietnam of those who were sent back to their native provinces, that is, those who went North in 1954 and then were infiltrated back to their provinces, to their native villages. I think it was partly ideological, but not all that much. I think it was partly a feeling that the government wasn't doing enough for them.

Q: Let's dwell on that for a second, because this is what a lot of people have dwelt upon. To what extent were Viet Cong successes based on genuine grievances among the people?

NOLTING: I don't think they were based on genuine grievances for this reason, because they themselves created the grievances. The grievances were mostly such things as not being able to get their rice to market, or not having enough schoolteachers, or not getting mail deliveries, simple things. The reason for those grievances were that the Viet Cong had blown up the bridges and had murdered some schoolteachers and had terrorized others, and had, for example, made the anti-malaria teams' job -- which was finally successful, thank goodness -- much more difficult by terror tactics. So, I don't think that the genuine grievance theory, even though some ill-informed and naive people may have taken it seriously, was the government's fault. It was the Viet Cong's fault, and it was they who tried to make it worse, who tried to stimulate the feeling that "the government has deserted you, join us."

Q: There's a point there I want to come to later, but I think it comes in a little later. One of the most publicized and one of the most famous incidents, where all of the disparate, conflicting opinions about Vietnam come into focus, were made to come into focus, was concerning a battle that was fought around New Year's in 1963.

NOLTING: Ap Bac.

Q: Yes, sir. Or as one general said, "oh, my aching bak."

NOLTING: That was Paul Harkins.

Q: I'll take your word for that. What recollections do you have of the furor that arose over the battle at Ap Bac?

NOLTING: My recollections are that -- I've thought of that a lot of times and I don't think it was all that serious. I don't think the South Vietnamese army ought to be indicted for cowardice. I think there were some snafus, I think a couple of the Vietnamese commanders were at fault. It was a battle, but it wasn't that big, as you know. I think the ARVN mishandled it, they didn't

move in when they should. I think it was blown out of all proportion by the American press. The worst thing that happened was Colonel [John Paul] Vann's spilling his guts to the American press and having it spread all over the headlines that the South Vietnamese Army, despite all that the Americans had done to train and supply them, were basically cowards and they couldn't win. I don't believe that.

Q: What about allegations that -- ?

NOLTING: Please, let me say something more on that, Colonel Vann, who is now dead and whom I admired except for this particular outburst, which I thought was very ill-advised, later gave his life in Vietnam. I don't want to speak ill of him. But I think that interview, I've forgotten whom he gave it to, was emotional and not fair.

Q: There were allegations at the time that President Diem had put out the word to South Vietnamese units that he did not want casualties. What do you know of this? Is it true, and if it is, why?

NOLTING: I don't remember any flat-out orders to anybody to avoid casualties. I do remember President Diem's discussions with me and others saying that the more casualties that could be avoided, not only on the side of the South Vietnamese Army, but on the side of villagers, fence sitters, and even Viet Cong, the better, the quicker the pacification of the country could take place.

Q: I see. There were allegations that the ARVN was not exhibiting enough initiative because of a presidential order not to press battles.

NOLTING: Honestly, I don't recall anybody saying to me or intimating to me, including President Diem or Paul Harkins after his many talks with Diem, or Nguyen [Dinh] Thuan, who was the effective minister of defense. I don't remember anybody giving me the impression that they were giving orders to hold their punches to their military. They were saying be careful about whom you shoot up, and we were saying that, too. And this I think is the important point. The idea then was pacification. It wasn't wiping out dissenters; it was bringing them over. The Chieu Hoi program was an example of it. The idea was pacification, the word was pacification, both in Vietnamese and in French and in English. The trouble was, again, that as hard as we would try in Saigon, and the government would try there, to talk about their pacification program, I don't remember a single case in which a reporter didn't translate pacification into "war". This was an enormous psychological error as it affected this country as well as Vietnam.

Q: It was a conceptual -- ?

NOLTING: As a conceptual thing, right.

Q: Okay.

NOLTING: Does that make sense?

Q: Yes, I think it does. What position did you try to get President Diem to take during the Buddhist crisis? Did you give advice on how he should try to handle that business?

NOLTING: Unfortunately that was one of my big mistakes, big misfortunes. I think I've gone into this before, I'm not sure with whom. The incident that triggered this was in Hue and it was around the first of May 1963. There had been an investigation, there had been very little if any agitation in the meantime, and we were scheduled -- my wife and two children, who were then there -- to meet our other two children in Greece for a long-delayed vacation. After waiting around for two weeks to see what, if anything, was going to develop from this, nothing did, and we left Saigon on the twenty-third of May, as I recall, and went on this vacation, which was to end with consultations in Washington. I was on State Department orders. Well, during that period all hell broke loose in Vietnam. The burnings, Thich Tri Quang, the most venerable of the Buddhist bonzes was burned or burned himself.

Q: That wasn't Tri Quang, was it?

NOLTING: No, no, I'm sorry. Thich Quang Duc. Tri Quang was --

Q: The militant.

NOLTING: -- a very different character.

So for six weeks there I was not at my post. I had speeches to make about Vietnam at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York and elsewhere, which were already laid on. So your question was, what did I have to do with it? I regret to say I got back too late to do anything about it. The thing was out of hand. This I will never cease to blame the State Department for and my deputy, because they both knew exactly where I was every day and could have notified me if they had wanted me back as a mediator, which I think I could have been.

Q: Why didn't they notify you?

NOLTING: Well, we're still on the record, and I'll tell you why. Because I think the person principally in charge of this in the State Department, Averell Harriman, wanted me out of there because I thought that President Diem was the best bet for achieving the United States' interests. I think he wanted me out of there so that Diem would have enough rope to hang himself.

Q: Is that what he did?

NOLTING: Well, I think he made a lot of mistakes that I think I could have helped him to avoid.

Q: What would you have done?

NOLTING: Well, that's a hypothetical question, all right.

Q: And you have the benefit of hindsight. I know that, too.

NOLTING: Yes.

Q: But would you have advised Diem to conciliate the Buddhists?

NOLTING: Yes, yes. Surely, in the beginning, because the Buddhist leadership had not been taken over by Thich Tri Quang, who was in my opinion a communist agent and who was branded later on as such by President [Nguyen Van] Thieu. At the height of the rioting in late 1963 he was glorified in this country as an upholder of the rights of the Buddhists, given asylum by [Henry Cabot] Lodge in the U.S. Embassy.

Q: What about the less militant -- who was the other, Tri Quang's sort of rival for leadership of the Buddhist movement?

NOLTING: I was looking up the name the other day and I can't remember at the moment. There was a group -- and I can find them out for you and supply them if you want -- of about four older Buddhists who had come to an agreement and compromise with the government, and that was undermined by Tri Quang and his group. There was a set of negotiations that went on for some six weeks. I had this from Bui Van Luong, who...

Q: Would you say that name again, sir?

NOLTING: Luong, L-U-O-N-G. First name was Bui, B-U-I. Middle name Van Luong. Okay. He was minister of the interior. He did the investigation at Hue. He came up with a report which I considered to be an accurate and objective report. Diem considered it to be so, and that's what he was going by. Nguyen Thuan, who was perhaps the most effective member of the cabinet, urged Diem to compromise with the Buddhists on the basis of this report. Diem tried to do so. Thuan was on the negotiating committee and so was Luong. They came to what seemed to be a satisfactory agreement.

Q: What was the basis of the agreement?

NOLTING: A reaffirmation of religious toleration, freedom, number one. A settlement of the flag incident, that the Buddhist flag could be flown, as indeed it always could be. But at Hue they had insisted on putting it ahead of the Vietnamese national flag, and that caused the incident. Money for the pagodas. There had been all along substantial contributions by the government to the pagodas. This was reaffirmed. Let's see, what were the other conditions? Well, the usual statement, which Diem said rather scornfully was totally unnecessary, that there would be no religious discrimination or persecution. There had been none, as I said often over there and later. Of all the things that divided that country, one of the things, thank God, was not religious dissension, because the whole spectrum of religions, from Buddhism to ancestor worship to Christianity to the Hoa Haos and the other sects, was transcended by the philosophy of Confucius, and Confucius stood, as you know, for religious toleration. Nearly all Vietnamese were Confucian in that respect.

Well, all of this I think could have been resolved. But I think what happened was the United States all of a sudden began to hammer the table on hotheaded instructions from Washington,

burned into action by the American press, to get on with it and tell this guy to apologize and eat crow and do things that he couldn't possibly afford to do as president of the country, which also would not have done any good. Because by that time the Buddhist movement had come into the hands of those who had only one objective, and that was the overthrow of the government. Well, that objective was the exact objective of the Viet Cong. So they were absolutely parallel on that. Whether they were united is a question which I've never been able to determine.

Q: What role did the raids on the pagodas play in all this?

NOLTING: They played a crucial role, in the American minds, American government minds. When Lodge and I were conferring in Honolulu on his way out and my way back -- this was about the twentieth of August 1963 -- that was when the news came of the raid on the pagodas.

Q: Can you describe the effect it had on you when you heard the news?

NOLTING: Yes. I was shocked and so were others, because my last action there in Saigon was to get a statement out of President Diem, which the State Department had been demanding, that there would be reconciliation or the strongest efforts at reconciliation with the Buddhists.

Q: Diem had agreed to this?

NOLTING: He agreed to it. The way he put it was rather interesting. He said -- this was rather typical of his way of doing things -- "my policy of reconciliation with the Buddhists is irreversible."

Q: That could be kind of a cryptic statement, couldn't it?

NOLTING: Well, what he was trying to say, of course, and he never said these things very well or appealingly to the American point of view, was, "Look, there's never been any lack of conciliation and I'm not thinking about admitting that I've been persecuting. I'm just saying that my policy of reconciliation with the Buddhists and all other religions is irreversible."

Q: So what led to the raids?

NOLTING: Well, I sent Diem a personal telegram from Honolulu when I heard about them. I said, "This is the first time that you've ever gone back on your word to me."

Q: You were hurt personally as well as shocked professionally.

NOLTING: I'm awfully sorry I sent that because later on I saw his minister, my good friend Nguyen Thuan, in Paris. He escaped after the overthrow of the Diem government. I said, "Do you remember this personal telegram?" sent when I was no longer ambassador. He said, "Yes, I took it to the President, and the President read it and shook his head and said, 'He doesn't know what the provocation was.'"

Q: What was the provocation?

NOLTING: Well, the provocation was continued packing of arms in the Xa Loi and other pagodas, continued riots proclaiming the overthrow of the government -- not a change in government but the overthrow of the government -- and a total unwillingness to compromise on the part of Thich Tri Quang and his militants on anything.

Q: Some critics have suggested that all Diem had to do was make a gesture towards [conciliation]. Some symbolic act would have pacified the whole business.

NOLTING: Well, I surely don't want to be in the position of saying that this was skillfully handled by the Diem government, or by the Americans. The only skillful people in this were these upstart Buddhist militants. Incidentally, that general association of Vietnamese Buddhists was a new organization. There had never been any such hierarchy. The Buddhist bonzes in the provinces were their own bosses. They did their own funerals, their own marriages, weddings and so forth. I had numerous letters, when I got back from this ill-fated vacation, on my desk from bonzes, some of whom I'd met in outlying villages, some of whom I didn't know, saying "count us out so far as this general association of Vietnamese Buddhists is concerned. We have nothing to do with them, we don't know who they are, and we don't subscribe to their policy or their slogans of overthrowing the government."

Q: Sir, I hope this doesn't seem impertinent. I don't mean it to be.

NOLTING: Sure.

Q: Some people would say or suggest out of hand, that this is Mr. Nhu speaking and this isn't the Buddhists at all. This is Mr. Nhu playing his propaganda organ. Did that thought ever strike you?

NOLTING: You mean the Buddhist movement was Nhu's invention?

Q: No, no. The letters that you got from the bonzes in the countryside disclaiming-

NOLTING: It's conceivable, but it never occurred to me.

Q: I don't know why it occurs to me. I have no reason for suggesting it.

NOLTING: It's conceivable, but I don't think so. I had no opportunity to answer them or to go further into it because I was about to leave Vietnam and there were so many pieces to try to pick up that I didn't answer those letters. So far as I know, like all of my papers [they] were left in the Embassy in Saigon and I don't have any official records of this, nor of anything for that matter, because in those days one tried to abide by the rules of the Foreign Service, which were that you didn't take official papers with you, ever. I notice, incidentally, and this can be on the record now, that most of the Kennedy advisers and the people in Washington kept records of secret, top secret papers and used them extensively in their writings. (Interruption)

Q: When the Diem government fell, the press carried accounts of vast joyous, spontaneous

demonstrations in the streets of Saigon. How do you square that with -- if I read you right -- your belief that by and large the Vietnamese people approved of Diem?

NOLTING: It's very hard to square that. I do not believe that the majority of the Vietnamese people or even the majority of the Saigon people, who were much more volatile and inclined to take any dramatic event as a reason for celebration, were joyous over this event. On the contrary, I think the majority were shocked and it was only the hotheads stirred up by I don't know what elements, but certainly some of them were Viet Cong or Viet Cong sympathizers, who indulged in these acts. I could understand that Madame Nhu would have been a target.

Q: Why?

NOLTING: Because she was unpopular and [so was] Nhu, brother Nhu, whom some Vietnamese called Bobby Nhu, in imitation of Bobby Kennedy. The Saigonese wits would refer to him as such. I can understand that they could be targets. While I was there I never heard from any oppositionists -- with two exceptions, which I'll mention later -- words of criticism against President Diem. That is to say, I've never heard anybody accuse him of being unjust or cruel. I have heard people say that they thought some of his policies were not the best, but in terms of integrity and the reputation for honesty and trying to do good for his people, I never heard anybody say a word against him. This was not true of his brother Nhu and it was not true of the Archbishop --

Q: [Ngo Dinh] Thuc, was it? -

NOLTING: Thuc, or of Madame Nhu.

Okay. The two exceptions that I mentioned were two generals who were at our home some months before this happened. One was General Don.

Q: Tran Van Don?

NOLTING: Tran Van Don, who was a cultivated man, and General Kim.

Q: K-H-I-E-M?

NOLTING: I think they were brothers-in-law. Sitting on the sofa one evening after dinner, they lit into President Diem and said he was unworthy to be president of the country.

Q: What was the burden of their objections to him?

NOLTING: Mostly that he was incapable, and that stemmed from their feeling that he interfered too much with the military running of the country.

Q: They were unsatisfied with the way the war was going?

NOLTING: Yes. But they went beyond that in saying that this man is really, you know, he's no

good. He's a bad character.

Q: Morally you mean?

NOLTING: Well, just incapable and no good and a bad political leader and so forth.

Q: So they were after his competence, not his personal--?

NOLTING: More after his competence, yes, but it was shocking to me. I said, "Gentlemen, you are my guests and I am an accredited diplomat to the government which happens to be headed by your president, who was elected." I gave them the reply which not only I but my predecessors had always given to the dissident generals. "You have a chance to run for president next time. Don't give us this stuff about revolt and supporting a revolt. Why don't you do your duty as military men? The United States is not going to get into this question of a coup d'etat." In fact, President Kennedy had promised President Diem on two occasions not to interfere in the internal affairs of South Vietnam.

Q: That reminds me of a question. There was a coup attempt in 1960 before you came in the fall of 1960. November as I recall.

NOLTING: Right.

Q: There are stories that President Diem and Mr. Nhu suspected that the CIA was involved in some capacity in that coup attempt. Do you recall anything of that nature?

NOLTING: If they suspected it at the time, I saw no evidence of it two years later. Neither of them ever brought that up. When I got there Bill Colby was the mission station chief for the CIA. He was close to Nhu -- I mean, close in the sense that they conferred often. President Diem also liked him and admired him. I certainly did. I don't think there was any hanky-panky going on behind my back in this regard. In fact, Colby was not only a friend but one of my most trusted advisers and members of our task force. He was later succeeded after about a year of my tenure by John Richardson, who was in my opinion equally trustworthy, forthright, and he also continued the connection, frequent talks with Ngo Dinh Nhu. So through those channels I never heard anything about suspicions of the CIA in connection with the 1960 coup. No, I don't remember any accusations of that sort.

Q: Fair enough. I have a question concerning the lines of authority within the U.S. Mission. Now, you testified very fully in your Kennedy Library transcripts about the cooperation which you got from General Harkins and that there was seldom if ever any conflict about jurisdiction and so on. Is it fair to say that this largely resulted from the fact that your personalities meshed very well?

NOLTING: Yes, I think so. I think the seed of conflict or noncooperation had certainly been sowed earlier on when, under the influence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and perhaps Bob McNamara, the secretary of defense, there was issued a directive which seemed to split the mission.

Q: Was this the letter of appointment which gave General Harkins -- ?

NOLTING: It was the letter of appointment and the description of MACV.

Q: Do you know who wrote that letter?

NOLTING: I don't know, but I have a strong suspicion that it was instigated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff or by McNamara or Max Taylor. Perhaps Max Taylor. I took the issue back to Washington, not because I had any feeling of jealousy with respect to an ambassador's position but because I could see only trouble. In every joint meeting you had of the military and State Department and AID and CIA and so forth, all of us, the question of who would chair the meeting, who would write it up, who would have the right to dissent and so forth might cause trouble. I went back to Washington on this issue, talked it over, and didn't get anywhere with [Dean] Rusk. Rusk said, "Oh, forget it, Fritz. You can get along with Paul Harkins." I hadn't met Harkins at that time.

The person that backed me on this was Averell Harriman. Since we couldn't get any satisfaction vis-a-vis the Defense Department or any positive position out of the Secretary of State, Harriman and I went over and saw President Kennedy. He immediately said, "This is wrong. It has to be rewritten to make it clear that the ambassador is in overall charge." I said, "Mr. President, I hope you don't think I'm fool enough to try to run or intervene in military matters of training or logistics or anything of that sort which I don't know much about. But the problem is that there can be misunderstandings down the line, there can be emergencies in which somebody has to come up with the U.S. position." And President Kennedy said, "You're absolutely right." Max Taylor was in the room. He said, "Max, rewrite that directive and get this clear: the ambassador is in over-all charge."

Well, in about two or three weeks there came through another directive which was still fuzzy as the devil. It was a little bit in the direction of the President's decision but hadn't changed the original directive that much.

Q: But this was of no practical import as far as your and General Harkins' positions?

NOLTING: It turned out not to be, no.

Q: But it could have been?

NOLTING: It could have been, yes.

Q: Were you aware that this ever got satisfactorily worked out?

NOLTING: It never did on paper.

Q: Not during your tenure at least?

NOLTING: Not during my tenure, no. One thing I might add to that -- it might be of some interest -- was that McNamara gave me a ride back in his plane as far as Honolulu from those meetings in Washington. I remember we were sitting together having dinner on his plane, and we got on the subject again. I said, "Bob, I hope you understand what this was all about." He said in effect, "Sure I do, but let me tell you that on this one the Joint Chiefs are absolutely adamant." That's why I mentioned the chiefs. "They said no four-star general is going to be under an ambassador." And I said, "Well, it's not a question of being under anybody, it's just a question of who has the over-all responsibility. If you want to tie the can to your tail and let me out of there, that's fine with me, but I can't have the responsibility from the President and not have the authority. And I'm not going to misuse that authority with respect to military matters." Well, McNamara's quite frank, and what he said in effect was, 'Look, on this one the Joint Chiefs have got me over a barrel. I can't do anything about it.' He may have been speaking as well of Max Taylor.

(Interruption)

Q: One point I would like to clear up a little bit is that in the meetings that were taking place in September 1963 where there was so much agonizing going on, I'm not sure if you were party to all of these or not. I think you were in some of them and not in others.

NOLTING: In NSC meetings in Washington?

Q: Yes, sir. There was one famous meeting at which Rufus Phillips, among others, gave testimony and-

NOLTING: It surprised me!

Q: -- it was pretty pessimistic.

NOLTING: It surprised me very much, because Ruf Phillips was one of the most can-do members of our mission out there. He came late. He had been only six months or so out there.

Q: Of course, he had been there earlier, had he not?

NOLTING: I believe he had been there earlier, but my overlapping with him was only maybe six months or a year. He was a very, I thought, good and effective member of the AID. And his pessimistic testimony in one of these NSC meetings surprised the hell out of me. I couldn't believe my ears. Similarly John Mecklin's. I could understand John because he had been brainwashed by his roommates, David Halberstam and -- what's the other fellow's name?

Q: Neil Sheehan.

NOLTING: Neil Sheehan. And also he was discouraged and disillusioned because his wife left him out there and so forth. But I was surprised by Ruf Phillips. I've seen him since and I've asked him, and he said, "Oh, did I go that far?" and I said, "You just ruined it,"

Q: Did you ever come to a reconciliation of why he testified? You had no inkling I gather that

this was coming?

NOLTING: No, I didn't.

Q: What did he say? What was the burden of his remark?

NOLTING: I can't remember fully, but I think the essence was that the economic aid was not taking hold,, the people were not getting the benefits of all this effort and money, and our side was losing the struggle.

Q: Didn't he have something to do with strategic hamlets? Wasn't he very deeply involved in that?

NOLTING: I think so, from the point of view of supplying materials, barbed wire and roofing for the houses and so forth.

Q: Did he have anything to say about that program that you recall?

NOLTING: You know, it would be reaching into my memory. I think now that you've suggested it, he did. My impression is he did say the strategic hamlet program was a failure, or words to that effect.

Q: That's pretty strong.

NOLTING: I'm not sure. You'd better get it from Ruf.

Q: All right.

To paraphrase story after story that appeared in the press and sometimes, many times perhaps, from military advisers in the field, if I can paraphrase it, why aren't our Vietnamese as good as their Vietnamese?

NOLTING: Yes.

Q: What is your reaction to that statement?

NOLTING: I think they were as good. Now, I wasn't in the battles as you were, later on, and I don't know what your opinion or others who were --

Q: My opinion is unimportant.

NOLTING: -- who had them on the flanks. That's what's important. But, you know, I think in counting them up, there were as many good battles, instances of heroic and successful military actions in which the South Vietnamese were successful, as there were debacles like Ap Bac, which we have mentioned earlier. I think, maybe I'm prejudiced on the subject, but I think it was the disastrous ones, the bad ones from our point of view, which hit the headlines, and very

seldom the good ones. Or if they did, they weren't featured because, why, we expected to be winners. We didn't expect setbacks, even from our allies at a time when we were not engaged as combatants.

Q: What about the accusations that were being made that too many operations were being launched to avoid contact rather than make contact? You heard a lot of that, too.

NOLTING: I did. I don't think it was true. We mentioned earlier trying to avoid casualties, trying to avoid the killing of innocent people, while you're trying to root out the terrorists. This was a strong feeling which we promoted in the mission out there, which our government promoted through us. It was certainly shared by President Diem and members of his cabinet. In some cases, he had to reprimand his generals for attacking villages which were comme ci, comme ca with respect to their allegiance. We had to limit -- and I remember having personally to pass on this -- the weight and number of bombs to be dropped on any target. These were bombs that we had supplied the Vietnamese Air Force, mostly for their T-23s. I think they were two hundred and fifty pounders, and they could do considerable damage to a Vietnamese village, as you know. Whenever they took off on a bombing sortie, it was cleared through us as to where they were going and where they were going to drop for this very reason, that we didn't want to put the fence sitters on the side of the Viet Cong.

Q: The advisers in the field probably objected to the delays that would be attendant upon that kind of a process, wouldn't they?

NOLTING: I suppose so. I wouldn't be surprised. But I don't remember there being many delays. It wasn't a complicated process. For that matter, there weren't that many T-23s and there weren't that many bombs. But we did try, and so did the central Vietnamese government try to limit the amount of bombing. In certain cases there were free drop zones where if they were overloaded or had to get rid of their bombs they could drop them. These were wooded forest areas. This rule was put in because on several occasions in trying to get home on a little bit of gas, they'd drop bombs and sometimes they'd hit an innocent village. It was nobody's fault, but it had to be cured, and the way to cure that was to say you can only drop them in these free zones.

Q: Right. Did President Johnson ever discuss any of this, anything regarding Vietnam with you after he assumed the presidency?

NOLTING: After he assumed the presidency, I wrote President Johnson a letter or two the purport of which was to say, "Mr. President, you have inherited a situation which I regard as a political vacuum in Vietnam. That is to say I don't predict any good things for the military junta as political leaders. And if that judgment is correct, then I would hope that you would not get too close to or embrace any of the military leaders." I saw him once or twice after that, and once I recall particularly, which was at the time of General Harkins' return when we were invited by President Johnson to come for some medal that he gave Harkins.

Q: This would have been the summer of 1964, I guess.

NOLTING: Yes. I remember his saying to me then, "I had your letter and I agree with you." But

what had happened in the meantime was that McNamara had gone out and given great hugs to everybody from Big [Duong Van] Minh to General [Nguyen] Khanh, and that had sort of set the pattern, it seemed to me.

One thing I'd like to ask you. Can I?

Q: Yes, sir.

NOLTING: I never understood, as much as I agreed with and admired Johnson's views with respect to Vietnam in the early days when he was vice president -- and I'm not talking about later on, because I had nothing to do with that and no inside information. But his views up to the time that he inherited the presidency I thought were good, sound, and well advised. They did not prevail with Kennedy so far as the overthrow of the Vietnam government was concerned. Kennedy went the other way, or his advisers took the bit in their teeth and went the other way, whichever way you want to put it. But anyway, Johnson was against that.

Then after the coup in Vietnam, he inherited the presidency, and a lot of things occurred which I don't understand. Not in chronological order, but the one I understand least is his reappointment of Cabot Lodge as ambassador after Lodge's first term of about eight months and his return to the Republican National Convention, in which I think he hoped to be nominated. The only explanation I have for that is that President Johnson wanted, as maybe President Kennedy wanted also, to have a good thick piece of Republican asbestos to shield him from Republican heat. Can you tell me whether that's true or not?

Q: I believe it. Yes.

NOLTING: And maybe because he thought that the man who had been instrumental in putting the generals in power could deal with them.

Q: I can't say that I can confirm that from what I have seen, but it certainly sounds plausible. (Interruption)
All right, sir, go ahead.

NOLTING: I would like it on the record that from my point of view, Vice President Johnson, both in his visit to Vietnam in early 1961 and in the other meetings that we had in 1963 in the NSC on the subject of the withdrawal of American support from the Diem government, I thought Vice President Johnson was absolutely right. I thought his judgment was sound. Like all of us, he was not completely satisfied with the way things were going in Vietnam, but he judged that it was better to keep on the course that we were on than to jump from the frying pan to the fire. And the frying pan was cooling; it was getting better rather than worse, in my opinion.

Therefore, when he inherited the political vacuum created in South Vietnam by the overthrow of the constitutional government and the immediately deteriorating situation, with the strategic hamlets beginning to be wiped out, with the province chiefs not knowing what to do, with everybody getting cross signals from the military junta, with disillusionment in particular in the countryside because of the overthrow and because of their respect for President Diem, when he

inherited this mess, what I can't understand is why he didn't do something about the advisers of President Kennedy who had created it. They were principally Averell Harriman, whom he kept on, Cabot Lodge, whom he not only kept on but reappointed to the ambassadorship out there. [I can't understand] why he didn't insist that Dean Rusk get into the act earlier and have the State Department take some positive remedial steps if possible. In other words, why he carried on with the old team when it was perfectly obvious to me and from what he said to me that he didn't approve of their previous actions? This I don't understand, and this is why I could never feel in my innermost bones that we were going to be successful in Vietnam, after the coup.

It seemed to me that there was a certain poetic justice in this thing, that we had an albatross that we never shed. It would have been possible for President Johnson to say we made a mistake, we should never have done this, but now we're in it we're going to see it through. That would have been one possibility. That to me would have cleared up my doubts and misgivings and I think would have had a lot to do with American public opinion, and I know it would have had a lot to do with Vietnamese morale.

You asked a while ago about the rejoicing in the streets in Saigon after the overthrow and the assassinations. That didn't last long. There's now, or there was before Saigon became Ho Chi Minh City, a large and growing body of public opinion in South Vietnam who really venerated President Diem.

JAMES D. ROSENTHAL
Political Officer
Saigon (1961-1965)

James D. Rosenthal was born in San Francisco in 1932 and educated at Stanford. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included posts in Trinidad, Saigon and Bangui. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

Q: When you went out to Vietnam in 1961, you were there from 1961-65 the first time around. What were you being told to be concerned about, before you went out?

ROSENTHAL: Well, as I said, I think this idea of infiltration from the North, the escalation of the conflict by the North, the way this might play in the overall Soviet push for expansion in the world -- the national war of liberation idea -- all coming to a focus in Vietnam. And that was the major focus of my work the whole time there, basically, except for some internal South Vietnamese political work.

Q: So you got out there in 1961. Could you describe in 1961 what the Embassy was like: the atmosphere, the political-economic and social atmosphere of an officer going out there at that time?

ROSENTHAL: The Embassy political section was about 8 officers. There was also a large CIA station. There was a lot of concern about the stability of the Diem regime. That was a primary

concern, because in December of 1960, there had been an attempted coup, which had failed. Then there was another one in 1961, when I was there, that failed. Then of course, in 1963 a coup ultimately succeeded, and threw him out. So that was a major concern. The other major concern was how well the South Vietnamese were doing in building and maintaining security in the countryside. And that eventually became the major focus of my activity.

Q: *Who was the Ambassador when you got out there?*

ROSENTHAL: Fritz Nolting. He was replaced by Henry Cabot Lodge later.

Q: *What was your impression of Nolting while you were there?*

ROSENTHAL: He was a very solid, very qualified man. I admired him very much. He was the first Ambassador I'd ever worked for, but a real gentleman, and a very intelligent and fair-minded man. I'm still an admirer of him.

Q: *Who was the DCM at the time?*

ROSENTHAL: I can't remember who it was when I got there, to tell you the truth. A little later it was William Trueheart.

Q: *What was the impression of how Nolting viewed the situation in Vietnam?*

ROSENTHAL: I think he viewed it fairly pragmatically. He was a very pragmatic man; he wasn't ideologically inclined or extreme one way or the other. I think it was pretty clear that he felt that our policy of supporting Diem was the right one. And he even, later on, in 1963, when Diem got into trouble, felt that we had no other alternative, but to continue to support Diem. There were those in the Embassy who didn't agree with that, who felt that the political situation under Diem was deteriorating, and that this would harm the war effort. At times I was tempted by that view, but I think I never came around to it. Because my impression, after traveling in the countryside and seeing how the war was going -- and that was my major job -- was that the war was not going that badly. There was political instability just in the capital. But outside the capital, stability was relatively good. I thought that by early 1963, anyway, the South Vietnamese were actually doing fairly well in the countryside.

Q: *Who was the head of the political section while you were there?*

ROSENTHAL: It started out with Joe Mendenhall. Then a year or a year and a half later it became Mel Manfull.

Q: *Were you immediately given this assignment of the countryside?*

ROSENTHAL: That wasn't immediate. My first assignment was to do up a summary, or an overall survey, of the security situation generally in the country, which I did. And then I began to travel outside Saigon a bit. And then, the next year, in early 1962, three of us Vietnamese language officers formed into what we called a provincial reporting unit of the embassy political

section. I was in charge of it. And we each took an area of the country, and traveled continually in that area. We came back and did reports on various areas. We were all Vietnamese language speakers, so we got out on a fairly broad basis.

Q: When you arrived in the political section, what were the relations with the CIA station, as far as how they looked at things. What were they reporting -- did you get any feel for how the two of you -- was it a little different?

ROSENTHAL: When I first got there, and for a year and a half afterward, I didn't feel any particular difference in the way we were reporting things. In fact, we were fairly close with a lot of the CIA officers. We even shared sources and contacts. It was a pretty close relationship.

Q: How about this idea of getting rid of Diem? When you initially got there...

ROSENTHAL: When I initially got there, I don't think that feeling was terribly strong. There were always a few people who thought our policy ought to be different, but my feeling was that that was not an overriding concern. It was more trying to make Diem perform and liberalize politically, because they had had this one coup, and then shortly afterward another coup attempt. Many people felt that he needed to broaden his government to prevent that from happening again. But the idea of getting rid of him -- I don't think it really became widespread, or maybe not even thought of at that time, early on. It was only when he had hit the Buddhist crisis of 1963 that positions changed.

Q: Was that really because of his actions, or was it because in Washington they didn't like the pictures of Buddhists burning themselves?

ROSENTHAL: It was probably both. But I think the perspective as seen from Washington was very important. The reporting of the press corps at that time was very important. What became increasingly divergent, to me, was the deterioration of the political situation in Saigon, which didn't affect the countryside or the war effort at all, as far as I could see when I went out there.

Q: At that time there were military areas in Vietnam. You say you had different areas to go to. Which one did you have?

ROSENTHAL: The Mekong Delta was my major beat. But I also covered northwest of Saigon, the old Iron Triangle area.

Q: So you had the southern area?

ROSENTHAL: Yes, but I also knew a fair amount about the northern area, because from November 1962 to about March-April, 1963, I acted as Consul in Hue, when John Helble was on an extended leave. So I covered his 6-8 provinces up in the North, at that time fairly extensively. So I knew those, and I knew the South. There was an area kind of in between that I wasn't so familiar with, but those two areas I knew.

Q: Can you talk a bit about how you got around and what you were seeing in the early periods

while you were there?

ROSENTHAL: To go to the Mekong Delta, you could drive. In fact I did. I drove fairly frequently down to My Tho, down to Can Tho. You could also get military aircraft relatively easily. You could arrange it through the military attaché. There were also aircraft run by Air America, run by the station. We would hop on those. But transportation really wasn't much of a problem. Even later it wasn't much of a problem. It became a little more military, and of course to go longer distances, into war zones, you had to have military aircraft. But you could drive a fair amount.

Q: Even in 1970, I drove from Saigon to My Tho. You would go out to the Delta or something -- could you give me a typical trip, and what sort of things you were seeing, and how you worked?

ROSENTHAL: You would first go to the Province chief and meet him. You would ask him how things were going; talk over various areas -- "This area, how secure is it, what are your problems," etc. Then generally you would go down to the district level and talk to the district chiefs. They would generally take you on a tour of wherever you really wanted to go or wherever they thought you should go. You would look, at that time, at strategic hamlets. I looked at hundreds and hundreds of them. You would go to smaller villages or smaller towns and go in the marketplace and see what was doing in the market area, for the economic situation. You would talk to peasants or to soldiers, ask them how life was. Also to civil servants and village officials. So each trip would be to a province, and would take anywhere from 3-6 days. Then you would come back and spend a week or so writing a report on it, and then study up for the next one. I would also speak a lot to the American military.

Q: Was the American military pretty well distributed throughout there?

ROSENTHAL: There was already an extensive advisory system in place by that time.

Q: What was your impression of the officers assigned to that?

ROSENTHAL: Most of them were pretty good. The ones I knew in the Delta were rather good. And that's particularly true in those early years. For some reason, maybe a little later, it became more of a ticket-punching type of thing. But in the early days, I don't think it was that way at all.

Q: They were probably getting more enthusiastic -- this was something exotic and a way to get out and see a real war.

ROSENTHAL: Right. And the other thing is that there were no U.S. combat units in the country at that time. The main effort was an advisory effort. Therefore, the best officers wanted to go there. Once the combat troops arrived, then the best officers generally want to go into combat units for a lot of reasons, but I understand it. So in the early days, 1961-65, I thought the advisory group was pretty good, pretty talented.

Q: Did you run across John Paul Vann?

ROSENTHAL: I did.

Q: *What was your impression of him?*

ROSENTHAL: That's a good question. I did not share the great admiration that some people, particularly the press corps, shared for him. He was a very good man, a good officer. Very enthusiastic and patriotic, and effective in many ways. But I think he tended to look at his situation as the microcosm of the war. And I don't believe it was. In fact, I don't think the Mekong Delta, as a whole, was strategic. I think that there was a lot of activity going on there, but the level of activity that went on in the Mekong Delta could have gone on for twenty years.

Q: *It essentially almost did. It never was the critical point.*

ROSENTHAL: No, it was always the highlands and the northern part of South Vietnam. And when I knew him, John Paul Vann didn't know anything about that area at all, and looked upon ARVN performance and ARVN activities and South Vietnamese capabilities in the Delta as how the war was going. And because it was so easy to drive down to My Tho, as you know, the correspondents would just get in their jeeps and go on down there, and talk to John Paul Vann to find out how The War was going. Well, the war wasn't wholly in the Mekong Delta, or even primarily in the Mekong Delta. But they would come back and report what John Vann told them about the war. And I didn't agree with that. I'd had enough experience elsewhere in the country to know that the Delta, although important, was not decisive. So I tended to take some of the things he said with a grain of salt. I didn't have a lot of contact with him. I met him several times and talked with him, but I didn't become an intimate of his, or anything like that. So I didn't share his perception, his view, of the war. And I think, actually, that he in some ways did a disservice. I don't think intentionally, but I think by focusing attention on his area, and perhaps diverting it from other, more important areas, he might have given a somewhat misleading impression of how the war was going. And certainly the correspondents gave a misleading impression of how the war was going.

Q: *What was your impression of the newspaper corps at that time?*

ROSENTHAL: Early on, I thought that the individuals were pretty good. I'm trying to think of the names. The first one I came in contact with for the New York Times was Homer Bigart. I didn't like him. I thought he was an opinionated, arrogant, old cuss, who I'm sure had great credentials as a combat correspondent in Korea and World War II. But he was very perverse. Everything that was going badly he would report -- it seemed to me, anyway -- and everything that was going well was just not reportable. There was also this idea in 1962, and it became a big thing with the media, that the U.S. was deceiving everybody by not admitting that more advisors were in there than were called for in the Geneva Accords, and so on and so forth. That's probably true. But it wasn't the major story, but they made it the major story. They focused a lot on that. I think that's really where some of the sour attitude toward the military and vice versa -- between the military and the press -- began. Or the government and the press began. And Bigart was one of those guys. And then he was followed by a fellow named Peter Grose, who was very good. I liked him. He was a younger guy, and I thought he was much more open-minded. And then I think David Halberstam came next for the New York Times. And he was really opinionated. I

didn't care for him too much, and I thought he became personally involved in the story. He and others like him. Even during the Buddhist crisis, when Diem really got into a lot of trouble, and of course the correspondents were reporting that and even magnifying it, taking pictures of Buddhists burning themselves in the street. I think they sort of took a personal stake in the story, which was that you had to get rid of Diem. And eventually that happened, without any idea of what was to follow. So I was not an admirer of the press corps. And I occasionally expressed that to some of the people, like Barry Zorthian, who was the PAO at the time, and others, like John Mecklin. I thought they were not doing a great job of covering the overall thing. And, it got worse later on. I think the press corps in Vietnam did a terrible job. I'm one of those dinosaurs that think that the press played a great role of doing us in in Vietnam.

Q: They seemed to get some very immature types. I remember I was Consul General there from 1969-70, having to go to the police station around the corner from the Embassy in order to get out some pressmen. There had been a riot, and they had pinned on the badge of the rioters, with black arm bands, and were helping throw stones at the police. And they were indignant as all hell when they got arrested. I wasn't very enthusiastic about trying to get them out.

ROSENTHAL: You should have let them stew awhile.

Q: Let's say I walked slowly.

ROSENTHAL: Good, I'm glad you did that, because most of them deserved it then. It was a terrible, terrible press corps.

Q: It reminded me a great deal of grad students who all of a sudden have the Holy Truth, and nobody else does.

ROSENTHAL: I think that was true from about early 1963 on. And then it got worse.

Q: Tell me about going up to the Hue area, when you would take over when John Helble wasn't there.

ROSENTHAL: Well, it was pretty quiet at that time. Hue was quiet. It later became the focal point of the Buddhist protests. But at that time it was very quiet. Hue was secure, quite secure. It was run by Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Can, who ran the northern provinces with an iron hand. I think strategic hamlets were a great success in that area, because Can really organized them. Not just physically, but politically. He had his agents everywhere, and they really organized those people. The strategic hamlet concept in the Delta was weaker because of the dispersed nature of the population. But in central Vietnam, the population did live in more concentrated groups, and you could organize them, defend them, and maintain political influence a lot easier. And he did. The proof of the pudding is that when Diem fell, of course Can himself fell. And the security in those areas deteriorated sharply, immediately, because that political influence, which Can provided, was no longer there.

Q: As you went around and sampled, were you getting any feel -- I'm talking about events before early 1963 -- were you able to talk to some of the Buddhist leaders?

ROSENTHAL: No, none.

Q: *Why?*

ROSENTHAL: They were not active, and they didn't seem to be a factor. They weren't attempting to contact anybody, and we didn't attempt to contact them. Particularly in Hue it wasn't the thing to do. But security was fairly good. I actually drove up to Quang Tri, and then over on Highway 9 up along the DMZ, Khe Sanh, and then to Laos, alone, without an escort at that time. I did it twice, I think. And then I could drive down the coast. I couldn't go all the way to Quang Ngai, because there was a stretch there that wasn't very good.

Q: *This was the "Street Without Joy"?*

ROSENTHAL: Yes, that area was still pretty bad. Quang Ngai, Quang Nam. But otherwise, I could get around very well, and talk to people reasonably well.

Q: *Did you get any feel for the type of people the central government was sending out, first at the higher levels as the province leaders, and then maybe the district. Were these political appointees? Who were the people you were seeing?*

ROSENTHAL: Well, in the Delta, my impression was that they were not necessarily political appointees. Now, that doesn't mean that they weren't politically connected, but they all were military officers. I thought they were pretty good, as a group. Particularly among the South Vietnamese, I thought they were as good an officer as you could find generally in South Vietnamese ranks, and fairly politically astute. They ran the thing reasonably well. Some were better than others. When you got up north, it was pretty clear that political connections were more important. That didn't mean they weren't capable. But they were clearly Can's men. Not Diem's men necessarily. They were, I think, stronger political leaders in the sense of organizing and maintaining control of the population.

Q: *What were you getting from your contacts on the American side, and then on the Vietnamese side, about Can?*

ROSENTHAL: Well, he was very reclusive. I never met him. In fact, I don't think that Helble did in several years there until the very end, when Can requested asylum. He was a very shadowy figure, but greatly feared. So I didn't have any personal impression of him at all. But there was no question that everything ran back to him in the Hue area, in the northern 6 or 8 provinces. He had a very tight control, and he was a very tough guy. He ran it in a pretty tough way. He didn't brook any opposition.

Q: *If we were seeing problems up there, what was the standard? You would tell the Ambassador, the Ambassador would tell Diem, in hopes that he would pass it on? Or did we even operate in that manner?*

ROSENTHAL: During the time I was there, the Consulate reported directly to Washington, as

well as to the Embassy. And the Ambassador visited fairly frequently, or John, or in some cases, me, we'd go down to Saigon every month or two, and report. I think the problems we were reporting were more military and security related problems, rather than political problems, at least in my case. John was there longer, so he probably reported more political problems. But my major focus was on the security situation, which I thought was not too bad, with the exception of a few areas. So, I would report on areas that had problems, or why they had problems, and so on. But I never had any feeling that I was being short stopped or anything. My reports were going direct to the Department, as well as to the Embassy. Nobody ever said stop, or change it, or whatever.

Q: Cabot Lodge came in 1963. What was the impression when he arrived? Did he come with a different approach?

ROSENTHAL: There was no question about that. I think I was on home leave when Cabot Lodge actually arrived, if I'm not mistaken. Anyway, it was right around that time. I'd just done two years, and he arrived about that time. By that time, of course, the political situation had deteriorated in Saigon. We had Buddhist monks in the Embassy, who took asylum after the Pagoda raids, and all this. Lodge arrived just after that. It was clear that he carried no brief for Diem at all. But you know, those first couple of months, he didn't really confide in the Embassy very much. He brought his own staff with him, almost like confidential assistants. I think he confided in them, and maybe a couple of the senior officers of the Embassy. For a couple of months he played his cards pretty close to his chest, almost until the coup actually occurred. But at some point, and I don't remember exactly when it was, it was as if Lodge had suddenly decided that the political section was okay and then he kind of opened up to us rather well. So I had a mixed impression of Lodge. I like him, actually. I thought he was a good man. He listened a lot, no matter what you had to say, once he understood you were on his side, a friend, or at least could be trusted.

Q: It sounds like almost the normal thing that goes on with political appointees as Ambassadors anywhere. They sort of come in, highly suspicious of the Foreign Service. You spend a long wasted bit of time, while they get to feel comfortable.

ROSENTHAL: I think that's exactly right. And of course this time there was also a considerable difference with the station. I mean, there were people in the station, including the station chief, who had close contact with Ngo Dinh Nhu, and felt that the policy that Lodge was perceived to be bringing with him was not the one that should be followed.

Q: What was the policy difference as you saw it from the Embassy?

ROSENTHAL: Well, when he first came in -- I can't say that I saw that he was there to overthrow Diem. I honestly can't say that. Now, maybe others could say that, but I couldn't say that. I was a junior officer; I didn't know that. But that was fairly clear as you got toward that point, after the Pagoda raids, and after Lodge's taking in these Buddhist monks and some of the meetings he had with Diem. It became fairly clear that this was pretty much the path that everyone was going down. I must say, that I thought by that time, probably that was the right thing to do. As it turned out, I was wrong -- I feel now that I was wrong. But at the time, I was on

board.

Q: Maybe you were gone part of the time, but could you give a feel -- it was the Buddhist movement that really changed things, wasn't it? How did that hit the Embassy, particularly the political section? What were we seeing behind this as it developed?

ROSENTHAL: It hit the political section fairly hard, in that we had been reporting that there was a lot of political discontent, as there was. There was no question about that. But we never thought it would come from the Buddhists, at least not in the political section. It just was an unexpected quarter from which to have gotten political opposition. We were rather taken aback -- I was, certainly, with the violence of their protests, burning themselves, conducting demonstrations, and so on. So I think it was somewhat of a shock.

Q: Were we looking for who was behind this, or were we trying to see if this was a North Vietnamese plot?

ROSENTHAL: Yes, there was that feeling that it might be that. I don't think it was accepted as the reason, but I think we felt that the communists would certainly take advantage of it, as they did. I don't think there was a prevalent feeling -- I don't recall, anyway -- that it was a conscious North Vietnamese plot. I think it was more an opportunity for them, than a circumstance they created.

Q: Where was the station coming out? Was there a divergence?

ROSENTHAL: Yes, I think the station was probably more concerned and focused more on the undermining of the security situation that the Buddhists represented. Not just the political situation, but the security situation generally. I think they were slightly more inclined to see communists behind it, or at least encouraging it. So there might have been somewhat of a difference there, but I don't think it was that sharp. I don't recall it being that sharp. I think everybody agreed that this was, at least primarily, or at least in a significant way, a self-generated thing, generated by Diem's intransigence on certain issues, but also by Diem's favoring of the Catholics.

Q: What was the root cause, as you saw it, for this flare up?

ROSENTHAL: I think basically the Buddhists, after a long period -- one could even say centuries -- of political impotence and political inactivity, noninvolvement, began, like the rest of South Vietnamese society, to be caught up in politics. I think they also had a longstanding, particularly in Hue, grievance against the authorities, who were dominated by Catholics like Can, and his brother, Thuc, who was the Archbishop of Hue. They felt that Catholics were favored, and they probably were favored. At the same time, a new generation of Buddhist leaders, Buddhist monks, had come into being. I think those Buddhist leaders, in addition to responding to these grievances, and then Diem's rather clumsy reaction against them -- I think that they felt that they could be the cutting edge of a Buddhist renaissance. I think they really had great ambitions of leading a Buddhist Renaissance in that part of the world, and certainly in Vietnam. They were dead wrong, because they didn't have the power, unity, or ability to do it. But at that

time, I think they felt that. As a matter of fact, we in the U.S. government felt that that was a possibility too. After Diem fell, we began to look into that, and to see if we could encourage it, to enlist the Buddhists against the communists.

Q: In the political section, while the turmoil was going on -- this is before the overthrow of Diem -- you had Buddhists coming in asking for asylum. Was the political section getting involved in who are the Buddhists, where are they coming from, and all?

ROSENTHAL: By that time everybody was involved in it. The political section, the station, everybody. When the three Buddhist monks, including Tri Quang, the major Buddhist leader, took refuge in the embassy, I was assigned to talk to him, debrief him, and see to his comforts. At the same time, a station officer also did the same thing. But we collaborated. We would talk to each other first, and decide who did what.

Q: What was your impression of Tri Quang? He was a leader whose face was everywhere in the States at the time.

ROSENTHAL: Well, he was a very charismatic leader, very forceful, very intelligent. I think his ambitions exceeded his grasp. As I say, he's really the ideological force behind the Buddhist uprising, and the Buddhist resurgence, such as it was. I think he felt so strongly about that, that he and his colleagues represented this resurgent Buddhism, that he carried it too far, and ultimately caused the downfall of the Buddhist political movement. He went too far, too fast, and tried to do too much. The movement was not ready for it.

Q: Were we trying to tell him to stop this immolation of monks?

ROSENTHAL: Before Diem fell?

Q: Yes.

ROSENTHAL: I don't recall that we did that. But I'm not sure that he would have had any way of doing it. He really was isolated in the Embassy. And while we gave him asylum, we were not about to let him operate a political movement outside of the Embassy. So we kept him isolated from his followers. So I'm not sure that we did that. Later, of course, we did it all the time. We tried to keep him from doing all kinds of things.

Q: Did you feel that he was approachable, or was he a man who was living in his own world?

ROSENTHAL: He was very approachable -- to me and to a few others that he trusted. I became the contact for Tri Quang, and basically for the Buddhists. Not out of any skill or anything, but I just happened to be there. Over the following two years, after the fall of Diem, I saw Tri Quang maybe 150 times, maybe more. I could literally go, anytime of the day or night, right up to his door in the Pagoda, and knock on it, and he would let me in. And he also came to my house several times, particularly a couple of times during coup attempts. So I would say I had total contact with him. I'm not sure how much good it did, but he was very approachable, and he wanted to use us for his own purposes.

Q: Did he understand the United States?

ROSENTHAL: No, not very much.

Q: He did understand the power of the press, though.

ROSENTHAL: Absolutely.

Q: Because basically, this was his great strength, or one of them.

ROSENTHAL: And he had some younger monks who also understood it pretty well. He had some help. They were very good. But of course, the press was very receptive to this kind of thing too. It wasn't a difficult thing to enlist the American press in a burning bonze. In fact it became a Pulitzer Prize photo. I don't think it took a whole lot of skill to do that. But later, after the fall of Diem, we hoped that Tri Quang and his movement would rally to the noncommunist side and provide a foundation of support, or additional support. As it turned out, I think they simply weakened it, because they kept opposing every government that came in for one reason or another -- even the ones that they suggested. Like Phan Huy Quat, for example, sometime in 1964. He suggested Quat, and said he was a good man. So Quat became Prime Minister, and within a couple of weeks, Tri Quang was against him. He was insatiable in terms of demands, and I think ultimately weakened the movement.

Q: Can you talk a bit of your experiences at the time leading up to the overthrow of Diem? Were you in Saigon most of this time?

ROSENTHAL: As a matter of fact, most of that time I was out of Saigon. I was traveling in the countryside. And that's why I say I tended to favor the view that the war in the countryside wasn't affected by the political turmoil in Saigon. Whereas there were others who were saying that the political turmoil in Saigon must be affecting the war. There is this famous trip that Marine General Krulak and Mendenhall took, and they came back with totally opposite views of what was going on. They were both absolutely right.

Q: This is when Kennedy said, "Are you sure you went to the same country?"

ROSENTHAL: Right. Well, they did go to the same country, but they saw totally different aspects of it.

Q: The military man was going out into the countryside, and Mendenhall was going to Saigon.

ROSENTHAL: And I had kind of the same experience, in my own little way, because I lived in Saigon, of course, and spent a fair amount of time there as well. But I wasn't at that time involved with the political opposition. There were other officers who did that. I stayed away from that, because I wanted to focus on the countryside. Then I got pulled into it when the Buddhists came to the Embassy. Then I began to get pulled into it, but only on the Buddhist side. I didn't really get to know the VNQDD or the Dai Viets, or people like that. At that time I was

not involved with them. Later I became somewhat involved, but not at that time. So I was focused primarily on the countryside.

Q: In the countryside, were you finding, not political movement, but almost tribal movements -- was there a lot of divisiveness out in the countryside, or were people thinking pretty much as South Vietnamese.

ROSENTHAL: That's a good question. I don't know the answer precisely. I never detected any great love for the north. Maybe they just didn't express. But I don't think there was much, and to this day I don't think there is much. The Delta, as you know, is made up of the Hoa Hao, and ethnic Cambodians, as well as ethnic Vietnamese of other stripes. So there were those movements, and there were those communities that certainly, while having no great loyalty to Saigon, certainly had no affinity for Hanoi. But the Delta again, as you know, is a rather mixed bag of people and communities. But I didn't detect any great separatist or hostile movements out there. They might not have had much enthusiasm for the government. The Hoa Hao, for example, I think had come back into the fold pretty much by that time.

Q: What would you call them?

ROSENTHAL: Sort of a religious sect, but even that was split into several different ways. The Caodai were a little farther north and to the west, again another religious sect. They had been crushed by Diem, of course, in the mid to late 1950s. By the time I got there, I thought they were pretty much at least neutral, if not on the government side. And the Hoa Hao certainly had no brief for the communists at all. In fact, the communists had a hard time in the Hoa Hao areas. They also had a hard time in the ethnic Cambodian area. The Caodai, I'm not so sure. I think they probably didn't do so badly there. So I didn't detect a lot of deep divisions in those areas. Not in the south, anyway. Now, in the northern part of South Vietnam, there were political divisions. Those places tended to be hotbeds of the VNQDD and Dai Viet in the French period and in the immediate post-Geneva period. They, of course, were deeply divided, not only between themselves, but against Can, against the Diem regime. So there was that political division.

Q: What about corruption during this time? Was this a major concern?

ROSENTHAL: Sure. I think it always has been in Vietnam. I got a little different view of corruption when I was talking to a district chief. I got to know him pretty well. I said, "You know, there are all kinds of rumors that you have phantom people on your payroll." He said, "Yes, you're right. I get the money for my civil guard, who have been killed and are no longer on my rolls. I give it to the widows, because there are no benefits here. You want to call that corruption, okay, go ahead." Now I don't know how true that was, but it gave me a little perspective that I hadn't really thought about before. In a system that doesn't provide certain things, maybe what we call corruption is the only way to get it. I'm not excusing a lot of corruption -- there were a lot of corrupt types. But I didn't see lavish displays of it, during the Diem period anyway. I was in Hue for a while, and the officials there didn't live lavishly or ostentatiously. The only area in Hue where it was relatively ostentatious, was with the new cathedral and Catholics. They were ostentatious in their display of religious power. I think that was one of the forces behind the Buddhist uprising. But otherwise, I don't recall having the

impression of blatant corruption, like you see in many other parts of the world. Or as I saw later in Vietnam.

Q: The overthrow of Diem was in early November.

ROSENTHAL: November 1, 1963.

Q: Where were you when this happened?

ROSENTHAL: I was in Saigon.

Q: What did you do that day, more or less?

ROSENTHAL: That day, my wife had just had a baby a couple of days earlier. I was at the hospital around noon on November 1st. I heard shooting. My wife said, "What was that?" I said, "It must just be practice." She said, "No, it sounds like more than practice to me." And she was right. So I went back to the Embassy, and didn't see her for another couple of days. When I got back to the Embassy, they said that a coup had started. I went out into the streets to see what was doing. I happened to come across what I think were coup-side soldiers. They were firing at some tanks coming down the street, and so on. So I reported back to the Embassy about that all through the afternoon. Then I went back to the Embassy at night. They were still fighting at night. Early in the morning I went out again into the streets, and I actually went into the palace with the marines that took it. I was there when they were sort of looting it a little bit, taking Diem's possessions and laughing about it, and so on. But I actually went in with them. That clearly was the end for Diem. I didn't know anything about what happened to Diem. I was not involved in that part of it. Actually, a funny thing happened to me. Being part of this provincial-reporting unit, we were exempt from being duty officers, because we were out so often. But my name got put on the roster by mistake, about a week before. I said to the administrative officer, "I'm not supposed to be on it." He said, "Rather than changing it, why don't you just take it this time, and we'll find somebody else later." It just so happened that was the date of the coup. So I was duty officer for Lodge that day. So I saw all of the telegrams that were going out, and I was there for about 48 hours.

Q: What was the reaction of Lodge and his support unit?

ROSENTHAL: Lodge was not an easy man to read. He didn't express his emotions very much, and he didn't confide in me -- not very much, anyway. He seemed very businesslike and matter of fact, and he wasn't at all emotionally involved. There wasn't an emotional reaction. I was not privy to his supposed conversation with Diem at critical times. One thing I was privy to, however, was something that is an image I've had my whole life since then. There was a CIA guy, Lou Conein, who was a liaison officer with the coup leaders. He was going to bring the coup leaders to the embassy, and he did. And Lodge -- I don't know if you know the old embassy, but it was a 7-story building and it had an elevator. Lodge sent me down to be there when they arrived, because I was the duty officer. I'll never forget the sight. This car pulled up to the Embassy and the cameras were grinding away. Conein hops out of the front seat, opens the back door, and salutes, and these guys come on out. As if he was delivering them to the

Embassy, which he was. I just went up with them in the elevator, and Lodge greeted them. I wasn't in on the meeting. I was shocked. The whole image of this fellow Conein, who I knew and thought was really a good man, and that was his duty. But just the idea. If anything, it seems to me, Lodge should have waited and gone to see them. Here were the guys who had just carried out a coup, killed the chief of state, and then they walk up to the embassy, as if to say, "Hey, boss, we did a good job, didn't we?" It's an image that I still carry. It doesn't leave me. I don't know what it represents.

Q: What was the feeling in the political section when this happened. Relief? Shock? Concern?

ROSENTHAL: The feeling was relief. Because by that time, everybody was clearly feeling that we couldn't win with Diem. And I don't recall many people saying the opposite, or saying anything by that time. It had just gotten to that point. I think we clearly felt it would be better for the war effort, and we were clearly wrong. The feeling was, I think, at least among the political section, that nothing could be worse than Diem. And as a matter of fact, everything was worse than Diem, as it turned out. And of course, when Diem was killed, that was a shock. It was a shock to Lodge, and it was a shock to everybody in the Embassy. I think we felt -- I didn't know -- but I think that Lodge felt he could get Diem out of the country, into exile. But that didn't happen.

Q: What was the feeling about the assassination of Diem and his brother? What was behind it?

ROSENTHAL: Nobody knew at the time. And to this day I think there are still a lot of questions about it. But there was this shock, from Lodge on down. I think there were some people -- I'm not sure I would count myself among them -- but there were a few people who said this is a terrible mistake. This really undoes a lot of what was accomplished by the overthrow. And that was correct, too. Because what it meant was all those people who were pro-Diem were immediately fearful. And their fears were somewhat justified. Some of their homes were looted that day, and some of the newspapers that had been published under Diem were broken into and vandalized, and so on. There were anti-Diem mobs in the street. So I think there was some justifiable concern. And when Diem and Nhu were obviously murdered -- not just killed in action but murdered -- that created a division that never did heal. Whereas if they had lived, it might not have been so deep. But that was a mistake, and there was shock at that, and real concern. But it just shows you, you can't control everything when you set these things in motion.

Q: Did you have the feeling that American presence was such that we could kind of control things and handle matters, rather than sitting back -- we were pulling levers and doing things? Was this the general feeling in the Embassy?

ROSENTHAL: I'm not sure that was the general feeling in the Embassy. I think it was the feeling in Washington. I've talked to people since who were in Washington who felt that way. But I don't think those of us in Saigon felt that way that much. We obviously had a great influence, but I don't think we felt we were really running things. But I think Washington did.

Q: After the coup, from winter of 1963 on, what were you doing, and how did you and the political section deal with the situation?

ROSENTHAL: Well, first of all, I immediately went back out to the countryside, because my task was to see what was happening as a result of the coup. And I spent the next couple of months doing that, to see what deterioration there had been. And there was some. I think I was covering the Delta and northwest of Saigon at that time. Lyall Breckon was covering another area and Dave Engel was covering the highlands. I was covering the Delta. And there was deterioration there. But again, the Delta wasn't strategic. And then, of course, since I had become a great confidante of Tri Quang, whenever I was back in Saigon, my job was to keep in contact with him, and to see what he was up to, and to push our preferences, desires, and views on him.

Q: Tri Quang -- how did he react to this? Did he feel that this was justified, that he was in charge?

ROSENTHAL: He felt that it was justified. Tri Quang was an interesting character, in that he was a basically irresponsible person. A good leader, but he would go up to the point of creating a situation and then step back from it. His immediate reaction was "well, I'm not involved in politics. We, the Buddhists, are not involved in politics." Which was total baloney. So I think that was sort of his initial reaction. He was happy that it happened. But one could then go and say, what do you want to do now? And he would say, "Who, me? I'm not involved in politics." And that was a theme that recurred for the next several years. Whenever you would get him to say he was for a particular government that came in, he would get to a point and then his support would just fade away. Or he would just not get involved at all. He was very good at negative politics, but had no concept of positive politics. There were some who later said that it must be that he's being manipulated by the other side, just to keep things stirred up, in order to weaken the South Vietnamese. He did keep things stirred up, and it did weaken the South Vietnamese. I personally don't believe that it was at the instigation of the communists. I don't believe that he was in their thrall. But he had his own agenda. He had this basic irresponsible trait, where you couldn't count on him to support anything. You could always count on him to oppose a lot of people, but you couldn't count on him to support anybody. So I was constantly trying to get him to do this and that and the other thing. Of course, he was trying to get me to do things too, or the Embassy or the U.S. government to do things. I sometimes saw him two or three times a day during crisis times. So we had very good contact, but not necessarily very good agreement.

Q: When you went out to the field, did you find the South Vietnamese military commanders looking over their shoulder, with concern about what was happening?

ROSENTHAL: Absolutely. You could almost tell that the political impetus had gone out of every program there was, including the strategic hamlet program. Before Diem fell, it used to be that the district chief and the province chief were politically motivated to do well, just like any administration has its own imperatives from the demands of its people. There was none later on, because there was so much turmoil in Saigon, the people in the field didn't know who was in charge, who to report to, who to be loyal to, what program was the one they were supposed to carry out. And that was very evident for the next couple of years.

Q: Was the Viet Cong taking advantage of this situation?

ROSENTHAL: Yes. They took advantage of it to demolish a number of strategic hamlets in the Delta, where I was. But they really took advantage in the northern part of South Vietnam, where there the political impetus just collapsed completely, and there was nobody giving any orders, and the Viet Cong did make major inroads, which they never gave up.

Q: When you went back to Saigon, did you find the political section preoccupied with trying to figure out which group of generals was doing what?

ROSENTHAL: Absolutely. That was the major preoccupation. And we all sort of tried to get that going. My specialty happened to be the Buddhists, but I also met with others. Everybody in the political section was devoted to that task, trying to patch together and keep together a South Vietnamese government that could conduct the war.

Q: Were there any promising signs?

ROSENTHAL: Not that first year, after Diem fell.

Q: In the political section, it sounds like a rather discouraged group of Foreign Service officers.

ROSENTHAL: No, I don't believe that's true. It was an unusual group of people. Many of us are still very close friends, with a kind of special bond.

Q: Who are some of them?

ROSENTHAL: Bob Miller, John Helble, Chuck Flowerree, Mel Levine, Mel Manfull, John Burke, Dick Smyser, Lyall Breckon, Dave Engel, John Negrofonte, Walt Lundy. I'm probably forgetting some right now, but people like that. A very highly motivated and effective group. I thought it was the greatest group I ever worked with. And there wasn't this great demoralization or feeling that everything was going to hell in a hand basket. I think there was still the feeling that we would prevail. We all worked very hard. It was an excellent and unusually good group. I don't think that they were emotionally involved in the situation.

Q: It was more a professional challenge, rather than our side lost.

ROSENTHAL: None of the latter at all. There was a lot of debate as to whether we should have done this, that, or the other thing. And we all lived it very actively. But I never detected any defeatism or demoralization. Quite the contrary. Like you say, it seemed to be a challenge, and everybody responded.

Q: What were you getting from the officers in the political section who were getting out to the various South Vietnamese military leaders who were taking charge and then departing? It was called a revolving door, at that time.

ROSENTHAL: A lot of that was done by the station or the MAAG group. Because they were the ones that had contact with General Khanh, Ky, Thieu, or whoever. And the political counselor, Mel Manfull, had some contact as well. But I was not involved at all in that, and I don't recall

any of my immediate colleagues who were. I think it was at a higher level, and focused more on the station and military, as they were military people.

Q: When you went out to the provinces and the districts, were the South Vietnamese province and district chiefs coming to you and saying, "Jim what's happening out there?"

ROSENTHAL: Sometimes they would ask. My impression was that we were always welcome. I never encountered anyone who was really negative about us being there, before or after Diem.

Q: Nobody was saying, "Boy, you guys did it."

ROSENTHAL: No, not to me, anyway. Yes, you're quite right, they would ask what was going on. And they were eager to receive us, to find out who was doing what to whom in Saigon, because they didn't know. That was kind of fun, because you became an informant as well as a reporter. It was often pretty good relationships.

Q: Did you sense a change during this post-Diem period, in both the press, which you have already alluded to, but also in Congress and American feeling toward Vietnam?

ROSENTHAL: I didn't feel anything about Congress and the American people. I didn't really have any concept of that at the time. The press, as I said, got worse. With every twist and turn of South Vietnamese politics, with the Buddhists, or the Catholics, or one faction or another coming up and trying to take power, or doing something. The press would just focus on all those things in a relatively negative way. They would pick up easy stories in Saigon. Then, of course, by the time American troops started to arrive, they would go out with American troops, and they would talk to the G.I. in the foxhole and say how's the war going? And every G.I. in every foxhole in every war has said, "This war is really screwed up." And for him, it probably is. But you have to step back and say, "what's the perspective?" I thought the press did a terrible job on that. And it did the same thing with the politics in Saigon. They liked to focus on the *crise du jour*.

Q: It's not much different today in Washington.

ROSENTHAL: But it was very bad then, and it got worse, as a lot of these media adventurers started coming in.

Q: You left when in 1965?

ROSENTHAL: I left in July of 1965.

Q: You said your wife had a baby there. What was family life like?

ROSENTHAL: It was pretty good, actually. We had a nice house -- small but nice. Most of the time we lived in a compound with four other officers and their families. We never felt any great danger. My wife had two children there. Her doctor was Diem's Minister of Health, who I think still practices here in Northern Virginia. He had his own clinic. It was a wonderful clinic. There was never any problem with that. We had a nice household staff -- things worked pretty well. My

wife also looks back on it as one of our better tours. So living was not that difficult. There were occasional periods when you would have a coup attempt or something that gave you a little bit of concern. Then, of course, my family was evacuated in February of 1965. When we started bombing North Vietnam, we evacuated all the families. So she was evacuated in February, and I stayed on until July.

Q: Were you there then during the beginning of the buildup of the troops?

ROSENTHAL: Yes, just as we started building up.

Q: What was your feeling from the people you were dealing with in the Embassy about putting American troops in there?

ROSENTHAL: Well, I can't really recall that there was a strong feeling one way or the other. I think some of us felt some concern of what would American troops really do here -- were we getting involved in something that would be difficult? But by that time the situation had deteriorated pretty badly. So I think there was this other feeling that well, we may need the troops to at least stabilize the situation. When they first came in, it was up in the north, and I think we all felt that that was the greatest threat. The rest of it didn't matter as much. If you had to have troops, that was the place to have them. So I don't recall any really serious misgivings about putting U.S. troops in there. Some concern, but no really serious misgivings. And no misgivings about bombing the north, that I can recall.

Q: Did the political section have much of a feel about what the Viet Cong were up to?

ROSENTHAL: I think so. We had pretty good information. We had a lot of intelligence from the station or stuff we would gather ourselves. As you know, intelligence wasn't that difficult to pick up there. It was not a terribly secretive movement. It wasn't open, but you could get the stuff if you wanted it. I think we had a pretty good idea of what they were up to. I don't think we had any illusions that Hanoi was not behind it. That was a big debate in Washington: the extent to which infiltration from the north really was going on, how decisive it was, and so on. But I don't think there was much question from those of us on the ground. There was certainly no question in my mind, that this was from the north, fairly early in the game. But back in Washington we had a huge debate whether or not they were using North Vietnamese troops, whether or not they were coming in by sea, whether or not they were doing this or that. Well, they were doing all of the above.

HENRY L. T. KOREN
Director, Southeast Asia Affairs, East Asia Bureau
Washington, DC (1961-1964)

Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Saigon (1966-1968)

Henry L. T. Koren was born in New Jersey in 1911. He entered the Foreign Service in 1948 and served in Haiti, Switzerland, the Philippines, the Congo (Brazzaville), and Vietnam. He was interviewed in 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

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

KOREN: Southeast.

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

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

Q: And Korea.

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

Q: Why was that?

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

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

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

Q: Yes.

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

Q: How did he treat you in these things?

KOREN: Roughly. If you didn't measure up in his opinion and didn't grasp the fundamental question quickly, he would tear you apart. He'd say, "What are you standing up there for that

way? Good God, man." You know, he was very rough in language. He didn't mean anything. He was very kindhearted personally, but he was a very tension-making individual to work for. To give you an example, two or three times he'd say, "Are you going to be in tomorrow?"

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

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

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

Q: Yes, it moves down.

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

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

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

Q: Special operating group, or something like that.

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

Q: Which would be Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia?

KOREN: Not Indonesia. That was South Asian Affairs.

Q: How about Burma, Thailand?

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

Q: How about North Vietnam?

KOREN: No.

Q: That was part of the Vietnam working group. Laos must have been right at the top of your list. This was the time when I can remember President Kennedy getting up and having maps on

television and talking about Laos. The idea was to neutralize Laos, wasn't it?

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

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

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

Q: The domino theory being what?

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

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

KOREN: To communism, primarily.

Q: Home-grown insurgencies.

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

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

KOREN: As I say, our national objective in Laos, for example, was to find a leader on whom we could put some authority and whom we could shore up. We tried several of them, and we finally came, because of Harriman mostly, to Souvanna Phouma. He was admittedly considered a communist fellow traveler, but he was the man that we had felt could neutralize and make Laos a neutral government. We would instruct the embassy on certain aspects of suggestions. For instance, it was also the time of Prince Sihanouk.

Q: In Cambodia.

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Were Malaysia and Singapore also in your peripheral?

KOREN: No. That was Southwest Asian Affairs.

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

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

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

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

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

KOREN: No.

Q: Harriman was pretty well . . .

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

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

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

Q: This is shortly before his death, too.

KOREN: Yes.

Q: This is in early November of 1963.

KOREN: Yes.

Q: Were you able to tell him anything?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KOREN: Rather bleak, as a matter of fact. You're probably aware of the failure of the hearts and minds of the people and the over-optimistic reports that were put out by the enemy's government, and various efforts had been tried and this was an effort to pull everything together. Probably, that was the reason that I was --

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: American military.

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

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

KOREN: Oh, no, no. You just were there, and, to be quite frank with you, I didn't know whether I was a (unclear) or a horseback (unclear) a long time. It wasn't until I went up to I Corps, the First Corps area.

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

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

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

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

Q: What were you saying?

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

Q: Whose favorite word was that?

KOREN: I don't know.

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

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

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

And I said, "Fine."

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

KOREN: It was changed. There was not boss, I think. As a matter of fact, it was taken over by President Johnson, and he sent one of his men out there, whose name I've forgotten.

Q: Komer?

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

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

KOREN: Yes.

Q: I mean, at least in the field.

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

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

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

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

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

Q: How about Bill Porter?

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

Q: How did you feel about Westmoreland?

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

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

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

Q: In February of '68. But at the time you saw it, did you see the guerilla warfare and the "night

belonging to the VC" as being an absolute must that you had to conquer, and did you see progress in this? Or did you see this as being almost an irritant?

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

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

KOREN: Pretty much accepted at that time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KOREN: There's something there and the civil word is leadership is what's lacking. God knows the war colleges are doing their best to try to find the key to leadership right now. Sometimes it works. The most recent example is Hackworth. Do you know that story?

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

KOREN: No. About Face.

Q: About Face, yes.

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

Q: Abrams?

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

Q: York?

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

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

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

Q: Well now, what were you doing?

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

Q: What was the problem?

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

That was the kind of attitude I got from the lower level of the Department, and I didn't do too

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Was the Phoenix Program in --

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

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

KOREN: It was exposing them, yes.

Q: Exposing them. How did this work?

KOREN: How did it work?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KOREN: CIA.

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

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

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

KOREN: It was better led from the top.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Very much exposed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Pacific action teams, or something like that?

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

Q: Well, that's all right.

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

Q: Enlarged division.

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

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

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

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

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

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

KOREN: Yes.

Q: I remember a friend of mine saying they were a tough bunch but it was hard to get them going, because they were under orders not to take casualties and so they were more passive. They watched out for their own protection, but really did play much of a passive role.

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

Q: They were there but more for --

KOREN: More symbolic.

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

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

Q: Could you explain what happened with Teddy Kennedy?

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

was the designated --

Q: Senior civilian?

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

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

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

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

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

"Now you tell me what you think."

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

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

KOREN: John Paul Vann, sure. I knew him -- well, I knew all of the (unclear) opposite numbers.

Q: What is your evaluation of him?

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

Q: He was working in II Corps.

KOREN: He was in II Corps, yes. I think I knew John before I even left Saigon. But any rate, I

think his problem was he was too much of a egotist. And I wouldn't say he did everything from the point of view of "what can it do for me," but there was always a grain about him. I don't want to do him an injustice by any means. I have not read that book.

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

KOREN: Who wrote it?

Q: Sheehan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: In Da Nang?

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

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

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

KOREN: Oh, yes.

Q: Hue was the . . .

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

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

One last question on Vietnam. What happened to the pacification effort after Tet that you saw in

the immediate aftermath of the pacification? Was this in a way helped because of the destruction of the Viet Cong cadre, or was your apparatus pretty well destroyed?

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

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

KOREN: Yes.

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

KOREN: My feeling was that we were making some progress. I think that's the best way I can describe it. Of course, from the point of view of I Corps, we had maintained the borders pretty well so that I thought that would gradually spread itself and spread its influence further down to other corps areas and give us the thing that we needed as much as anything else was confidence and we needed some accomplishments so we could say, "Oh, boy. We're on the right track. Let's keep going."

W. AVERELL HARRIMAN
Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs
Washington, DC (1961-1963)

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
Washington, DC (1963-1965)

Ambassador-at-Large
Washington, DC (1965-1969)

Ambassador W. Averell Harriman was born in New York in 1891. He received a bachelor's degree from Yale in 1913. From 1933-1939, he was a member of the Department of Commerce. In 1940-1941, he was sent as a special representative of the President to Great Britain and Russia. He has been named U.S. representative in Europe, Special Assistant to the President, Mutual Security Administration, Governor of New York, U. S. Ambassador-at-Large, Assistant Secretary for Far East Affairs, and Representative of the President to peace talks in Paris. This interview was conducted in 1969.

Q: You were Assistant Secretary of State, I believe, when he made his first trip to Vietnam. Did you talk to him about that at the time?

HARRIMAN: I don't recall talking to him about it. I remember he went. I don't recall talking to him about it. I may have been on a trip, but I don't recall speaking to him about it before he went.

I remember the most important thing that happened -- the most publicly important thing that happened on that trip -- was his bringing the camel driver to the United States, which I thought was a very fine move of public relations in terms of the Pakistanis, as well as the United States. But I remember he had a talk with President Diem and I remember reading copy about it. But I don't remember having any particular talks at that time.

The most intimate relationships that I had with the President, when he became President, related to the peace efforts he made. He sent me on a trip in December 1965 to a number of countries. It was just before New Year's and I remember very well his calling me on the telephone and he said, 'Averell, have you got your bags packed?'

I said, 'Well, it's always packed, Mr. President.'

He said, "Bob McNamara is here with me. He's got an airplane waiting for you to take you to Europe."

I said, 'Where do you want me to go?'

He said, "That's for you to decide."

Then he explained what he wanted to do. He said he was going to continue the Christmas pause in bombing the North for a period, and he wanted to get support for his peace move. He wanted to get peace negotiations started, and I left that evening at 8:00 o'clock, as I recall it. I had no instructions, of course, except the general instructions which he gave me.

I went to Poland. I had a number of extremely interesting talks. I went to Poland first, Warsaw. I arrived there -- that was about 3:00 o'clock by my watch, 9:00 o'clock in the morning by the local time. I was met by the ambassador and he said that the Foreign Minister was ready to see me in an hour. I asked him to put it off for an hour and a half so I could get shaved and breakfast. But I've got a memorandum of my talk on April 19 with Michalowski, which relates to some of the steps which the Polish government took.

Q: They sent Michalowski to Hanoi after your talk with them, did they not?

HARRIMAN: Yes, while I was there, Michalowski went to Hanoi. This memorandum not only covers that, but also covers later attempts which the Polish government made at that time. I don't know whether we gave this copy of the memorandum of the conversation that I had with Mr. Michalowski, who is now the Polish Ambassador to the United States, on February 19th of this year which you may or may not have. I don't know if your files have got it.

Q: They may not have, if you have a copy that you can give to us.

HARRIMAN: I will be glad to give it to you because it covers the discussion that I had with him about certain talks which they carried on subsequently-which might be useful to complete the-

Q: We'd be very happy to attach it to this.

HARRIMAN: We have a copy of this, haven't we, Mark?

(Mark): Yes.

HARRIMAN: Although my arrival was not heralded, I spent 24 hours there. I spent all day most of the time, with Polish officials.

Q: You talked to Rapacki?

HARRIMAN: I talked to Rapacki, I had several talks with him and I saw Mr. Gomulka. I think there's a record of that in my report of those talks. They took it seriously. They took the President's position seriously -- possibly because I knew the Poles over the years, and gave them my assurance that the President was serious in this move. I don't know that they would have taken it from many people without some notification from the President. But, after all, my position with different people around the world had been such for so many years that they accepted statements that I made without any statement from the government.

But I didn't know whether they would receive me. They had only heard the night before that I was coming. As a matter of fact they had only heard that morning because I had left so hurriedly. I didn't know until an hour or two before I landed, a couple of hours before I landed, that they were going to see me. So on the basis of that rather hurried information, it is quite remarkable the Polish government sent their foreign ministry official to Hanoi, and he stayed there two weeks and he did what he could.

This memorandum shows his account, as he described it to me three years later, of his visit. There's some information in this which I did not have before, such as that the Soviet government encouraged the trip, the Chinese government discouraged it. But the government in Hanoi was not ready to negotiate at that time and Michalowski felt that if we'd held the pause for a little longer period they might have come around.

Q: He still believes that in 1969?

HARRIMAN: He still believes that in '69, but I don't. I have my doubts about it. I don't subscribe to that. I thought the President held the halt as long as he could and should at that time. I didn't know how long he was going to hold the pause, and I was anxious for -- I didn't know that Michalowski had gone, but the Poles said they would take some action. I knew others were trying to take some action and I was anxious to give them enough time. I think the President gave ample time by this pause, 37 days in all, but it was -- I've forgotten exactly how many days it was after I went to Warsaw. It must have been nearly a month, nearly four weeks.

Q: Yes, it was nearly the end of January.

HARRIMAN: I thought he ought to give them at least three weeks, and he gave them four weeks. So that I think Hanoi had every opportunity to accept the President's offer. This trip of

Michalowski was evidence of very real interest on the part of the Poles. And Mr. Shelepin, the Russian, went there, but how much he did at that time I don't know.

Q: Went to Hanoi, or came to Warsaw?

HARRIMAN: He went to Hanoi. He was on a trip to Hanoi. He was one of the senior members of the Communist party secretariat. He went to Hanoi for what purpose I don't know, but he was going there regardless of this visit.

I did not go to Moscow on this trip because I thought it would be embarrassing to the Russian leaders. I had talked about the war in Vietnam with Mr. Kosygin the year before. I had seen him in July -- not the year before, some months before -- July of 1965, six months earlier. And he had indicated that they wanted to see the war finished and thought that Hanoi would be willing to discuss a peaceful settlement. I reported that to the President and I am sure those documents are in the file. I'll look it up and see what I've got. If I have anything further I'll be glad to give it to you. But I did not go to Moscow because I thought there was a difference of opinion between Peking and Moscow about ending the war with Peking desiring to see the war continue, to see us continue to be involved in it, and Moscow wanting the war to stop -- each for their own ends.

But I went on, of course, and saw a number of other countries. We might stop this a minute and let's find out what we have in the files on this. I reported my talks briefly to the President and the Secretary of State. Those telegrams will undoubtedly be in the files. If they are not -- there were several from Warsaw I see here. I, as always, repeated very briefly the substance. I think there are three reports here.

Then I went on to Tito, whom I had known very well over the years. I first knew him during the war. Then I went to see him in '51 when he was in great trouble. I went there for President Truman to talk with him about his military needs. He thought at that time that Stalin was going to unleash his satellites and he wanted some additional planes and tanks and other equipment. I think we did something for him at that time. So I had a rather long experience with him. He was very anxious to do what he could. He said his influence with Peking was zero! In fact, he maintained that Peking was reserving for him the most vicious attacks.

I remember him saying this rather amusing story -- I'm not sure I put it in the telegram -- but he said that they had just called him a "Revisionist Bandit". I suggested that wasn't anything very much, because they had called us "Imperialist Bandits" for years, and he said, "Oh but you don't understand. A revisionist bandit is a far worse character than an imperialist!" This was the kind of personal talks that we had.

But he did say that he, of course, had influence in Moscow and would be very anxious to end the war, to see the war ended, because he thought his security was at stake. He was afraid, of course, that there would be a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States and that would affect his security. That was true of all these Eastern European countries that I talked to at different times. They were very anxious to end the war. In his case the Yugoslavs were not giving any substantial military assistance, I think they only sent a few hundred thousand dollars worth of medical equipment. It was rather silly for us to put Yugoslavia on the same list as those

who were helping the North Vietnamese. I think, that's all they sent. Their Crescent Society, so-called, paralleling our Red Cross in their opinion, had sent this equipment, these medical supplies. But, in any event, he did call in the ambassador, the Russian ambassador, the same afternoon that I saw him. What message he sent to Moscow, I don't know.

I went on and saw a number of different people. He recommended I talk to Nasser. He and Nasser considered themselves quite close, being so-called neutrals. And I'm rather interested that Gromyko now is on his way to see Tito, having just returned from a visit to see Nasser in Cairo. It may well be he went to talk to Nasser about a settlement of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel, and it may be that's why he's going there. It's particularly interesting that he should be going to Belgrade at this time when certainly the Communist party and Russia must be quite angry with Tito for not permitting the Yugoslav Communist party to go to their meeting, which is coming to a close in Moscow now. There were several communist countries that didn't go. I think the only three of them that I remember are, of course, the Chinese communists, the Albanians, and Tito. I don't remember which other ones.

Q: The Romanians threatened not to go, but then went.

HARRIMAN: But they did. The Romanians have gone, and what's interesting about that conference is it's not going too well for the Russians -- not much unity. The Italians have made a major issue of the Soviet interference in Czechoslovakia, spoke very vigorously against this Brezhnev doctrine of interference with the sovereignty of another state. Of course, the French Communists are opposing it. I don't know what position they're taking. But it's interesting that the Soviet Union is going ahead with its business with the Yugoslav government, in spite of the difference, a very strong difference. I can't help but think that he's reporting to Tito about his talks with Nasser.

But anyway Tito recommended that I go to see Nasser, and I did on the same trip and had a very interesting talk with Nasser and he did take up with the Soviet government, I'm sure, the desirability of their influencing the Hanoi government to undertake talks about peaceful settlement. I urged him to approach other neutrals.

I also saw on this same trip Mr. Shastri, the Prime Minister of India, and President Ayub of Pakistan, and both of them agreed to talk to Mr. Kosygin at Tashkent. As a matter of fact, President Ayub left almost immediately after talking to me to go to Tashkent. That was the meeting which was called by Kosygin to bring pressure on both the Indians and the Pakistanis to end their war. We supported that initiative. I'm sure both Mr. Shastri and President Ayub did speak to Kosygin. Of course, Mr. Shastri died, so I never had any report of it, but President Ayub, whom I've seen subsequently, said that they did with Kosygin, although he was very angry with the United States for having starting the bombing while he was in Hanoi. He has never quite gotten over that. He felt it was a personal affront. Obviously it was not, but he felt that it was, and it's one of those unarguable questions that you can't argue with him. But I'm inclined to believe that he did give some sort of instructions to Shelepin to see what they could do to encourage Hanoi, but obviously they are not ready to exert any major influence.

(tape interrupted by phone call)

I'd like to say a little more about the Russian attitude towards Hanoi. After my talk with Mr. Kosygin in July, 1965, I became convinced that they, the Russians, wanted to see the war ended. I had a very rough talk with Kosygin. He was not at all in a generally friendly point of view, because he had a number of things that he was annoyed about. The principal one was Vietnam. He kept saying, "Don't you realize that this war only helps the Chinese?" It became evident to me that what they wanted in Southeast Asia, which has subsequently developed in the subcontinent of India-Pakistan, they want to see Southeast Asia strong enough and independent enough to resist Peking's expansion to the South.

Now, there are certain people who have felt that the Russians would want to see us bogged down -- occupied -- to give them a freer hand in other parts of the world, and also they would like to see the Chinese diverted to the South rather than to the North, just as Chamberlain tried to divert Hitler to the East to Russia, rather than to the West. And I'm very much annoyed with these people who argue this way because they are very stupid. Some of them are experts in the State Department -- not the foreign service. Let me put you straight, not foreign service, but experts who felt they knew more about this. They thought the Russians ought to, if they knew more about this. They thought the Russians ought to, if they had any intelligence, direct Peking South. It just so happens that the Russians don't believe that. Now I can't tell you why they don't believe it, but they don't.

If we want any greater evidence it is their action in India-Pakistan. They are giving both India and Pakistan assistance. Actually they are giving them both military assistance, which we have largely dropped out of. You know we have stopped giving both India and Pakistan much military assistance, although we're giving both economic assistance. They are doing both economic and military. They want to divert Pakistan from its closer relations with Peking and this is the way they feel.

Now other evidence is that the Soviet Union helped us both during October to create conditions which made it possible for President Johnson to stop the bombing in North Vietnam as he did in November 1968, and then again in January helped us end this rather ridiculous undignified discussion on the shape of the table. They brought heat to bear on the Hanoi delegation to stop that nonsense and to agree upon a compromise. Actually it wasn't a compromise. It practically accepted one of the suggestions that had been made from Saigon, so Saigon couldn't refuse. But in any event this is direct evidence.

But they, and I think it's important to understand, will only go so far. I used to talk to the Secretary of State about this, and he said, "Well, if the Russians really want to help end the conflict, all they have to do is stop giving weapons to Hanoi." I think we've got to recognize the Russians, so stated by Mr. Kosygin, look upon North Vietnam as what he calls a "Sister Socialist State." It is their obligation as the great leader of the communist movement, it's their obligation to support North Vietnam just as we considered it our obligation to support South Vietnam.

In the second place, they have a limited influence. The North Vietnamese are fiercely nationalistic. They don't want to be dominated by Peking or by Moscow, and the influence of each of them is relative. I don't know which has the most influence, but the Russians evidently

have some influence and were ready to use it to start negotiations to end the war.

They believe their interests are better advanced by ending the war in Vietnam. I don't care who has different opinion, I'm satisfied that this is true. So I'm satisfied that Mr. Kosygin did something. But, in any event, there is the combination of Mr. Michalowski's visit, of which we have the detailed account of his visit and a detailed statement there that the Russians encouraged him. And the interesting part was -- the first time we knew it -- the Chinese argued against it, were quite violently opposed to it. That is an indication that our guesses about the position of both countries were true. But in any event, we don't know what Shelepin said or did. He didn't go into any -- and Mr. Michalowski doesn't know either.

Now in addition I stopped in Tehran to see the Shah, partly as a gesture of good will. I had known him very well. I had known him since the wartime days. I met him first in 1942 when I went to Tehran with Prime Minister Churchill and went up to Moscow at that time. I have seen him intimately. He's stayed in my house in Sun Valley and he's come to dinner and that kind of thing. I thought if I flew over without talking to him, it would be misunderstood. So I visited his country just to consult him, and I think he was pleased that we were doing it. But I didn't think anything particularly would come of that.

I find that I reported my talks with Mr. Shastri by telegram. I reported also my visit, rather brief, to Pakistan. Also, I reported on my talk with -- as a matter of fact the report of my talk with President Ayub came from Tehran because I left almost immediately after that talk. Then there's another report of my talk, which is undoubtedly in the files, with the Shah of Tehran.

And I had this rather interesting talk -- Ambassador Battle went with me to talk to Nasser at his home and my only instructions related to the Fourteen points, which was about all I had to go on. We had taken a position stating our attitude in the Fourteen points. I had those with me and I could use them wherever need be. Nasser -- naturally everyone was rather flattered that the President should send a special emissary to see him, and he indicated that he would do what he could, but there wasn't very much which I thought he could do. On the other hand, one of the principal reasons for going was that Tito had suggested that it might be worthwhile since Nasser had certain contacts with Peking whereas he, Tito, had none.

I notice in this report that the Foreign Minister this morning said that they would talk to the representatives in Hanoi and later to the Chinese -- Peking. Nevertheless I don't think any of these talks with Peking had any influence. Did I make any other calls on that trip, Mark?

(Mark): Bangkok and Tokyo. There's also a tab from Manila. You met Rusk coming around in Manila.

HARRIMAN: Oh yes, that's true. I went back and I went on to Bangkok. I saw Martin and I saw Sullivan there. I didn't go to Laos on that trip?

(Mark): Yes, Bangkok, Tokyo, Canberra, Laos, Saigon and Manila.

HARRIMAN: I must have gone to Bangkok and then Vientiane and then to Tokyo and then to

Australia. Then I came back because the Secretary asked me to meet him.

Q: You met him in Manila.

HARRIMAN: No, I met him at Bangkok, I think. I went back to Bangkok to meet the Secretary because he asked me to come back that way to pick him up and take him after the funeral of Shastri who had died in Tashkent. I think while I was waiting for him as a matter of fact, I went back to Bangkok and then went to Vientiane but I did not go to Saigon on that trip, did I?

(Mark): Yes, you came back to Bangkok and then went to Saigon -- then Manila, then home via Honolulu.

HARRIMAN: Then I made the second trip with Vice President Humphrey. When did I leave? That was another trip? So the trip with Vice President Humphrey was at the President's request and we covered a number of countries in Asia. Did I leave again from Washington?

(Mark): Yes.

HARRIMAN: I remember Senator John Cooper was along. I've forgotten who else. We made a number of stops. The President asked me to make sure that the leader understood his policies in each one of these countries, and he wanted to make sure that the Vice President was fully briefed.

The Vice President did a very good job in those countries. I remember his speech in Canberra in which Prime Minister Holt was present. This was a largish lunch of a cross section of opinion forming people in Canberra. Mr. Holt said to me as the Vice president finished -- he talked for half an hour. It's rather well known that the Vice President doesn't always have a terminus, but in this case he had exactly a half-hour on the radio. He was told when to break off so he only talked for half an hour. Holt said, "This was the best presentation of an issue made by any visitor to Australia in my experience." He supported, of course, the President's position. And he did a great job. Vice President Humphrey, when he limited his speeches, was an extremely effective speaker. His problem was that he usually made three speeches at one time and he lost some of the effect because -- I'll speaking of his domestic speeches. But he made a very good impression everywhere he went. Did we go to Wellington, or didn't we, on that trip?

(Mark): I don't remember.

HARRIMAN: Anyway, that was the trip in which Bobby Kennedy came out for the coalition government and Vice President Humphrey made his now-famous remark, "That would be letting the fox into the chicken coop." I think that must have been in Canberra, at the press conference. (I thought it was Wellington), if he didn't go to Wellington that trip. You don't recall? (Note: It was Wellington)

(Mark): I don't.

Q: When did President Johnson give you sort of the general commission to lead the peace

initiatives?

HARRIMAN: Where's that memorandum I wanted? The first mission that he gave me is this one that I speak of at the end of -- it was really Christmas week. He called me at noon and I was off at 8:00 o'clock that evening. The only instructions that I had -- the information that I had -- were the 14 Points which I used to good advantage.

I've got a little memorandum here of my talk with him in Manila in October '66 -- that same year -- and this was rather typical. I'll give you a copy because I'm sure you haven't got it. These were my notes of "No Distribution" of my personal talk with the President. He asked me to return and visit a number of countries, which I'll speak about in a little while, to describe what had happened in Manila. I asked the President what he wanted me to emphasize to the heads of governments that I saw. He replied, "You know what I want, peace. And you can quote me in any way that you think would be helpful. I will support anything you say."

Q: That's about as broad a commission as you can hold.

HARRIMAN: He said, "Has any President ever given you more sweeping authority than that?" And I replied, "No." I told the President I thought the Manila conference had been extraordinarily valuable even though the effect would not necessarily be felt for months. This is a little personal touch which you might want.

I remember on several occasions I would ask him that question and he would say, 'Averell, you know better than I do, go ahead and talk to them. Tell them. You know what I want.' This was the attitude of President Roosevelt on a number of different occasions, without any instructions, and I have been used to doing it. But I always had a feeling that President Roosevelt gave me this authority and if I did all right, I'd be all right; if I did something which he didn't like, I would be out on a limb and the branch would be sawed off. But with President Johnson I knew exactly that he meant this, what he said. I had a complete feeling of confidence that he meant exactly what he said. Of course in each one of these cases he knew that I was familiar with the subject. He wasn't giving me a wild blank check because he knew that I was thoroughly informed. A most interesting case was one that he sent me a few days after the Dominican --

Q: April of 1965 when you went to various Latin American countries?

HARRIMAN: Yes. This was an extraordinary trip. I reported. I think I've got nothing more.

Q: You went in May, it was probably before you left.

HARRIMAN: I arrived in Bogota, the first stop, on May 1, so it must have been on April 30.

(Mark): This is the report, a summary.

HARRIMAN I did not make a report on this. I've got a very detailed report of a trip I made after Manila, after this trip. Perhaps I'd better cover the Manila first.

Q: All right, sir.

HARRIMAN: I submitted this to the President and I assume you have a copy of this?

Q: If it went to him, yes sir. There should be one in his files.

HARRIMAN: But this is a copy dated November 28 for the President and the Secretary of State and it has an account of each one of the visits I made at the end of November, right after Manila. It has a summary report and then it has a memorandum which is entitled, "Matters of particular interest to each country." in which I have a detailed statement of what I saw in each country as it related to the countries themselves as well as to the Manila trip.

I felt a great need of haste on that trip because it was only important if I saw the head of government immediately. And I remember one very extraordinary day on which I had already stopped at Indonesia and I had seen the three principal members of that government, I stopped at Ceylon, and that was an interesting visit because not very many people visit Ceylon, and I'm glad I did because Ceylon is quite an influential Buddhist state, and they had been attempting to work with the Saigon government and with the Thai government to improve their relations and it was quite interesting. And I went to New Delhi and I saw Mrs. Gandhi and I spent the night. I remember having breakfast with Ambassador Bowles. Then I saw President Ayub, had lunch with him. I had to go to Peshawar and take a separate plane to go down to Rawalpindi. Then on to Tehran. I had tea with the Shah and I arrived in Rome just in time for a live 11:00 o'clock broadcast on television.

Q: That was some day!

HARRIMAN: That was one of the fullest days that I've had. But I felt it was very important. I was in a particular hurry on that trip because I thought if I went quickly to places it was important. I saw of course the Italian representatives, the Italian government. I remember one untoward incident was the ambassador. After Italy I went to France and I talked to the NATO Council there. I saw Couve de Murville. I didn't see De Gaulle on the visit. I went to Bonn. I went to London. I saw, of course, both Prime Minister Wilson and Brown.

Then I went to Morocco at the request of Ambassador Tasca. That was an unfortunate visit from my standpoint because Bourguiba was particularly furious that I hadn't gone to see him, so I had to make a special trip a few weeks later, on which I went to Tunisia, Algeria and Spain on that next trip. But it was a good thing because the King, whom I had known for some time -- as a matter of fact I had met him as a little boy at Casablanca Conference when President Roosevelt saw the King. They have a very warm feeling toward the United States in general, particularly President Roosevelt, because President Roosevelt took a very strong position that Morocco should have its independence, and they gave him credit for it. Unfortunately, we've had difficulties with some of our relations with Morocco because we promised -- I think President Johnson promised a very moderate amount of perhaps 12 million dollars worth of military equipment -- to sell them that. And there was some difficulty with the delivery and some second thinking about it. So it was a useful trip for that reason.

Q: Did any of the visits on that trip result in any initiatives toward negotiations with Hanoi?

HARRIMAN: No. The purpose of this trip was quite a different purpose. As you'll see from this little memorandum I'll give you, the purpose of the trip was to inform them about the Manila Conference; to inform them of the efforts the President was making for peaceful settlement; to get support for the President's initiative for peace. And I didn't ask them to take any immediate steps. In this memorandum about this trip I emphasized the fact that the President sat at a round table with six Asian leaders as equals, which impressed them; the favorable military developments of South Vietnam; the limited objective that the President had of letting the people of South Vietnam decide their own future. I won't go into it all, but these were all matters which they were interested in -- the constitutional procedures which had been established. It was more a general effort to get a more sympathetic attitude towards what we were doing among these countries than it was to ask them to do anything particular for peace. I expressed the President's willingness to stop the bombing if there was reciprocal action taken by Hanoi, and in some places I was very frank. I told Mr. Couve de Murville that what President De Gaulle had done at Phnom Penh was counter productive. I had known Murville for many years, and there was no problem about being particularly blunt about it.

Q: I believe the Poles were in the middle of a new peace initiative right about that time. Were you involved in that one?

HARRIMAN: Oh yes, that was the so-called Marigold, covered by this memorandum. I wasn't talking at this time about these different peace initiatives. There were a number of them that were constantly keeping us busy. That was a peace initiative which started with Ambassador Lodge talking with the Italian Ambassador and bringing in the Polish representative.

Unfortunately, the middle of these talks -- I don't think I have to supplement what was said here about how the talks broke down. I've always been satisfied that the Poles were acting in good faith. But they never had a firm commitment from Hanoi to start negotiations. But they were trying to act in good faith as middle men between getting two recalcitrant people -- I won't say recalcitrant -- two people together who were at loggerheads. And they weren't successful in doing it. Unfortunately, the bombing of Hanoi came in at that time -- which was just bad luck, no connection between the two.

Now I think I might say something about the Dominican visit, because I thought that was quite a useful trip. There again, the President sent me off with a minimum of notice --

Q: And minimum of instruction, too?

HARRIMAN: No instructions. As a matter of fact that trip developed as I went. I think I took one foreign service officer with me. I was to go first to Bogota, and then the trip developed from that. I had it rather rapid again, because unless I went quickly it didn't mean very much. They were all concerned over the Dominican -- remember we landed our troops; first a small detachment, then a rather large detachment -- and the facts were developing as I went along. I went to eight countries, and talked to heads of government of eight different Latin American countries, and was gone from Washington exactly seven days. So you can see it was rather

hurried, particularly as I didn't have a special plane. I did use the attaché's planes over a couple of legs of the journey but it was rather a hectic trip on commercial air flights.

I saw the press. I've always made it a rule never to talk on background but only to talk on the record. I think one of the great mistakes some people make is to try to talk with people in foreign countries for background. They don't understand it, number one; and number two; the Americans don't really abide by it because there is always someone they talk to in confidence who leaks it out. So I talked to the press on arrival. Naturally the trips were heralded to some extent and the press and television and radio were always present on arrival and on departure. I answered questions, which were also on television. Since our position was actually changing from period to period -- remember we first went in to save lives, and then we went in with a larger and larger group -- so I took the position that our motives were to save lives and to end the fighting. They should wait until the last chapter was written, and then they would see all the President had in mind was to make it possible for the people of the Dominican Republic to express their own views without the tragedy of any more bloodshed.

Q: Do you think they understood that?

HARRIMAN: On the whole I had a pretty good press in spite of the fact that in a number of these countries they were quite shocked by the intervention, the move from the principle of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, which was really the end of landing Marines, was quite a shock in a number of countries. As I recall it, about half the countries were sympathetic and about half the countries were very much opposed. As I recall it, the President of Colombia was sympathetic. Of course Brazil was sympathetic. I spent two days in Brazil because I had to go from Rio to Brasilia. I saw the President there. Then also the President of Panama was sympathetic. I thought it was four, but I'm not sure. It was certainly at least three.

The other countries refused to say anything. Some of them were quite sympathetic to the President. The President of Chile was a good friend of the President's and he said that he could not take any public position, for his own political position -- he was having a good deal of trouble at the time. There were demonstrations going on at that time. That was the only place I had any difficulty with demonstrations. But that was going on against him so he couldn't take any public position. The other presidents, I think, felt the same way about it. That whole record of the position of each country is well known, so I don't think there's any use going into it.

Q: No.

HARRIMAN: But it certainly did some good in that they felt somewhat better about the fact that the President sent his personal representative to explain the position. And it did some good in the press, because I didn't dodge any questions and I answered them. That was the most active, in fact, it was the most exhausting trip I made.

I think in all, during the four years from '64 to '68, until I got involved, I went to nearly 50 countries and some several times, pretty well divided between Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In almost every case I saw the head of government and had some

particular reason for President Johnson. That may not have been true about Africa because for one year, from March '64-'65 the President assigned me the job of looking after Africa. I was not much involved in Vietnamese affairs during that period, except as related to the question of peace.

Q: What about those initiatives for peace? You mentioned Marigold, I know there are a lot of other ones. Are there other ones that reached the stage of considerable importance?

HARRIMAN: Well, the most important one I think were the discussions in London --

Q: February '67?

HARRIMAN: I happened to be in Florida for a long weekend -- one of the few times I was away and I'm sorry that I wasn't there. That was a very unfortunate period. It was bad luck. It was bad luck that Kosygin was in London just at the time of the four-day Tet cessation of bombing. There's no doubt that the North Vietnamese took most extraordinary advantage of that four-day stop in bombing. I think the Navy reported that it looked as if at 7 o'clock, whenever it was, a curtain went up and the flocks of small ships and large ships moved down. And then when it was over, the curtain came down. I remember one of the pilots, who was observing one of the routes of North Vietnam into Laos, said "This looks like the Jersey turnpike on a Sunday afternoons" There was tremendous pressure from our military on the President. He did extend it, I've forgotten how many hours, whether it was a day or something, a little bit longer. But I've always thought it was very bad luck that Kosygin was in London at that time. If he had been there several weeks, or a couple weeks ahead of Tet, or a couple of weeks afterwards, and hadn't been tied to this Tet cessation, something might have come out of it, because Kosygin told Wilson that he was ready to do something to bring us together. I've always felt something would have come of that if it hadn't been tied to this Tet period.

Kosygin asked that it be extended, and there really wasn't time. We almost gave him an ultimatum -- "you must have an answer within a period of time," which was quite impossible to get.

Now Wilson thought they were making progress. [Chester] Chet Cooper was in London at that time. He was my assistant working on this. He had a very close relationship with Wilson and with Brown, he had been there earlier before they were important dignitaries. I'm satisfied they were taking it very seriously, and there's every indication that Kosygin was trying to do something.

But I don't in any way suggest the President was wrong in not extending the Tet truce at that time -- or the pause in bombing at that time -- because the North Vietnamese were taking such fantastic advantage of it. It was almost impossible to stop the military from demanding they be continued. So, as I say, if it had been in a lull, possibly something might have come of this talk because there is no doubt Kosygin wanted to do something as later was shown in the telegrams that he sent the President. I think there's one in June of '68, in which he said something to the effect, "I and my colleagues have reason to believe. . ." Therefore the talks which started between the Russians and Hanoi in January '66 evidently were continued, and although Moscow never

took a very firm position of insisting that Hanoi should start negotiations, I'm satisfied that they did what they felt they could within the limits of their relationship with Hanoi and the influence that they could bear. But in any event I think that one in London was one of the most promising.

I had no patience for U Thant and some of his claims, in which he suggested that he told Stevenson that if certain things were done at a certain time, peace talks could start. It was quite a different thing to have some rather vague talks begin from having anything come of them. So I've very little patience for the criticisms that certain people made that opportunities were lost. I think the Marigold talk might have led to some talks in Warsaw between our representatives if it had not been for the unfortunate bombing of Hanoi, but whether they would have come to anything or not it's very hard to say. None of these various attempts -- there was the one with the two Frenchmen which Henry Kissinger --

Q: Yes, in the summer of 1967 --

HARRIMAN: President Johnson did everything -- he gave every opportunity and I don't recall any of them in which I felt there was any loss except as I have suggested, the two -- the closest -- Marigold, and the talks with Wilson in London in February of '67?

Q: What about your own mission to the Romanians in late '67?

HARRIMAN: The Romanians were given every opportunity and they showed, as the Poles did, a real desire to do something. In fact, they did even more than the Poles because they sent -- what was the name of that man, Macevesecau -- their deputy foreign minister on two trips. One was the result of my visit to Romania in the -- I think that was about the first of December, 1967. I stopped in to see them because I had understood that they were unhappy that I hadn't visited them before, had long talks with prime minister Maurer. As a result of that trip they sent their senior officer to Hanoi. He came back and reported to us here in Washington the result of his trip; made a second trip back, but nothing came of it. He did everything he could. They were remarkably accurate, I thought, in the reports of the conversations, because they told the bad news as well as the good. It was an indication of the good faith of the Romanian government in attempting to bring us together.

Q: Then it was the President's speech of March 31, that finally did get things started. It was not some other initiative?

HARRIMAN: No, it was entirely the President's initiative. I think a lot of these efforts began to bear fruit, because no doubt in January '66 when Michalowski went there, the North Vietnamese were unwilling to start negotiations. I think the March 31 -- I was rather surprised. I didn't think that this partial bombing halt would bring them to talks. I like to show the times I was wrong. People are very apt to remember only the times they were right. But if I had to bet -- no one asked me to bet -- but if I had been asked to bet whether there would be a favorable response to the March 31 speech I would have said the reply would be negative. It might lead to something else, but they wouldn't start talking. At least on even money I would have bet against it. But it did start the talks. You know what happened from the full record of those talks. The most minute of details are in the records.

Q: When did the President tell you that he wanted you to be his representative for the talks, and how did he instruct you for that?

HARRIMAN: I think that Rusk told me first. Of course, in those negotiations we had the most detailed instructions. Every statement we made in the public meetings -- we drafted them in Paris, sent them to Washington, and got them approved. We did have a number of private talks, in which we had general instructions rather than detailed instructions. Those went on -- the first ones were with Cy Vance and Colonel Lao, and the later ones with both of us together with Mr. Habib, who is an extremely capable foreign service officer, assigned to us, who had served in Saigon. The three of us met with Le Duc Tho, when he was there, and if he wasn't there, met with Xuan Thuy, who was the head of the mission.

And those talks, we got to know a good deal of the North Vietnamese thinking on a number of subjects, but not in regard to the political settlement because we did not want to discuss any details of any political settlement without the Saigon government present. I'd always hoped that the Saigon government and the NLF would get together, with or without Hanoi and ourselves being present, sooner or later working out some kind of an agreement which only the Vietnamese could work out. It's very hard to figure what kind of an agreement is satisfactory to both Saigon and the NLF. There are certain aspects of the NLF which I think we should bear in mind, although there's no doubt, as we've said many times, that the whole uprising of the V C was stimulated, organized, trained, financed, supplied, directed from Hanoi; these NLF people are Southerners and there is a difference of point of view between Southerners and Hanoi, just as there is in the Soviet Union between the Ukrainians and Moscow, and certain other parts of Russia.

I think they want to remain independent for a certain period of years before they join -- there have been varying statements from five or 10 to 15 years. And I think there are certain things the Southerners can do among themselves which Hanoi will go along with. But the NLF, I don't think, wants to be taken over by Hanoi until the government of South Vietnam is on an equal basis with them.

So I thought, frankly, there is a fundamental basis on which the Southerners can get together if they are willing to do so. On the other hand I have felt that it is absolutely essential for the United States and North Vietnam to come to an agreement. We have got to remember that Hanoi didn't keep the Laos agreement for a single day. They didn't tell this to me, but they contended to some of the Americans that saw them and reported to me that they were forced to sign that agreement, which they didn't like, by the larger powers, presumably Russia and China. They made the naive expression, the statement, "We always keep agreements that we make ourselves." Well, what is obvious in dealing with all the communists is they only keep the agreements that are in their interest to do so. Therefore, I think we've got to come to an agreement between the United States and Hanoi, with Moscow's help, for a long term relationship.

I'm encouraged that this can be done because at several times the negotiators in Paris in our private talks asked about what kind of relationship they could have. They want to be independent of Peking and of Moscow, and they want some relationship with us. They look upon American

technology as the best in the world. They showed fascination in the miracle rice, as an example. They wanted to be independent of China and the supply of their food. They are inclined to believe this miracle rice, plus the techniques of using it, will do so. So I think there's a chance that we can have some sort of relationship which will last for a period of years which will make them live -- I said very bluntly that the North Vietnamese would have to learn to live with their neighbors in peace or there will be no peace in Southeast Asia. They never answered that. But it's not going to be easy.

So far President Nixon has lost the momentum which, under President Johnson, we had in Paris. I think they were quite prepared to discuss the mutual de-escalation of the violence and some real progress could have been made if the Saigon government had appeared on November 6.

Q: The press reported last summer in 1968 a reduced level of violence. Was there a time that you and Mr. Vance thought we might have --

HARRIMAN: Yes, that's on the record. We made great public and private statements to the Hanoi representatives about their shelling of the cities and actually I found, in two cases, by appealing to world opinion we got Hanoi to reverse actions they were taking.

The first was in regard to the prisoners. I was asked by the President to watch the prisoner of war situation, which I did from May 1967. He wanted someone to give attention to the prisoners of war and so I did. But the North Vietnamese were then talking about trials of our prisoners as war criminals. We did a lot. We started a campaign in every country; we asked every embassy, sent out directives, and a major drive was put on. The North Vietnamese abandoned that, because they were held up as misusing prisoners. They, of course, never would permit, which we tried every way we could, to get representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the prisoners. But they did end those trials.

The next was in connection with this bombing of the cities. We did put on a major drive to get people to recognize the barbarism of hitting, shelling, cities -- I mean civilian population in the cities -- even to the point where U Thant, you remember, came out with a statement. That offended them very much, to have U Thant come out against --

Q: On our side.

HARRIMAN: On our side -- it was a unique experience. So they stopped it. I think they stopped about the middle of June. I think actually the last time that one or two shells dropped in Saigon was June 18. So for two months there was very little action.

Now they are quite blunt on this in our private talks. They said, "Whenever we do anything which is of an offensive nature, you say that these actions on our part are not conducive to progress in our Paris talks for peace." which is almost verbatim of what I used to say. "But then just as soon as we stop them, your military in Saigon boast that the war is over, we've got them licked!" Actually, I think this is correct. I think that's an unfortunate aspect of some of the statements that come out of -- it's quite natural for military men to make statements which they think to be true.

No doubt after an offensive, they have to regroup, and have to resupply. It's a very long and tedious journey to get stuff from Hanoi down through the jungles into the hands of the enemy forces. But in that summer, Vance and I both thought this lull had a political connotation as well. The same was true the end of October or early November. They disengaged in the northern two provinces. They had 25 regiments in the northern two provinces, some of the toughest fighting was going on there. They took out 22 of the 25 regiments. Eleven of them went as far north as the 20th parallel, nearly 200 miles. When the orders were given for General Abrams to put all-out pressure on the enemy, he took the First Air Cavalry Division out of that area, because the fighting had been so reduced, down to the Third Corps. Our military say they had to do it -- in Saigon.

After analyzing all the information we had the military in Paris agreed with us -- we were in full agreement -- there was a political connotation as well as a military in the actions they were taking at that time. So I have a belief -- Cy Vance and I both believe, and nobody will get us to change that opinion -- that this was a military action which they took in reply to the President's action of stopping the bombing. We could have made progress if the Saigon government had joined the talks in Paris at that time.

Now the information we had as to the fact of the matter in the Saigon discussions were stated publicly by Mr. Clifford in his November 12 press conference. Everything he said confirmed what our impressions were, and of course he had some information about which we were not familiar. I think he said that they had stayed up all night discussing it, and he went to bed to have some sleep before listening to the President's speech announcing that he had stopped the bombing. That was October 28, and the word came that Saigon wouldn't agree. This was a great shock to him. It was a great shock to us in Paris. We had no indication at that time that President Thieu hadn't fully agreed with every step the President was taking. So it's a very serious regret that they didn't move at that time. What their motives were it's hard to tell, but I'm satisfied that someone was sending information to them, "don't do anything before election." They wanted Nixon to win. They thought he would be tougher. I'm sure that President Nixon had nothing to do with it, but I'm sure certain people did send them that information. And then everything that Vice President Ky did in Paris and Lam did later on when they finally agreed to talk, when we had these weeks and weeks of discussions about procedural questions. They wanted to hold up talks until President Nixon came in. They didn't want to have any substantive talks while President Johnson was in office -- because they thought that President Nixon would be tougher or more inclined to go along with them. In fact I believe President KY did his best to break the talks up. He would have liked to see them wiped off the slate before President Nixon took over.

Q: Did you and Mr. Vance recommend that the United States cut our military activity back during that period?

HARRIMAN: We had some discussions about it when we were back here and I told the Secretary of State that we felt, both of us, that it would be well to do so. But I don't think we put anything on the record. We didn't want to put things on the record which might be at variance with the President's position. We did recommend in the summer, which is on the record, that we should take advantage of the lull -- you see the President in his March 31 speech said that "if the

other side will take some reciprocal action, I will stop all the bombing," or something to that effect. We thought this lull in military action was sufficient to take that step. The President didn't believe so and didn't take action at that time. Then I'm satisfied that in October, myself, that the Thieu government didn't -- one of the reasons they didn't go along was because they were advised by their friends, including Madam Chennault as well as the Ambassador here, that if we did have peace, Humphrey would be elected. Whether that would have happened or not I of course can't say, but South Vietnam was told that they had better not take that chance. I'm quite sure that President Nixon had nothing to do with it, but some friends passed that word out.

Well, was there anything else?

Q: I was going to say, you have just a few minutes on the end of this tape; if there is anything you'd like to add, don't let me limit you.

HARRIMAN: No, I was naturally tremendously gratified -- Vance and I both were, devoted to the President -- that we were able to be to some extent instrumental in getting what I have called publicly the train on the tracks, the peace train on the tracks with it's full head of steam up. And on January 18 we finally came to agreement on all procedural questions, but President Nixon has done nothing for five months since then. The steam has gone out. The whole Situation has toughened up. He's lost a tremendous opportunity, and I wouldn't be telling the truth if I wasn't extremely upset. President Nixon has spent this time, as far as I can find out, doing nothing except discuss with Thieu the relationship between our two countries. Vance stayed in Paris for 30 days. Lodge was not permitted to talk. He stayed there principally to turn over to Lodge the relationship we established. I'm not suggesting we had any particular friendly relations, but we got to know each other to a point where we knew when they were telling the truth and they had more confidence in us.

Actually I don't think the President permitted Lodge to have private talks with the Hanoi delegation for two months. That lost the momentum which President Johnson had made possible and dissipated a great service which President Johnson did for our country and to an incoming President in having these negotiations in a position where they could be carried on. What will happen from now on, I don't want to predict, but I am resentful, extremely resentful, of the fact that President Nixon took four months, until May the 14th, before he announced his policies. As far as I can make out, there wasn't anything he said on May 14 which President Johnson had not previously said. I tried to do the best I could publicly, and said it was a constructive speech, and pointed out certain aspects that were constructive. I've been publicly appealing to the President to carry on private discussions for an agreement in reduction in the violence. I think if we carried on under President Johnson's leadership we could have done that, and what the political settlement would have been, I can't tell. But it was Vance's and my belief that we should cut the violence down, and we did not believe that any progress could be made politically as long as both sides were trying to spar for an improved position militarily.

Q: Do you feel like President Johnson was prepared to rescind the orders to put all pressures on?

HARRIMAN: I'm personally am sure he would have if we could have shown there would be

mutual reduction of violence. He felt that until we got the four parties together that full pressure should be kept on them. But if we had come forward with a mutual reduction of violence, I'm quite satisfied that he would have agreed to that. They told us in private talks that we would make no progress as long as we were trying to improve our petition. As soon as we started the talks we should have accepted the status quo on the ground and gone to a peaceful settlement. This attempt to have a slightly better military position is not conducive to any progress, as far as I'm concerned. President Nixon came into the office, having promised the American people he had a plan for peace. And when he made his first speech on Vietnam four months after he became President, he said, "I have been very diligent in looking at every aspect of the situation in Vietnam, and now I've come to the following conclusions." And he made a statement which reaffirmed practically everything that President Johnson said.

Q: Concluded that "my predecessor was right!"

HARRIMAN: Yes. If we had been allowed to be attacking the President -- which is something about the American system that differs from the British. As soon as a man becomes Prime Minister he's subject to attack by the opposition. Here, we're suppose to give them a period of time-

Q: A 100 days or something.

HARRIMAN: Well, a 100 days, but now Senator Mansfield has given him 6 months which will be another month. But if I had been in the position to state publicly what I felt privately, it's that he deceived the American people into thinking he had a plan, and he boasts about the fact that he's been diligent for four months while American boys were being killed at an increasing rate, and then reiterates the President's [Johnson] position. I don't think there was a thing he said in the May 14th speech which hadn't previously been stated by President Johnson. So I'm frankly very resentful of it. And I do believe that if President Johnson had continued as President we would be in much better shape in regard to negotiations now than we are. I can't predict the future.

Today Mr. Vance, who felt so deeply about it has endorsed the Clark Kerr group, who are out for a negotiated settlement. Their first provision is to declare a cease-fire -- a mutual cease-fire. I've stated publicly we ought to negotiate a reduction of violence leading to the cease-fire. And I'm satisfied we're not going to make any progress in the political settlement until we undertake to reduce the fighting.

DEAN RUSK
Secretary of State
Washington, DC (1961-1969)

Secretary of State Dean Rusk was born on September 2, 1909. He went to David College, receiving a B.A. in 1931, and later received an M.A. as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University in 1934. After college, he joined the U.S. Army from 1940-1946. He joined the State Department in 1946. His interview was conducted in

1987.

Q: You were of course involved in Vietnam from a very early time, and I'd like to get some indication as to how much Mr. Johnson as Vice President was involved during that period.

RUSK: Well, in the first place, he was kept fully informed about everything that was happening in Vietnam. He attended the National Security Council meetings and Cabinet meetings, and he had a State Department officer on his staff who kept him briefed on the daily reports from Vietnam. So I would say that he had full information. He did make a trip to Vietnam, as you will recall, and the historian will have a chance to read his full report on that trip.

Q: Did you talk to him about that trip?

RUSK: I talked to him about it after he came back. He was briefed on it before he left. I was present when he reported on his trip to President Kennedy, but I think it would not be correct to say that Vice President Johnson participated in the detailed decisions that were made by President Kennedy on Vietnam unless President Kennedy talked to him privately about them because the key decisions were made not at formal meetings but informally by President Kennedy in consultation with his key advisers.

Q: And Mr. Johnson was usually not present at that.

RUSK: He was not regularly present at those special meetings that were called.

Now the most important decision that President Kennedy made was to go beyond the levels of troops that were in effect permitted by the 1954 agreements, and greatly to augment our advisory position in South Vietnam. Under the Geneva Agreements the French had been permitted to leave about six hundred and fifty people in South Vietnam as a military assistance group. By agreement with the French, we later substituted Americans for those French, and so we had about six hundred and fifty people there who were ordnance people, and quartermaster people, and signal people, who were there to advise on the use and employment of American equipment that was being supplied under the military assistance program. It became apparent to President Kennedy that that much effort was not going to be nearly enough to do the job, and so he greatly increased the advisory role out there and moved the complement to about seventeen- or eighteen thousand before his death.

Any historian will want to look carefully at what President Kennedy said on the public record about Southeast Asia. You will find a great deal of material in the three volumes of the public papers of President Kennedy. There is no question that he felt very strongly that it was vital to the security of the United States that Southeast Asia be maintained as a free area, that it not be allowed to be overrun by the Communists. That was his policy, and some of the so-called Kennedy people who have tried to portray President Kennedy in a different role just missed the point. I'm not a ghoul, [and] I'm not going to dig President Kennedy out of the grave as a witness to later policy, but I think the historian will want to look carefully at what President Kennedy said publicly while he was President in order to make judgments about what President Kennedy's policy towards Southeast Asia was.

Q: You are saying that the commitment was as firm as it ever had been or could be at the time the Administration changed in late 1963?

RUSK: Yes. President Kennedy made the determination that I think any President would have made, that it was necessary for the United States to make good on its commitment to South Vietnam. Every President since President Truman had come to the conclusion that the security of Southeast Asia was vital to the security of the United States; that if Southeast Asia with its peoples and its vast resources were to be organized by elements hostile to the United States that would create an adverse and major change in the world balance of power; and that it was in the interest of the United States to maintain the independence of these Southeast Asian countries, particularly those covered by the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

So when President Johnson became President, he found seventeen- or eighteen thousand Americans in Vietnam under a policy which was clearly aimed at maintaining the independence of South Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia and Thailand. Now, the question arises as to whether President Johnson could have changed that policy. As Vice President he was certainly loyal to the policy of President Kennedy. There was no question about that. In a purely constitutional sense President Johnson might have been able to reverse course-

Q: But he would have had to do it against -- I take it -- the more or less unanimous advice of his advisers.

RUSK: There was no advice to President Johnson from any of his advisers that we cut and run in Southeast Asia. President Johnson took office determined to carry out the main policies of President Kennedy. He did that both in domestic and foreign affairs.

In another sense the President would find it difficult, if not impossible, to change a commitment of that sort. When you look at the consequences of cutting and running, the consequence is such that no President is likely to be able to accept. Not only would Southeast Asia be overrun, but the fidelity of the United States under its security treaties all over the world would be brought into question. In Asia we have treaties with Korea, Japan, the Republic of China, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand. If those who would become our enemies made the judgment that our participation in those treaties was merely a bluff, then those treaties would have no deterrent effect.

Q: Which is one of their chief purposes.

RUSK: That's quite correct, and the effect would be that there would be those who would be tempted to move into areas which were covered by our treaty commitments elsewhere. To give one or two examples, in June 1961 Chairman Khrushchev produced a crisis on Berlin in his meeting with President Kennedy in Vienna in June. Chairman Krushchev in effect said to President Kennedy, 'We're going to turn East Berlin over to the East Germans, and you've got to work out problems of access and the presence of U.S. troops in Berlin with the East Germans.' The implication was that the East Germans would not permit us to maintain our forces there, and Chairman Krushchev said that any attempt by the United States to use force against the East

Germans would mean war. President Kennedy had to look him straight in the eye and say, 'Well, then there will be war, Mr. Chairman. This is going to be a very cold winter.' Now, it was of the utmost importance that Chairman Krushchev believe President Kennedy on that point; otherwise, there might well have been a war.

Coming later to the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy had to say to Chairman Krushchev, 'Wow, Mr. Chairman, those missiles must leave Cuba. We'd prefer that they leave by peaceful means, but they must leave.' Now, suppose Chairman Krushchev had said to President Kennedy, or had thought in his own mind, "Don't kid me, Mr. President. I know that your principal newspapers and your key Senators will collapse when I put on the pressure." That's a very good way to have war.

The credibility of the President of the United States at a moment of crisis and the fidelity of the United States to its security treaties are both of the utmost importance in maintaining peace in the world. The idea in the minds of leaders in Moscow and (n Peking that they had better be careful because those fool Americans just might do something about it is one of the principal pillars of peace in the world. So the issue in Southeast Asia is not just Vietnam, it's not even just Southeast Asia. It has to do with the maintenance of peace in a system in which the United States has security treaties with more than forty nations.

Q: The world system --

RUSK: So that any decision by President Johnson in 1963 or '64 to abandon Southeast Asia would have been a decision to abandon the fidelity of the United States under its commitments, and this would have been a very grave thing -- not only in Southeast Asia, but in the general world situation.

Q: Was there any advice at that time that you could have maybe the best of both worlds and honor your commitments and not cut and run, but still not invest any more resources in the position we were trying to hold there? Was there a middle-ground that was an option, even at that time?

RUSK: The historian is going to want to make some judgments about the problem of timing in using our forces in Southeast Asia, this question of gradualism. Basically we were on the strategic defensive in Southeast Asia. All we were trying to do was to deny to North Vietnam its effort to seize South Vietnam by force. Tactically in given local situations we took the offensive, but strategically all we were trying to do was to prevent something. We therefore responded to what North Vietnam was doing. President Kennedy put in an increased number of advisers, hoping that those would be able to overcome the effect of the North Vietnamese personnel that were being infiltrated into the South. Then after our election of 1964, North Vietnam began to send major units of its regular army into South Vietnam so that-

Q: There's no question about that unit infiltration?

RUSK: No, no question about it at all. Not only were they eventually picked up on the ground and identified, but we had intercept material indicating that they were on the way.

Q: This was as early as, you said, right after our election so-

RUSK: We began to get information about the movement of these units in December and January after our election.

Coming back to the point of gradualism -- looking back on it the question arises as to whether we might have prevented further North Vietnamese efforts against South Vietnam had we put in more troops sooner. For example, if President Kennedy had put in one hundred thousand men in 1962 as soon as it was discovered that the Laos Agreement of 1962 was not going to work, or had done it in 1963, it's just possible that that demonstration of substantial force at a very early stage would have caused North Vietnam to pause and decide that the Americans really were serious. But the gradual response left it open to North Vietnam to speculate that if they just did a little bit more, they'd be able to overcome what the Americans were willing to do. We followed the policy of gradualism in terms of responding to what North Vietnam was doing partly because we didn't want a larger war ourselves, partly because we were on the strategic defensive and were therefore responding to what the North was doing, partly because we did not wish to stimulate China and the Soviet Union into decisions which might have led to some active intervention on their part. We were trying to maintain this as a war that would not go beyond Vietnam, you see. But this is a judgment that the historian will have to make.

Q: Did the fact that we had an election in 1964 and that Mr. Johnson was terribly concerned and distracted by that perhaps make it difficult for him to give the attention to Vietnam that first year that might have produced a different result had he had the time and the concentration to do it?

RUSK: No, he gave full attention to Vietnam during the campaign and in the period just after the campaign. There was never any inattention on his part. What he was doing during that period was, in effect, coasting along on the decisions that had been made by President Kennedy. The level of forces did not begin to increase significantly until the spring of 1965.

There is one very interesting point about our elections of '64. Again, the historian will want to look into this, particularly if he can get any information available out of North Vietnam. President Johnson, although reaffirming our commitments throughout his campaign in 1964, made it clear that we were not interested in a larger war. Barry Goldwater, his opposition candidate, talked as though he wanted to make it into a larger war in order to get it over with. Johnson won. It's entirely possible that the fellows in Hanoi said, 'aha, Johnson has won the election. He says he doesn't want a larger war. This means that we can have a larger war without an increase in risk.' It was after our election and before the starting of the bombing of North Vietnam that North Vietnam began to send the regular units of its own army into South Vietnam. The 304th Division, for example, was started out for the South very soon after our election, so we've sometimes speculated as to-whether Hanoi misinterpreted the election of 1964 and thought that they could therefore increase their forces without running the risk of increasing the United States forces.

Q: Although that had come after the Tonkin attack when we'd demonstrated our policy of retaliation before the election.

RUSK: Yes, but they might have decided that that was an isolated episode and that this was not a matter of general policy, because there were some other attacks that had not led to retaliation.

Q: Right. And that was one of the questions I wanted to ask you. Was there a reason why we followed a policy of retaliation at Tonkin, and then at Bien Hoa and other instances we didn't do so?

RUSK: Well, I think that the main difference was that in the Tonkin Gulf incident there were attacks on American ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin and the issue there was whether or not --

Q: There wasn't any question of the facts? I don't mean to interrupt you, but the facts were quite clear with the people who were considering the policy that this had in fact happened?

RUSK: I never had any doubts about the facts. Certainly, no one has seriously challenged the first attack. There has been some doubt cast on the second attack. But the commander of the ship and all the intervening commanders had no doubt about it, and I was impressed with the intercept material which we picked up from North Vietnam because my impression at the time was that North Vietnam had no doubt about the fact that they were attacking these ships, you see. And they were the ones who would have the best means of knowing.

Q: The critics have made a point of what our ships were doing there, supporting apparently covert operations by the South Vietnamese. Had the policy -- or allowing or ordering that support -- been discussed at the Cabinet-level?

RUSK: These vessels were not there in support of any coastal operations by the South Vietnamese. They were not there in that role. They were there on missions that were more like the Pueblo mission. They were on an independent intelligence-gathering mission in the Gulf of Tonkin. Of course, since it was high seas we expected to maintain our capability of being present in the Gulf of Tonkin, and we weren't going to be driven off the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin just because of a scrap going on in South Vietnam. But it is not true -- and Secretary McNamara testified to this -- that these vessels of ours were there covering or, in a sense, associated with some South Vietnamese coastal operation.

You see there had been a little guerilla war going along on the coast back and forth across the DMZ between the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese. The North Vietnamese were using coastal waters for infiltrating men and arms into the South, and the South Vietnamese were retaliating. But the destroyers that were attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin were not there to give cover to operations of that sort.

Q: Was this policy of retaliation already decided upon prior to its event, or was it one that you met and decided upon after the attacks occurred?

RUSK: It was decided upon after the attacks occurred.

Q: Was that a meeting in which the President personally got involved?

RUSK: Oh, yes, he was very much involved in this one.

Q: What about the degree of advice at that time? Was it still pretty much unanimous that this was something we couldn't allow, or were there important objections?

RUSK: I don't recall any significant objections from any of the senior advisers. I think the advisers to the President were unanimous on this point.

Q: That we should retaliate?

RUSK: That's right. There was some discussion about how many points and what kind of targets and things of that sort, and it was decided to limit the retaliation to the bases from which these torpedo boats had come out and basically retaliate against the nature of the attack rather than to attack Hanoi and Haiphong and more general targets.

Q: What about the Resolution that grew out of it? Was that something that also arose at that time, or was that a matter that had been discussed previously and decided upon?

RUSK: Fairly early in his Administration, President Johnson came to the conclusion that at some stage he was going to ask Congress to associate themselves with the effort in Vietnam.

He had remembered very clearly that at the outbreak of the Korean War that Congressional leaders had advised President Truman not to ask for a Congressional resolution and suggested to President Truman that he use the powers of the President to conduct the Korean operation. Well, President Truman accepted that advice and did not ask for a resolution, and then some Senators, particularly Senator [Robert A.] Taft, later attacked the whole operation on the grounds that he should have asked for a resolution.

President Johnson, remembering that, felt that at some stage he wanted to associate the Congress with him in the effort in Vietnam. Since that was known, various efforts were made to see what a draft resolution would look like. I never participated in those directly because I never thought the time was ripe to ask the Congress for a resolution, so that I am not familiar with the details of some of that preliminary staff work that had been done.

Then when the Gulf of Tonkin came along and the President consulted with the leadership of the Congress, he discussed with them whether this was not the time now to go for a resolution putting the Congress behind the United States policy on Vietnam and making it clear to North Vietnam that we were serious about it. The Congressional leadership encouraged him to do so. There was practical unanimity among Congressional leaders on the desirability of a Congressional resolution, and so we had our hearings, and promptly the Congress passed the so-called Gulf of Tonkin Resolution with only two dissenting votes in the Senate.

Paragraph II of that resolution, which the historian will be able to see, of course, was not about the Gulf of Tonkin, but was about Southeast Asia, and it simply affirmed that the United States is

prepared as The President determines to use whatever means are necessary including the use of armed force to assist the states covered by the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in the defense of their liberty. Now, there was no question at all at the time about the meaning of that resolution.

Q: The critics -- Mr. [J. William] Fulbright particularly, has later said that he didn't understand it to mean what it was later said to mean. Were there questions at the time? Was he given some kind of assurance at the time that has led him wrong?

RUSK: I think the historian will want to look at the discussion on the floor of the Senate on that resolution in order to make a judgment on that kind of point, because as I recall one Senator asked Senator Fulbright whether this resolution would encompass the dispatch of large numbers of forces to South Vietnam. Senator Fulbright said, "Yes, the resolution would cover that." He hoped that it would not be necessary to take such steps, but that the resolution would cover it. So that there was no question at all in my mind at the time that the Congress knew what kind of resolution they were passing. Some of them later changed their minds, and when they changed their minds they tried to throw some cloud upon the resolution itself. But there was no doubt about it at the time the resolution was passed.

Q: And no one was fooled who didn't want to be fooled.

RUSK: No, it's very simple language. These Senators are all educated men. It's only two or three short sentences. They knew exactly what they were voting for, and the floor discussion in the Senate brought out all of these aspects. Senator Morse, for example, who opposed the resolution, told the Senate very frankly what this resolution meant, and because it meant that he himself opposed it. It was a very far-reaching resolution.

In the testimony, by the way, Senator Fulbright told me at the close of Secretary McNamara's and my testimony that this was the best resolution of this sort that he had ever seen presented to the Senate. I noticed that that particular sentence was deleted from the published text of the testimony.

Q: That takes on considerable irony in the light of later events.

RUSK: I will never forget Senator Fulbright's remark in that regard. He was all for it at the time. He urged the Senate to give it immediate and unanimous approval. Perhaps we made a mistake in not calling it the Fulbright Resolution.

Q: I keep asking you about whether or not anybody was opposed because I think it is important to get it into the record that there was, if it seems there was, unanimity through this period on these decisions that sometimes the critics later forget about. It's a little repetitious for me to keep asking you, but that's why I do it.

RUSK: President Johnson briefed the Congress on Vietnam more extensively than any President has briefed the Congress on anything. When he first became President he used to have briefing sessions at the White House for Senators and Congressmen. He brought them down in groups

and he'd have the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State give them a full discussion and gave them a chance to ask questions [and] make comments and I think he went through the entire Congress at least twice in this course. There was not evident at that time in those briefings and the reactions of the Senators and Congressmen to those briefings -- there was not evident any I serious opposition to what we were trying to do in Vietnam.

It was not until the costs of the war increased, it was not until large numbers of Americans got out there and the casualties went up, that in 1966 and 1967 there began to be second thoughts in the Congress about our commitments in Vietnam.

Q: Some of them then forgot how they had reacted to your --

RUSK: That's right, and they forgot that they passed the Southeast Asia Treaty with only one dissenting vote back in 1955, with only Senator [William] Langer [R-ND] opposing it. Senator Morse voted for the Southeast Asia Treaty; Senator Mansfield signed the Southeast Asia Treaty along with Mr. Dulles and Senator [H.Alexander] Smith [R-NJ] in Manila when the Southeast Asia Treaty was first brought into being.

Q: At the same time all of this was going on, during the summer, there were some I suppose you could call them peace initiatives being made. Can you add anything on things such as the Seaborne mission as to what we were trying to do at that point, the sort of guarded approaches we were making?

RUSK: Let me make some general observations on so-called peace initiatives. On our side some of us had remembered that other crises had been resolved by preliminary secret contacts before any publicly known discussions got under way, The Berlin crisis of 1948 was resolved by private contacts between Ambassador [Philip C.] Jessup and Ambassador [Jacob A.] Malik in New York, and the matter was pretty well settled before the fact that talks were being held even became known.

The Korean War was put in the course of settlement by some very private contacts which have never been in the public record involving Ambassador [George] Kennan on the part of the United States, and that led to the negotiations which brought the Korean War to a conclusion.

So we were always ready to explore the possibility of private contacts which might give the clue to a solution of the problem. We were not interested in prolonging the war, we'd like to wind it up as soon as possible on a satisfactory basis, and we didn't want any possibility that the absence of machinery or the absence of contact would be an obstacle toward bringing the war to a conclusion. So we took a good many initiatives ourselves in stimulating such things as the [J. Blair] Seaborne mission. We were interested when third-party governments tried to get into it -- the Canadians, the Soviets, the Poles, the Hungarians, the Romanians -- or when individuals like U Thant or private citizens tried to play a role in one way or another. We were always ready to try out those various channels to see whether or not there was any indication on the part of Hanoi that they would be interested in talking about peace.

One thing that the historian will discover if he looks carefully through the record is that so long

as I was Secretary of State there was never an initiative from Hanoi that could be described as a peace-feeler. The initiatives always came from somebody else, either ourselves or third parties. I cannot recall a single instance in which there was an initiative from Hanoi that could be described as a peace-feeler. Again the historian may want to make a judgment on whether we tried too hard in these peace-feelers and these various contacts -- that by the frequency in which we probed for some possibility of peace and by the numbers of bombing halts and things of that sort that we might have mislead Hanoi into thinking that we were irresolute.

Q: The same criticism one might make about not starting the troops.

RUSK: That's right. So it may be that we have -- by our concern to be sure that no obstacle stood in the way of making peace -- that we confirmed in Hanoi's mind the idea that we were ready for peace at any price, and therefore caused them to be more obstinate and more stubborn than they might otherwise have been. That's a judgment that the historian will have to make.

Q: Did we have a well-conceived negotiating position at that time or were you just really trying to talk to them -- to make contact with them as opposed to picking out what the negotiation would look like if indeed they got started?

RUSK: The basic negotiating position was really very simple. The problem of peace in Southeast Asia arises because there came to be more than fifty regiments of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam, because more than forty thousand North Vietnamese troops were in Laos contrary to the agreement of 1962, because North Vietnamese-trained guerrillas were operating in Thailand, because Prince [Norodom] Sihanouk had publicly charged that Hanoi and Peking were giving assistance to the guerrillas in Cambodia-the most neutral of all neutralist countries. We were aware of the fact that men and arms were being infiltrated across the northeastern frontier of Burma out of China, and the Governor of India has made public the Chinese involvement in the tribal areas of Eastern India.

The problem of peace in Southeast Asia arose because Hanoi and Peking were doing things outside of their own borders that they had no business doing, so our negotiating position was basically that they stop doing it and that they take their troops back home and that the South Vietnamese be allowed to work out their own future for themselves; that the Laos Agreement of 1962 be given full effect; and that things like that North Vietnamese infiltration of Thailand be stopped.

There are some people who would call that asking for unconditional surrender. We weren't asking Hanoi to surrender anything, not an acre of ground, not a man. We weren't trying to destroy Hanoi. We weren't trying to seize them. We weren't trying to support the South Vietnamese in overrunning North Vietnam. All we were trying to do was to get the North Vietnamese to stop doing what they were doing outside of their frontiers against their neighbors in Southeast Asia, so our negotiating position was relatively simple on that point.

There were possibilities [that] if the North Vietnamese wanted elections, if they were ready for some political determination by the people of South Vietnam as to their own political future -- there were things of that sort that could be agreed to. We never had any problem about devising a

negotiating position, but the point is that we sent out signal after signal after signal and never got any return from Hanoi.

Q: None at all during this whole period.

RUSK: None at all. There were some people, particularly private citizens, some third parties, who did not understand the lingo of the discussions between ourselves and North Vietnam, and they would go to Hanoi, or they would meet some Hanoi representative at some third capital, and they would hear something that they felt made a significant difference. They'd come back seven months pregnant, thinking that peace was about to break out, and that they were going to be responsible and maybe get the Nobel Peace Prize for it. Well, when we would check these things out against what Hanoi had been saying and what they were saying privately and what they were saying to us, we found nothing in them. So we had a frustrating experience in so-called peace initiatives.

Q: Does this include such things as, say, the U Thant one?

RUSK: There were a great variety of initiatives that would have to be characterized as something less than constructive. The Poles, for example, had the idea that their job was to find some face-saving formula by which we could save our face and get out of Vietnam; whereas, we were not trying to save face -- we were trying to save South Vietnam.

The Hungarian Foreign Minister [Janos] Peter and I engaged in some serious talks over a period of time about an initiative which Peter was supposed to be taking. That turned out to be a fraud.

Q: What was the defector's name -- later-

RUSK: Radvanyi.

Q: He confirmed later that that one was a fraud?

RUSK: Yes. When Radvanyi defected he told me that there never had been anything in the Peter approach, that Peter was not in an effective contact with Hanoi, and that they had had no encouragement from Hanoi about the things that Peter was saying to me. Radvanyi told me that he tried to convey that to me by an expression on his face when he was coming in at the request of his government to report on one or another aspect of it, he was trying to give me a signal that what he was saying was not true. He was accompanied by a member of his Embassy who was a member of the Secret Policy so he couldn't tell me straightaway, but that was an instance that was just a plain fraud.

The Romanian initiative was a serious one.

Q: That was a very late one, wasn't it?

RUSK: That's right. That was at a later stage when [Gheorghe] Macuvescu, the Deputy Foreign Minister, went to Hanoi at least on two occasions; and they were serious and sober, and although

nothing came out of it, the Romanian part in it was a responsible and reasonable part that we appreciated.

As far as U Thant's alleged initiative was concerned, it's very unfortunate that the principal witness to that transaction, Adlai Stevenson, died before we could get the matter fully put down in the record, but a mistake we made was that we did not conduct that transaction in writing at all times because we found U Thant to be an unreliable person in regard to it. We got the impression that U Thant's channel, as the principal Soviet representative in the Secretariat of the United Nations. We thought we knew that this fellow was a KGB man, so we were immediately alerted to the fact that this KGB man might be representing his government -- the Soviet government -- in stating that Hanoi would be willing to meet in Rangoon if we were prepared to do so; or he may be conducting a black operation. He may be trying to deceive us in some way.

I had several talks with [Andrei A.] Gromyko immediately following that episode, and there was never any indication from Gromyko that he was aware that Hanoi wanted to meet with us in Rangoon. Had this been a Soviet government affair, there's no question that Gromyko would have said something to me about it because we had some very private talks on the whole subject of Vietnam.

To clinch the matter, I asked the Soviet Ambassador, Mr. [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin, about this transaction, because it had gotten to be public and gotten to be something of a little minor scandal. Dobrynin, on one of his trips to Moscow, searched the records in the foreign office and talked to his colleagues in the foreign office and came back and reported to me that there never had been a message from Hanoi, and that their man in the Secretariat had never been given any instructions to say to U Thant anything whatever on the subject. Dobrynin's speculation was that maybe their man in the Secretariat had made some casual remark at a cocktail party or in some other way, and that U Thant had seized upon this and run with the ball without having anything in mind.

Q: This was all after the event?

RUSK: This was all after the event. Now U Thant never gave us any message which he had sent to Hanoi, or which Hanoi had sent to him, about the possibility of a meeting in Rangoon. We never had any messages in front of us on which we could make a judgment. We simply had a very closely guarded hint from U Thant that if we were prepared to meet in Rangoon that Hanoi was willing to do so. We could never confirm that. My own present judgment is that this was something that U Thant had done, but that there was nothing from Hanoi on which he could base it.

Q: What about the charges made by the publicists, like [Eric] Sevareid [Look, Nov. 31, 1965] and Norman Cousins, that somehow this got stopped purposefully before it got to the White House, or that it was not fully considered or fully checked into at the time of the event itself?

RUSK: Again, let me point out that nothing of this sort developed in my talks with Gromyko.

Q: And they were at the time -- ?

RUSK: And they were at the time. They were at the United Nations and in Washington at the time. Had there been any Soviet knowledge of Hanoi's willingness to talk in Rangoon, it certainly would have come out in these talks with Gromyko. So we were skeptical about the authenticity of this all along. I personally suggested to U Thant that he use whatever channel he had to follow up on it and develop the matter further before we made a final judgment on it, but he never did that, never reported back to us on it. Just before his death -- the very week of his death -- Adlai Stevenson was in London and was on BBC, and he was asked about this. He said, "Well, I was never very clear about with whom the talks were supposed to be held and what about," so that on the public record Adlai Stevenson's own skepticism on the matter was registered.

I have no way of judging the Eric Sevareid story because that was a third-hand account. Sevareid himself says that his conversation with Adlai Stevenson was supposed to be off-the-record, but how much of that was Eric Sevareid and how much was Adlai Stevenson, I don't know. Again, it's a pity that we never got this point really straightened out while Adlai Stevenson was alive.

We did not reduce this transaction to writing because U Thant was so insistent upon the utter secrecy of the matter that we respected his request to handle it simply on a word of mouth basis, and it was a little unsatisfactory because the communication was from U Thant to Adlai Stevenson to me. Whatever I knew about it, the President knew; and there was never any concealment of anything that was going on. But we had a deep skepticism about the authenticity of any such idea, and it later worked out that our skepticism was well-founded.

Q: That pretty well ended the events of '64, with our election and, as you've indicated, the increased infiltration. Did the military situation change sharply at that general time period -- late '64 and the beginning of '65? Did it deteriorate markedly?

RUSK: In the spring of '65 it was apparent that unless we made some significant reinforcements of our own forces that the increased manpower of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong would likely cut the country in two and could cause very serious problems. We were faced with a serious step-up in infiltration, including North Vietnamese regular units, and I have no doubt that had President Johnson not increased our forces in the spring and summer of 1965 that the situation could have collapsed from a military point of view.

Q: That is in spite of the opening of bombing which came in February.

RUSK: That's right.

Q: Can you lead up to that and the circumstances which led to taking that action? That becomes one of the main points of attack by critics in later times.

RUSK: I'm not a very good witness on the actual beginning of the bombing of North Vietnam in February of 1965, because I had gone to the Churchill funeral and had come down with the flu. [I] came back and spent some time in the hospital and then went to Florida for a period of ten days or so. I was not present for the discussions which led to the beginning of the bombing of the

North.

I was not opposed to it. I felt that we should do whatever was necessary to affect the battlefield in the South, and the bombing of the infiltration routes in Laos and the bombing of the supply routes coming down from the North were entirely in accord with my judgment as to what the situation permitted or required.

My general attitude toward bombing the North reflected somewhat my impressions from the Korean experience. We bombed everything in North Korea from the 38th Parallel right to the Yalu River and had complete air superiority, and yet with full bombing we were not able to prevent the North Koreans and the Chinese from maintaining an army of five hundred thousand men at the front. They would bring in their supplies piggy-back, and at night, and in bad weather, and build up their supplies and then lunge forward for ten days or so, and then wait and build up their supplies again and lunge again.

So I was skeptical about the direct effect of bombing on the battlefield itself. I had no doubt that the attrition of forces in the infiltration routes made that bombing valuable, and I had no doubt that the limitations on supply routes was valuable. I was always skeptical about bombing up in the far North, in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, because I did not believe that that bombing had much effect on the battlefield in the South -- and it was bombing that was very expensive in terms of planes and men lost. Hanoi and Haiphong were two of the most heavily defended areas that you've ever seen in warfare. So I was always in a mood to suspend that kind of bombing if there was any possibility of converting it into a serious peace move.

There were times when we would stop the bombing around Hanoi and Haiphong for periods of several days in a radius of five or ten miles of the two cities in conjunction with some peace move that we or somebody else was making. Now, anyone who ever expected the bombing to end the war ought to have his head examined, because bombing just doesn't do that. It makes it more difficult, but it doesn't prove to be a decisive military factor.

Q: Was there a disagreement, or a misunderstanding, about what we hoped to accomplish by the bombing in that first few months in the spring of 1965? Did some people have one idea that it would lead to the negotiating table, other people think that it would end the war on a military basis, and other people think that it might just punish them? That became an item that the critics fastened on at a later point, too.

RUSK: Well, in retrospect, I think that it was a mistake to have the bombing of the North run by Commander-in-Chief Pacific from Hawaii rather than by the commander in South Vietnam, because that tended to mean that there were two wars. There was [Gen. William] Westmoreland's war in the South and there was Admiral [U.S. Grant] Sharp's war in the North. CINCPAC in Hawaii was of the view that if they just continued to escalate their bombing that that alone would bring the war to a conclusion, whereas the effect on the war in the South was minimal.

The bombing was also related to the question as to whether the war would expand and whether Red China would come in. If anyone had asked me in 1963 whether we could have a half a million men in South Vietnam and bomb everything in the North right up to the Chinese border

without bringing in Red China, I would have been hard put to it to say that you could. One of the effects of a policy of gradual response was that at no given moment did we ever present Peking or Moscow with enough of a change in the situation to require them to make a major decision based on overall world-wide considerations, in terms of intervening in that war. So just as the North Vietnamese infiltrated, so did we and helped thereby, I think, to limit the war to Vietnam.

Q: Is that why publicly the President frequently referred to the policy even after the bombing began as really being no change or not inconsistent with what we'd been doing anyway? Was that pretty well for Hanoi's consumption?

RUSK: That was partly for that, yes. You see, we were trying to limit the expansion of this war. We didn't want to see it develop into a bigger war, and we didn't want the Red Chinese to come in. We didn't want Moscow to come in with any of their own forces. One of the reasons, therefore, that we played down the importance of any particular steps that we took was to play it down from the point of view of the enemy as well.

Q: What about the timing of the bombing? Isn't it Charles Roberts of Newsweek, or somebody, who is quoted as saying that Mr. Johnson once told him that the bombing had been decided on back in 1964 and had been waiting for a time -- or that's the implication anyway. Was it a matter that was decided upon during that period when you indicate you were --

RUSK: No, the bombing of the North was always, from 1961 onwards, one of the possibilities. It was one of the alternatives that was considered, but no decision was made until February of 1965.

Q: It was retaliatory --

RUSK: Yes, but all alternatives were constantly being looked at right across the entire spectrum. Some alternatives were dismissed rather quickly. For example, the alternative of just getting out - - withdrawal. The alternative of using nuclear weapons was just brushed aside and put on the shelf because there was no basis on which anyone would reasonably want to use nuclear weapons in that situation. But all of these alternatives were constantly being looked at when any important decisions came up for review, and we established review groups from time to time without having in mind that there would be new decisions, but just to review the bidding -- to see where we were, to see whether we could do things differently, and to see whether there were opportunities that we had overlooked either in the peace direction or on the military side. I would be surprised if the record would show that any decision were made to start the bombing before February 1965, although there was discussion of it.

Q: There was the consideration, I'm sure, by everybody that bombing might also mean the necessity for added troop deployment as supports units, if nothing else. Was the connection between bombing and troop increase recognized and fully considered?

RUSK: Yes. You see, the armed forces of South Vietnam were somewhat fragile during this period. And the political situation in South Vietnam was somewhat fragile. There had been the overthrow of Diem; there had been a succession of coups --

Q: Somewhat of an understatement right at that particular period.

RUSK: That's correct. So if bombing would lead to a larger war, that is if the North Vietnamese were to shoot the works and put all of their regular forces against the South, then the question is whether the South Vietnamese and the forces that we had there were capable of standing up to it, you see. Some of us wanted to be careful about what we did militarily until there had gotten to be a stronger situation in the South, both politically and militarily. Otherwise you might start something you couldn't see through. So bombing the North itself required that the situation in the South be strengthened because it could be anticipated that the North would make a larger effort in response to the bombing of the North.

Q: So really the beginning the bombing and the troop decision are part of the same thing?

RUSK: Yes.

Q: In this sense when you decide on one you know you're deciding on the other at the same time.

RUSK: The bombing undoubtedly greatly increased the length of time it took to infiltrate men and material into the South. We picked up a lot of prisoners who reported on their experiences on the route south, and it's quite clear that the bombing was a harassment that they didn't like at all, and that the attrition, morale and otherwise, on the infiltrators from air-bombing was very considerable.

Q: Was there important opposition within the government at high level to the bombing at the time it was undertaken?

RUSK: No. As a matter of fact, George Ball recommended it as Acting Secretary. You see, I was away at the time, and he would have been one who later might have been expected to oppose it, but he made the recommendation.

Q: And the fact that Mr. Kosygin was in Hanoi and not considered important enough to delay it when the Pleiku attack occurred?

RUSK: At that time the bombing had nothing to do with Hanoi. It was on the southern part of North Vietnam. It was on the infiltration routes and just across the DMZ. Initially it started out as simply pinpoint attacks on a limited number of targets and did not start out as a systematic bombing of North Vietnam.

I think there were those who -- there were some -- who felt that it might be better to wait until Mr. Kosygin got out of town, but the Pleiku attack was delivered while Kosygin was in town. So you've got to have some sort of sense of balance and reciprocity on these things. If the North Vietnamese laid on a particular attack in Mr. Kosygin's presence, we didn't see any reason why we couldn't lay on a responsive attack while he was still there. But there was never any question about his personal safety because the bombing didn't go up there at all.

Q: The responsive nature of it was incidental? It was understood by everybody that this was the beginning of what would be a continuing policy, not a one-shot response.

RUSK: That is correct.

Q: Let's begin by talking about the pauses. There were two publicized ones at least in 1965, the one in May for six days, I guess, and the more prominently displayed one at Christmas-time. What was the purpose and the results of those actions?

RUSK: The point had been made that North Vietnam would never talk so long as bombing was going on in the North, and so on several occasions we stopped the bombing either partially or entirely in order to find out whether contact would indicate any readiness to talk on the part of Hanoi about serious matters.

In May of 1965 we stopped for six days but saw no indication of any desire to talk or any change in their situation on the ground, and so we resumed that bombing. Then later on that year it was hinted to us that that bombing pause had been too short; and that there had not been time for other governments to turn around with Hanoi and explore the situation -- develop what might be done.

Ambassador Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, told McGeorge Bundy -- whether on instructions or not I don't know -- but told McGeorge Bundy that if we could stop for a longer period, say two to three weeks, that that would give the Soviet government a chance to make contact with Hanoi and see if something could be done. The President was skeptical of this and was skeptical of the idea of bombing [pauses] because he had seen no indication from Hanoi that they were interested in peace. We came up to the Christmas bombing pause which was traditional -- to stop a few days at Christmas -- and the President decided, on my recommendation and others, to extend that bombing pause for a further period in order to see whether or not Dobrynin's remark to McGeorge Bundy had any substance in it, and to give other people a chance to make contact with Hanoi if they wished to do so. So we stopped for thirty-seven days, but on about the thirty-fifth day Ho Chi Minh made a statement which was very negative indeed and made it clear that a longer bombing pause would not do the trick. So the bombing was resumed.

I think what we have been up against here, and I'm now speaking in September of 1969, is the fact that North Vietnam has not yet made a decision to give up its desire to seize South Vietnam by force and incorporate it into North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh's will, which was published at the time of his death, makes that very clear. The reunification of Vietnam under Hanoi was always a consistent and permanent objective of Ho Chi Minh.

The North Vietnamese might have cooperated with any face-saving device by which we would simply abandon South Vietnam, but bombing pauses, and intermediaries, and peace initiatives, and all the proposals that were made over the years ran up against that hard fact that Hanoi had not abandoned the decision that it had made back in 1959-1960 to go after South Vietnam and unify it by force if necessary.

When you have a bombing halt there are always those who say, "Well, if you will just stop the bombing a little longer, something good might happen." So whether it was six days or whether it was thirty-seven days, or whatever it was, you see, there would always be critics who would like to make it permanent. We did make it permanent in 1968, and even then the attitude of the North Vietnamese negotiators in Paris showed that they were just as hard and implacable as ever, and that a full stop of the bombing on a permanent basis did not produce the desired result.

Q: So really we were making tactical changes when actually they would have to make a strategic change of giving up a major objective before there was any hope.

RUSK: That's right.

Q: Was there a major debate in our government about that bombing pause of Christmas of '65, or was that something that was decided on fairly narrowly by just the very top advisers, with the President playing a personal role?

RUSK: There was no great debate about it. There was a recommendation from me and others that we extend the Christmas bombing pause for another period, chiefly to find out whether the Soviets would be able to do anything in Hanoi that would be constructive. There was no great fight about it, so I would think that it was dealt with in a fairly relaxed manner.

I must confess that President Johnson's disappointment in that thirty-seven day bombing pause made a lasting imprint on him, because he was very skeptical from that time onward that anything could be done by way of peace initiatives, and probings, and bombing halts, and things of that sort. I think that he might feel that he was badly advised to go through that thirty-seven day bombing halt, because nothing came out of it, you see. But it was a calculated risk and a calculated possibility, and those of us who recommended it felt that it was worth the try since no great damage was done on the military side by a thirty-seven day pause.

Q: What about the Russians? Did you, in your mind, at that time operate on the general assumption that they were really trying to be helpful?

RUSK: I don't agree with those who think the Soviets want us to be engaged in a war in Vietnam. I think they would be glad to see this war brought to a conclusion, but on the other hand they have reasons of their own for not wanting Hanoi to be driven into the arms of Peking. This would be something of interest to them in their problems inside the Communist world.

We never found that the Russians were prepared to step out in advance of Hanoi and take positions that were not already agreed to by Hanoi. They would refer points to Hanoi simply as messages from the United States, and they would make general statements that if the bombing stopped something good would happen -- something of that sort. But we never got Moscow to step out in advance of Hanoi on any significant point. I think this was because Moscow had become something of a satellite of Hanoi -- because of Moscow's fear that if they weren't careful Hanoi might just align itself fully with Peking with all that would mean for the Soviets in the Communist world.

Q: What about the display of public diplomacy? That doesn't sound like something that the professional diplomats would conceive. Did Mr. Johnson conceive that idea himself, sending Harriman and Bundy and --

RUSK: Arthur Goldberg.

Q: -- Arthur Goldberg around the world on that tour?

RUSK: That was basically President Johnson's own idea. He wanted to get maximum public opinion effect from the bombing pause, and also to increase the possibilities that there might be some response from Hanoi in some fashion. If Hanoi felt the pressure of world public opinion effect from the bombing pause, and also to increase the possibilities that there might be some response from Hanoi in some fashion. If Hanoi felt the pressure of world public opinion, they might be more responsive than if they did not feel that pressure.

My own view was that Hanoi is fairly well insulated from world public opinion. They pay it very little attention. They don't really care about it and therefore, generalized world public opinion doesn't mean very much to them. I doubt very much that Hanoi pays much attention to advice from Moscow. I think Hanoi has been very stubborn about its own private attitude towards these matters.

Q: Did that really accomplish very little, in the way of meaningful -- ?

RUSK: No, I think the visits that you refer to did do something to help in the attitudes of other governments and world public opinion generally, but it didn't have any impact on the actual war itself.

Q: One thing I noticed that struck me about the Norman Cousins' story, and of course he is one of those whom you indicated as an example -- one of the people who thought in a pause -- if you just let it go two or three days longer something would happen. His contacts that he mentions on this were White House staff people who were not really concerned primarily with National Security affairs. They were Moyers and Valenti, as I recall.

Had this become a problem -- people outside of the normal areas such as State and Bundy involving themselves in Vietnam affairs and trying to play a role perhaps they weren't qualified to play?

RUSK: Vietnam is a subject in which everybody gets involved in one way or another. If they're not called in to be involved, they tend to involve themselves in it. Valenti and Moyers were both very close to the President, but they did not have any direct responsibility for Vietnam.

During that period I don't myself recall any of those private contacts that reflected any real movement by Hanoi -- that is, during that thirty-seven days pause. Had there been any such movement we would have known about it, and we would have been very alert to it because we were looking for it. But wishful thinking plays a big role in these matters, and a lot of times

people just rely upon their hopes rather than upon evidence as to whether any movement had occurred.

Q: What about the resumption of it -- the physical decision to resume bombing. Did a debate of some substance occur at that time, as to whether or not to continue it?

RUSK: Not very much, because Ho Chi Minh had made his attitude very clear on about the thirty-fifth day of the bombing pause, and we waited another two or three days before we started the bombing, but there was no indication that the thirty-seven day pause had made the slightest imprint on Hanoi.

Q: Going back to my old standard question here, had dissent against what we were doing in Vietnam become widespread at all in the executive branch by, say, early 1966? Were there beginning to be opponents in high places by that early?

RUSK: The historian will want to look at some of the oral histories done by some of those who were supposed to be dissenters to check on this, but it was my impression that there was much less dissent than the newspapers were reflecting.

In the case of George Ball, for example, he did not argue vigorously inside the government for a substantially different point of view. He was named by the President as the Devil's Advocate to take an opposing point of view, in order that the President would have in front of him different considerations so that the President would be sure that all aspects of the matter were in front of him when he made his decisions.

Q: Named by the President?

RUSK: Named by the President. He was asked by the President to be a Devil's Advocate, and it may be that George Ball convinced himself in the process. But George Ball didn't come into my office every other day saying, "Look, we've got to do something radically different in Vietnam." He was extraordinarily helpful in working out the details of these various peace maneuvers and contacts and procedures and things of that sort. He managed those very well.

Q: I guess things like the [Edmund A.] Gullion mission were pretty much his operation, weren't they? He was the --

RUSK: Yes, in general the senior advisers to the President were generally unanimous in their recommendations to the President on matters involving Vietnam.

Q: And that still was true --

RUSK: Once in awhile the President would have to make a decision. For example, there might be differences of view about whether a particular target should be taken under bombing.

Q: A tactical matter.

RUSK: That sort of thing, and whether a particular factory or particular bridge near a populated area, or something of that sort should be hit. But on the larger questions, the President's advisers were generally unanimous.

On that point, the historian will want to 'look carefully through the notes of the Tuesday Luncheon meetings because those meetings were crucial in terms of the decisions that were made about Vietnam.

Long before historians get to this particular record, they will know all about those Tuesday Luncheon meetings because they undoubtedly will appear in books and things of that sort. There the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the [Joint] Chiefs of Staff, and the Director of Central Intelligence Agency, and the President's Special Assistant on National Security matters -- Walt Rostow and before that McGeorge Bundy -- would sit down at the table and talk in complete confidence and candor about the matters that were up for decision.

They were invaluable occasions because we all could be confident that everyone around the table would keep his mouth shut and wouldn't be running off to Georgetown cocktail parties and talking about it, and so great candor was possible. We had a good deal of very lively discussion and the notes on those discussions will be extremely helpful to the historian in making judgments about who advised what and what the issues were.

Q: About that same time period, say early 1966, at least in your own mind what were the prospects? How did things look at that point? Did it look like we were going to be able to accomplish still with a reasonable investment of resources the goals that you'd set out to accomplish five years earlier?

RUSK: I never had any doubt about our ability to deny Hanoi a forcible seizure of Vietnam. I never had any fear about the possibility that the North Vietnamese armed forces could achieve a military victory in the South, nor did I believe that the North Vietnamese would be able to generate real support among the South Vietnamese people.

There were many reasons for that view. One was simply a military judgment about who had the muscle to accomplish what they were trying to do, but I was impressed with the fact that we had thousands of Americans in South Vietnam out in the countryside in groups of ones and two and threes and fours living among the South Vietnamese people and completely at their mercy. While I was Secretary of State I don't think I can recall a single incident of treachery on the part of the South Vietnamese people with respect to those Americans. I don't recall that any of them were turned over to the Viet Cong by their South Vietnamese colleagues. If the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were making any headway among the people of South Vietnam, or if the South Vietnamese people really wanted what Hanoi was trying to do to them, you were bound to get a lot of incidents of treachery with respect to these Americans that were living out in the countryside completely at their mercy, and this just didn't happen.

Q: These were civilian Americans too -- not armed --

RUSK: Civilian Americans, not armed, and just wholly dependent upon the South Vietnamese

people in the countryside for their own personal security.

We did find it necessary to build up our forces out there as the North Vietnamese built up theirs. And there could have come a time in 1965 and '66 when the North Vietnamese might have had enough force in the country to achieve their purposes had we not built up our own forces, and had not the South Vietnamese not built up their forces as well.

Q: I think one of the things that has bothered some of the critics maybe had been the fact that the government always seemed to see the situation in terms as you've described, and the non-official reports from South Vietnam always were so much more pessimistic. Did you ever try to find out why your information and the information that the press got didn't seem to be the same, or why they interpreted it differently? Did the government take into consideration this other kind of intelligence that was coming back from nonofficial sources?

RUSK: One of our leading publishers, a man of great reputation, visited South Vietnam and came back shaking his head about the reporters out there. He said that there were too many reporters out there playing the role of Secretary of State.

Q: We had lots of Secretaries of State during your years.

RUSK: There were too many reporters who had their own view as to Vietnam and the outcome and who did not accept the basic commitment of the United States and the basic interest of the United States in an independent Southeast Asia.

Also, bad news makes more news than good news. If you had two thousand acts of kindness on the parts of South Vietnamese to American soldiers in the course of a day, and you had one instance where an American sergeant in a bar would get into a scuffle with somebody, it would be the American sergeant's scuffle that would be reported rather than any one of these two thousand acts of kindness. It's in the nature of news that the negative is more news than the positive, and so we did have some problems about the nature of the reporting out there from time to time.

Q: But you were confident enough in your own sources that you were pretty sure that what you were getting was accurate in contrast to what the public was being sometimes told?

RUSK: Well, in the middle of a war there are always problems of marginal inaccuracies in terms of casualties, in terms of the extent of pacification, and things of that sort. You always were in the position of leaving a margin for error of five or ten percent, or whatever it might be. But the general accuracy of our official reporting, I think, is well-founded, and the historian will find that it was in good shape.

Q: The first major event of that year, I guess, was the Honolulu conference. Was there anything about the background of that, or the accomplishments there, that you can add perhaps to the documentation?

RUSK: I don't think that there's anything that I can add to that that is not fully in the record, and

the historian can get that out of the record.

Q: The timing of that during the first of the televised Foreign Relations Committee Hearings -- was this a decisive element in deciding to have it right then rather than at some perhaps other time?

RUSK: I don't think so. I think that was a matter of mutual convenience to have it at that time.

Q: Shortly after that, you've indicated earlier you might just mention something specific about the [Chester] Ronning initiative, which comes in the spring of 1966, I think, the Canadians --

RUSK: Well, that was again one of those efforts that we made to establish contact to find out whether there was any possibility for a peaceful settlement. Ronning was a very competent diplomat and had access to people in Hanoi. At least we thought he would have access to them, and we simply briefed him so that he could pursue the matter a bit and explore the possibilities, but he produced nothing.

Q: Just a blank still, pretty much similar to the '64-'65 times.

RUSK: That's right. We drew many blanks. That was one; the Gullion mission was one. There were many efforts that were made that simply showed no response at all from Hanoi.

Q: Did the Canadians agree with that? Were the Canadians not unhappy that we had slighted them in some way?

RUSK: No, I think that they realized that this was a vaccination that didn't take.

Q: What about then from that time on into the balance of '66? Are there any unpublicized efforts that were of consequence during that period that we put some faith in at the time?

RUSK: I don't think so. I think, and when you talk about putting faith in them, we made the effort even though we did not expect that any miracles would occur, but we made the effort so that there would never be any possibility that the problem was lack of communication or lack of a channel. We thought it was important always to maintain a channel between Washington and Hanoi of some sort, somewhere, through some means, so that if Hanoi ever came around to a change of mind it would be possible to register that fairly quickly and easily and in confidence.

Q: What about the initiative that they call in print now, 'Marigold.' Was that of a different order at the end of 1966, one that had more substance to it than just a contact-type thing?

RUSK: This was a rather strange exercise because the Polish member of the ICC in Saigon had some talks with [Henry] Cabot Lodge and then went up to Hanoi on a visit. After spending some time there [he] came back with a formulation of the U.S. position. He didn't come back with a formulation of Hanoi's position, but he came back and presented to Cabot Lodge a series of points which he considered to be his interpretation of the U.S. position. Well, now, this was a rather strange procedure because we would have expected he would have brought back

something that reflected Hanoi's position, but he indicated that he thought Hanoi would talk on the basis of that stated position.

Q: How different was that from anything that Lodge would have given him?

RUSK: We would not have formulated our position that way; it had some similarities, but it also had some points needing clarification. Despite the fact that this was all very strange, we told the Poles to say to Hanoi that we would talk on the basis of these points although some clarification would be needed. The Poles objected very much to the phrase "some clarification would be needed," because they wanted us simply to buy those categorically without any opportunity for really discussing them and we had to make it clear that we would have to discuss points of detail with Hanoi if we got into conversations with them. What message the Poles sent to Hanoi I don't know, but Hanoi refused to talk on that basis.

Q: The Poles couldn't produce the North Vietnamese at the -- ?

RUSK: That's right. The Poles simply were unable to produce the North Vietnamese. We were ready to -- . We had men all set to be in Warsaw, ready for the talks, but the Poles were unable to produce North Vietnamese warm bodies.

Q: Do you think the bombings of Hanoi that the critics have made so much of played any part in this inability of the Poles?

RUSK: I think that was more of a pretext than a real reason. Among other things, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were bombing Saigon at that time, in terms of reciprocal -- . I was in Saigon at about that time and they bombed the airfield at which I landed the day before I arrived, and while I was in town they tried to bomb the big bridge that leads northwest out of Saigon. But even then when the Poles said to us, "Oh, your bombing is terrible and gets in the way of these talks," we stopped the bombing around Hanoi and Haiphong and told the Poles we were stopping the bombing around Hanoi and Haiphong for a radius of ten nautical miles -- and that's three hundred and something square miles -- and told them that if that was the problem then we would cure that particular part of it. That made no difference. My guess is this was all a pretext on the part of Hanoi, who did not want to talk.

Q: One of the accounts of that makes a lot of the fact that the bombing was coincidental and accidental, and maybe we wouldn't have done it had the coordination been better. Is it possible that that lack of coordination did exist?

RUSK: I suppose one could make that point, but the bombing that was involved was several miles from the center of Hanoi, and it was no more serious than the bombing which they were doing in Saigon. I mean if there was any real interest on the part of Hanoi in peace and in these proposals, they would not have let these bombing incidents get in the way. This was simply a reflection of the lack of seriousness of interest on their part.

Q: What about the Manila conference which was the next major gathering of the chiefs of state and all the people of consequence? Does it have some significant accomplishment or some details that you can add that are important?

RUSK: You're referring now to the summit conference?

Q: Yes.

RUSK: I think the Manila Conference was a very useful meeting of the chiefs of government of the countries with troops in Vietnam, and it made it possible for us to get pretty definite agreement, not only on the military measures which were required but also on the approach toward a peaceful settlement. It was there, you recall, that a formula was worked out for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Vietnam if North Vietnamese Forces were to be withdrawn and the level of violence subsided. No, I think it brought about a pretty good meeting of the minds with the chiefs of government with troops in Vietnam, and I think it was a very useful exercise.

Q: The reason I ask is that Secretary [Clark] Clifford later on will make quite a lot of the lack of enthusiasm that our allied governments expressed to him in the summer of 1967 when he toured around, but there wasn't that lack of enthusiasm -- the six or nine months later?

RUSK: I must say that at Manila the other allies did not come rushing in with offers of substantially more troops. One of the burdens we've carried in Vietnam is that more countries have not participated with more muscle. Korea has done a valiant job with the large number of troops they have down there. Thailand has done a respectable job taking into account the jobs that exist in Thailand in the northeast there where the Thai armed forces are engaged against guerrillas in their own country, but Australia and New Zealand could have done more. The Philippines could have done more. Britain could have done more -- Britain did nothing in the military side.

We needed more international effort here in a matter in which many countries have a stake, and this has been one of the burdens that we've had to carry. We have not found it possible to let the attitude of other countries determine what the United States does because we've got our own vital interests at stake here and we can't subject those to the unwillingness of other countries to pull their share of the load. So we've carried a heavier part in Vietnam than we ought to have carried if others had done their fair share of the job.

Q: But you weren't reading that, at the time of the Manila Conference, as being a question by them of the necessity of our action?

RUSK: No, there was none at all on that, and of course the Manila conference did help in increasing the number of troops somewhat put in by others.

Q: By that time, had the matter of peace initiatives been organized in your department in such a way that it's accurate to isolate something like the Harriman group, as I notice some accounts are now doing. Was there a specific task force sort of thing organized under Mr. Harriman to follow up all the peace initiatives?

RUSK: Yes. He was, I think, Ambassador-at-Large, and was given the responsibility of probing

for any kind of possibilities of peace, and that was his full-time job. We tried our best to find ways and means to establish contact in a way that might lead to peaceful settlement, but again we ran across the adamant attitude of Hanoi at every stage.

Q: And people like the famous Harry Ashmore and William Baggs trip which comes early in 1967 -- they were just wishful thinking that there was some kind of movement on the part of Hanoi?

RUSK: Yes, they didn't bring back anything that changed the situation at all.

Q: Did missions like that contribute anything positive, or were they negative forces insofar as you were concerned?

RUSK: I think that they sometimes confused public opinion because they'd come back and pretend that there was some sort of a peace initiative which was not there. This was some of the same sort of confusion that attended Bob Kennedy's visit to Paris. It also may have helped convince Hanoi that we were interested in peace at any price because there were so many of these various efforts by intermediaries -- or self-styled intermediaries -- trying to probe for the possibilities of a peaceful settlement. My own guess is that if Hanoi realized without any doubt at all that we were committed and we were going to stay there, we were going to see it through, that they would bring themselves to a decision to make peace sooner rather than later.

But as of September 1969, I think that it would be fair to say that Hanoi now realizes that they cannot win what they want by military means. That it's beyond their capabilities. But they may also judge that if they just stay with it that American public opinion will collapse and that they will win on the home front in the United States rather than on the ground in Vietnam.

Q: By early in 1967 we were talking to the North Vietnamese for the first time, I assume in Moscow -- the Trang and John Guthrie channel.

RUSK: Yes.

Q: What led up to that, and what were its consequences, if any?

RUSK: I think this was another attempt to establish a channel of communication that was discreet, that would not become public, so that if there was any message that the North Vietnamese were willing to give, that there would be a channel through which it could be given.

We did a number of these. There was the Ed Gullion attempt and there have been others, some of which have never been in the record; but I would suppose that there were literally dozens of efforts to establish a channel somewhere so that we could be in direct contact with the North Vietnamese. Again, the North Vietnamese weren't interested in talking seriously about peace.

Q: They didn't talk back at all in that channel?

RUSK: No. In general I would say that the North Vietnamese proved themselves on various

occasions to be willing to listen. They would be willing to hear what we had to say, but they wouldn't send anything back on the return channel.

Q: We could talk, but that was a one-way --

RUSK: That's right, and so they would just probably analyze under a microscope what we were saying to see if there was any change in our point of view, but we never got anything back except a harsh reiteration of their public positions, their four points, or the Viet Congas ten points, or whatever it might be, as a basis for settlement in Vietnam.

Q: This is the time that we were proposing, as I understand it, what's called the Phase A- Phase B formula.

RUSK: Right.

Q: Proposing it, at least on one occasion, through Harold Wilson to Mr. Kosygin. That's a very confusing episode -- the whole Chester Cooper mission to London and so on. Can you straighten that out, particularly in reference to its relation to Mr. Johnson's letter to Ho Chi Minh which coincides in time?

RUSK: Well, the Phase A-Phase B concept was that we could stop the bombing in Phase A if there was a Phase B in which other things would begin to happen on both sides. This was simply a small device to get around the North Vietnamese contention that nothing could happen until we stopped the bombing. So we thought we might be able to put together a package in which stopping the bombing would be the first step, but then there would be some previously agreed second and third steps which would move the situation toward peace in Vietnam. What we were interested in was knowing what would happen if we stopped the bombing and no one was able to tell us. The Phase A-Phase B was an attempt to negotiate on that particular basis.

I think in the Wilson-Kosygin exchanges -- they worked out on the spot some actual language which was not precise enough for President Johnson, and which was generally in line with the kind of briefing that Chet Cooper had given to Prime Minister Wilson. But since in these matters every syllable, every comma, is important, Wilson concocted some language and gave it to Kosygin without clearing it with us first -- that is, not clearing it with the President first. When the President got this proposal -- the message -- in front of him, he realized that he ought to give something to Kosygin which was consistent with what he, the President, had just gotten through giving to Ho Chi Minh. So Johnson insisted that Kosygin be given a type of message which was consistent with the message which the President had just sent to Ho Chi Minh in a letter.

Q: Well, did that reverse the Phase A-Phase B offer?

RUSK: No, it didn't, but it made it clear that we expected to have something in return for stopping the bombing. I think the record will show that and show how the various drafts came out and what the President's final draft was. It was unfortunate that Harold Wilson gave Mr. Kosygin some language which had not been cleared in advance with President Johnson. That was the basic cause of the misunderstanding.

Q: In regard to the letter to Ho Chi Minh, I've been told on several occasions that that was a fairly personal matter with Mr. Johnson and yourself. What were the circumstances of that?

RUSK: President Johnson was a man who instinctively tried to put himself in the shoes of the other fellow and tried to figure out what was on his mind, and he wanted to be sure that the other fellow also know what was on the President's mind. So President Johnson felt that it would be desirable to have a direct communication with Ho Chi Minh so there would be no misunderstanding through intermediaries or anything else. He just put to him the proposition that we would stop the bombing in exchange for some reduction of the war and as a step toward peace. I think it was President Johnson's idea that he send the letter directly to Ho Chi Mirth.

Q: That's something he wanted to do?

RUSK: That's right. [It was] something he wanted to do, because he wanted to be sure that the top man on the other side knew what was in his own mind. So we drafted that letter, and he made some changes in it and then sent it on.

Q: You say "be" -- the Department drafted it, and Mr. Johnson edited it?

RUSK: I think it was done with the Special Assistant for Security Affairs, Walt Rostow, and myself doing the principal drafting on it.

Q: Did it go through several drafts over a considerable period of time, or was it a fairly?

RUSK: No, it was done fairly quickly and fairly simply. It was not a long letter.

Q: No, as I recall the published version --

RUSK: It was a fairly short letter.

Q: I was really thinking in terms of whether or not the letter had been drafted before Cooper's instructions had been made to send him to London -- so that he would have had an opportunity to know --

RUSK: He didn't know anything about the draft of that letter.

Q: He wouldn't have known about that -- ?

RUSK: No, he didn't know about that letter.

Q: Is that the normal course of affairs that he wouldn't have known that?

RUSK: As a matter of fact, I think he went to London before the letter was finally drafted. I'm not sure, but I think the letter was sent while he was in London.

Q: So he wouldn't have had an opportunity to see the draft of it.

RUSK: That's right, but he would not have been in on that letter anyhow had he been in Washington. This was handled by a very small group.

Q: Did it represent any kind of change as far as the President's position was concerned?

RUSK: No, none at all.

Q: No hardening, or something of that nature, as some have maintained?

RUSK: That's right.

[interruption]

Q: We were in the middle of 1967 and you had, I assume, talked about the whole letter. Is there anything you think of to add?

RUSK: I think I have nothing more to add on that.

Q: In the summer of that year, or right at the beginning of fall, the major event is the San Antonio Formula. Did this represent something different on our part?

RUSK: The San Antonio Formula represented one advance on what had been said before. You will remember that I said that the Phase A-Phase B formula anticipated that we would stop the bombing first on the basis of agreement as to what would happen in Phase B -- in which both sides would agree to do various things. In the San Antonio Formula, we stated Phase B as an assumption: "We assume, of course," said the San Antonio Formula, "That the other side would not take advantage of our cessation of the bombing." We had in mind that what we meant by that would be the subject of negotiation and discussion with Hanoi. Naturally, we did not want them to build up infiltration and attack across the DMZ and go all-out militarily if we stopped the bombing, but stating it as an assumption was again an effort to find a way to let Hanoi proceed despite what they had been saying on the subject. Again we ran across the completely negative attitude of Hanoi in dealing with it.

Q: There wasn't any disagreement among the President's chief advisers as to what was meant by "not taking advantage?" I know Mr. Clifford later on makes the statement to the Senate committee, I think, that it meant, you know, not that they'd stop infiltration but that they wouldn't increase it.

RUSK: No, there was no disagreement among the President's advisers on it. I personally regretted Secretary Clifford saying that before the Senate committee because that is something that ought to have been left to negotiation. That tended to undermine our bargaining position in a negotiation. It [negotiation] ought to try to spell out what we meant by the assumption that they would not take advantage of it, you see, so that what was wrong with it was not the substance of

it, but the fact that it was said in advance of an actual negotiation.

Q: Reducing an option that a negotiator' might have had.

RUSK: That's right.

Q: During that whole period of time there were a number more of these individual channel contacts that you've mentioned several times. Mr. [Henry] Kissinger undertook one in the summer. Mr. Harriman pursued one with the Romanians, I think, later on in the fall. Were these any different than the earlier ones, or were they again a repetition of the same?

RUSK: We took seriously the Kissinger and the Romanian channels because we thought they were both serious as far as the intermediaries were concerned, and Kissinger handled it very well. He was responsible and accurate, and accuracy in these matters is of the greatest importance. Both of them came to nothing because there was nothing coming back from Hanoi.

Q: So, except for the nature of the channel, they weren't any more substantive than some of the earlier ones?

RUSK: No, they didn't produce any more than the others did.

Q: What about the Vietnam elections which came in that same fall? Did Mr. Johnson play any special personal role in arranging those or carrying them out?

RUSK: No, we were very pleased to see them move to elections. We had pressed them to do so because we thought that the government of Vietnam would be stronger if it were on an electoral basis, and we also had more confidence than some of the South Vietnamese did as to the results of such an election. We did not believe that the Viet Cong would make any appreciable dent on the elections despite their threats of terrorism and their propagandizing against the election itself. But we tried to leave that as much as possible to the Vietnamese processes. They had an electoral commission, and they worked out their own rules for the elections.

Of course, there has been a great tradition in Vietnam for elections at the local level. The village elections have been historically a part of the Vietnamese scene. That was true during the French period. It was true even during Japanese occupation. The villages of South Vietnam have their own village democracy, and so the idea of an election was not all that strange to them.

We felt that if the government would just take its courage in hand and hold an election that they would get a mandate from the people which was stronger than anything they had up to that point, since they rested more or less on a coup. We were very pleased to see the election and were pleased with the general conduct of the elections. We thought they were pretty fair. We had all sorts of observers there. There were hundreds of press people looking over the elections. They found very little fault with them in terms of fairness and procedures, and we felt that the election greatly strengthened the government of South Vietnam.

Q: It wasn't a matter of our forcing the South Vietnamese government to hold them?

RUSK: No. We advised them to, and we encouraged them to, but we didn't force them to.

Q: It might be a good time to make a comment on that general problem. Many of the critics seem to me to always have assumed that we could at any time call the turns for the South Vietnamese government. What was your feeling as to how far we could go in reality to control what they were doing?

RUSK: Well, we can't make and unmake governments in Vietnam. We just don't have it in our capability. It would be silly for us to take steps that would cause the South Vietnamese to turn around and start shooting at us. There are limits beyond which you can [not] go in imposing your will upon somebody. You can give advice, you can persuade, you can cajole, you can sometimes put on pressure, you can sometimes threaten. But at the end of the day, these decisions have to be made by the South Vietnamese themselves because, although we've had a substantial military presence there, we can't take over running the affairs of seventeen or eighteen million people. There are limits beyond which you simply can't go.

Q: So the idea we can make them do something, as far as you're concerned is false?

RUSK: And, particularly, we can't make and unmake governments. That's something they have to decide.

Q: How much importance in settling something like Vietnam can you expect from the kind of personal diplomacy that Mr. Johnson at least engaged in to a certain extent in such things as Glassboro that year?

RUSK: By the time this material is available, Mr. Johnson will already have published his books in which he covers Glassboro in some detail.

Q: He does cover it in detail?

RUSK: Yes. At Glassboro, President Johnson gave Mr. Kosygin a formulation to send to Hanoi somewhat along the lines of the San Antonio formula. It involved stopping the bombing as a step toward peace, and assuming that the North Vietnamese would do some things in reciprocity for stopping the bombing. Mr. Kosygin took it and indicated he would send it to Hanoi, but again we never got an answer from Hanoi. We never got an answer through the Russians.

Q: So you don't know --

RUSK: So we don't know. In the first place, we don't know that the Russians actually sent it to Hanoi. We suspect they did, but we assume that Hanoi's response was negative because we never heard from the Russians on it. But Mr. Johnson will have already covered that in his books.

Q: Late in that year they had the first of -- and this I suppose gets part of 1968 as well -- first of what the press has since called the "Wise Men" meetings. I think it was in October or early November of 1967 that group met first.

RUSK: Yes.

Q: Was that a technique of getting advice that Mr. Johnson frequently turned to, or was this something new and different for that occasion?

RUSK: Governments frequently call upon people outside of government for advice, and Mr. Johnson followed that procedure. We thought that it would be useful to get together a group of very distinguished and very experienced men who had not been involved in the day-to-day operations in Vietnam, who were somewhat removed from all the detail and all of the theology of the subject, and get their general review of the situation.

Q: Who decided who would come to that meeting?

RUSK: The President and I and the Secretary of Defense primarily decided who should be invited, but it was almost an obvious list. I mean, if you looked at the names of the people there -
- Arthur Dean -

Q: What Richard Rovere [The American Establishment, New York, 1962] called the "Establishment" --

RUSK: That's right. They were the names that were almost self-nominated if you assumed that you wanted to constitute a group of that sort. It was Dean Acheson and Jack [John J.] McCloy and Arthur Dean and Robert Murphy and a good many others whose names the historians will have in front of them. In that first meeting the group was pretty nearly unanimous that we were on the right course. They had a strong sense of our commitment. They felt that it was necessary to see the thing through -- that we should proceed in the way we were going and do what was necessary to bring about a successful result in South Vietnam.

It's interesting to see that that same group met in the spring of 1968 after the Tet offensive, and it was interesting to note that the Tet offensive had made a major impression on some of the members of that group.

Q: That is what made the impression?

RUSK: I have no doubt about it myself, just as the Tet offensive made an impression on a lot of people here in this country. Although the Tet offensive was a military disaster for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, it had a considerable propaganda and psychological impact, and clearly shocked people here in this country and caused them to feel that the situation was getting to be hopeless. So in the second meeting of these same "Wise Men" there were a number of them who had been so impressed by the Tet offensive that they were not nearly so sure that we ought to proceed as we were doing, and that we ought to sort of make the best peace we can. They were about evenly divided in the second meeting, but the first meeting was very clearly a very strong impression that we were on the right track and should proceed.

Q: Was the nature of the briefings that they got different essentially?

RUSK: They were not intended to be. Of course in the second meeting the briefing reflected the setback in the countryside of the Tet offensive because, although the North Vietnamese suffered enormous casualties in the Tet offensive, it did interrupt the pacification program in the countryside rather significantly in some areas because the South Vietnamese forces were drawn back into the provincial capitals and in the district towns to give close-in defense to the populated areas that were being attacked under the Tet offensive, you see. That left some sections of the countryside pretty exposed to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces. I think that was the type of briefing that seemed to be discouraging to some of these wise men.

Q: It wasn't a panicky-type briefing?

RUSK: No.

Q: -- intended to be the same type briefing that as before?

RUSK: [We did] try to make it as factual and as direct and as realistic as possible and not try to flimflam them by false optimism or anything of that sort, but [to] give them a true picture of what the situation seemed to be.

Q: Had Secretary Clifford's growing disillusionment with some of the things we were doing by that time -- did that make a difference between the two meetings?

RUSK: No.

Q: How much of a difference was there between State and Defense by February of 1968 and March?

RUSK: There was no significant difference between State and Defense by February and then March at that time.

Q: Mr. Clifford's views hadn't reached the point at that time -- as they have apparently later become -- that we should have begun turning back military action and -- ?

RUSK: That's correct. Mr. Clifford came into Office as Secretary of Defense with the reputation of being a hawk, and it was not until some time later that he began to change his own views on these matters.

Q: Was that during the period of the drafting of the President's March 31st speech then?

RUSK: No, as a matter of fact, I'm not a very good witness as to just when and how Secretary Clifford seemed to change his mind on some of these matters because he never brought these matters up at the Tuesday Luncheon, never argued with us about it in any formal way. It was just an informal kind of thing that came about through an erosion of his point of view rather than through actual proposals he made. He didn't propose, while he was Secretary of Defense, the point of view that he reflected in his Foreign Affairs article that he wrote after he left office. He never made any such proposals to the President or to me.

Q: You found out about those then, in print?

RUSK: Yes, sure.

Q: What about the drafting of that speech, and particularly the decision to put in it the partial bombing halt north of the nineteenth or twentieth parallel?

RUSK: Well, in the spring of 1968 the President wanted to review the military requirements in Vietnam, and he invited the Chiefs of Staff and General Westmoreland to -- excuse me, it was General Abrams by that time -- to indicate what they considered the situation to be and what their requirements were from a military point of view. They came back with the suggestion that, in certain contingencies, it might be desirable or necessary to add another two hundred thousand men to our forces in Vietnam.

It was not a hard recommendation. It was simply some contingency planning -- some possibilities that were being discussed -- and so we had some discussions in Washington in February and March about whether we would move in that direction. It would involve calling up the National Guard and Reserves. It would involve, in effect, the declaration of a national emergency. It would involve many more billions on the Defense budget, and it would be a very substantial step.

Early in March, March 4th or 5th -- along in there -- and President Johnson will have covered this in his book -- I suggested that, as an alternative to adding substantially to our forces, that we consider a very serious bombing halt, at least in those areas of North Vietnam that were not directly involved in the battlefield in the South.

Q: This goes back to your old opinion on the bombing.

RUSK: That's right. My own idea was that if we bombed only south of the twentieth parallel, that we would do that kind of bombing which was necessary to defend the area around the DMZ and the northern part of South Vietnam, [we] would give our Marines the full protection of tactical bombing in that area, but that we would not bomb up in the Hanoi-Haiphong area -- which was very costly to us anyhow, and [would] try to use that as a device to try to get some talk started with Hanoi.

When I made that proposal, the President thought about it a few minutes and said, "Get on your horses; let's get something ready on that." And so during March we prepared a plan for the cessation of the bombings except up north to the twentieth parallel, accompanied by an offer to have talks with North Vietnam.

We did not know whether they would talk on the basis of a partial stoppage of the bombing. I personally rather thought that they would because that would be a very profitable transaction for them in terms of what they were running into in Hanoi and Haiphong on their own. After all, being bombed was not a very pleasant operation.

But the President did not make a decision on that point until just a day or two before he actually gave his March 31st speech, and therefore the earlier drafts of his speech did not have that particular point in it. When you draft speeches, you don't put things in them that the President hasn't decided on; and so it was only in the last two or three days that that particular part was added to the President's speech. And, of course he added himself his own withdrawal from the Presidential campaign.

Q: So the dramatic meeting in your office that was described by the Washington Post and Newsweek and others is really sort of an anticlimax. It's really not that drama-charged at all.

RUSK: That's correct.

Q: That work had been going on for some time.

RUSK: That's correct.

Q: What finally decided the President on it? Did the 'wise men's' meeting finally make the President make this decision, do you think?

RUSK: No, I think that he wanted to move the situation to start another chapter in Vietnam if he could, and he also probably thought about it in relation to his own personal decision about whether to campaign for the Presidency. He felt that if he was going to withdraw from office that he might try this on to see if he could move the matter further toward peace while he was still President.

Q: Did you have any hint that he was going to add that last paragraph on his own?

RUSK: Yes, he talked to me about this the previous year and left me with a very clear impression that he was very seriously considering withdrawing from public life at the end of his first full term. He will have covered this in his book by the time this recording is available, but he had talked to me about the fact that no Vice President had ever succeeded to the Presidency and then run for two full terms.

He referred to the tragedy of Woodrow Wilson, who was desperately ill while he was still President. Although President Johnson didn't put it in categorical terms, I had the impression he was concerned about his health as far as running and serving out another full term was concerned.

The idea that he was driven from office by Vietnam is just not true. Long before dissent in Vietnam had become significant he had talked about withdrawing, and I think he had such advice from his wife. He had had his own views on the matter, so I was not surprised when I was told on my way to New Zealand for a meeting that his speech was going to have in it a final paragraph that would be of interest to me.

Q: And that's how you were told?

RUSK: That's how I was told, I knew then that that was what the final paragraph was going to say.

Q: Do you think anybody would have given him different advice during that period of they had known that he was definitely not going to run again?

RUSK: I don't know. My advice was not based upon that factor, although I always had in mind the possibility that he would not run again. My advice was based upon an attempt to get the Vietnam matter into a new chapter, if possible, by getting some real talks started between North Vietnam and ourselves as an alternative to building up the forces in it.

I must say that I always felt during this period that we had enough I forces out there to do the job.

I had been a Colonel on War Plans during World War II. I remember General Marshall once saying that his rule of thumb during World War II was to give a military commander half the number of troops he asked for and double his mission, and that that worked out just about right. I had the feeling that the five hundred and thirty-five thousand men that we had in Vietnam, plus the much larger forces of the South Vietnamese, plus the Allied Forces, were fully adequate to deny military victory to the Viet Cong and to the North Vietnamese. So I didn't see much point in talking about adding another two hundred thousand men, or any significant additional numbers of men, to the forces out there. We tend to luxuriate our deployment of forces for particular missions, and I felt we had enough.

Q: What about the imbroglio that immediately began over where the talks would occur? Why did that happen, really? It seemed to the public at least so much a detail. Was that a substantive issue?

RUSK: Well, we had to have a place where the South Vietnamese could come. We had to have a place where we could consult our Allies if they wanted to be consulted, and we thought it was only reasonable to have a place that was reasonably congenial to both sides. The South Vietnamese could not come to Phnom Penh or to Warsaw.

Q: They couldn't go to Warsaw?

RUSK: We asked the Poles about that, and the Poles gave us a very equivocal reply. So it was perfectly obvious that, since our object was to get the South Vietnamese at the table along with us as soon as we could, that a place like Phnom Penh and Warsaw were out of the question just as Hanoi would have been out of the question. So with all the possibilities in the world that were open to both sides, we felt that it was unreasonable on the part of the North Vietnamese to stick on Phnom Penh and Warsaw. We had offered them some fifteen alternative sights, ourselves, probably thereby ruling out any one of the fifteen as a matter of face and prestige.

Q: Had you excluded Paris from the fifteen on purpose for that reason?

RUSK: We left out Paris partly because some of us thought that Paris would be acceptable, but partly because the President didn't want to go to Paris. He was afraid that General de Gaulle would have a negative influence on the talks -- given General de Gaulle's attitude toward our role in Vietnam. As it turned out Paris proved to be very satisfactory as a site because President de Gaulle acted very correctly, and the French did everything they could to facilitate the talks. So as far as a site is concerned Paris proved to be very acceptable.

Q: Had the famous statement that's so often used against him that we'd go anywhere any time to talk peace -- was that a statement Mr. Johnson added to his speech some time? That doesn't sound like State Department drafting either.

RUSK: Well, that's a matter of rhetoric. We wouldn't expect Hanoi to come to Washington, and we wouldn't expect to go to Hanoi. I myself on occasion said in the previous months "If anybody can just turn up the warm body of a North Vietnamese for me to talk to, I'll be there." Well, that didn't mean that I would go just anywhere. This is the difference between rhetoric and actual arrangements.

Q: After the talks opened and Mr. Harriman and Mr. Vance went to Paris, did the nature of their instructions change during the balance of 1968? For example, there was a spring offensive by the enemy that Mr. Johnson reacted to publicly. Did this tend to harden our position in the early part of those talks?

RUSK: No. In general, I would think that the record will show that the basic instructions to Harriman and Vance remained pretty consistent throughout. Their object was to get the North Vietnamese to accept the South Vietnamese at the conference table, and then on detail to get a mutual withdrawal of forces, to get release of the American prisoners of war, and to get compliance with the Laos Agreement of 1962, and other factors that would involve liquidation of the war. There might have been some changes in detail in terms of how you respond to particular points made by the North Vietnamese.

But again, certainly as of September 1969, although they are physically present and are sitting at the table in what is supposed to be talks, the North Vietnamese have made no contribution of substance to those talks at all. They're completely adamant, and we're having the same experience in the formal talks that we had in all of these preliminary and private explorations with them, so there's no sign yet that they're seriously interested in bringing this matter to a peaceable solution.

Q: There was a highly publicized lull on the battlefield in the summer of 1968. At that time did the Paris delegation think that we should do something on the ground in way of reducing activity to perhaps spur talks along?

RUSK: I don't recall recommendations that they made on that point. I've seen some reference to it since then, but I don't recall recommendations by a Paris delegation that cut across their instructions.

Q: There wasn't, at least, a major debate in the high places of government about it, or you would

recall it?

RUSK: That's right. We had no serious debate about that.

Q: What finally did lead to the breakthrough that allowed the President to stop the bombing entirely in the North in October?

RUSK: A full stoppage of the bombing involved three -- what we called basic facts of life. We made it clear to North Vietnam that if we stopped the bombing, the South Vietnamese were to come to the conference table; that there would be no violations of the demilitarized zones up in the North so that the stoppage of the bombing would not endanger our forces in the northern part of South Vietnam; and there would not be continuation of rocket and other types of attacks on the major population centers.

Q: This was an explicit agreement; signed, sealed, and delivered, so to speak?

RUSK: No, as it worked out we only got a formal agreement on the South Vietnamese coming to the conference table, but we got full understanding by the North Vietnamese that we would expect them to comply with the other two points. We went over it with them eight or nine times in the course of the negotiations.

Q: These were in the secret talks now?

RUSK: In the secret talks. We went over these three points with them eight or nine times. We took it up with the Russians and made these three facts of life perfectly clear to the Russians. Before we finally stopped the bombing in October, President Johnson communicated with the Russians and said, "Now here are the three facts of life. We're not calling them conditions. We're just saying that no President can stop the bombing unless these three things are taken into account, unless these three things occur." And the President said to the Russians, "We have some doubt as to whether the North Vietnamese fully understand the importance of these three points." The Russians came back saying, "Your doubts on that score are unfounded," which we took to be a confirmation that the North Vietnamese did understand and did in fact accept these three facts of life as being essential to the stopping of the bombing.

Q: Now, what time in frame is this? Is this early or mid-October?

RUSK: We went to the Russians in mid-October, I think it was. By that time the matter had begun to gel, because by early October it began to be apparent that the North Vietnamese were going to accept the South Vietnamese at the conference table.

Q: That was the key that had to be overcome.

RUSK: That's right.

Q: Well, what delayed the arrangement then from going into effect until October 31st, I think, when the bombing was actually ordered stopped?

RUSK: Well, for one -- to pin down these points -- it was not until the middle or later October that the North Vietnamese specifically agreed to the presence of the South Vietnamese at the table, although we had had some sort of hints -- some reason to believe early in October that they would in fact do so. We had to pin that down, and then there were some problems of timing -- the relation between the stopping of the bombing and the timing of announcements, the number of days that would elapse between the bombing [halt] and announcement of a meeting at which the South Vietnamese could be present, and things of that sort. There was a good deal of fussing around about detail, and it took a little time to sort those out.

Q: What about the South Vietnamese? Were they explicitly committed to attend at that point?

RUSK: Well, we thought that they were all on board. As a matter of fact, we had an agreed joint communique worked out with President Thieu and President Johnson in which the announcement would be made, but then when we got around to the point of being ready to go with it, President Thieu decided he had to consult people in his own government. When he took it up with his Cabinet and some of his legislative leaders, he got cold feet and decided that he couldn't go ahead with it.

Well, it was too late by then. We had already told the Russians, and we had already agreed with the North Vietnamese, and so we had to go ahead even though the South Vietnamese were not prepared to issue a joint statement and were not prepared immediately to come to Paris. We had quite a fight with them about that.

Q: Was there any importance played by the celebrated activity of certain Americans, notably Madame [Anna] Chennault, in connection with her political campaign to try to keep the South Vietnamese from getting on board, or staying on board?

RUSK: It's hard to know with certainty whether the South Vietnamese were playing American electoral politics at that time. It's possible that they were. It so, this was very reprehensible. I think that there's no doubt that Madame Chennault was trying to influence them not to come to the conference table, and that she probably had electoral considerations in mind.

I have no reason to think that Mr. Nixon, personally, was directly involved in this kind of a thing; but it may be that the South Vietnamese on their own felt that if they agreed to come to Paris this would give Hubert Humphrey a big boost and that as between Humphrey and Nixon they would prefer Nixon. Whether they still think so or not, I don't know.

Q: They may have had second thoughts, but it's too late now. But there was no connection between Madame Chennault and the Republican leadership -- ?

RUSK: Well, I just don't know what connection there was. As I said, I never had any evidence that Mr. Nixon himself was directly involved in that.

Q: After the talks began in November and December, did Mr. Harriman and Mr. Vance then recommend that we reverse our order to General Abrams that maximum pressure on the ground

be exerted?

RUSK: The record would have to show that. I myself don't recall that they did. I would be inclined to think that had they done so, I would have recalled it. But that could be looked at in terms of the cables that came from Harriman and Vance back to Washington.

Q: So essentially Mr. Johnson's Administration and your tenure as Secretary of State left the talks open but with no real change in the situation from the time they opened?

RUSK: That's right.

Q: Did the new Administration adequately get briefed from the old, in other words, did they come to you for the advice -- ?

RUSK: Well, during this period of the campaign President Johnson kept the candidate Nixon fully informed of what was going on. I had some briefing sessions with him myself, for example. On this matter of stopping the bombing, President Johnson was in touch with all three of the principal presidential candidates, and, in fact, had them on a conference telephone call before the actual announcement was made to tell them what had gone on. They had all agreed to it about ten days before that, so as far as the candidates were concerned, this was a national decision.

This was a national action for which the President took responsibility, but on which the candidates were informed. The President did everything that he could to insure that he would not do anything that would be obnoxious to any one of the principal candidates during this period.

Q: And certainly, so far as you were concerned, there was nothing about the change of Administrations that necessarily would have changed the nature of the talks or interrupted the machinery of the Paris talks at all?

RUSK: That's correct, and that has proved to be the case since the Administration has changed. President Nixon and Secretary [William] Rogers have continued those talks in Paris in about the same way that I suspect they would have gone on had President Johnson remained in office.

Q: There's probably a whole lot of detail that I may in one of our subsequent sessions ask permission to come back to after I've had a chance to read through this transcript, but so far as the direct questions that I've sent you in advance this seems to be about it.

In the line of getting what was in your mind, though -- just a sort of general speculative question -- if you had known in, say, early 1963 or '64 what the ultimate cost of lives and resources and dollars and public opinion was going to be with our activity in Vietnam, do you think looking back that you would have advised any differently?

RUSK: Well, every American casualty takes a little piece out of those who carry the responsibility, and I've felt that it was a great tragedy that it was necessary to ask our young men to undertake this fighting after all that has happened in the last four decades.

On the other hand, the overriding problem before all of mankind is to prevent World War III. We learned the lessons from World War II and wrote them into the United Nations Charter and into our great security treaties. The principal lesson we learned from World War II is that if a course of aggression is allowed to gather momentum that it continues to build and leads eventually to a general conflict. This was very much in our minds when we wrote collective security into the United Nations Charter, and when we concluded such treaties as the SEATO Treaty.

Our problem is to prevent World War III. I said we learned the lessons of World War II, but no one is going to learn any lessons from World War III. There won't be enough left, and so the problem is to prevent World War III before it comes about. If I had thought myself that there was no connection between Vietnam and preventing World War III, I might have had a different view about Vietnam. But if there is that connection, and the historians will have to judge this, then the effort made in South Vietnam was very much worthwhile.

There's another point that is highly relevant. Two-thirds of the world's people live in Asia. Half of them are free; half of them are in Communist China. During this period in which we have made a stand in Vietnam, the free nations of Asia have made remarkable progress, not only in terms of what is happening in each particular country but in the cohesion which has been developing among the free nations themselves in regional activities, such as the ASPAC grouping of Pacific powers, and such as the ASEAN grouping of the Southeast Asian powers, and the Asian Development Bank, and the initiatives taken by Japan to stimulate agricultural production. All sorts of things have been happening out there, so that behind the cover of our resistance in Vietnam has been a steady strengthening of the forces of free Asia.

Now, they face the prospect of living next to a billion Chinese armed with nuclear weapons and proclaiming a doctrine of militant Communism -- militant world revolution. It was my hope that the Vietnamese experience would give them some time in which they could strengthen themselves to be able to survive the implicit pressures of a Communist China and maintain some peace in Asia of the sort that is conformable to the national interests of the United States. Now, this is something that only the historian will have a chance to tell about. That has not worked out as yet. That has not evolved, but if the free nations of Asia ten years from now are surviving as independent nations -- making their own decisions about their own national life and their own orientation in world affairs -- then the Vietnamese experience will have been worth the tragic price that has been paid for it. If, on the other hand, we are moving down the chute -- the chute toward World War III, then at least we can say that we tried to stop it by stopping it in Vietnam.

I just myself hope in September 1969 that the North Vietnamese will not win on the home front in the United States, and that an internal collapse of morale in the United States will not give them what they've been unable to win on the battlefield in Vietnam.

Q: I gather you're not too worried about what the historians are likely to decide in twenty years if indeed we do avoid the holocaust --

RUSK: It depends on how the story comes out. It depends upon what kind of people we are. The American people are now in the process of deciding whether we can see this thing through and insist that it come to a reasonable conclusion so that the nations of Southeast Asia can live their

own lives and that there can be a situation there that the United States can look upon with reasonable contentment. If the Communists are allowed to overrun South Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia and Thailand and on beyond, then I think we're on the way to World War III.

Q: This is our third session taking place on January 2, 1970. Let's begin, Mr. Secretary, with a couple of questions that have occurred to me in reading your prior transcripts, one involving particularly the coordination between our military effort in Vietnam and the political goals we sought.

Some of the critics are saying that the Johnson Administration never successfully coordinated the military with the political effort, and that the military declined to push the pacification effort and that the Administration didn't force it to do so. Would you comment on that general subject area?

RUSK: First, let's talk about coordination back in Washington. I think it's important for the historian to bear in mind that the principal decisions made about Vietnam were made at the Tuesday Luncheon; and at those luncheons President Johnson had with him the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of Central Intelligence, and his own Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. We talked about all aspects of Vietnam at those luncheons -- military, political economical, psychological -- and decisions were taken with those who were carrying responsibility for all aspects Of the Vietnam struggle. I don't believe there was any lack of coordination as far as Washington was concerned. President Johnson frequently would say that his right arm was Secretary McNamara in pursuing the military aspect of the Job in Vietnam, and his directive to Secretary McNamara was to get the military job done.

His left arm was his Secretary of State who was expected to try to find a peaceful solution to Vietnam if possible. Now during the period when President Johnson was President, and the historian will find a good deal of this in President Johnson's book, we had literally dozens of contacts -- discussions -- with Hanoi trying to probe the possibilities of a peaceful settlement. Those efforts were always known to, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Similarly, when we were adopting bombing targets, and when we were authorizing bombing operations, those plans were always brought into the Tuesday luncheon; and the Secretary of State had a chance to comment on them and frequently did so that as far as Washington was concerned there was pretty good coordination.

For a time President Johnson had Mr. Robert Komer in the White House to coordinate what was called "the other war," that is, the political-psychological-economic side of the war, in order that all the agencies in Washington that were concerned about that aspect of the war would pull together. The Department of Agriculture was interested in agricultural developments; the Department of Commerce in trade, and the Department of the Treasury in the economic situation. Komer's job was to coordinate all those activities as far as Washington was concerned.

Now, in the field. In Vietnam the Ambassador was the President's principal representative, and it

was his job to insure that the military and political and psychological operations were coordinated on the ground . That was not easy, because we were expecting the South Vietnamese not only to fight a war but to build a nation in the process. It isn't easy to improve education and improve agriculture and restrain inflation and do all these things in the middle of a war, particularly a guerrilla-type war which subjected the government structure in the countryside to continued harassment. It's hard to build schools when school teachers are being assassinated. The Deputy Ambassador in Saigon was the man who was primarily responsible for that job of coordination, reporting to Ambassador Bunker or Ambassador Lodge.

When you're trying to move a complex situation on a broad front, there are always going to be problems of coordination, and so I won't claim that coordination was perfect but it wasn't as bad as some people seem to think. There was no instance where it was a case of not being informed as to what was going on and what was being attempted. The military kept very closely in touch with the political and other developments. The State Department kept very closely in touch with military developments. The first thing I did every morning when I got into the office was to read the detailed military report of the day before in Vietnam, so I kept always very closely in touch with military developments because they were a crucial part of the total effort out there.

Q: And the military was not then basically out of sympathy with the pacification effort in such a way that made it difficult to make progress in that area?

RUSK: No. The military had a lot to learn about how you fight a guerrilla war. During the 1950's the South Vietnamese armed force, such as it was -- it was not very large during that period -- was trained more or less for conventional war -- divisions against divisions. That seemed to be the nature of the threat posed by the organization of several divisions in North Vietnam. It was not specially trained to handle guerrilla warfare.

Guerrilla warfare has complications of its own. It's one of the most difficult kinds of warfare to meet, because the defense -- the South Vietnamese -- had responsibility for protecting a very large number of places. There were forty-three provincial capitals, there were two hundred and forty district towns, and the government held all of those. Now, any one of those was subject to being attacked by guerrillas at any time because the guerrillas did not have to seize and hold a position. They only had to cause trouble and hit and run -- strike and fall back. It meant an enormous commitment of forces to protect the positions that were being held by the government, whereas the guerrilla was free to move around, so that the defense in a guerrilla war situation has a special burden and involves a great deal of manpower.

When the North Vietnamese sent their regular divisions into South Vietnam, you did get a certain amount of conventional war in the classical sense. You had large unit actions against each other in the search-and-destroy operations, and sometimes during the TET offensive of 1968. But I'm not sure in 1970 that we yet have learned all we need to know about how you deal with guerrilla war situations.

Q: Certainly we still have problems from time to time.

RUSK: That's right. I think it's a very subtle, complex, difficult kind of struggle to carry out.

Q: Mentioning the present -- early 1970 -- President Nixon's policy has gained the title 'Vietnamization.' How different do you consider that from what you and President Johnson were trying to do during the time that you were in office?

RUSK: President Johnson followed the policy of building up the South Vietnamese armed forces, and if the historian will look at the rate of increase of the South Vietnamese forces -- say, from 1965 onward -- he will find that there was a very striking increase in the actual numbers, size, equipment, of South Vietnamese forces throughout that period. There were some problems about the rate at which we could turn over responsibility to the South Vietnamese, particularly in matters of equipment.

For example, on the M-16 rifle we were very late in producing the M-16 even for our own troops, and we felt that our own troops had first priority on so sophisticated and complicated a weapon as the M-16 rifle. We only had one producer of that rifle. They were producing only something like -- I don't know -- thirty thousand a month or something -- this is a figure that can be checked. It was not until 1967-68 that new producers were called in to make additional M-16 rifles. That then got the production situation in a position where we could begin to issue M-16 rifles to the South Vietnamese forces, and the Nixon Administration inherited that increase in productive capacity.

As far as helicopters are concerned, we wanted to turn over more helicopter responsibility to the South Vietnamese, but the training time required to train helicopter pilots was very long. It was a minimum of a year and possibly more. The supply of helicopters was limited for awhile to those that were absolutely essential for the U.S. units that were directly involved. Now, as South Vietnamese pilots become trained, and as helicopters can be issued to the South Vietnamese forces, then they can take over more responsibility than they could otherwise.

My guess is that had President Johnson continued in office and continued the policies that he had in chain at the time he left office, that he might well have brought about some reduction in U.S. forces himself. Whether he would have done it exactly like President Nixon, I have no way of knowing at this point, but when you look at the increase in the regular forces, the popular and regional forces, and the local defense units in South Vietnam, you'll see that from 1965 onward there was a regular and steady increase in available military manpower in South Vietnam.

Q: [You] just didn't call it Vietnamization?

RUSK: We didn't call it Vietnamization because so long as we were in office we were not actually withdrawing U.S. forces on the theory that we were turning over responsibility to the South Vietnamese.

I think that it was unfortunate that the term Americanization of the war caught on as much as it did, because throughout the war the South Vietnamese carried a very heavy part of the struggle. Their casualties, particularly if you include the local forces, were always significantly larger than American casualties. For example, when you look at the figures on wounded, the South Vietnamese only counted as wounded those who turned up in hospitals, whereas the Americans

would count anybody who had a scratch on an earlobe due to enemy action as a wounded. Eighty-five percent of the American wounded returned to service -- returned to duty -- so that we counted everybody, and the South Vietnamese only counted those that were serious enough to go into a hospital. I think if the historian will look at the casualty figures, he will realize that at no time did the United States ever Americanize the war to the point of carrying the sole burden of the war. The South Vietnamese were always carrying a very large part of it, and this is reflected in their casualties -- not only the casualties they received themselves but the casualties they inflicted on the enemy.

Q: The other part of the Nixon program, to go along with that, is apparently the change from the battle tactics of maximum feasible pressure, or search-and-destroy. Was that a decision that was seriously considered before you left office that might also have been made had the Administration remained in office?

RUSK: We had some debates on search-and-destroy as a technique, as a tactic. The principal purpose of search-and-destroy was to keep the enemy forces, particularly his battalions and regiments, at a distance from the cities. We had no desire to sit back and wait for the enemy to make his own choices as to which towns and cities he would attack, and then find ourselves in an urban war where the civilians would take a great deal of the burden of the fight and where house-to-house fighting would be very mean and difficult. The idea was to catch him while he was still out in the countryside where you could fight him with a minimum of disruption to the life of the country, and where artillery and air bombardment and other weapons could be brought to bear much more effectively than could be done if you waited until he came into the cities.

We debated that at considerable length at times, and, in general, left the actual tactics to the commander in the field. We felt it was not possible back in Washington to give detailed guidance as to how our commanders would handle their battalions and regiments. We pretty well left that up to them. We hoped that they would combine with their search-and-destroy action on the pacification front, so that the countryside would in fact become pacified and that the population of the country would be increasingly secure from Viet Cong raids.

Q: The rest of Asia sometimes, I'm afraid, gets overlooked in the emphasis on Vietnam, but it's a very important area obviously. Was there a major attempt during the Johnson Administration to move toward regularizing our relations with Communist China in any way?

RUSK: We, in our talks in Warsaw, took various steps to try to improve relations with Peking. We repeated the effort made by the Eisenhower Administration to bring about an exchange of newspapermen. We proposed the exchange of scientists, scholars, of professional men -- doctors. We proposed the exchange of weather information. We proposed the exchange of basic plant materials in the basic food crops such as rice and wheat, things of that sort, but we got nowhere with it because Peking always came back with the answer that there was nothing to discuss until we are ready to surrender Taiwan.

This has been the great problem about improving relations with mainland China. They insist that Taiwan, sometimes known as Formosa, is a part of China -- their China. They don't recognize that China was split in a civil war and that the Republic of China on Taiwan has an existence of

its own. They claim that the promise of the Cairo declaration to deliver Taiwan to China meant that we should now deliver Taiwan to mainland China since they claim that the People's Republic of China is the successor to the China to which Taiwan was promised. This simple attitude forces everyone to ask themselves what they're prepared to do about Taiwan, because if you're not prepared to surrender these thirteen million people on Taiwan to mainland China, then you're not in business with China -- with Peking. Peking won't talk to you, won't do anything.

My impression in January 1970 is that if the United States were to offer tomorrow morning to recognize Peking without the surrender of Taiwan that Peking would turn it down, and so that has been the bone in the throat of efforts to improve relations with Peking. Now, the Nixon Administration has renewed these efforts, and as of today we still don't know whether representatives to Peking will resume their discussions in Warsaw, or in some other capital.

Q: Are the Warsaw talks -- or were they in your Administration -- a two-way street, or did we just get a sort of stony silence from them? Do they make any response at all to our overtures other than just rhetorical criticisms?

RUSK: We never got any forthcoming response to any of the proposals we made. We got no satisfactory answer on a few remaining Americans left in mainland China. We never got any positive response to the various proposals we had made about various types of exchanges that I've mentioned. The main theme of the Chinese representatives in the Warsaw talks was always that we must abandon the Chiang Kai-shek clique. We must turn Formosa over to the mainland, and get our forces out of Asia. So it was a very stiff set of talks without any real give and take -- without any real exchange. It was a case of talking at each other but no real discussion with each other.

Q: You've been involved with the problem of Red China since its successful creation in the late '40's very closely. Is the American political climate essentially different regarding what it is possible to do politically with Red China today than it was, say, in the early '50's when you were in the Department?

RUSK: I think that there's a significant difference. I think there's more flexibility in the general attitude of the American people toward mainland China now than there was back in those days. On several occasions -- and the historian will have to check this -- on several occasions the Congress passed resolutions back in those days opposing the recognition of Peking.

You see, when the British recognized Peking and we did not -- this was before the outbreak of the Korean War; this was 1949 -- I was then Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs -- it was my impression that British and American policy might come together again on the basis of the conduct of Peking. If Peking behaved itself and acted like a loyal member of the international community of nations -- lived at peace with its neighbors -- it was my impression that eventually American policy would move toward the recognition of Peking but that if Peking acted in a militant fashion and demonstrated it was going to be a constant source of trouble in Asia, that British policy might then move toward the American point of view.

Well, the Chinese intervened in Korea. Mainland China is the only nation that has ever been

called an aggressor by the United Nations. It was my impression that these events would cause the British to pull back on their recognition and maybe break diplomatic relations with mainland China, but they didn't. I understand that Prime Minister Churchill at one time wanted to do that -- pull back -- but the Foreign Office wouldn't let him do it.

The British also were preoccupied with the problem of Hong Kong. That was a kind of hostage to British policy so they were influenced by the desire to maintain a position in Hong Kong, if at all possible. Hong Kong is not defensible from a military point of view and depends upon the acquiescence of mainland China in the British occupation of Hong Kong.

Q: Even their water supply now, I think, comes from inside mainland China.

RUSK: I think that's right. Also, they buy vegetables, and they buy other stuff. There's a very heavy trade between Hong Kong and mainland China.

Q: But the point is, I guess, that it's not fear of domestic political reaction that prevent changes in our China policy?

RUSK: No. I think that if it were possible to find a reasonable basis on which to improve relations with mainland China that the American people would be glad to see it happen. There will be some discontent. There's still a small so-called China lobby, I suppose, but it's of no consequence and was not during the Kennedy and Johnson years. The issues really turned on whether or not we were prepared to surrender Taiwan to mainland China.

Q: Why does it seem, as it does to me -- perhaps not entirely accurately -- that the academic expertise in the country -- the China scholars, and so on -- all are of the opinion, or virtually all, that our China policy is not very imaginative or well advised? Why are they out of phase with the policy makers in this regard, if they are?

RUSK: I think one of the reasons is that they live in the world of opinion, and the policy maker lives in the world of decision. The policy maker is faced with the fact that thus far there is not much opportunity to improve relations with mainland China without the surrender of Formosa, and that is a major obstacle which the American government just hasn't been able to contemplate. It's not for us to surrender these thirteen million people on Taiwan. They're not ours to surrender in the first place, and it would be a major act of perfidy if we were to do so, or attempt to do so.

I think another thing is that some of the so-called China scholars would like to see us improve our own position by making a gesture, such as toward recognition, even though Peking turned it down. In the world of decision you are not enchanted by empty gestures. If we were to recognize Peking, it would cause a considerable amount of pain to non-Communists in Asia -- people like the South Koreans, and of course the people on Taiwan, the Thais, and others in Southeast Asia, the Filipinos. The question is whether you, by making a gesture, give pain to some of your closest friends without accomplishing anything.

Q: When it's just a gesture.

RUSK: Just a gesture. So I think that those would be the principal points.

Then I think, too, that in government we have looked upon the Chinese as being very militant in their orientation. What they say is very tough, and they have broken with the Soviet Union over the issue of militancy in support of the world revolution. We know that the Chinese have been active in Burma, sending arms and men across the northeastern frontier of Burma. We know that the Chinese have been causing trouble in eastern India among the tribal areas of eastern India. We know that the Chinese have been sending agents into northern Thailand and are building a road down through Laos aimed at Thailand. So people in government are necessarily concerned about the militancy of Peking.

The scholars are inclined to say, "Oh, well, don't listen to what they say. They don't do anything about it." They're inclined to say that Peking, in fact, is following a policy of caution, and that we should not draw as sharp a distinction as we tend to draw between the Soviet Union and Peking on problems of doctrine. Only the historian will be able to sort that out because it will depend upon what happens in the next several years in Asia.

You see, at the present time peace in Asia is being frustrated because of the more than fifty regiments of North Vietnamese troops that are attacking South Vietnam, by more than forty thousand North Vietnamese troops operating in Laos, by North Vietnamese trained guerrillas operating in Laos, by North Vietnamese trained guerrillas operating in northeast Thailand. Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia has publicly complained about the assistance which Hanoi and Peking have been giving to guerrillas in Cambodia, and there's the most neutral of all the neutralist countries.

I mentioned the men and arms coming across the northeast frontier of Burma, and the activity of the Chinese in eastern India. Almost every week infiltrators come from North Korea across the thirty-eighth parallel into South Korea to cause trouble. There's no doubt of the fact that these Communist countries in Asia -- Peking, Hanoi, North Korea -- are acting on a militant basis. They're causing trouble to their neighbors, and sometimes the scholars are inclined to put that to one side, to downgrade the importance of this activity.

There'd be peace in Asia if these Asian Communists were to live a normal life alongside of their neighbors there and leave them alone, because there's no non-Communist country in Asia that has any designs on moving against the Communist countries of Asia.

Q: You mentioned Laos there a couple of times. During the Kennedy Administration, I suppose that was the chief public hot spot. Did Mr. Johnson as Vice President have any major responsibilities that involved Laos during that time?

RUSK: He kept well-informed about Laos, but I don't recall that he took a very active part in the basic decisions that we were making about Laos. He did inherit the bitter disappointment of the Kennedy Administration in the failure of the Geneva accords of 1962 on Laos.

When President Kennedy became President, he took a long look at Laos and decided that the

best solution for Laos was to get all foreigners out of that country -- leave it as a land-locked buffer. The Laotian people themselves were gentle, civilized people who obviously had no interest in killing each other. The battles that were fought were not very bloody; a few big explosions made quite a battle. I remember one incident when the two sides left the battlefield in Laos to go to a water festival together for about ten days and then went back to the battlefield, so we felt that if they were left alone, that Laos would provide no threat of any sort to anybody and might be a useful buffer between North Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia. President Kennedy talked to Chairman Khrushchev about that in Vienna in June 1961, and Khrushchev seemed to agree that the answer to Laos was for everybody to get out and leave it alone.

So we went to the Geneva Conference, which had already started, and made several important concessions to get an agreement on Laos. For example, we accepted the man as Prime Minister that the Soviet Union recognized as prime minister. He was not our prime minister. We accepted Prince Souvanna Phouma, the neutralist, as the Prime Minister of a coalition government. We accepted a coalition government, one-third of which was to be Pathet Lao, Communist in character. We accepted the international neutralization of Laos, and we accepted the idea that we'd get all of our people out of there. We had about six hundred people there at the time.

But the trouble is that we did not get any performance out of Hanoi on those Laos accords for a single day. The agreement specified that all foreign forces would leave the country. North Vietnamese forces did not leave the country. The agreement specified that Laos would not be used as an infiltration route into other countries. At no time did Hanoi stop using Laos as an infiltration corridor into South Vietnam. The Pathet Lao -- the Communists -- did not permit the coalition government to exercise authority in those areas of Laos held by the Communists; and they did not permit the International Control Commission to exercise its functions in those areas of Laos held by the Communists. So President Kennedy was bitterly disappointed by the failure of the Laos accords to achieve their purpose, and President Johnson inherited that failure and our inability to get any measure of compliance by Hanoi. The historian will want to try to find out what the attitude of Russia was toward Laos during all of this period.

I had the impression at the time of the Geneva Conference on Laos in 1962 that the Russians were acting in reasonably good faith on the basis of the agreement which seems to have been reached at the meeting in Vienna in June between President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev, but we never got any help from the Russians in getting performance on the Laos accords of '62. The historian may want to inquire as to whether it just happened that the Russians lost considerable influence in Hanoi at about the time that the Geneva accords of '62 were concluded, and were not able to bring Hanoi to comply for fear that this would simply drive Hanoi into the arms of Peking. I think this may be one of those points where the Russo-Chinese rivalry led to a frustration of the Geneva accords on Laos, and led to the inability or unwillingness of the Russians to try to press Hanoi to comply with them.

Q: Did Mr. Johnson have to make any new decisions on Laos in the first year or so after he came to the Presidency?

RUSK: By the time President Johnson became President, the main effort of North Vietnam was clearly aimed at South Vietnam so that President Johnson was greatly preoccupied by the South

Vietnamese aspect of it. Of course, the infiltration through Laos was a part of the Vietnam problem, but the North Vietnamese themselves concentrated more on South Vietnam than on Laos. Had North Vietnam thrown against Laos a fraction -- a fourth -- of the effort that they threw against South Vietnam, they might well have overrun Laos and seized it completely. Why they did not do that I don't know. It may be that by the time this material is available it will be known that North Vietnam did in fact expect to pick up Laos as a part of its total program in Southeast Asia.

Q: I read just, I think, last week that our bombing program in Laos actually began in about May of '64. Was that a Presidential-type decision that had been made?

RUSK: Yes, the bombing program in Laos was always the matter of highest policy consideration and was worked out in consultation with the government of Laos -- Prince Souvanna Phouma -- at all times.

Q: And with his approval?

RUSK: With his approval.

Q: You had mentioned the beginning of the bombing program in Laos and the acceptance of that by the Laotian government. Why has it been possible for those who are criticizing our policy in Southeast Asia to refer to Laos as a secret war?

RUSK: Well, there's a very simple reason for that. Prime Souvanna Phouma has been very anxious to maintain the formalities of the Geneva Accords of 1962, and it was his judgment that he did not want to publicly talk about American air operations in Laos. He wanted to maintain the theory that it's only the North Vietnamese who are acting militarily in violation of the Geneva Accords of 1962.

Our view was that since the North Vietnamese were acting militarily against Laos and abusing Laos with infiltration into South Vietnam, that that suspended the military clauses of the Laos Accords of 1962 and that it was perfectly appropriate for us to take action in Laos -- among other things to defend South Vietnam. But Souvanna Phouma wanted to keep it quiet, and it was solely for that reason that the American side has been as quiet about Lao as it has been -- no other reason.

Q: But the Administration did make a decision that our commitment to Laos was in the nature of being as strong as our commitment to Vietnam in the sense that we were pledged to put our force in there?

RUSK: After the Geneva Accords in 1962 there was some doubt about that, because in those Accords Laos promised that it would not call upon the protection of any other group of countries, such as SEATO, and we agreed to that declaration of neutrality by Laos so that it's a very questionable thing that the South Asia Treaty now applies to Laos in the same way that it applies to South Vietnam. You see, Laos was one of the protocol states of the Southeast Asia Treaty.

Q: They wrote themselves out of the protocol --

RUSK: But they wrote themselves out of the protocol, and we accepted their writing themselves out of it. So in the technical sense of law and politics, I think our commitment is somewhat different than is our commitment to South Vietnam.

Q: I see. How does that apply then to Thailand? Shortly after you left office, there was a public outcry regarding secret commitments that the Senate said they had discovered that had been made to Thailand without their knowledge. Were there new agreements made with Thailand during the Johnson Administration that didn't previously exist in the way of commitment?

RUSK: As far as Thailand is concerned it is a main member -- signatory member -- of the Southeast Asia Treaty so that there is no doubt at all about the treaty commitment as far as Thailand is concerned. Furthermore, Thailand was clearly covered by the August 1964 resolution on Southeast Asia, the so-called Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

In this SEATO military organization a good deal of contingency planning went on, just as it goes on in NATO, in CENTO, and in other places-- Plan I, Plan V, Plan VIII, that kind of thing, were worked out simply on a contingency basis as happens in any alliance. Those contingency plans are not ordinarily made public. They're not ordinarily discussed with members of Congress. They're based solidly upon commitments undertaken by the Congress. There was only one negative vote on the South Asia Treaty when it was approved by the Senate. There were only two negative votes in the entire Congress on the August '64 resolution which reinforced the Southeast Asia Treaty commitment.

Q: So these agreements were really just contingency plans based on agreements that you feel were adequately known?

RUSK: Contingency plans based upon policies which had been thoroughly discussed with the Congress [and] on which Congress had acted.

Q: So there was no evasion of the Congressional prerogatives in that sense?

RUSK: I don't know of any secret political understandings with Thailand. There was secret military contingency planning, but I don't know of anything that went beyond the Southeast Asia Treaty. The so-called Rusk-Tanat communique -- which simply spelled out that the obligations of SEATO were both joint and several -- was made public at the time, and was entered into after consultation with members of the Foreign Relations Committee.

You see, the SEATO Treaty says that -- Article 4, paragraph 1 -- in the event of aggression by armed attack against a member of the treaty that each state shall take steps to meet the common danger -- each signatory, each party, I believe the treaty calls it. Now that meant that the responsibilities were individual as well as collective. It was, of course, up to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization if possible to move as a group to deal with an aggression against a member of the organization, but in the absence of group action, individual responsibilities still were there. Each party shall take steps to meet the common danger, and so the Rusk-Tanat communique

made that clear, because at that time France was on the way out of SEATO, and the question was whether there was a veto in SEATO by France in the event of aggression against Thailand. In order to settle down the Thais, we simply confirmed that these obligations were individual as well as collective in character, but there was nothing secret about them.

Q: The allies that we have in the Far East who participated in Vietnam are frequently called mercenaries because of our contributions to their troop support. Was that a necessary prerequisite to their cooperation -- that we bear the cost -- perhaps even beyond the actual cost of the troop use?

RUSK: That is a phrase which has been used by some of the opponents of our effort in Southeast Asia. To me it has little substance. For example, Lend Lease during World War II, which was massive in character, did not make mercenaries out of the British and the Russians or the French. We have the resources to be able to help countries that are in trouble, and so we help to pay the bill. We did the same thing in the Korean war. I would compare what we've been doing in Southeast Asia to what we did during World War II under Lend Lease.

Q: Our payments haven't gone beyond the military necessities of the power concerned? We haven't paid more than the bill for their participation?

RUSK: No, but bear in mind that quite apart from what they were doing in South Vietnam, some of these countries had other obligations that they had to be concerned about. For example, North Korea is very menacing these days towards South Korea, and it has been important to help the South Koreans improve their own armed forces with additional manpower and additional equipment and things of that sort. That requires military aid.

The Thais have a pretty good struggle going on up in the northeast part of their own country, and they needed additional materials such as helicopters. They needed additional artillery -- things of that sort -- and they needed to increase the size of their own armed forces so that there were needs which went beyond the actual needs of troops positioned in South Vietnam to which we made a contribution. But to call that bribery, or to say that that translates these people into mercenaries, is just a part of the polemics of the South Vietnamese debate.

Q: It's not a case of those powers saying, 'Well, we won't play unless you perform,' this type of thing -- where they threaten non-support unless we give them additional aid.

RUSK: I have no doubt that the British, the French, and the Russians said that to us during the Lend Lease negotiations.

Q: They may have, as a matter of fact.

RUSK: There's nothing unusual in that. It's a matter of capability as well as will so there may have been some discussion of that. I don't recall. No one ever said that to me, but implicit in the situation was that they had various needs and if they were to meet those needs they would need assistance, and we were in a position to give them assistance.

Q: It's frequently said that those allies and those elsewhere in the world, as well, who criticized our policy in Southeast Asia publicly were sometimes privately telling us that they were glad we were there and didn't want us to leave. Is that an accurate impression?

RUSK: We have not had public criticism of any importance from those who have troops in South Vietnam -- Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, the South Koreans. We might get some criticism at times when they think that we're not going to see it through to a successful conclusion. They may be a little nervous about our will, particularly when they listen to the domestic debate in the United States on the subject and listen to some United States Senators. There are others in Asia who would not publicly give us support, but who privately realized that they have a stake in the successful outcome of what we were trying to do in South Vietnam. I have no doubt myself that if we suddenly were to abandon South Vietnam, that this would cause dismay in places like India and Burma and Indonesia and Malaysia, and even Cambodia.

Q: They made that clear to us in various ways?

RUSK: I can't say that each one of them did. It would be embarrassing to some of them for me to try to put words in their mouths on this matter. I don't think Burma ever said that to us, but some Indian leaders have; some Indonesian leaders have; certainly the Malaysians have said that. Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia has never said that in so many words.

Q: Some of them are just not in a position to say it at all.

RUSK: That's right.

Q: What is your source for that, if I may ask?

NOLTING: A number of articles that I've read and correspondence with Vietnamese friends.

In other words, there was a possibility, I think, of our cutting this albatross off of our necks. I don't understand why President Johnson tried to bull it through the way he did on that score, which is a psychological-sociological-political point. Nor do I understand why he tried to bull it through in undeclared, limited war, unfinanced by taxes. Those are the questions that linger in my mind. But on the question which is to my mind important to history because there is such a blank with respect to it, that is the influences which brought about the American government's complicity in the overthrow of President Diem, Lyndon Johnson was absolutely right, and it's extremely ironic in my view that he should have inherited this tremendous blunder of his predecessor.

Q: That's very well said.

FRANK D. CORREL
Program Officer, USAID
Saigon (1962-1963)

**AID Vietnam Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1963-1964)**

Frank D. Correl was born in Germany in 1929. He received his BS from Rider College in 1950, and his MA from Columbia University in 1955. He served in the US Army from 1953 to 1955. His postings include South Korea, Vietnam, Morocco, Sri Lanka, Lesotho, and Zambia. W. Haven North interviewed him on September 29, 1990.

CORREL: In October, 1962, I was sent on a direct transfer to the AID Mission in Saigon, Vietnam.

Q: How did this come about?

CORREL: I had made a brief reference earlier about having been in this situation where I was very much in the Mission doghouse for my views. I happened to be in touch with a former supervisor of mine who had been transferred to Vietnam. Somehow things happened and the word came through that I was needed in Saigon. I wouldn't say that I arranged it, but I certainly indicated my availability. As I perhaps didn't know too well at the time, the worm does turn and, of course, by the time this request for a reassignment came up, things had changed by 180 degrees in Seoul. When I left, I was sorry to go, and I think Jim Killen was sorry to see me go.

Q: What was your assignment in Vietnam?

CORREL: In Vietnam, I was assigned to a large commodity import program, and I worked on that during my tour.

Q: It must have been tremendous.

CORREL: Well, actually in dollar amounts it was not as great as the program in Korea was. In terms of complexity and in terms of management style, it was a very different atmosphere and a very different situation.

Q: What was the complexity?

CORREL: Well, for one thing, it was a much larger office. There were four Americans and eight Vietnamese. We did more commodity analysis; we had a great deal to do with foreign importers, which was much less the case in Korea. In Korea, my supervisors had ranged from being relatively disinterested to being very interested in how the program was making an impact. During the time I was in Vietnam, the one Chief I worked for had a philosophy which reflected very much what the Mission philosophy was: That was: "they need it, they ask for it, they get it." We essentially were running the equivalent of a mail order service for the Vietnamese. Whatever it was they wanted, they got it.

Q: There was no room for critiquing or challenging them?

CORREL: It was not welcome. You were considered to be a sorehead or even disloyal if you basically even questioned the modus operandi under which things were happening in Vietnam. I didn't stay there very long. Subsequently, I also saw the picture from the other side, sitting on the Vietnam desk in AID/W (AID/Washington) for a while. I have kept a copy of an interesting letter that Jim Killen asked me to write him after I'd been in Saigon for a while about my impressions of the place.

Q: What did you tell him?

CORREL: Well, I told him seven pages worth of stuff.

Q: Well, we could put that in an annex if you'd like.

CORREL: It's probably the easiest way to do it, but what I did highlight was that our preoccupation was counterinsurgency, and that this was eating up the rest of the Mission at the expense of other priorities. In our commodity import program, we were doing the same thing we were supposed to do in Korea, and that is generate local currency for the defense effort. We had an anomaly of foreign exchange rates that was even greater than in Korea, but unlike Korea, nothing was ever done about it in Vietnam. We had instances where the commodity import program actually ran counter to what some of our project program was trying to do. I remember in particular aid to set up a local dairy. The Foremost Dairy Co. had a project in Vietnam, and under the project we were importing dairy equipment and everything else and providing extensive technical assistance. Under the Commodity Import Program we were bringing in very large amounts of sweetened condensed milk, which is what this dairy was supposed to be producing. Our objectives in the two programs were in complete contradiction.

Q: Your letter.

CORREL: Perhaps I ought to quote a couple of things, that's the easiest: "The commercial import program in the past has not had a program level determined at the beginning of the fiscal year. The practice has been to issue procurement authorizations as they were requested by the government of Vietnam and whatever that added up to on June 30 was the level for that year. The composition wasn't determined either. In the words of my boss, they need it, they ask for it, they get it. In several important instances, government requests and PA issuances were based on the word of certain importers. "Relations between our office and traders are very close indeed," I could have said of suspicious characters. The leadership of the Mission basically was only concerned that these levels be used and local currency be generated, even if it was at a very unfavorable rate of exchange.

After I got back to Washington, I was working on the desk over my objections. I really wanted to accept an offer to go to the African Bureau at the time, but agreed to work on the Vietnam desk. Together with two analysts on the desk and an economic officer in the Asia Bureau, we worked on an analysis of the commercial import program in Vietnam, which was actually presented to a White House advisor, Mike Forestall. He asked a lot of questions. Subsequently, the word came back to us to stop being nitpicking about these programs. This made me decide that the time had

come for Vietnam and me to part.

Q: What was the heart of the issue that you were presenting from your analysis?

CORREL: Not only were we not accomplishing our aims in Vietnam with regard to strengthening the economy, we were actually encouraging multiple waste of the resources. On the one hand, the Vietnamese were getting aid for such things as that dairy plant, or a paper mill that was being undercut by commodity imports and they were not generating anywhere near what they could in local currency with the resources we were giving them, but sort of spiriting them away. We were creating a dangerous degree of dependency that we would not be able to satisfy once things calmed down, if that ever happened.

Q: The commodity import program was counter productive in terms of development ?

CORREL: Not only in development terms, I don't think there was even much thought of development, but even in accomplishing its stated objectives.

Q: Which was?

CORREL: Which was to generate local currency for the counter insurgency effort. Basically, I was very unhappy in a substantive, professional way. I thought that the Mission in Saigon was completely on the wrong track. I got to feeling that way almost from the first day, very shortly after my arrival when we had a briefing from the Major General commanding the Military Assistance Group, and the stuff that he was telling us about Vietnam and about the war effort, was untrue and unbelievable. It was kind of an embarrassment working there. I don't know that the Mission had very strong leadership and there seemed to be a feeling that whatever was happening was perfectly okay and that any questioning was considered to be undesirable and disloyal. Ironically, much later, in 1971, a State Department senior official told me that at the time a number of the embassy people had agreed with my positions but had not felt free to say so.

Q: Did you work with it or socialize with any of the Vietnamese?

CORREL: Only with the people who I worked with in the office. Unlike the other people in the office who had absolutely nothing to do with the local employees and local counterparts after hours, my wife and I socialized with several of them and in fact, became quite close friends with a couple of them.

Q: How did you find Vietnamese people to work with and so on?

CORREL: Some of the Vietnamese in my office I really valued as coworkers and friends. There were others where it was more of a neutral experience. Not that they were hard to get along with or anything like that, but I frankly think some of them had other interests. I think they were serving as intelligence agents for importers, or possibly were government agents. One didn't see them very much in the office, but I wasn't responsible for supervising them. I was very definitely one of the Indians. Otherwise, I didn't really get to meet many Vietnamese, except a few through

the medium of a fellow who was supposed to be an Assistant PL480 Officer in the Mission. He told me that he was CIA and he certainly had some interesting contacts. Otherwise, the Vietnamese people met would have been people in the market or like that.

Q: How was life in Saigon at that time?

CORREL: Other than having to be always on the alert for something happening, it was very pleasant, until the middle of August of 1963. But, Saigon was a very large, sophisticated city, representing Vietnamese, French, and Chinese culture. It was a place where one could really enjoy good food, an interesting culture, a lot of things to do and what have you. We were constrained from going out of town. I did get over to Cambodia on personal leave for a trip to Angkor and to Phnom Penh. In addition, I went on a working trip to look at commodity import programs to both Cambodia and Laos with a State Department officer from Hong Kong. That was certainly very fascinating. Then, on either the 20th or 21st of August, 1963, a great deal of tenseness had built in Saigon, much of it due to Buddhist opposition. Then, the forces of the President's brother, Ngo Diem raided the Buddhist temples, including one right next to the AID Mission. We weren't at work for several days. We had been without an Ambassador for a while. Henry Cabot Lodge came in at that point to become Ambassador, and he had to walk down the street to come to our Mission, because our street was cut off and we were isolated.

Q: You said you went to Cambodia and Laos. Does anything stand out in your mind about that trip when you went to see their commodity import programs?

CORREL: It wasn't too different. I had the feeling that in both Cambodia and Laos there was a little more give and take with the government, but nothing very significant. It was a very interesting trip.

Q: Why were you asked to go? What were you supposed to do?

CORREL: It was basically to go along with the State Department man while he familiarized himself with how the commodity import programs worked. I got to talk to the respective officers in the two Missions, but it was not exactly a dawn to dusk-type job. There were a couple of very distinct personalities in the two Missions who believed in running the Missions in, I won't quite say authoritarian manner, but with a very strong presence and that certainly colored how people at subordinate levels worked in the Mission.

Q: What's the other one?

CORREL: I'd like to mention that I arrived in Vietnam roughly three or four weeks before the first monk burned himself on the street. The tension and the very high degree of unpopularity of the government proceeded to become more and more marked. It made life in Saigon and getting the work done considerably more difficult as one got the suspicion that the government was losing meaningful control of the support of its people. And, of course with the coming of the attack on the Buddhist Temples, there were instances where people just felt that the United States was pouring money down a rat hole. There were also some personal experiences. I'd just like to mention one incident in the latter part of August 1963 while we were at work and trying to sort

of figure out how to get through this whole business. My two children, one of whom was a baby in a pram, and the other was a little boy about three years old, had gone with the nurse maid to the Circle Sportif and then had been held on the street by a Vietnamese guard armed with a bayonet for an extended period of time at the height of a very hot day while my wife was going frantic at home. Incidents like that really also made one wonder just exactly whether anybody there was interested in what the United States had to do in that country, except to throw its money away.

Q: After being in Vietnam you went on to the Vietnam desk; were you on the desk very long?

CORREL: I was on the desk for approximately eight months after I came off home leave.

Q: Anything particular during that time?

CORREL: Yes, it was a very important period. With the assassination of Ngo Diem on November 1, 1963, and, of course, the assassination of John F. Kennedy after that, and with real instability coming to the fore with regard to South Vietnam, the United States decided to embark on a very big increase in the level of assistance and, of course, a much greater military involvement. We were supposed to have had 16,000 American military advisors in Vietnam during the time that I was there. While during that eight months, we didn't get anywhere near the half million troops, significant increases took place. The level of interest at the White House had increased. There had been a lot of interest in the White House before, but apparently there was also a great deal of difference of opinion. But, I think that in 1964, policy started crystallizing and the more dissenting elements were shoveled out of the way. I remember a couple of officers in particular who definitely ended up in the deep freeze. They were State Department officers. In AID, the Asia Bureau was very much attuned to meeting whatever was asked of them. This was the period when Secretary of Defense McNamara and the Deputy Administrator of the Agency, Bill Gaud, went off to a big meeting in Hawaii, where Gaud came back with the word that the AID Program was to increase very extensively, including the provision of, if it wasn't out and out military equipment, it was the next best thing. Thus, the character of the assistance effort in Vietnam became much larger and also qualitatively changed because of the tremendous increase in quantity and dollar value.

Q: What was the change? Change to what mainly?

CORREL: One big item was a whole bunch of radios and other communications equipment. The commodity import program increased quite significantly. They started sending more people out for the office of rural affairs and as provincial and district representatives. Reports also came back from Vietnam, not just from people like me, but also from visitors who'd been sent out there under contracts, that the whole concept of the strategic hamlets had very significant flaws in it. I remember quite well a woman who was sent out there to do an evaluation of strategic hamlets and being asked to do that without ever going to one. And, she said, well I can't do much of an evaluation if I can't go visit them, will you let me go to ten of them? The military said, well we can't guarantee your safety, and she said, well can you guarantee just one place I

can go to and spend the night? And they said, no they couldn't even do that. It cast some very serious doubt on the stuff that was being fed to the public and maybe being fed to people at the highest government level and what was happening at a different level.

Q: Anything else during that eight month period? What was your job at that time?

CORREL: My job was basically program analysis and stuff like that. I remember one time I was asked to do an analysis. I had a couple of people working for me on the desk. We were asked to do an analysis of the Vietnamese economy and some of its weak points and strong points, which we did. The Desk Officer at the time was Walter G. "Stony" Stoneman. He took a look at our report. It was reasonably critical and he said, "I want to check this out with the CIA." He then came back to me with a little note, which said that the CIA had looked at the report, had said that it contained more stuff than they had available, and that they had absolutely nothing to add to it, that they were going to adopt it as their own analysis. This was most interesting, as at the same time we were being told that our view of what was happening in Vietnam was just unwarranted and wrong-headed.

Q: What was the main point you were making in that analysis?

CORREL: An account of the weaknesses in the economy and its heavy dependence on Uncle Sam acting as a Santa Claus.

Q: A very dependent society.

CORREL: Not only very dependent, but increasingly dependent.

Q: Well, so after eight months, what precipitated your leaving that part of the world?

CORREL: Oh, change in desk officer, general fatigue with the program, the feeling that I was unable to work effectively there, and that if anything, my presence was considered counter-productive.

PAUL D. HARKINS
General, US Army
Saigon (1962-1964)

General Paul D. Harkins was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1904. He graduated from West Point in 1929 and served in World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam where he held the Military Assistance command. General Harkins was interviewed by Ted Gittinger in 1981.

Q: What was the reaction of Americans in Saigon to the coup? I guess it was mixed.

HARKINS: Mixed. I think the embassy and the CIA now - that's another thing. When everything

settled after the twenty-third of August attempt, they took off military law and things were going along pretty well again for a while. Then in Lodge's book, now, I was supposed to be very close working with the Ambassador, and I did with Nolting. But he said that he worked with CIA, and this guy Conein again contacted the generals without informing me. That's true, because I didn't know it, but he'd been working with CIA and this man Conein, other generals had, until the twenty-eighth of October when Don came in and told me that they were going to change the government. Later on I found out that they had been working behind my back, which is not a very good way to run the country team.

Q: I've seen you quoted - I don't know whether it was accurately or not - on October 30 making a very optimistic prognosis for the war and the general situation in Vietnam, or maybe it was October 31. It was very close to the coup, a day or two before. Were you quoted accurately?

HARKINS: I don't think so. I don't remember the quote.

Q: Well, I have a copy of it here.

HARKINS: I felt that way, and I so reported to Taylor and McNamara and as a matter of fact, Mr. McNamara said, "Well, get ready to bring a thousand American troops home." And we started working on that right away.

Q: Well, what I would like you to comment on is if you knew that there was a coup in the offing, didn't that affect your optimism in any way?

HARKINS: No, not particularly, because I think things in the country, all over the country, were going in our favor at that time. The army was taking over and we had built up the CIDG, the Civil Defense [Civilian Irregular Defense Group], and the province troops, and they had things pretty well under control as a matter of fact at that time.

Q: Now Lodge, I think, reported a couple of months after the coup when things began to slide downhill, when it became obvious that the military situation was turning around, that in fact the security situation had been deteriorating since the previous spring or some such.

HARKINS: He didn't know anything about it. He never left Saigon.

Q: And he wasn't taking your advice on this kind of thing?

HARKINS: No, no. We didn't see eye-to-eye at all. I think if Nolting had stayed there, things would have been much different. But every time Lodge would stab me in the back he'd tell Mrs. Harkins how pretty she was.

Q: How much time did Ambassador Lodge spend at the Cercle Sportif?

HARKINS: Do you mean playing tennis?

Q: -And swimming. I've heard that he spent a lot of time there.

HARKINS: Oh, I think he probably went over in the afternoon every day. I don't know. I never went there, as a matter of fact. I wasn't a tennis player at the time. I didn't have time to, in the first place.

Q: Now, Diem's other brother, [Ngo Dinh Can], who was up in Hue, I think, that made quite a story, how he was handled. He was arrested and executed, I think, well after the coup, sometime after the coup. Did this case pose some special problems for you?

HARKINS: No. No, I don't remember the Can incident too well.

Q: Well, it was mainly a political thing.

HARKINS: There were so many people being done away with.

Q: Can you describe how all of this affected the military situation?

HARKINS: Well, as I say, the commanders didn't know who to turn to, and they didn't know whether they were going to keep their own jobs or whether they'd be colonels tomorrow, or the generals didn't know if they would be reduced in rank or if they'd be the next ones to go. And they were looking back towards Saigon for guidance, and guidance wasn't coming out of Saigon, because as I say, you can't get guidance from twelve guys who don't see eye-to-eye all the time. So that really they were looking for their own jobs and staying close to home and not getting out with the troops and seeing that the war was carried to the VC.

Q: Why didn't Minh assert himself and give direction to all of this?

HARKINS: I don't think he was that strong. I think he was a popular man, but I don't think his decisions were very good, and as a matter of fact, that's when General Khanh said, "We're not getting any guidance from Saigon and I'm just going to take over."

Q: Were you able to establish a good relationship with the new regime, the Minh regime?

HARKINS: Yes. I got along fine with them, because I knew them all, except one named Thien, I think. He had been out of the country, and I didn't know him at all. But he was a pretty important guy.

Q: Can you give me some assessments of character of some of these guys? What was your assessment of Big Minh? That he was popular?

HARKINS: That he was popular, but as I say, he was not a decision-maker as far as knowing what to do in the country. Khiem was probably the strongest of them all. He was sort of the one that held them together as chief of staff.

Q: That was Tran Thien Khiem, I think.

HARKINS: K-H-I-E-M.

Q: *Yes, right.*

HARKINS: And Don, as I say, he wasn't a good military commander. I think he would have been a good ambassador someplace. He was a very polite, nice, easy-going type of man, but not the type that would carry on military thing and go out and see that things were done.

Q: *Did none of Minh's regime impress you particularly as a take-charge sort of type?*

HARKINS: No, I don't think there was anyone who showed the leadership, and that's probably why he didn't get any decisions out of them.

Q: *Now, a couple of weeks after the coup there was one of many Honolulu conferences.*

HARKINS: One a month.

Q: *The country team was there, Secretary [Dean] Rusk was there, Secretary McNamara was there, General Taylor, McGeorge Bundy was there, I know that you were there. I don't know what transpired. Did you give a briefing on the military situation? Can you recall?*

HARKINS: I usually did. At all those briefings I was asked to give my -

Q: *Can you recall anything special that transpired then?*

HARKINS: Not particularly, that one, no, because I told them what the truth was then, that the whole strategic hamlet program - well, I'm not sure now whether this is after Khanh took over or-

Q: *No, this is before Khanh.*

HARKINS: Before Khanh took over.

Q: *This would have been probably November, still, of 1963. My information is that you gave a fairly optimistic report and that McNamara expressed a good deal of skepticism, but I don't know if that's true.*

HARKINS: I don't recall. I mean, we had so many different conferences. As a matter of fact, somebody from the Joint Chiefs of Staff was to visit me every month I was there, and of course, Admiral Felt would visit me frequently. Then if they didn't visit, I would have to go back to Hawaii. So it was really a monthly trip. I don't know how many times I've flown the Pacific Ocean, coming and going. You could leave Honolulu, say, at twelve noon and fly in daylight all the way to Saigon and get in to Saigon at 7:00 p.m. the next day. But it would still be daylight.

Q: *What kind of thing did that do to your biological clock?*

HARKINS: Well, I had a couple of bunks on the plane.

Q: *I see. I know that one thing resulted from this conference, at least I have seen a document that says that there was a directive put out that planning begin, I gather contingency planning, for clandestine operations against the North, what later became the 34-A operation. Do you remember the origins of that at all?*

HARKINS: No. No. I don't. Sorry.

Q: *That's fine. Now, McNamara came again, I think in December of 1963, to Saigon and visited, and I have some indications that he carried back a recommendation that contingency planning begin for bombing the North. Do you remember anything about that visit? I'm sorry I don't have the documents for that period, but I just don't have them.*

HARKINS: No, I don't.

Q: *Okay.*

HARKINS: You see, I didn't have any control over the bombing out there. That would come from CINCPAC, probably.

Q: *Okay.*

HARKINS: And although I was probably in on it, I don't recall that I was in on any of the planning.

Q: *Well, it would fit that CINCPAC would have made the recommendation. My records show that Mr. Trueheart went home in December. Do you remember that?*

HARKINS: You mean to stay home?

Q: *Yes. What I'm curious about is the background for that. Was this a routine change or in line with a policy change?*

HARKINS: I think probably a policy - no, I'm not sure because Trueheart was more or less of the opinion that it was good for Diem to be gone, and so was Lodge. He'd been there quite a while, I think.

Q: *Well, I'll tell you. Frankly, I've heard that he was sent home because he'd made you his enemy. And I thought I'd just ask you if there was anything to that.*

HARKINS: Enemy?

Q: *Yes.*

HARKINS: I don't know in what sense you'd mean an enemy.

Q: *Well, in the sense that he'd been anti-Diem and you were pro-Diem.*

HARKINS: Yes, that's true. Yes, that's true. Yes, he was anti-Diem.

Q: *Well, my source said that he had crossed you, and that deputy chiefs of mission don't cross chiefs of MAAG and get away with it. Is that true?*

HARKINS: I had nothing to do with his relief.

Q: *Okay. Now, this is curious, because as I understand it, Mr. Trueheart was replaced by David Nes, and Nes only lasted about six months before he was sent home. Do you know anything of that story?*

HARKINS: No, because after the Khanh - I knew Nes, but I'm not sure of the reason why [he was relieved]. Lodge had so many likes and dislikes. As I say, he was a loner. He liked to do everything by himself and if his deputy would do something, and he might be away or have a different interpretation, it was up to Lodge to tell them, "I can't work with this man. Have him relieved'."

But after - well, [William] Westmoreland came out as my deputy in January and he'd been there two days or three days when Khanh took over and said, "What do we do now?" I said, "Nothing. You just sit and wait and see what happens." Then I knew Khanh very well, and Lodge had to call me and say, "Who is General Khanh?" He had never met him, and yet he was a corps commander up in Hue. I told him he was probably the best general in the Vietnamese Army, I mean as far as the military was concerned. So when he took over, Lodge didn't know him very well, and when we went out on trips, Khanh would take me along with him and, as I say, Lodge would be in the second seat of the second helicopter.

The first Sunday after he took over, we met him at the airport at six o'clock in the morning for breakfast, and then we went out and got some helicopters and flew about fifteen miles north over Saigon and landed, and there was an artillery battery there, four guns. He went up and I said, "What are you going to do?" They were all pointing north, and he said, "I'm going to shoot to the North." So he went up and I stayed in back because it was his day, and he had the whole press corps there; there must have been about thirty of them, photographers and all taking pictures of him. And he'd turn around and say, "Where's General Harkins?" The press looked around, and I said, "I'm right here. I'm back here." He said, "Come up here." And Khanh put his arm around me and turned to the press and said, "I just want to tell you that General Harkins is not my boss, but he's the best friend Vietnam has, and I just want you to publish that." And they never did.

Q: *They never did? What did Lodge make of a statement like that, do you suppose?*

HARKINS: He wasn't there. He wasn't asked to go.

Q: *Did you say that you knew that Khanh was going to make a coup?*

HARKINS: Yes, he told me.

Q: Does this put you in a kind of predicament?

HARKINS: He put it this way, when I went up to see him and he had this beard which is a funny little goatee - they don't grow [them] very much.

Q: I think they grow [them] but only when they're old and respected, don't they?

HARKINS: He said, "I'm not going to shave this off until I've taken over." And I just told him, I said, "Oh, General Khanh, we don't want another coup." So about two days [later] he sent his American adviser, who was a Colonel Wilson - I think his name was Wilson - down to see me.

Q: Jasper Wilson.

HARKINS: Jasper. And he said that Khanh was going to come down to this corps commanders' meeting in Saigon, but he wasn't going to stay in the house with the other generals. He was going to stay with me in my quarters, Wilson's quarters. And he says he has a friend, a parachute battalion commander in Saigon, and I think they had five companies in the battalion, and he put a company around each of the five leading generals - Minh's house, Don's house, [Le Van] Kim's house, and [Ton That] Dinh's house, or whoever they were then, Din's, I think. And when they found the troops there, they said, "What's this?" They said, "We understand there's going to be a coup and we're to protect you." So at four o'clock in the morning they went in and arrested the generals.

Q: These are the generals that became known as the Dalat generals, I think.

HARKINS: Yes, they took them out to the airport and met Khanh, and he said, "I'm the commander now." And then they were sent to Dalat, I think.

Q: Does this put you in a rather peculiar position when you know a coup is coming and you're supposed to be the adviser to the senior military man? I told them back in Washington that it was coming up, and I said, "I've already got this word." And they didn't do anything about it.

HARKINS: They didn't.

Q: No. They took over.

HARKINS: Well, as the adviser to the head of government, and you know that he's about to get knocked out of that chair, doesn't that put you rather in a compromised position if you know that this is coming? Well, it's hard to figure those things out, because I knew that Don had told me that they were going to get rid of Diem, but I didn't go up and tell Diem, and I knew that Khanh was going to do something. I wasn't quite sure how he was going to do it, and I didn't go up and tell Big Minh. They weren't getting along anyway - the generals - so maybe it was a change for the better. I thought it was.

Q: You thought it was a change for the better with Khanh?

HARKINS: Yes, I did. Because one man was running things then, and he was strong enough to make decisions.

But I left and they had a meeting in June in Hawaii and I wasn't invited to go, so I knew something was up. Well, I was sixty then, anyway, and I had to retire that year, and that was a good way to get me out, to say that I was going to retire. Westmoreland went with Lodge. I didn't go. So I don't know what happened. But I was sort of depressed at that, and I knew my days were short, that Westy was going to take over. I made arrangements to come home by a slow boat and I was told that I had to fly home.

Q: Let me ask you about a couple of things -

HARKINS: The President wanted to see me.

Q: Yes, I think I sent you a copy of that document. Now, McNamara visited again in March and made a very well-publicized trip, I think, around the country with Khanh, with his arm around Khanh and saying -

HARKINS: And Taylor, too. They said the President told them to have their hands holding his hand up in the air, that we are behind him.

Q: And he was chanting a slogan, too, as I recall, and he got it wrong. Do you remember that?

HARKINS: What?

Q: He was chanting a slogan in Vietnamese, as I recall, and he got the inflection wrong, and everybody laughed at him. I've heard this story. Tran Van Don tells this story. He said the phrase was "Vietnam Muon Nam," but he got the inflection wrong. It's supposed to mean "Vietnam a thousand years," but the way he inflected it, it came out "Vietnam go to sleep." (Laughter)

HARKINS: Yes, you had to be careful in Vietnamese. I know my wife started to take it up and studied Vietnamese, and we went to dinner one night with [Nguyen Dinh] Thuan, who was the secretary of defense at that time. He turned to her and said, "I understand you're taking Vietnamese." And she said, "Oh, I've only had three lessons. I find it very hard." And he said, "Well, say something." And she said something that she thought was "How do you do" and he laughed like hell. She said, "Why are you laughing?" And he said, "Would you say that again?" So she did, and he said, "Well, what are you saying?" She said, "How do you do?" And he said, "No, you're saying 'Hello, dearie.'" So she quit. (Laughter) She decided she wasn't going to get in trouble anymore.

Q: How often during that spring when obviously the military situation was beginning to get bad, you said that the Viet Cong battalions were beginning to be encountered pretty regularly, and they were beginning to chew up some South Vietnamese battalions. Was the subject of introducing American troops beginning to be discussed at this time?

HARKINS: No, not while I was there. No.

Q: *Not yet. Not even as a contingency?*

HARKINS: No.

Q: *At some point, and I haven't determined exactly when, Khanh began to talk - at least privately, later publicly, but at least privately - about extending the war in some way or other, marching north or moving north. Did he talk to you about this?*

HARKINS: No, but I think that was his line of chatter when I went out that Sunday after he'd taken over, and he said, "We're going to carry the war to the North." Well, shooting four guns off fifteen miles north of Saigon wasn't going to carry the -

Q: *Not very far north, was it? Well, what did he mean, do you suppose? What did he have in mind?*

HARKINS: I think he probably wanted to go up and I think he probably had an idea that he'd probably take his army and move right north across the Seventeenth Parallel.

Q: *Well, did you give him any advice on that score?*

HARKINS: No, I didn't, because we weren't for it, I don't think, at that time and it would take a lot of backing, a lot of supplies and a lot of things we didn't have.

Q: *Now, the media have come up a couple of times. Some reporters' names have come up, and I wanted to ask you a few questions on that score. Can you describe how your relations with the media evolved during your tour? How did they start out? How did they end up?*

HARKINS: Well, they started out fine, and they ended up very poorly. I think because of the way they reported things like Halberstam reporting things that just weren't true.

Q: *Can you give me examples of that?*

HARKINS: Well, I think that his reporting that the bonzes were killed and the raids on the pagodas, that wasn't true. I think the Catholic battalions fighting Buddhist battalions, I don't think that was true. I mean, within the Vietnamese Army. Of course they were fighting Buddhist battalions, but there weren't Catholic battalions fighting Buddhist battalions within the [Vietnamese Army]. And then four or five other little things that he took up to the press. As I say, he handed out mimeographs and sort of had the press eating out of his hand. And I was walking along with him one day and I said, "What's the matter? I know you're Jewish, I know Diem is Catholic," and I said, "Are you letting that bother your reporting?" And he turned to me and said, "How do you know I'm a Jew?" Well, I wasn't sure of it at the time, but then after he left and was relieved from that - as a matter of fact, the New York Times people came over and they relieved Halberstam. They sent him over to Poland, and he tried to do the same thing in Poland, and Poland kicked him out within thirty days. He should have been kicked out of

Vietnam in the beginning, but the Times, I don't know -

Q: I know one of the big stories that he broke was one that you've mentioned about the story of Ap Bac, the battle of Ap Bac.

HARKINS: How we got slaughtered there. Well, they said, "What's happened down at Ap Bac?" And I said, "Well, nothing. They got defeated, the village troops got defeated, but we sent this parachute battalion down. We lost the city for a day and then we took it back." I said, "That's war. We went in and took the whole thing right back." So I said, "There's nothing wrong with that. I mean, they had the courage to go in there, and win it back."

Q: Of course he reported it as a defeat for government forces.

HARKINS: It was in the beginning, I mean, they were just driven out of town. But they were the province forces; they weren't the regular army at that time. I think there were the village forces and the province forces.

Q: Now, he cites as one of his principal sources on this story, an American adviser who was down there, I think with the Seventh Division under General Van Thanh Cao. Did you have a lot of trouble with that sort of thing, with advisers talking to the press?

HARKINS: Just one.

Q: Just one.

HARKINS: Just that particular one. He was always outspoken. And when he was down there when I wanted Cao to go out and see what was going on, he said, "Well, I can't. Your adviser has taken my plane and he's flying around."

Q: Oh, boy. This was John Paul Vann we're talking about, right?

HARKINS: Yes. Then he went back there and got killed over there.

Q: Yes, as a civilian, I guess.

HARKINS: Yes. I don't know what happened to him.

Q: He was killed in a helicopter crash.

HARKINS: Was he?

Q: Yes. Now, Halberstam plays up Colonel Vann as a superb field adviser and so on and so on. What is your version of that story?

HARKINS: Well, I told him one time I didn't know whether to promote him or demote him. I said, "Sometimes you're so fine and sometimes you're just too outspoken." And I said, "That

doesn't help me in my job when you're.. ." And I think he did talk to Halberstam quite a bit. But he was a very opinionated sort of a man. Quick-tempered.

Q: *Was he good?*

HARKINS: I think in advising the military, yes, he did very well. But then some of them tried to be province chief and you couldn't do that. You had to let the Vietnamese be the province chiefs.

Q: *Now, his boss, Vann's immediate boss, as my information has it, was a man named Daniel Boone Porter, who was the adviser to the IV Corps colander, I guess. He was a full colonel. Do you remember a Colonel Porter? Daniel Boone Porter was his full name. He lives down the road down at Belton, I believe. A Texas A&M graduate.*

HARKINS: I probably knew him but I don't pin the name down.

Q: *Well it's not that important. How was Ambassador Lodge's relations with the press?*

HARKINS: Oh, I think he got along fine with them. He had them to his house for breakfast and things like that. I'd invite the press - not all of them at a time - but if we had some dignitary there and we'd give a dinner party, I'd invite one or two of the press to be there. I got along with them very well until they started reporting things that weren't true. I know one Saturday they had a report come out over the wire and somebody had said, "'Have you seen this report by this reporter just sent'" - and I forget which one it was, AP or UP or something - "that ten thousand troops have invaded Pleiku? What do you know about that?" And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about it. I can't believe ten thousand troops are going to invade without me knowing it." So I immediately got on the phone to Pleiku and I put out a refutation of that that afternoon because I talked to not only the province chief, I mean my adviser in that province, the corps, and he said, "No, that isn't true at all. We're still here and have our patrols out at the border." So I denied it, and the press room called me up and said, "Why did you deny that?" I said, "Because it isn't true."

Q: *That would have been a little unusual for the VC to put ten thousand troops together, wouldn't it?*

HARKINS: I guess they were North Vietnamese coming in. I think we've pretty well covered the waterfront.

Q: *Now, we've mentioned a couple of reporters. We've mentioned Halberstam several times, Neil Sheehan I suppose was there.*

HARKINS: Yes, he was there. I don't remember their names.

Q: *Do you remember any good ones? Any that struck you as particularly well-versed, objective, good reporters.*

HARKINS: What was the girl's name?

Q: *Marguerite Higgins, perhaps?*

HARKINS: ...Marguerite Higgins. She was very good.

Q: *Was [Jim] Lucas there when you were there?*

HARKINS: Yes, Lucas was there. I've seen him on TV many times, and I've met him someplace out in the West Coast, I believe, he was out there. He was a go-getter, I mean, he was down there at the palace running along the walls as soon as - when they overthrew Diem.

Q: *Now, I believe you said you did not attend that last Honolulu conference in June, right?*

HARKINS: No, I did not.

Q: *Now, you were presented the Distinguished Service Medal later that month, June 24, I think. Can you give me any of the details of that? Anything that stands out in your mind about that visit?*

HARKINS: To Washington?

Q: *Yes.*

HARKINS: Oh, I was told that the President wanted to see me, and he wanted to present me with this medal, the Distinguished Service Medal. And I said, "That's very fine." Then they wanted to have a review for me at Fort Myer. And I said, "Oh, tell them I don't need the review. _____ the troops." But they insisted, so I said, "All right." So I made a farewell, short talk there. And Mr. McNamara had a dinner for me and the President was there. I talked to him and he said, "I want to see you in the office," and I said, "Let me know." So the next day I called to make an appointment with him to see him, and they said, "Well, he's busy. He's out of town now for the next three weeks and getting ready to run his campaign." Well, I found he'd gone down to Texas for a while, and I never did get to see him.

Q: *You never did get to see him then?*

HARKINS: Never did see him. They didn't want me to see him.

Q: *General Harkins, did you have a debriefing to go through when you came back to the United States?*

HARKINS: They called it a debriefing, but I did the briefing, it seems to me. I went up to see Congress. I talked to Mr. [Clement J.] Zablocki, is it?

Q: *Yes.*

HARKINS: And I talked to his committee, and I never did get to see the President, and talk to

him. And of course I talked to Mr. McNamara and Secretary Rusk, but it was me doing the talking rather than a debriefing, as such. I don't know what they would call a debriefing.

Q: *Was it a sort of end-of-tour summary?*

HARKINS: Yes.

Q: *Can you recall the kind of picture you tried to present to Mr. Rusk and Mr. McNamara?*

HARKINS: Well, at that time, I thought Khanh was doing pretty well and I thought he'd bring the whole thing together, but apparently when General Taylor went out there as ambassador -

Q: *Which was just about this time, wasn't it?*

HARKINS: Yes. As a matter of fact, I had an office in the Pentagon, which was just in case I wanted to do anything or see anybody. I didn't. I wasn't going to write a book about it then but I did have some notes and they told me I was going to have this review and I wrote a little speech for that, that was just a one-page affair. But Mr. - the press man for Mr. McNamara - I can't think of his name right now.

Q: *[Arthur] Sylvester?*

HARKINS: Sylvester. He came over to see me, and when I left Saigon, I said, "You know it's a funny thing." Khanh had a dinner for me and invited Ambassador Lodge, and that was in 1964. And I'd get up and thank Khanh and made a few remarks. I said, "It's an odd thing to me that here we are in the middle of a war over here, and the commander's being sent home when here we are in the middle of an election back in the United States and, Mr. Ambassador, you're staying here. You should be running for president." He looked at me, sort of shocked, and I got home, was in this office [when] Mr. Sylvester came [and he said], "You know, Mr. Lodge is home now." I said, "No." He said, "Yes, he only stayed a week after you did."

Q: *Oh, my.*

HARKINS: And he said, "We're going to send a new ambassador."

Q: *You had no intimation that Lodge was leaving whatsoever?*

HARKINS: No, not at all. Not at all. I was surprised. He said, "We're going to send a new ambassador," and he said, "Do you know who he is?" I said, "Yes, I can guess." He said, "Who? Nobody knows." I said, "General Taylor." He looked at me, and he said, "How did you know that?" I said, "It was just logical." (Laughter) So then they said, well, he's the one. So he went out there.

Q: *Why did you think it was Taylor, and what was your reaction? How did you feel about that?*

HARKINS: I don't know. I thought he'd probably do fine, because he knew so much about

Vietnam. But then he and Khanh didn't hit it off at all.

Q: *Do you have any insight into why that was?*

HARKINS: No.

Q: *Have you talked to General Taylor since that time?*

HARKINS: Yes. I've talked to him, but he just didn't get along with Khanh. I don't recall what he said, but he said, no, he wasn't the man as far as he was concerned.

Q: *Did you have any occasion to consult or advise about Vietnam?*

HARKINS: No. No. When I came back, and as I say I met myself coming home giving talks around town to the Rotary and the Kiwanis and the schools and the churches and things like that, women's clubs, engineering clubs. I really was on the soapbox four or five times a week. Then everything turned around [against] Vietnam, I mean the attitude of the country here turned against it.

Q: *When would you time that more or less? Was there a specific time? Would you say that it was at Tet in 1968 or was it before then?*

HARKINS: I think it was right before then, because all the things you get from the press and the TV and everything were horror stories.

Q: *Right.*

HARKINS: And the bloody war. It was really gruesome as a matter of fact, and that turned the attitude of the people and in particular the youth who didn't want to go over there and get into that mess. Then people stopped asking me to speak because the war - because we went over there to help a country stop communism and we were asked to go over there. We didn't go over there on our own. We were just asked as defense if we would help, and we did. Like we've done for so many other countries. But it didn't sit right with the American people, and I just stopped talking about Vietnam because I only had the one story.

Q: *Looking back now - and I'm sure you have many times - what seemed to you to be the significant personalities, the significant turning points or changes in policy? Were there any crucial points when the thing could have turned around and wasn't?*

HARKINS: I think the first upsetting thing was a visit by Senator [Mike] Mansfield around Christmas in - what was it, 1962?

Q: *I think that's right.*

HARKINS: He came over, and he didn't leave Saigon. I was there, so - and he had been there once before in 1954 or 1955, and he talked to Diem. Now, when you talk to Diem you've got to

listen an awful lot.

Q: That's my information, too, yes.

HARKINS: And Mansfield liked to talk, and this first visit he had was for about four hours. And he couldn't get a word in edgewise, I mean, Diem did all the talking. Well, on this visit, the second one, he came back and he didn't leave Saigon. He went to see the President, Diem, and there was a six-hour meeting. I wasn't with him. I don't think the Ambassador was with him. So he came back and reported to the President there had been no change in seven years from his visit in 1954 to this visit he made then. And I don't think he meant it the way it sounded. I think he meant it that he didn't get a word in edgewise. But the changes that had gone on in Vietnam were really terrific: the schools, the villages, the roads, the airfields. Oh, there were tremendous changes, the harvest, the crops, and all those things. Really, the five-year plan was really going, but the way Mansfield put it, there'd been no change in six years. And it really was the beginning of "we've got to have new leadership."

Of course, then the Harriman-Hilsman thing [happened] in August and trying to overthrow the government when the message came to Lodge, and Lodge showed it to me and he sent Conein over and Big Minh wouldn't see Conein. Then Lodge went back to Harriman and Hilsman with this message saying that they wouldn't accept it unless there was somebody in authority. Then the word came for me to do it. Well, I had got nothing from the Defense Department; these were all State Department messages. So I put a flash on the wire for General Taylor saying, "I have been told to go to see the generals to overthrow Diem." I said, "This is from the State Department. I have no advice from the military, Defense." Taylor was playing tennis at the country club, McNamara was out of town, the President was down in Hyannis Port, and none of them knew the telegram had come. President Kennedy said, "Who is running this country?" And he had a meeting at nine o'clock from them on Vietnam and what was going on out there, and that was another very upsetting thing.

Q: Well, now, I've heard versions of that story which say that Hilsman did get the telegram cleared before it went out.

HARKINS: He did not. He got it cleared by [Michael] Forrestal, and he had it cleared by Harriman. But Hilsman didn't last long after that, you know.

Q: I think he left in February of 1964.

HARKINS: Well, I think it was sooner than that, wasn't it?

Q: No, he stayed on for the first couple of months of the Johnson Administration and left in February of 1964, although I think the decision was made before that time.

HARKINS: Well, he was a West Pointer - class of 1941, I think - and when he first came out to visit me, he said he knew all about guerrilla warfare. He had been in Burma, I think, during his career. And he said, "The only one I have to see - Mr. Kennedy, the President, said, 'I want you to see Harkins and talk to Harkins, and see how things are going.'" So that's really the only time I

met him personally.

Q: What were your impressions?

HARKINS: Well, I didn't know his background, but I don't think he was the expert he said he was on guerrilla warfare.

KENNETH N. ROGERS
RSO General and Staff Aide
Saigon (1962-1964)

Kenneth N. Rogers was born in New York in 1931. He received his BA from Ohio State University in 1953, and his UJD from George Washington University in 1958. His career includes postings abroad in Hong Kong, Saigon, Luanda, Kingston, and Tangier. He was interviewed on October 21, 1997, by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: You left there in January 1962. Where did you go?

ROGERS: Vietnam. They said, "Here is a guy who knows about Vietnam. He was just there. Ship him right back."

Q: There weren't many in those days. 1962 was not high Vietnam.

ROGERS: Not at all. I was assigned to be the number two person in the two man Consular Section. When I arrived, I got off the plane and learned that the two men from the Consular Section were on that plane leaving. Frank Malloy's brother, Ian, was one. He drowned in Mexico some years later. I never met him. Another fellow's name I can't remember. I never saw them. I was there all alone. They actually departed on the same Pan Am aircraft on which my wife and I arrived.

Q: This was in Saigon. In 1969, I was consul general in Saigon. We had a booming Consular Section. You were in Vietnam from 1962 to when?

ROGERS: Until March 1964.

Q: What was Saigon like in 1962?

ROGERS: The people were very, very sweet. We had an old building down the street called Ham Nghi deep in the downtown. It was very insecure. When I arrived, I was the Consular Section. Then, a fellow arrived, Harland Eastman, who became the consul. I was his assistant for a while. Then another young man named Anthony Lake came in. So, I always tell Tony Lake, the immediate past National Security Advisor, that I was his first ever supervisor in the Foreign Service. He agrees. It was great fun. William C. Trueheart was the deputy chief of mission at that

time. He was a wonderful person. I was very active and very vigorous in this consular work. At that time, the Vietnamese government required all military personnel to have a visa before they came there. They had to fill out this elaborate form. So, I drafted a diplomatic note from William Trueheart saying, "Our soldiers are coming here to help and protect you. I don't think they should have to have a visa." I presented that to him. He said, "You can't do a diplomatic note like that. It's got to be elaborate, full of lavish embellishments with a lot of depth and background." I said, "Why don't you try it? Let's see what happens." He did and it worked. So, he was very pleased. Then, a fellow named Dickson Boggs, who was the then staff aide to Ambassador Frederick Nolting, was transferred to Belgium. Bill Trueheart asked me to take over as staff aide to Fritz Nolting, which I did.

Q: Before we moved to the ambassadorial aide job, what was consular work like during this 1962ish period?

ROGERS: One part was shipping and seamen. A lot of sailors had problems, getting drunk, missing ship, that sort of thing. So, they took a little work. A lot of visas were for Vietnamese military going to the U.S. for training. We required them to have a visa. Occasionally, American citizens were very curious, wanted to know what was going on. David Halberstam was there almost every day.

Q: He was a "New York Times" correspondent.

ROGERS: Yes. I got to know him very well. The famous "Beat" poet, Allen Ginsberg, came to see me. I had read "Howl" earlier and he was so pleased that I knew about it. He stayed with us in the office a long time, discussing Vietnam. I can't remember what he was talking about now, but it was interesting to meet him. He died fairly recently.

Q: What about Americans marrying Vietnamese women?

ROGERS: There were a few.

Q: Of course, we didn't have the military...

ROGERS: We had a handful of military. Generally, it was discouraged. But if they really meant it... Let us say that sometimes an amorous drunken week-end would produce great affection and yet the Army would always say, "Give him two weeks to cool off" and darn if they weren't right. Usually, most of those faded away. But the sincere ones eventually got married. But some were just young, inexperienced, and frankly, in some cases, being taken advantage of. Usually, if made to wait a few weeks, it wore off.

Q: Was there any adoption of Vietnamese orphans at all?

ROGERS: Yes, I helped with a lot of those.

Q: Was it a problem?

ROGERS: No, I don't think so.

Q: In my time, the problem was bureaucratic. According to Vietnamese law, the President had to approve each orphan's adoption if it was with a non-Vietnamese. The President was kind of busy with a war on his hands.

ROGERS: We never had that problem. There was a merchant seaman who posed a very interesting problem. He was in love with a beautiful bar girl. She somehow became pregnant. He loved her dearly. He was a simple person, brawny, strong, and sweet. So, I said, "are you really going to keep this child?" "Yes, Sir, Mr. Rogers. That is my child and I really want to have it." I said, "You know, you're not married." "No." "It would be a wise thing for that child's future if you married before the child was born." "Okay." I said, "The baby is due within hours." "Yes." "Let's go." I got a U.S. missionary to go with me to the hospital. He was marrying them as we got to the hospital steps. They were pronounced husband and wife. Went in the doors and out came the baby, an American citizen. Sadly, that man was killed in a motorcycle crash later, but I gave the child a U.S. passport, to which he was then entitled.

Q: What about jailed Americans? Was this a problem?

ROGERS: Yes. One was a particularly difficult case. On the gangplank of a merchant ship, he hit over the head a fellow merchant seaman from the same ship and killed him, but as he killed him, he rolled back onto the dock. So, the Vietnamese claimed jurisdiction over him. He got five years in Chiwa prison. We had a lot of elaborate problems over that. He was still there when I left. Eventually, he got out.

There were a handful of merchant seamen... I hate to pick on merchant seaman.

Q: That's what you had at the time.

ROGERS: It was a pretty rough crowd, actually. They would get into all kinds of drunken brawls and trouble. But that was their style. That's what they wanted to do. We just let them sober up in jail for a couple of days and signed them onto the next ship if the captain would take them.

Q: When did you become Fritz Nolting's staff aide?

ROGERS: I would say well within six months of arriving.

Q: This would have been still 1962.

ROGERS: Yes. So, sometime in 1962.

Q: What was your impression of how Nolting operated?

ROGERS: I think he was a very kind and wonderful person. I really adored him. He was very good to everyone, very humane and thoughtful. He always found the best side of a person, forgave their errors and stupidity. He was not always in focus with all the elements of the

country team, but he was the boss, so I think they all liked him very, very much.

Q: Now you were sort of sitting at the side of the ambassador or behind the ambassador. What was your impression of how the country team at that time viewed Diem?

ROGERS: Nolting's view was "We have to work with him. He is the leader of a nation state which we recognize." He was concerned that his brother, Ngo Diem Nhu, was influencing him too much, but felt that if we worked with him, gradually, things would be okay. He was concerned that Diem was out of touch with the reality or just didn't want to face some aspects of it. He felt that he had a distance, a sense of the traditional emperors, that he didn't feel for the people. I remember when Diem would drive around in town, a police car would go in front of him and everyone was required to turn facing the opposite way and not look at him. They really meant it. I peeked. That didn't apply to me, so I looked around to see him many times. Ambassador Nolting wanted to work with him, knew his shortcomings, but he was concerned that if anything went awry, the result would be more chaotic. Of course, he was quite right.

Q: Did you have any feeling for strong opinions contrary to this or just strong opinions on the country team? Did these surface while you were present? I'm thinking about the Political Section, the military, the CIA, etc. Did you pick up any feel for this?

ROGERS: No, on the contrary, my memory is that they pretty much supported him. A problem developed more from newsmen who seemed to feel otherwise. I am sure Halberstam was there during Nolting's tenure. They wanted to show drama and excitement and become famous by reporting what they felt would sell newspapers. John Mecklin was the USIS director in Saigon at that time. He wrote a book called "Mission in Torment." Nolting was on a cruise ship somewhere between Greece and Yugoslavia when he heard on the radio that he had been replaced by Henry Cabot Lodge in Vietnam. Nolting was sad, mystified, and hurt by that. He went back to Vietnam very briefly. His childhood friend was DCM Bill Trueheart. I think Nolting blamed Trueheart for Nolting's relief, but it wasn't Trueheart's fault. It had nothing to do with him. The main purpose was for President Kennedy to have a prominent Republican in Saigon to give the appearance of bipartisan balance. Fritz Nolting did a wonderful job and I was very devoted to him. Some weeks later, Henry Cabot Lodge arrived in Saigon with Freddy Flott and James Michael Dunn, lieutenant colonel, U.S. Army. Freddy was the friend of George Lodge, son of Henry Cabot Lodge. He needed a job, so George said, "Dad, could you give Freddy a job?" Mike Dunn was a very tough, hard person who got to know Lodge when Lodge was on two weeks' active duty for training in the Army Reserve. He hooked onto him and became his hatchetman. Dunn enjoyed hurting people and wrecking careers.

Q: How did the news of Nolting's replacement hit the embassy?

ROGERS: We were all very sorry. We all loved him. We got in his place a distant, rather arrogant, cold, famous person. Fritz Nolting would play the piano at his residence. Lodge was a totally different style. He was very aloof. I remained his staff aide until my normal time ran out, whereupon Tony Lake replaced me and sometime later, Peter Tarnoff replaced him.

Q: Did you get the impression or was it going around the embassy that Lodge had come out to

get tough with Diem and we really had to push? This was the Kennedy administration. It was a pushy, hard-nosed... At least they liked to think they were a hard-nosed administration. Did you get that feeling?

ROGERS: Definitely. In fact, the first bump in this crescendo that developed was when the first Buddhist self-immolation, burning suicide occurred. Madame Nhu, Diem's sister-in-law, the so-called Dragon Lady, said, "It's just a barbecue." Lodge reacted with his first press statement. I was with him. He wrote, "It's terrible to say such a thing" and criticized her directly. Buddhists were trying to end the war either with communist influence, or on their own true peace initiative. They were being harassed by the central government and Lodge on the second or third day there (I was with him.) went to a famous Buddhist temple to demonstrate his reaching out to other sectors of the community.

Q: How did Lodge use you as a staff aide?

ROGERS: One traditional task was screening calls, listening to all of his phone calls to take notes. As an illustration, suppose either he or Fritz Nolting said, "Okay, I'll go to lunch Monday with you at 12:30." I would write all that down in his schedule book. That was one of my tasks to deal with all that. So, a great deal of his oral flow went through me. I also organized his papers and got there earlier than he so I would have all the cables arranged in a priority system so he would be sure to read the most important ones first, that sort of thing. I organized meetings for him. I was the "helpful hand."

Q: Did you get any feeling for the role of the CIA? Was there a difference between the time of Nolting and the time of Lodge from your observation?

ROGERS: Yes. My clear memory is that the CIA station continued to try to work with the Diem regime as Nolting had, but it finally came down to Lodge saying, "Well, I'm the boss and we're going to do it my way." I remember, symbolically, he took the residence of the CIA station chief and said, "I think I want your house." It was a message to the Vietnamese saying, "I can do this and he works for me." He literally kicked him out of his house and lived there. That was only maybe 10 houses away from me on the same street, Phung Khac Koan, so I remember it very well. It was, perhaps, not historically important, but symbolically, at the time, it was.

Q: These things send messages. How important was the American military as far as the Ambassador's action was concerned?

ROGERS: Lodge knew General Paul Harkins in World War II. Harkins was then the four star general who was the head of the military activities in Vietnam. They had actually served together in the same regiment, as I recall. Paul Harkins was his senior at one stage in an armored division.

Q: I think Lodge resigned from the Senate, served in North Africa, and then came back.

ROGERS: He know Harkins from that time. That was helpful. I think he got on alright with him. Lucien Conein was a CIA officer. He is still living in Virginia [Note: Conein died in 1999.]. I saw him at a funeral not too long ago. He was a lieutenant colonel, uniformed. He was Lodge's

liaison with restive generals who were thinking of replacing Diem. My impression was he was involved a great deal with that task, more so than much of the rest of the CIA. Conein knew many of the senior Vietnamese officers when they were all in the French army in WWII.

Q: Did you gain any feeling about a growing impatience of Lodge with Diem after he arrived?

ROGERS: Oh, yes, and it gradually seemed to turn a corner and he'd say, "Well, he's got to go." How and when precisely that turn occurred, I don't recall. But it did happen. Unfortunately, Diem and his brother, Ngo Diem Nhu, were killed the following morning.

Q: Were you there at the time?

ROGERS: Oh, yes.

Q: What was the situation from your perspective just prior to the General's coup?

ROGERS: It was very, very tense. We knew of troop movements around town. We were aware of that. I'll never forget, on the day of the coup, to show you how much I was out of the loop (Even though I was the staff aide, there were some things I never knew.), I went into work one day and Lodge didn't show up. Then, the coup began. I called and he was having lunch with Mike Dunn. I said, "There is a coup underway." He said, "I know. I am staying here. You stay there." So, Bill Trueheart and I stayed in the office. We didn't know what was going to happen. I had a submachine gun on my desk. I didn't know if they were going to storm the building or what was going to happen. Mercifully, the embassy was not stormed. It became very dramatic. I was at the embassy all night long. I went out in the morning with Jim Rosenthal to walk over to the palace and we saw the damage that had been done to it as it had been attacked. I walked around the grounds and in the barracks of the palace guard. We didn't realize it at that time, but Diem had fled to Cholon and was eventually picked up and killed by an army captain who in turn was later killed. That was certainly an unforgettable and dramatic day.

Q: When you heard about these events, what were you getting from the junior officer mafia about this being a good thing or something else?

ROGERS: I would say they were more conservative on it, feeling that the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know, and that we'd better try to work with this system that we know, try to get his brother, Ngo Diem Nhu, out of power. In fact, Lodge once suggested to Diem, "Maybe it would be better if your brother took some leave in the Philippines or someplace" and tried to gracefully get rid of him. Diem wouldn't hear of it. From what I know about junior officers, in my view they're all very sincere, conscientious people who did the best they could.

Q: At that time, did we have much in the way of language officers and people who were out in the field or was it pretty much an embassy-centered operation?

ROGERS: The latter, although in approximately 1963, we began getting Vietnamese language trained people there. The only one I recall who spoke Vietnamese and was there immediately

before I arrived was Lyle Brecken. He is still living and is a good friend. Then, six other Vietnamese-trained people arrived. But there weren't too many. Most of our work was done in French. I didn't speak Vietnamese.

Q: We did not have this vast network that later developed of officers out in the field.

ROGERS: No. We did have provincial reporters, but not as elaborate as the CORDS program eventually became. It was very small, nothing like was later there. One of those provincial reporters later became Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific and for EUR, Richard Holbrooke [Note: U.S. representative to the UN in 1999]. He was one of those first provincial reporters. I remember distinctly when he came to the office and said, "I have to see the ambassador." I said, "Okay." I was not the doorkeeper. I wanted to facilitate communication. I said, "He's got some ambassador in there now making a courtesy call and he has somebody else coming later, but I'll hold that so you can get in and tell him your story." His point was that things were not as rosy as had been reported by the military in the Mekong Delta region. That was the first time I met Holbrooke. He was certainly very hard-driving, very determined to get his message across, which was a message in contrast to what others were reporting. He was out there in the field.

Q: Was there any concern that maybe our information was coming too much from sort of political circles within Saigon and not really reflecting the state of the country?

ROGERS: Yes. I used to call it "veranda reporting." You sit around with the usual suspects, the same old folks, in sort of an incestuous turnabout and you hear the same story.

Q: The veranda of the Continental Hotel.

ROGERS: That sort of thing, or homes. But I've seen that all over the world. Either it's the veranda or it's what the taxi driver told you on the way to the airport and that's the way the lazy people do their reporting. But hopefully, I'm confident, nowadays people are much more astute and professional about it.

Q: Was there the feeling that America's critical interests were at stake in Vietnam at this point?

ROGERS: No, I don't think so. There was some theoretical domino collapse nonsense, but I certainly didn't buy that. I didn't think it made any sense. That was that if Vietnam falls - to what? Into itself. Actually, the concept was, we were trying to help the people of Vietnam establish their own independent identity free from outside control (read China, Soviet Union). I think that if the Cold War were not underway, we would have taken no particular interest. Just as in much of Africa, our interest was sparked by East-West struggle, but it had nothing or almost nothing to do with our direct interest.

Q: What about after the killing of Diem and his brother, how did this hit the embassy?

ROGERS: I think that everyone was very tired. They had been up all night and were just kind of touchy, hoping that it would all work out. Lodge had me organize a dinner for what he called

either the Council of Sages or the Council of Notables, some across-the-board group we tried to piece together to try to get people from all aspects of life - university, religious groups, business, and so forth - and try to get them collectively to see how best we should proceed to assist them in their development. I recall also that that didn't amount to much. It kind of sputtered away quickly.

Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese political class?

ROGERS: They were very much - I won't say francophone, but had a veneer of French style to them. They were certainly not pro-French in that all of them wanted independence from France. They were glad of that. I think that they had enough of the French. Some businessmen still stayed there and seemed quite content. There was a sense that "This is our nation and we want to do it our way." I'm sad to say that our position was, "Go ahead, provided China and the Soviet Union aren't involved," which they were. I suppose China historically did look upon Indochina as a former satrapy that owed fidelity to China. They had many conflicts. They had been occupied and had wars with China over the years. On the other hand, during the French colonial period, especially during World War II when the Vichy government controlled it, a lot of Vietnamese were inside China. A lot of the Vietnamese "democratic patriots," as they called themselves, worked within China in the hopes of eventually getting the French out. Of course, they didn't.

Politically, it's a Mandarin elitist culture from the old animite times. It's my theory that Diem saw himself as a replacement for Bao Dai and that he was a regal personality. His family was very powerful. Ngo Diem Tuc was the Archbishop of Hue, the senior Catholic official in Vietnam.

Q: After the coup, you were still there when they started the series of revolving generals?

ROGERS: Yes. The coup was in November 1963.

Q: It was very close to the assassination of Kennedy.

ROGERS: It was about 20 days from that.

Q: So we're talking about November 2nd or so.

ROGERS: I remember, when Kennedy was assassinated, I had to look in a book to see how you make the black mourning wreath on the flag to put out in front of the embassy. All those little things. But shortly after that, my tour of duty ended in January. Tony Lake replaced me and I went off to my next assignment.

W. ROBERT WARNE
Assistant Development Officer, USAID
Saigon (1962-1964)

W. Robert Warne was born in Washington, DC on November 30, 1937. Mr. Warne attended high school in Tehran, Hawaii, graduating in Brazil. He then attended Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School. After graduation in 1962, Warne took a commission, spending two years with artillery in the Army. Warne then became a member of AID in the fall of 1962, to begin a diplomatic career spanning 24 years. Warne has also served in Buenos Aires, Brussels, Kingston, and Paris. The interview was conducted by C. Stuart Kennedy April 1, 1995.

Q: I like to get the stance. The first time you went to Vietnam, you went there as...

WARNE: I only went to Vietnam one time, and that was a two-year tour with my family- my wife Susanna, and baby daughter of six months, Robin. We arrived in Vietnam in December of 1962, and left in December of 1964.

AID was so anxious to recruit me and others like me. It was building up a program called Provincial Operations, which was assigning Americans to the provinces to administer local AID programs. I happened to be the first AID officer assigned to the Mekong Delta. It was an experiment. As an exception, AID allowed me to take my family along. The family did not want to be separated.

Q: What was the situation like in Vietnam at that time, as you were told before you went out? Obviously, you weren't told much.

WARNE: I really didn't know even what I was going to be doing, when I left Washington. Actually, the situation was fluid and contested by the Viet Cong. We were trying to get a grip on what was happening. We were assessing what our program should be. Our mission was "to win the hearts and the minds of the people." Our aim was to consolidate the Vietnamese government's presence and governance. The issue was how we could grapple with a civil war, or insurrection, and best respond to it. We were experimenting to see what would work with us.

When I arrived in Saigon, I went in to see my boss, Rufus Phillips, who, although I didn't know it, had had a career in the CIA. Rufus had now surfaced as an embassy officer and was coordinating the Provincial Operations program. He was highly effective, energized and dedicated and assessed conditions accurately.

Provincial Operations had a budget of, I'm not even sure exactly how much - it was twenty or thirty million dollars for this program. I was allocated about a million dollars and assigned to two provinces. Rufus called me in and said, "Well, Rob, I'd like you to go down to these two central provinces in the Mekong Delta, Vinh-Long and Dien-Binh." A colleague introduced me to the two province chiefs. I found a place to live and set up a program. I didn't have any other guidance. I knew that I was supposed to develop programs to respond to the province chiefs' and the communities' needs.

Q: I just want to get a little feel about how we went about this. How old were you when you went there?

WARNE: Twenty-three.

Q: So you're twenty-three years old. You're sent...

WARNE: Just out of the Army and college.

Q: And no particular training.

WARNE: Absolutely none at all.

Q: Did they hand you a volume of guidelines of what you were supposed to do?

WARNE: They only thing they handed me was a map.

Q: If I weren't a former government employee myself, I'd think that was incredible. Was there anybody before you went out you could talk to and say, gee, what are the options?

WARNE: No. I was required, once a month, to write a report about the program. From that, and from the various other reports from the provinces around the country, we developed common guidelines.

Basically I was a community-action officer who was trying to extend effectively the reach of the government into the countryside.

Frankly, I think the description that the U.S. military advisor used to describe the Provincial Operations program was quite apt: "Dynamic inexperience." We were very anxious to go out and do things. We had resources and were determined to show results.

There were three or four guidelines that I quickly developed myself. One was to complement the province governor. I did not do anything without his involvement or without his commitment that he wanted me to undertake it. He and his staff needed to be involved in the project and, most importantly, identified with it. I didn't want it to have a U.S. identification to the program. Our goal was to build the capability of the provincial and district governments.

The second guideline was that [I wanted to do something that would] impact on the local communities in the countryside. I found that there were five or six things that we could do that the people needed badly. These were impoverished, rural, rice-growing areas. I went to each community to determine what the communities needed and what the people would become involved in. I developed a flip chart that described how the province and the local people could participate together in community-action projects. From those discussions with each of the village councils and local communities, we would identify local projects.

These broke down into building schools, providing school supplies, digging wells, providing livestock, or poultry, fertilizer, building a bridge, providing a nurse and medical supplies.

Refugee relief was a major component. We had a number of people who were relocated out of areas because of the insurrection.

Military engagements occurred daily. A lot of people didn't realize that in that period, in the middle '60s, there was such a buildup of the Viet Cong. There was a V.C. regiment in each of the provinces. These were broken down into mobile platoons and squads. I have a map here that will show the pattern of military incidents. We had at least 30 or 40 incidents a month. Many of them were assassinations, bombings or sniper fire. I was caught in 40 or more incidents myself while I was there.

Q: Did you feel that your presence was a problem to the province people? I would think that the whole idea, on the part of the Viet Cong, would be to discourage aid coming from the United States.

WARNE: Yes, the Viet Cong systematically destroyed the projects whenever they launched an operation. Whenever there was an incident against my person, it was, I think, indirect. The American military picked up leaflets and other information that purported the V.C. had a price on my head. It seemed like a large amount of money at the time. But there was a price on everyone's head--the province governor and the U.S. military adviser and others--so I was not being singled out. I was exposed. I went throughout the two provinces everyday. I sometimes I preferred to go without a military escort. I never felt that I was a direct target. But I'm sure that if the V.C. had had the opportunity, they would have killed me. I had several vehicles mined while I was there. The closest incident I had was when the province governor and I walked into an ambush. The V.C. shot two of the soldiers with us.

The Viet Cong did not know what to do with me. I wasn't a hostile, in the sense I wasn't out trying to kill them.

They also exploited our activities. The V.C. used our grain (we had a lot of bulgur wheat and cooking oil) for their own purposes.

It was a discouraging effort. During those two years, we were losing the war. I could see it visibly. When I first arrived there were many remote areas I could go to and work in. By the time I left, many of these areas were insecure. Our schoolhouses and other projects were torn down. The security deterioration made it much more difficult to travel. Several of the roads to the district towns that I regularly used were blocked. One time, I actually had to persuade the province governor to let me use an antique tank and a platoon of soldiers to clear the road in order to get some supplies through. I was increasingly discouraged. My reports described the pattern of attacks of the Viet Cong. They were squeezing the province towns. They built roadblocks and took over the villages and transportation around the provinces.

Another discouraging feature was the uneven quality of the local leadership. One province governor, Major Minh, was particularly effective. He knew how to work with the people, and had integrity and honesty. But we had other province governors who did not measure up. There were five during the time I was there in just one province. The government also changed several times in Saigon. This dramatically impacted on our effectiveness. In fact, frankly, at some points,

I was really the province governor because I had resources and capability. The military advisors and I helped to hold things together during these turbulent times. But we were continuously losing ground to the Viet Cong.

I worked very closely with the military. That was one of the things that I made a point of doing. I'm not sure all of my colleagues did. I wanted the military to know exactly what I was doing.

Q: You're talking about the American military.

WARNE: Yes, and also the Vietnamese. At first, until my family moved to the province with me, I lived with the military. I was doing, and I tried to design programs with their participation. I think they appreciated that. I always had a good relationship with the military, in one of the provinces. In the other province...

Q: Which was?

WARNE: This was Vinh Long, which was the more prosperous and important of the two provinces. It also had a larger population - about 200,000.

Q: What was the capital?

WARNE: The city of Binh Long was the capital. And I have a map here I'll be glad to show you.

But I had an adverse experience, partly due to my inexperience. The province governor, who was a well-trained, French-educated colonel, exploited the population and his situation. I began to pull back from giving full support to him.

The province had a poorly conceived program of building strategic hamlets, essentially barbed-wire fortresses around villages. The purpose was to prevent the Viet Cong from night attacks and infiltration. It was not a well-conceived plan because the villages could not be protected in this manner. We put a lot of resources into strategic hamlets which remained vulnerable.

At that time, the government required each province to report the amount of hamlets that had been secured and the effectiveness of the security.

This governor wanted to look good. Instead of securing the individual villages, he built an immense barbed wire fence and mote around his province. Perhaps over 600 kilometers. This effort was not sensible. There's no way you could secure such a long barbed-wire fence. He also used forced labor to build the fence.

I objected.

This was not the plan. The aim was to develop the resources for the community, not exploit the people.

When I objected, the province governor became incensed. He reported to President Ngu Dinh Diem that I was not cooperating. The government undertook an official inspection.

[I told my boss about this situation, and he actually was called in by the president and asked who this guy was and what was going on.]

Well, my boss, Rufus Phillips, got a U.S. Navy plane to fly over the province and photograph the long barbed-wire fences, to demonstrate that the province was not following the instructions of the strategic hamlets. He gave the photos to the president's brother to respond to these accusations. My situation with the governor had come to a breaking point. I bid farewell. He was proud and rigid. I never developed a good personal relationship with him, although he was very kind to me. I stayed in his home a couple of times.

The last time I stayed with him, I gave him a bottle of scotch. And he insisted I open the bottle and take the first drink. He thought I was trying to poison him.

He told me to take this road out of town. A MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group) advisor, a captain, said, "Why don't you take an alternate road." I'm glad I did because I avoided an ambush.

The province governor was related to the president. He was protected politically. But they did transfer him six months later from that job. The Viet Cong continued to expand its control over the rural areas.

Q: Obviously, you didn't speak Vietnamese. How did you find out what was going on?

WARNE: I spoke a little French, and I did study Vietnamese. I had an interpreter. I did most of my business through an interpreter. This interpreter became a close friend. He escaped from Vietnam after the war. With our help his family and he now live here in the Washington area.

Q: Was corruption a bad problem?

WARNE: It was a serious problem and never controlled adequately. For example, we would allow expenditures for gasoline; there was no way to control vouchers. But corruption was not rampant. I didn't have all that much money. Much of the aid was in kind. I would buy uniforms, equipment or seed. I don't think anyone really made a lot of money over me.

I would always get equipment such as trucks and pumps from whatever sources would be available. Communications came primarily through the local telegraph. USAID/Saigon sent me a wire saying 17 rehabilitated WWII trucks were available. No one seemed interested in them. I said, "I'm coming to get them." They added to our transportation capabilities. The Vietnamese military used them more than I did. That didn't bother me; they needed the trucks. I did not draw a line between the civilian and military activities.

Regarding corruption, I had some problems. Two or three province governors were free-wheeling. I was careful about the release of funds, but some funds were misused. In one case, I

had to halt expenditures because of malfeasance. Frankly the lack of effective government and commitment by our Vietnamese counterparts were our most troubling problems. The Vietnamese at the provincial and district [levels] in some cases undermined our efforts to win public support and cooperation for the government.

But for the most part, our programs had an impact.

Provincial Operations used to compare Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's visits to Vietnam to a division attack. He would just overwhelm us with requests for data and analysis.

I filed several reports about the difficulties to carry out our programs; and we were losing ground and lacked effectiveness.

These reports caused several confrontations with McNamara's senior staff. They called me up to Saigon. I disagreed with their conclusion that things were going well. I said, "I can only speak for the provinces I know, but conditions are exactly opposite from your conclusions. We're losing ground. It's just a matter of time before these provinces will be taken over by the Viet Cong." I illustrated with four maps. One map portrayed the Viet Cong activities in the province; every terrorist incident was marked on it. Secondly, a map showed the secure areas where we could operate. The third described the number of strategic hamlets and the number kept shrinking. Finally, a map located our programs and those which had been destroyed or abandoned. McNamara's staff questioned my analysis. They said that I didn't know what I was talking about.

They did make one credible point. Senior staff said, "Some of those early strategic hamlets were not well established, you didn't have effective presence, and the security program has now been consolidated. Perhaps so, but the area controlled by the government was shrinking and this contraction occurred during the entire period I was in Vietnam.

Another major effort that was not going well was the Vietnamese military directed me to relocate tens of thousands of refugees from areas that were Viet Cong controlled. We were trying to strip them of resources and population. Relocating these people was a terrible job, because I lacked the capability to relocate several thousand people from their homes and provide them with basic services, medical care and foodstuffs. A number of small, temporary communities were built. But the people returned to their homes at the first opportunity. Many were hardened Viet Cong by the time they left. I tried to discourage the program, but I often was instructed to do it. Large relocation as a retaliatory measure against the Viet Cong was a serious mistake.

A Special Forces unit was stationed in one of the most insecure areas. I used to fly in to see them and help with various programs. It was a very hostile area. We always received ground fire whenever we flew in or out. During my assignment, the Viet Cong gained control of the entire district, except for the immediate area around the Special Forces camp. The US team was a thorn in the V.C.'s side but did not check their insurgency.

I came to the conclusion that we just didn't know how to prosecute the war. We were in a civil war that called for a different approach. We had a weak government, a government that was not

committed to prosecuting the war. For example, the Vietnamese objective was to avoid casualties. The military often avoided closing with the Viet Cong. The Vietnamese leadership was often corrupt and ineffective. There were some exceptions however. Some Vietnamese were very good officers. For the most part, we had an uphill battle. Unless we were really willing to commit millions of men to secure the countryside, we couldn't make the difference by presenting the war under those conditions.

Q: Were you there during the coup that took Diem?

WARNE: Yes, I was there, but I was not in Saigon at the time. Many expected a change because Diem and his family were being criticized and seemed ineffective.

Q: Did that have any particular effect?

WARNE: Yes, it did. It had a destabilizing effect. Most key positions were changed. All the old relationships were cut. New inexperienced people took over. It was a turbulent period. There was a noticeable slowdown in governmental leadership and programs. For the most part, key positions were given to cronies. The selections were not based on merit. Frankly these Mekong Delta provinces were given secondary priority. The best officers went to jobs in Saigon, other cities and major commands. This was a mistake I believe.

Q: Was John Paul Vann down there?

WARNE: Yes, he was. He was not far from me. He started in Long-anh, which was the province north of me. He had a different approach as a military leader. I did not direct the military operations. His experience in presenting was similar to mine. For example, the Vietnamese military refused to close with the Viet Cong in both operations.

We had two or three major engagements with the Viet Cong during the time I was there. We never had an engagement larger than company size, but we had several company-sized attacks. Several US military officers were killed. On two occasions the V.C. attacked the provincial capital in which we lived. Those were mainly skirmishes, however. Once a mortar round dropped near our home.

Q: You're speaking about Americans.

WARNE: Yes. The American military advisors were competent and dedicated but not the ebullient, strong leader and outspoken type that Vann was. I can remember sitting on the steps of the province chief's house when one of the majors was leaving as head of the advisory unit. He said, "Rob, I just wish I could say that I accomplished something during the year I was here. I didn't really make any difference."

When I left Vietnam, I was assigned to the Vietnam Desk. Actually, I was first assigned to go to Brazil. My assignment was changed to put me on the Desk. I returned a year later on a presidential evaluation mission led by President Johnson's Special Assistant Robert Komer. I

went back to my old haunts. I reversed the course of Komer's evaluation. He started in the north, and I went first to the south. I covered many of the same stops, during the ten days of the visit.

One of the most heartrending experiences was in the visit to the province town of Vinh Bink-Phu Vinh. I had been there two years and knew people. The same province governor Colonel Tranh was in charge. The military advisor, Colonel, Muckerman, was also there. DoD had extended his tour. We discussed their plans. They said, "We're undertaking a new operation. We're going to secure Cau-Ke district. We have two battalions reinforced with so many armored personnel carriers and artillery. The V.C. headquarters were going to be surrounded. Permanent ARVN presence was to be established.

I said, "I participated in a similar operation with the previous province governor about two and a half years ago. I camped out in the district for several weeks; got eaten up with mosquitos and suffered from diarrhea. We lasted about three weeks before withdrawing. We lost so many men by booby traps and sniper fire that we gave up and pulled back. It was just a terrible experience. We thought that we had the forces needed to secure the district."

They said, "Well, it's different this time. We've got it organized."

I said farewell to them as they went off to lead their units.

I heard later that the province governor got out on one side of his jeep and Muckerman on the other. A land mine went off and blew the province governor's leg off and badly wounded Muckerman. That ended that operation.

We never learned. We never developed the experience and the know-how to prosecute the war. Our personnel were rotated every year. The Vietnamese commanders changed even more often. We never figured out how to combat guerillas and operate in a civil war. Perhaps we could not win the war. But operations focused on local areas in a concerted, comprehensive way would have slowed the V.C. down, if not reversed, their success.

Q: You're obviously looking with hindsight. But let's go back to the McNamara people you were talking to when you were there. Were these people who were resolved on a course and they wanted to have the figures that looked good to them? McNamara had this tendency...

WARNE: To quantify everything.

Q: Did you have the feeling that it had to be positive?

WARNE: Yes. It was an attitude that was cultivated by the way that we ran the military. Civilians were just as bad; I'm not saying it was just the military. We brought people over on short assignments, eleven months to a year. They needed to demonstrate accomplishment to get promoted. The President wanted to win the war. We were providing a lot of resources. We were determined to make it look good.

Saigon was removed from reality. As a result, fictitious accomplishments became the rule of the day. I'm not saying that everyone was being misled or satisfied with reports. I can remember Al Kromer talking to the President's advisor for Vietnam. He was a real terror, a tough guy. His nickname was "blow torch". In quiet moments, he said, "We really are dealing with a civil war." But no official would ever say that publicly.

I had an interesting experience when I first arrived at the Vietnam Desk. Komer called "Hey, Warne, I understand you've been out in Vietnam and you know the situation."

I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "The University of Michigan is going to have a teach-in, and they want to have someone to tell the students about the situation in Vietnam. Would you do that?"

I have never been so scared in all my life. I was confronted by 10,000 screaming kids ready to tear me from limb to limb. I shouted over their yelling and I got out safely. Attending those teach-ins was not a good idea. We were a magnet to draw people in. Things went downhill rapidly regarding public support for the war. The president was caught in a difficult situation.

When I got back from Vietnam, Len Unger, a deputy assistant secretary, was in charge of Vietnam at the State Department. He called two or three recent returnees to ask us for advice. The issue was whether we should increase U.S. forces. This was early in '65. The president had a DoD proposal to send 50,000 more troops. The first major commitment of US forces.

I was the only one in the group who opposed a troop commitment. I said that, unless we were willing to commit major resources in the two provinces -- at least a regiment in each province -- we would not succeed in those areas. Even with a regiment in each province, it would be difficult to prosecute the war. Without being able to have dominant presence in each of the provincial districts we couldn't drive the Viet Cong out. Otherwise we could secure some of the roads and key communities, but the rest of the countryside would be controlled by the Viet Cong. My family and I had a unique experience setting up household in a town of 25,000 one hundred miles south of Saigon. My wife taught school until the principal asked her to stop for security reasons. At first, we were able to drive to Saigon, but shortly we relied on air transport for food, mail and travel. When we left, we flew out by helicopter. Suzy, my wife, would be alert for a plane to buzz the house each week. This was the grocery, mail run. She was the only Caucasian woman for much of the time. Life magazine did a four-page story on us just before we left. It was a major blunder to escalate the war. We committed US forces to an open-ended situation. We lacked the will to provide the troops and long term commitment to gain the upper hand. Without such determination, we should never have gotten involved in a civil war in which the Viet Cong had the upper hand.

Q: When you were back in Washington, how did you find the Vietnam working group you were on? You were in an AID working group.

WARNE: No, I wasn't. I didn't explain what happened to me. My appointment to the Foreign Service came through when I was in Vietnam, and on one of my trips up to Saigon I was sworn

in. Since they were now assigning FSOs to the provincial jobs, I was converted from a reserve to a regular officer position. I continued on in the position same salary and grade. I made a mistake. I probably would have had a more successful career if I'd stayed in AID. I came in as an FSR-8. That's the lowest rung of the Foreign Service reserve. I was promoted one rung while I was in AID, and State picked me up as a seven. But AID had already put me in to be promoted to a six. I would have gotten ahead more rapidly in AID and was headed for program management.

When I was ready to return to Washington, the Embassy at Saigon said there was no reason to give me any training. I had already been in the field. The beginning A-100 Course was waived. I didn't have any language qualifications, so I couldn't get promoted above a six without passing the language exam. State was going to send me to Spanish, but it pulled me off to go on the Vietnam Desk. I ultimately took Spanish on my own in early morning classes.

I had orders to go Brazil. During transit, I offered to give a briefing to the Vietnam working group -- the inter-agency-level management of Vietnam.

I had an illustrative report on what went on in Vietnam from my perspective in the provinces. It had four parts: community action; the military situation illustrated by several maps of how the Viet Cong was taking control; the leadership in the local area; and finally an evaluation of progress issues. I had one series of photos of the results of U.S. bombing raids on a Buddhist temple that had killed several Buddhist monks. I explained how the Viet Cong had drawn us into the engagement.

When this incident happened, I went to the division headquarters and complained to the division commander. It had really set our program back. I lost effective relationships with two district chiefs because of it. I had gone to see the Dai-Duc Mekong, the Senior Buddhist monk, to make homage and apology. He allowed me to give restitution for the monks deaths and rebuild the temple. That was not the only incident, there were several like that. I tried to get across to the military that this was not productive.

There was an Air Force general at this working group briefing who got very angry at me for this description of what happened. So I got a little notoriety out of that confrontation.

Ambassador Unger asked me to stay on in Washington rather than go to Brazil. I joined the State Department's Vietnam working group. I was one of the five on the Desk. I spent about two years on the Desk. By the time I left it had more than doubled in size. During the entire period I was the most junior officer on the desk.

Q: You were there about '64 to '66?

WARNE: Actually, it was '65 to '67. I left Vietnam just at the end of '64.

Q: Did you find, with this working group, that there was an attitude that we have to see things in a positive light, Americans can do anything, we can do this? What was the feeling?

WARNE: No. The desk had the attitude that the Administration needed to do a better job of improving the capability of the Vietnamese government, and broadening its political base. We focused on political development through development of the National Assembly, and broader participation of the populace, and strengthening responsiveness. For Example, the Desk worried about the Buddhist demonstrations, and other dissident groups.

No, the working group did not have an attitude that we had to do anything to win the war, and that we were going to cover up the problems. The State People had integrity and were honest about developments. But the Desk was not in the driver's seat. The military was running the war. We could have done more, however, to explain to the administration what our problems were. We were dependent on the embassy and the AID mission for reporting. Everyone wanted to be positive and make progress.

Those involved knew the war wasn't going well. We ran an around-the-clock working group in times of stress in Vietnam. I happened to be in the operations center, on the phone to Saigon, during the Tet Offensive. I was the first one to get reports on how the country was breaking up. We all knew it was coming. We did not anticipate Tet; that took everyone by surprise. Essentially, what we were trying to do was hold a deteriorating situation together.

I was assigned primarily to follow developments in the Mekong Delta and coordinate activities with USIA and AID. I had never been in an embassy. I had an entirely different background than the other officers, who had all been in the embassy political section in Saigon. They had different skills. I learned a lot. If I was going to be a Foreign Service officer, that's where I had to start. For example, I prepared each week a worldwide assessment of developments in Vietnam which was used as talking points for all of our embassies and spokesmen.

When I returned from the trip to Vietnam in 1966, I wrote an extensive report describing how the war was not going well.

Komer, on the other hand had come back with a very positive report.

My boss, Ambassador Robert Miller, recommended that it be sent over to the White House. But it never went anywhere. In fact, I don't think Len Unger ever read it. I followed up a couple of times and asked if he'd had a chance to read it. And he said, "I've taken it home, but I was so tired, I didn't get it out of my briefcase." My views didn't make any impact at all.

I can remember my boss getting angry with me one time. USIA wanted to set up a TV network throughout Vietnam -- TV in all the local villages. This was to get our message across to the local population. The American military was anxious to get TV out there for the troops for entertainment purposes. USIA took excessive time to prepare its proposal. My boss kept getting more and more angry with USIA for dragging its feet. He worried that McNamara would say, "Let's do it. The hell with the USIA. The troops need it now." I just couldn't get USIA to move. It was one thing after another. Thus, all of us had difficulties in moving a lethargic administration. Washington was not on a wartime footing, although the Desk worked. We used to work around the clock when emergencies occurred.

The Department asked me to do a lot of public speaking. I was in nearly every major city and on numerous radio and TV programs. I described the AID program and the community action effort. AID also used me for recruitment.

One of my peculiar jobs on the Desk was to review FBI files on demonstrators. The FBI sent over regular reports on demonstrators, perhaps 10 to 20 a day. I just filed them. It was a waste of time. The agent would be sitting in a car on the corner; the suspect would be walking across the street. Great detail about nothing.

Obviously, the administration was struggling with a very strong civil uprising in our own country against the war. We weren't handling that well at all, either. We just couldn't cope with the justified public outrage about prosecution of the war. Eventually, the opposition knocked Johnson out of the White House. Fortunately, I had left the desk before the peak of the outrage. By that time the Johnson Administration had blundered seriously over Vietnam. Its leaders refused to accept reality -- the U.S. could not dictate terms that produced a favorable outcome for it.

MAXWELL D. TAYLOR
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Washington, DC (1962-1964)

Ambassador
Vietnam (1964-1965)

Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor was born in 1901. He was Chief of Staff of the Army in the Eisenhower period from 1955 to 1959 and ambassador to Vietnam from 1964 to 1965. He was interviewed for the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library by Dorothy Pierce in 1969 and by Ted Gittinger in 1981.

Q: General Taylor, you are a very well known individual and I really don't feel that it's necessary for me to give your whole career by way of introduction. Since we are going to be dealing primarily with the '60's, I would like to make touchstones of your various services and assignments during that period. This is more for my benefit and to be sure that I have the times correct on them. You retired as Chief of Staff in 1959. This is, of course, under President Eisenhower. President Kennedy recalled you to active duty in 1961, and you served as the military representative to the President. From '62 to '64, you were Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; from 1964 to 1965, Ambassador to Vietnam; and since then you have served as Special Consultant to President Johnson on diplomatic, military, and strategic matters. Just this March (1969) you have become Chairman of the military-

TAYLOR: I became a member of the Intelligence Board at the same time I became a consultant. I then succeeded Mr. Clark Clifford as Chairman of that board when he became Secretary of Defense.

Q: Also, during your career you've authored two books, The Uncertain Trumpet and Responsibility and Response. General Taylor, before we begin I would like to find out if you have participated in any other oral history project.

TAYLOR: Yes, I participated in the recordings for the benefit of the Kennedy Library covering essentially the period of time during which I was associated with President Kennedy. As you have indicated, that was from April 1961 until the President's death.

Q: Have you any changes or corrections or additions to add to that tape here?

TAYLOR: No, I don't think so. I went rather thoroughly over the events which were included in that period with which I was associated. They're available on file under the terms of access to them in the Kennedy Library. I would imagine that if I changed them now, it would be for the worse.

Q: In an effort not to take your time and duplicate any statements that you have made, I will primarily pick up from '63, except for earlier associations with President Johnson and some overall pictures of the '60's which I'd like to get from you. Before we get into this, I'd like to just start with when you first met Lyndon Johnson and what the circumstances were.

TAYLOR: I'm sorry to say I can't pinpoint the exact time. It was during the period when I was Chief of Staff of the Army, which was in the Eisenhower period from 1955 to 1959. He, of course, was Senator Johnson and I saw him frequently in connection with the Preparedness Subcommittee of which he was chairman. I testified before him on many occasions. I got to know him in that sense of the word, which was not particularly intimately, but I did see enough of his work in the field of national security to form a very high opinion of his interest in national security and also the vast amount of energy he expended in becoming thoroughly knowledgeable with many complex subjects.

Q: Is there any particular time, or times, that stand out in your mind during the period?

TAYLOR: Yes, I remember very well an occasion -- the year of which I cannot mention without consulting my diary -- but it was known that the Joint Chiefs were very unhappy about the budget of that particular year. He [Johnson] called a full scale open hearing of his subcommittee and before klieg lights brought each one of the Chiefs, one by one, in front of the committee to testify on what they thought of their budget. It was somewhat humorous because the Chiefs, constrained as they are by the ethics of their position -- in other words not taking advantage of an open hearing to complain about their civilian masters in the Pentagon -- were in a very unenviable position. They had to tell the truth, yet they also certainly did not want to suggest disloyalty to the civilian leaders. It ended up something like this: that each chief would talk about his own budget and in response to questions indicate that he didn't think that budget was large enough. But then, at the end, the final question the chairman would ask, "Well, what about the entire Defense budget?"

'Well,' they'd say, 'We think that is all right.' This led one of the Senators to say, "This is the most unusual situation, where four insufficient budgets add up to a sufficient overall budget."

Q: Were there any other such occasions? [What was] did you think, the then-Senator Johnson's reasoning for bringing you in this setting?

TAYLOR: Well, it was public knowledge that there was great unhappiness at the Pentagon. I presume I was the prime villain because these were the days when, as the Army spokesman, I was fighting the cause of flexible response versus massive retaliation. This was known about town but had never been aired in a public sense. I would say that Senator Johnson recognized it was a highly important matter; that it was not really parochial inter-service bickering as sometimes it was described. But it was a question of two contending strategies of great national importance. To air the issue in this way would be a profitable and useful exercise.

Q: And did you air it, sir?

TAYLOR: Within the constraints to which I referred. I believe this was '58. The following year I retired and produced *The Uncertain Trumpet*, which was a formal statement of this issue in a more or less compact form.

Q: Are there any other occasions during that period?

TAYLOR: That stands out just because of its conspicuous nature, but I have nothing other than my recollection of many discussions with Senator Johnson, hearings before him, and his great interest, as I say, in the Armed Services and the problems of the men in uniform.

Q: Did you have many sort of private sessions with him?

TAYLOR: No, I don't recall any. I would see him occasionally socially around town. But again, this was far from being an intimate relationship.

Q: Did you formulate any opinions at that point as to the possible political career of -- ?

TAYLOR: He was known as very energetic and as a comer in the Senate. I would see his hand in the Pentagon in the form of questions, interrogations, expressions of interest on a thousand-and-one subjects which were conducted under the responsibility of the civilian Secretaries of the Pentagon.

Q: What, in your judgment, do you feel has been the major foreign policy, defense-related problems of the 1960's?

TAYLOR: I think the easy answer is Southeast Asia -- Vietnam, Secondarily, I suppose, the Middle East situation. That's certainly true today, and I think both of those problems, of course, have roots well in the past.

Q: This, of course, would cover part of the Kennedy period Just prior to this, the Cuban missile crisis was of course involved in that era.

TAYLOR: I might say that my first involvement with President Kennedy was as a result of the Bay of Pigs. I was in private life in New York at the time and was called down two days after the Cuban Brigade surrendered to meet with President Kennedy. Vice President Johnson was present at the time in the Oval Room. I was facing a very shocked new Administration [over] this serious disaster -- disaster from a military and political point of view -- and complete uncertainty as to what really had occurred. After about twenty-four hours of discussing it with President Kennedy, Vice President Johnson, McGeorge Bundy -- the principal actors of the White House -- I agreed to undertake a review of the Bay of Pigs. I was to be chairman of an investigating committee, the other three being Bobby Kennedy; Allen Dulles, the head of the CIA; and Admiral Arleigh Burke, who was CNO at the time. So it was through the Bay of Pigs that I was recalled eventually to active duty in mid-summer, and then stayed on until 1964 when I went to Vietnam.

Q: General Taylor, in President Kennedy's campaign in 1960 he did, of course, concentrate very heavily on defense problems and posture. Had he had any contact with you?

TAYLOR: No, I was living in Mexico at the time and looking at this election campaign very much from a distance. I did, however, receive a letter from him while I was still in Mexico saying he had read *The Uncertain Trumpet*, and congratulating me on it -- just a few lines. That was the only contact I had with him, and I had no idea that I would ever be associated with his Administration.

Q: When you did come into his Administration -- this sounds like a loaded question, but did you have any indication that you would be going into the Joint Chiefs position?

TAYLOR: No, not in the slightest. I came down first hoping to get back to Lincoln Center, where I was trying to build buildings for the Performing Arts in New York; and deliberately set up a very tight schedule for the investigation of the Bay of Pigs so that within a month or a month-and-a-half my report was ready to be filed. But at that time, when that work was drawing to an end, Bobby Kennedy, as a go-between for the President, started propositioning me, so to speak, about coming back to active duty. I had no desire to do so, but it's awfully hard to say "no" to a President, especially one that's in trouble, and he was in trouble at that time. After some negotiation it was agreed that I would come back with the title of Military Representative to the President assigned to [the position]. I had no idea that I would ever really go back into uniform, although I was technically on active duty. I worked in civilian clothes and was in effect military and intelligence adviser to the President.

Q: During this period did you have any dealings with the Vice President?

TAYLOR: Only occasionally. I would see him at NSC meetings, for example; special conferences on various things. But he was usually just in a listening role. He very rarely took a leading part in the discussions of that period. In October 1961 I was sent by President Kennedy to Vietnam with Walt Rostow and four or five other representatives of the government to examine the situation and make recommendations -- which turned out to be a rather historic mission because it was a turning point in our relations with South Vietnam.

Upon return, one of the first things President Kennedy asked me to do was to see the Vice President and go over the whole thing with him. I went down to the Capitol, I recall very well, and sat with him for an hour or more going over all my impressions; first my report which I was about to file with the President and all the circumstances and all the impressions related to it. We had a very warm discussion of it in the sense that he showed a great deal of interest and, I thought, a rather unusual understanding of the seriousness of what we were recommending: that this was indeed adding to a commitment which had for awhile seemed to progress favorably but had fallen into very bad times the previous year.

Q: This is of course taking on what we call the advisory role in-

TAYLOR: The expansion of the advisory role, I would say, because we'd had advisers in Vietnam ever since 1954.

Q: That's right. Do you recall anything about the meeting or his response or reaction to your report?

TAYLOR: Well, just about as I indicated -- great interest in all I was talking about. I would say - - my impression at the end -- that he acquiesced rather reluctantly -- didn't put it in formal words -- that there were many uncertainties in this course we were going down, but it still looked like about the only choice we had.

Q: Any other particular occasions during his Vice Presidency?

TAYLOR: No, I wouldn't say so. Nothing stands out.

Q: Of course, in 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated, you were in the position of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Were there any changes in your activities and your responsibilities when President Johnson took over?

TAYLOR: Yes, very much so. One of the first things the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs would think about at such a time was "Does the new President have all the information he needs in relation to a sudden surprise attack, nuclear type attack -- that sort of thing." He has a very complex role to perform, extremely serious decisions to make regarding even the threat of nuclear attack. They're all recorded in a so-called black book which is carried wherever the President goes. So one of my first concerns was to get time in his schedule, which was tremendously crowded, of course, with all the things he had to do, a new President suddenly carrying those heavy responsibilities. My task was to get to him and to take the black book and to go through it and remind him of what he had to think about in a crisis.

He at least had to know where the sources of information could be quickly found in the case of crisis. I made that explanation to him. It's not easy. It's a complex matter. I frankly didn't feel that I had been too effective in getting all the principal points across. [I] then sought another appointment, which I got some weeks later, to go over a second time -- the contents of the famous black book.

In those early months, also, I recall very well explaining to him a very important decision that President Kennedy had taken with regard to the functions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. President Kennedy had been very unhappy over the support given him by the Joint Chiefs at the time of the Bay of Pigs.

One of the things which came out of that investigation was the feeling on the part of some of the Chiefs that anything that was not a strictly a military matter, they had no responsibility for. Hence they had no responsibility to warn the President if, for example, the Bay of Pigs -- which was being conducted by CIA -- looked like a dangerous and uncertain operation. That wasn't their business; and hence they took a rather detached attitude toward it. This was very apparent to the President, once he had a chance to see really what had happened in the preparation of the Bay of Pigs operation and its execution. He paid a remarkable visit in March -- I'd have to get the time -- to the Joint Chiefs in person and talked to them about his concept of their responsibility, and later confirmed it in writing.

Now, it was important because he emphasized that he as President couldn't consider just military aspects alone or political aspects alone of a given problem. He had a single problem and it consisted of many facets of many components. His decision had to take into account all factors. He looked to the Joint Chiefs not as military specialists, but as men of experience who had been about the world and had seen many aspects of foreign policy problems. He wanted the Chiefs to advise him in those terms as broad generalists in the field of foreign policy, not narrow military specialists.

To me that was a very important statement and gave a new and broader orientation to the task of the Chiefs than had any President before. It was so important that I wanted President Johnson to know that that was on the books. He listened very attentively. He neither approved nor disapproved, but with the knowledge that it was on the books he tacitly approved it because he never changed it. I'm sure if he were asked today, he would say, 'yes, that is indeed the kind of support I want from the Joint Chiefs.'

Q: When you first met with the President and reviewed the contents of the black book, did you feel that he had a basis on the information or were there areas he indicated he had not been informed?

TAYLOR: He had never seen the black book before. It was unknown to him.

Q: How well was he up to date on the -- ?

TAYLOR: I would say, he was not up to date at all on these particular things because actually -- . I wouldn't say they had been reserved for the President. All this information is for the President, and he, of course could have briefed the Vice President had he wanted. I got no impression he had ever done that. This was a new subject, or really a list of subjects as far as the President was concerned.

Q: Could you just briefly give me your assessment of what the most critical situations were at this period?

TAYLOR: Fortunately, these problems that I was concerned about, namely what the President does in case of an alert of nuclear attack never arose. So that this was just theoretical knowledge, but it could have been the most essential knowledge in the world under certain circumstances. I would say that he got to know all these things, but in the beginning we were throwing a lot of rather technical information at him in a hurry. I thought the first time was not enough and hence I asked for the second appointment.

Q: Did you feel particularly close to President Kennedy?

TAYLOR: Yes, I would say I did.

Q: Did you develop this type of relationship with President Johnson?

TAYLOR: Not to the same degree, although I had known him longer than I had known President Kennedy. It resulted somewhat from the different kind of work. I got to know President Kennedy best when I was in the Executive Office Building. I would often see him several times a day on many different subjects. In other words, it was as military representative that I really became close to President Kennedy. That closeness tended to diminish somewhat as I moved across the river into the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The physical distance from the President has a great effect. That's why the man who's outside his door is one of the strongest men in Washington. So I felt I had lost to some extent my very close feeling for President Kennedy just because I was farther away over there. With President Johnson -- I was never on duty in the White House with him. So I would say I've got to know President Johnson better as a consultant than I ever did in official life.

Q: You had just really a fairly brief period in there in which you concluded your position as the Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Did anything occur or happen during that period -- . I think it was about six or eight months in there before you took over your Ambassadorship?

TAYLOR: Well, nothing that really stands out in terms of our relations to President Johnson. We always had a tremendous amount of business going on, of course, between the White House and the Pentagon -- to include the Joint Chiefs. But nothing that I would say is conspicuous in recollection.

Q: I was thinking of the Gulf of Tonkin, but that happened later.

TAYLOR: That was later. I was in Saigon when that occurred.

Q: When did you first discuss with Mr. Johnson becoming Ambassador to Vietnam?

TAYLOR: Well, there was a sort of prolonged discussion of how to fill the vacancy that Cabot Lodge was creating in Saigon. Many, many suggestions for replacements were made. I was asked to suggest possible replacements; McNamara was; Dean Rusk, and so on and so forth. A great many people were looked at for the job. For one reason or another either the President

didn't want them, or they were in positions like Bob McNamara -- who himself volunteered for the Job -- as did Dean Rusk. Obviously they couldn't be sent to Saigon.

I was asked, would I be willing to go if the President wanted me. I said the last thing I wanted to do was to go to Saigon. "I've finally reached the top of the military profession. Furthermore, I have some family problems, for a very long period of time." I'm enjoying what I'm doing. I couldn't be out of the country

But regardless of that -- McNamara was rather a go-between. A President never likes to ask anybody for something and get a negative answer, for obvious reasons. Bob McNamara finally said to me, "Well, I think it's narrowing down to you; now, what about it?"

I said, "Well, I'll just repeat, it's the last thing I want to do personally, but if the President really wants me to go over there, I will. But I'll have to limit it to one year because of family problems I have here in the United States." After that word went back to the President, he asked to see me, and then formally tendered the position, and I accepted. I didn't tell him it was the last thing I wanted to do, but I did say, "I'm sorry, I really can't stay out of the country for more than a year at this time."

Q: Would you say that anyone was particularly influential in your recommendation?

TAYLOR: Recommending me?

Q: Yes.

TAYLOR: No. Of course, I was on very close terms with Dean Rusk and Bob McNamara, they're good friends of mine, and the President. I don't know that anyone was particularly -- I was obviously in the group to be considered. The way I describe it -- the press asked me about Dean Rusk and Bob McNamara -- also Bobby Kennedy who had been mentioned. What did I have that they didn't have! I said, "I have the invaluable quality of dispensability."

Q: Did you see any reasoning behind this? Of course, you were a very capable and logical candidate.

TAYLOR: There were many factors you could see. First, the place was going to pot very fast. Diem had been overthrown, and the place politically was in a turmoil. It stayed in a turmoil all the time I was there. The place never got better until I left as I often say. So the President wanted to send somebody that was known around the country. In other words, he didn't want to get a good professional named Joe Smith who had never been heard of. To strengthen the team and also to meet the obvious criticism, "Look here, why are you sending a general over to this highly complex diplomatic post?" he then got [U. Alexis] Alex Johnson to agree to go as my deputy, which was a very gallant thing for Alex to do. He was the senior, professional diplomat in the government -- and to take a number two job after being ambassador to two or three different places and being a very valuable man around town! But he's a lifelong friend of mine, and it was a great source of strength to take him with me. But it permitted the President to state that he had a good

team there, military experience and diplomatic experience, to deal with a situation which included both military and political factors.

Q: Was there at this early time the anticipation of the forthcoming build-up that, of course, did occur in '65?

TAYLOR: No. Of course, we didn't know we were going to have that build-up. The principal issue that I had in my year in Vietnam was how to get some political stability in the situation. I had five different governments to deal with in a year. Coup followed coup, and to stabilize the turbulence was the greatest problem. With that, there was the growing demoralization of the South Vietnamese at their own impotence, their own ineffectiveness.

My conclusions, which were based upon observations going back to 1961, were that sooner or later we would have to use our air power against the homeland of the enemy north of the seventeenth parallel. I hadn't been Ambassador more than a few months before I started recommendations to resume consideration of this course of action, which had been considered and rejected in the past. It was only after three terrorist attacks on American installations -- one, the Bien Hoa Air Base Just before the election; one, on the Brink Hotel in the middle of Saigon on Christmas Eve; and then finally the attack on Pleiku Air Base in February which fortunately took place when McGeorge Bundy was visiting Saigon.

After each one, I recommended air reprisals against targets in North Vietnam and was turned down the first two times. But along with Mac Bundy, with his reinforcing voice, we got agreement to retaliate for the attack on Pleiku; which really initiated the start of the air campaign which gradually expanded therefrom.

Concurrently, one of the arguments I had with the President was on the subject of our dependents. He was terribly worried about the American dependents. Even at the time I went over, he gave me a long talk -- "I think we ought to get them out Just as fast as we can." I asked him to please let me get on the Job and study this problem directly.

I hadn't been there very long before I developed a very strong feeling that there were many objections to taking the dependents out. It looked like scuttling and running to some extent. It would create added doubts in the minds of the South Vietnamese as to whether or not we were going to stay with them. There was great fear, great suspicion at that time that because of their inability to govern themselves, we were Just going to throw up the sponge and leave them at some point. If they saw all the American dependents go home, that would certainly increase their concern and probably increase their political instability, which was bad enough under the most favorable of circumstances. So that I held out against the President. He came back at me -- I first had filed a negative recommendation, and he came back, arguing the case back and forth. Finally it got to the point that I was urging, "Let's start bombing North of the seventeenth parallel in reprisal for these terrorist attacks." And he was saying, "You get the dependents out, then we'll talk about the air campaign." So eventually I put my protesting wife and all other dependents on air planes and sent them back to the United States.

Q: I remember hearing at about that time myself, personally, that it would have been very

difficult had an attack been made on the city to safely evacuate all our dependents.

TAYLOR: Yes, if the city were under attack. Well, that is quite true. It was always a possibility that almost anything could happen in the city. Why they didn't have more terrorist attacks in Saigon in that period than they did, I don't know, because the place was wide open to terrorist attacks. The President was very much worried about it. But it was the fact that we evacuated and then immediately started the bombing campaign that nullified the danger of demoralization of the South Vietnamese from the evacuation, because one offset the other.

Q: When you think about your tenure there, that one year, what is your feeling about the relationship of the President with his mission in the country?

TAYLOR: Well, it was very close, extremely close. He asked me when I went over there to send every week a message to him directly, not to the State Department. It is a practice that has been going on with all the subsequent Ambassadors to Vietnam. I welcomed that. There's nothing like having the feeling you can talk to the President any time you want to. And I used it as a device to give him personal insights -- in addition to the cables which of course are the formal formalized reactions of the mission. It's a great thing to be able to get your own coloration into the reporting.

Q: What is your reaction to the charge that the handling has been too much in Washington as opposed to there on the scene?

TAYLOR: I don't agree. This is a criticism made with regard to military operations. There was no interference with the military operations in South Vietnam when I was there, other than those which are obviously necessary. You couldn't let the military commander go running across international boundaries into Cambodia and Laos and various places -- not that the military commander wanted to -- but necessarily there have to be guidelines within which to conduct military operations. President Johnson and his government provided, I thought, very reasonable guidelines for the ground war.

Where Washington control became very exacting, and properly so, was in the attack of these targets in North Vietnam. Because here was the use of a military weapons for a political and psychological purpose. We were attacking those targets for three reasons. One, to give the feeling in South Vietnam that for the first time they were being allowed to strike the homeland of the enemy, the enemy that had been making their lives miserable for twelve to fourteen. Second, to restrict and make more difficult the infiltration of men and supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. The third reason was both psychological and political. It was to remind Ho Chi Minh and his council that were sitting up in Hanoi running a war at no expense that they were going to start to pay a price, and an increasing price as long as they continued.

Now, that being the case, the President then had to take into account the dangers of the expansion of the war. When we started bombing, we didn't know how China would react; how Russia would react. I think most of us didn't fear this, but you couldn't eliminate the possibility of an extension of the war resulting from the bombing.

So great prudence at the outset, I think, was entirely justifiable. That meant control back here.

The President is Commander-in-Chief, and he has the responsibility. If he wants to do it himself, that's his right. I didn't feel that President Johnson ever exceeded what normal prudence would dictate in controlling this very potent weapon, but also a weapon that entailed certain hazards.

Q: As Ambassador, what differences did you find in that capacity from your previous military career?

TAYLOR: Not very much, as a matter of fact. First, there was a very heavy military component in the task there, increasingly so as time went on. Also, it was a question of organizing a team of people representing various governmental activities to work as a unit, work as a harmonious group. That problem exists in the military profession. Also, it required an intimate knowledge of government here in Washington. I insisted on returning home every other month so that I could be here personally and talk to the President and talk to McNamara and talk to Rusk and the people around town. Something which my successor didn't do, and I would think he would regret it because there's nothing like getting right back to Washington to get the feel of the home front and also to bring a sense of reality of what's taking place overseas to the decision-makers.

Q: General Taylor, from the events that happened I'm wondering if there are particular things like Bien Hoa and Pleiku that you just recall the events as they occurred while you were there. I'm wondering how you ever got any sleep on that job.

TAYLOR: It was a seven-day a week Job; always has been; and still is. But it was intensely interesting just because there were so many things going on, and so many things going on very badly. I think most people would say *that* period was the trough of our policy. It was the black year. The fifth government I dealt with was the Ky government, from which has sprung the constitutional government today. Things got better after I departed. But it was a very strenuous year because of the uncertainty of whether you could hold the Vietnamese government together and get the Vietnamese people behind this war to a greater extent. So my problems were not military. The war itself I never worried about, but rather the political aspects of the problem.

Q: It was during this period, wasn't it, that there was a growing Buddhist uprising. So you were also dealing with that?

TAYLOR: Well, really, the Buddhist problem -- very much misinterpreted at the time here in Washington -- had its most serious consequences in the year of '63 when it resulted in the overthrow of the Diem government and his assassination. But that same group of radical bonzes (Thich Tri Quang, etc.) were still running around the country, were a tremendous problem because having tasted political success in overthrowing Diem, they wanted to continue to be a political force without any responsibility, but pulling the rug from under the recurrent governments. They were pretty successful a couple of times. But by the time of the end of 1965, we rather closed in on them, and also, on some of the generals who had been collaborating with these Buddhists. We got some of the trouble-makers like Khanh out of the country -- who are still out of the country, I'm glad to say.

By the end of that year, the South Vietnamese themselves were so discouraged by their bad political performance that they were getting to the point where they were willing to put national

interests ahead of their minority factionalism, which had been the great curse of the previous period.

Q: You said that you felt that this was misunderstood in Washington. Were they placing too much emphasis on this?

TAYLOR: In '63 misreporting, twisted reporting, had created an impression that the Diem government -- Diem being a Catholic and his brother and his immediate family very devout Catholics -- was guilty of religious oppression of Buddhists. Well, it never was.

It was really a small wing of the Buddhists allied to some of the generals who were anti-Diem in a -- really a conspiracy, which created a series of events including the burning of bonzes, which unhappily is not an uncommon thing in the history of Vietnam but to us in America it looked like a horrible thing. I can still remember the picture of the burning bonze on the front page of one of our weekly magazines. It shocked our entire country and created the impression that something must be seriously wrong in the relations between the great religions in Vietnam for this to take place.

Well, there wasn't anything seriously wrong. The religion versus religion issue did not exist. But it was rather the political groups, which included certain segments of Buddhists and certain segments of the Catholics who were vying for political advantage. It was a political game of alliances and of groupings based upon religion.

Q: Did you have any feeling that there was any Communist undermining or motivation in these Buddhist uprisings?

TAYLOR: We always suspected it but never proved it. Some of the Buddhists leaders were certainly following a course of action in parallel with what the Viet Cong, or Hanoi, would certainly have liked them to follow. But whether that was just empathy or whether it was actual conspiracy, no one ever knew. We never were able to prove a direct link between Thich Tri Quong and his people and the Viet Cong.

Q: General Taylor, did you cover the assassination of Diem in the other tape with the Kennedy Oral History?

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: Could I just ask you one for one statement on that just to be sure that it's in there?

TAYLOR: All right, and then I'm going to have to break off. It's three o'clock.

Q: There are many, many stories and charges that there was of course, U.S. involvement in that assassination. What is your view of that?

TAYLOR: There was a schism here in Washington between the senior advisers of the President on the whole question of Diem. We were not together in Washington. There were two groups.

One group said, "you can't win with Diem." That was their slogan: "you can't win with Diem! He's a tyrant, a dictator. He has a bad brother and a bad sister-in-law" and that was true; "They have come between him and his people. He can't communicate with his people. His leadership is deteriorating. We must get rid of him."

The other group, which I belonged to said, "Well, most of those things you say are true, but if you get rid of him, then who?" Well, nobody had an answer to that. They hadn't the foggiest idea of how to answer that. So Group B would say that it was a great folly to do anything that would encourage an overthrow of Diem unless we had a better solution, or at least even a solution, which was not the case.

That split existed all through '63 with differing interpretations of what these events meant that we were seeing in Vietnam. But, meanwhile, President Kennedy did not take a personal position. He was still unconvinced by either side. But he also favored doing what Ambassador Lodge recommended, that various sanctions be imposed upon Diem -- holding back aid, various things to remind him he'd better see the Ambassador and listen to his advice--something that Diem was not doing at the time, or was resisting at the time.

Well, you can't do the things like that without it being public knowledge. Just the very fact that the United States government was showing disenchantment with Diem, disapproval of him publicly, was great encouragement to the people who had been plotting against him for years; so in that sense our actions encourage the plotters. Simply by seeing that we disapproved of Diem's actions we certainly encouraged the elements that eventually overthrew him and assassinated him. Beyond that I know nothing. I know nothing of any direct American intervention, and I don't even know who killed Diem. I don't know who knows, as a matter of fact. He and his brother were found shot in that personnel carrier.

Q: General Taylor, this is our second interview, and today is Monday, February 10. We are again in your offices. We had been talking about Vietnam in our first interview. I would like to continue with that area and ask you, first, about our bombing of North Vietnam. Of course, this begins with the Gulf of Tonkin incident. I'd like to have your assessment of it and your activities regarding the bombing of North Vietnam.

TAYLOR: Well, with regard to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, my role was really nothing. I was simply a very interested by-stander and observer from Saigon, where I was the Ambassador. Also, of course, I was impressed with the Congressional resolution which followed the Tonkin Gulf incident with the very sweeping authorization it gave to President Johnson in the use of American military forces in Southeast Asia. But I had no part in it other than observing it.

With regard to the bombing of North Vietnam -- going back to my visit in 1961 at the behest of President Kennedy, the report which I submitted upon my return to Washington included a reminder that the day might well come when it would be necessary to strike the source of aggression, which was North Vietnam. We did not recommend it in 1961, hoping that we could settle the issue of aggression within the confines of South Vietnam without going to the North. However, by the time I got there as Ambassador, following a disastrous political upheaval in the wake of the assassination and overthrow of President Diem, I became convinced early that

bombing of the North should be undertaken fairly soon -- I thought about the fall of 1964 -- in order to pull the country together; give it a feeling that they did have a chance against the enemy of the North who had been at their throats then for some twelve or thirteen years. So as Ambassador I began to recommend that this be done following an evacuation of our American dependents in South Vietnam.

Then in the fall -- November 2, as I recall, of 1964 -- the enemy mortared our big air base at Bien Hoa with considerable damage to our airplanes and some loss of life. This was the first time the enemy had deliberately attacked an American installation, and it indicated a clear change of tactics on their part. I immediately recommended a reprisal strike against appropriate targets in North Vietnam. This was Just on the eve of the American presidential election. It was a most untimely recommendation as viewed from Washington. I'm sure it was received with very little enthusiasm.

Q: How did the Vietnamese leaders feel about this? Were you receiving their -- ?

TAYLOR: They, of course, were anxious all through this period to start striking North Vietnam, even though many of them were Northerners themselves. After the bombing started I would take around the target list to show the then-Prime Minister Quat where we were going to strike to get his concurrence. He would say, "Well, that's interesting. That's only about thirty-five miles from my uncle's farm." But he was perfectly happy about it. In fact, he was convinced that it was indispensable that we use our air power against the North.

After the Bien Hoa incident, on Christmas Eve the Viet Cong blew up the Brink Hotel in the heart of Saigon -- again an attack at the Americans. Again I recommended reprisal. It was not accepted. But in the meanwhile the debate was getting very intense in Washington. It was quite clear that they were going to have to take this step, reluctant as the leadership was to do so.

It was actually in February -- February 7, I believe -- that the next major attack on our installations took place. That was in Pleiku, again with considerable loss of life and damage to American planes. By pure chance McGeorge Bundy was visiting me in Saigon at the time so that both of us got on the telephone to Washington and reported, "Now this is the time we feel we must strike back." Plans had already been made, and strikes were off in the course of the next twelve hours against military targets in the southern part of North Vietnam.

President Johnson announced why he did it. He had three reasons. They were valid then, and I think they're valid now. The first was the point I've already mentioned -- the need to raise the morale of the South and give the people of South Vietnam the feeling that for the first time they were striking the homeland of the enemy. Second, to use our air power, insofar as air power could be effective, to limit and slow down and restrain the infiltration of men and supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. And then finally, to remind Ho Chi Minh and his advisers in Hanoi that they were no longer sitting in a sanctuary directing a war without paying a price for it. And *that* little by little, by the graduated use of our air power we could destroy everything of military value in North Vietnam which was above the ground. That was the story of the initiation of the bombing and I think the general reasoning behind it.

Q: There has been a lot of controversy around the bombing as it has continued over the years. What is your assessment of the effectiveness of it?

TAYLOR: I think the greatest testimonial has been the screams of anguish from North Vietnam, and the fact that they mounted a worldwide campaign for over two years to get the Americans to give up the bombing. To them it was a catastrophe. From that point of view I would say that it met generally the three points which I indicated as being the justification.

I think most of the skepticism has been directed at the fact that obviously it did not stop the infiltration. The answer to that is that the infiltration would have been much greater, much easier, much cheaper, and much faster had it not been for the bombing. So I have no question in my mind that it was justified, was necessary, and I regretted very deeply that we gave it up so cheaply.

Q: This is for the negotiations as of recent date?

TAYLOR: This is under the present conditions.

Q: We had several bombing pauses in there-

TAYLOR: Yes, I know that, and I was against those for the reason that it turned out that they failed. They failed, but at the same time they gave the enemy the hope that, if the Americans can be talked into a pause, they can be talked into a suspension. And if they can be talked into a suspension, they can be talked into a cancellation."

Your next question bears on very much of a related matter -- the introduction of American ground forces which took place just a month later. We started the bombing in February of '65 and the first troops -- the first Marine element -- landed in Da Nang in March. That was a very tough decision also, and I must say that I had doubts. I had no reservations about recommending the bombing. I did have reservations about the introduction of ground forces because it was quite apparent that once we started, no one could predict what would be required -- how far we would go. But it was the judgment of our military leaders in South Vietnam that by the spring of 1965 the military situation had changed so adversely, that General Westmoreland could no longer guarantee the safety of the great base at Da Nang against attack.

It was in December 1964 that for the first time, so far as we know, North Vietnam began to send to the South the tactical units -- regiments and divisions -- of its own Army. Our commanders in the north sensed the fact that they were being hit by forces well beyond the strength of those which had been present previously. General Westmoreland became very much concerned about Da Nang. It was for the purpose of defending that base *that* the first Marines came ashore.

In the course of the next couple of months the whole situation was seen more clearly as more critical than we had anticipated, and General Westmoreland also asked for troops to go into the Saigon area to protect Bien Hoa and the many installations in the Saigon vicinity. There were three purposes -- three missions -- given those troops. The first was to be responsible for the close defense of important American installations. The second was to control the immediate

environment of these bases so that they could not be mortared -- or at least mortaring would be made more difficult; and finally, to provide some mobile reserve of combat troops that could be moved by our helicopters quickly to enter the ground battle to assist the South Vietnamese when they had engaged an important target.

The necessity for it was the fact that if we hadn't done something, we would certainly have probably lost the northern three provinces. After that loss we'd either have had the harder task of rooting out the enemy after they got in, or conceding the North to the enemy. And that consideration accounts, I would say, for the troop build-up through '66 and '67. It was really to match the increasing escalation of the other side.

Q: Did you at the first introduction anticipate the number it would go to?

TAYLOR: I beg your pardon?

Q: When we first committed our ground troops there, did you anticipate the size of the commitment it would go to?

TAYLOR: No, I did not. I don't think anybody could. Nobody did. Always, as is appropriate, the military staffs in Saigon and in Washington had contingency plans -- in other words, the plans to put in ten thousand, twenty thousand, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, and so on -- simply a catalog of plans so that they could be implemented rapidly if the decision were taken. But no one undertook in those days to try to estimate what the requirement would be because it depended so much on how far the enemy was willing to go.

As to the appraisal of the military leadership and strategy in Vietnam I'm not sure whether you refer to the American, or the Vietnamese, or a combination.

Q: Primarily the Americans, but I'd like to know the Vietnamese, too.

TAYLOR: I would say that the American forces performed well beyond what anyone had a right to expect when they were thrown into action in a distant country against a very elusive enemy. But fortunately, beginning in 1962 under President Kennedy, our Armed Forces had been directed to prepare themselves for this kind of combat. Hence they entered Vietnam with an excellent training ground preparation for this kind of war.

I think their performance over there is testimony by itself. I don't have to praise them. They've achieved far more with fewer forces than anyone ever anticipated in a guerrilla war where the enemy has open frontiers and the possibility of retreating into sanctuaries to which we cannot follow him. Our American leadership, I think, has been superb. I don't know of any improvement that anyone could make to the general tactics and the strategy, under the ground rules which have been decided for the Armed Forces.

Q: What about the Vietnamese leadership and the -- ?

TAYLOR: The Vietnamese leadership was very spotty, more or less as was the case in Korea

where, as in Vietnam, we had the problem creating an indigenous army on the battlefield. Leadership is hard to come by in these Oriental countries, particularly a country like Vietnam where leadership was deliberately retarded or suppressed by the occupying foreigners -- the Japanese and the French and the Chinese before that. So it has been difficult to find promising young leadership, to cultivate it and develop it in order to meet the very arduous requirements of combat.

However, I think the record, when it's all over, will be good, considering the great handicaps of training forces in time of war. So they've been getting better all the time, but they're still far from being a modern or a sophisticated armed force.

As to the cost of Vietnam or the value of Vietnam, I suppose you would say -- I have not doubt in my mind that the historians twenty-five years from now, provided we end this in consistence with our objectives, will say it was a painful but necessary course of action on the part of our government.

As to how to regard Vietnam -- whether it's a civil war or a limited war -- neither describes it. It's a war of liberation, a people's war of the kind which has been announced by Peking, by Hanoi, and by Moscow as the favored technique for the expansion of Communism because it is relatively cheap; it can be disavowed; and it's not risky. It does not risk escalating into large conventional war, or a nuclear war. The spokesmen of all three capitals, Khrushchev, Kosygin, Lin Piao, Giap, Mao, all of them have proclaimed openly: "This is the way we're going to do it." So this is the real test of whether or not this technique, the "war of liberation", will succeed and become available for use elsewhere, or whether it's a disastrous failure -- which I hope it will be.

Q: Do you think Vietnam could be considered a mistake in terms of where it was, the political situation -- ?

TAYLOR: It's awfully hard to move Vietnam, you know.

Q: Well, for instance, perhaps it might have been in Thailand, or Indonesia, or-

TAYLOR: You go where the trouble is. In other words, we didn't pick this place. This is where the crisis occurred. It either had to be met there, or not met at all. If it hadn't been met there at all, then Thailand would have gone. Laos would have long since followed, and I suspect the Communists would still be in charge in Djakarta.

The negotiations, of course, represent a new development since last year. I personally think we made a mistake in showing overeagerness for negotiations, feeling that there's something miraculous in sitting down at a negotiating table. Having observed the long two-year session at Panmunjom, I was far from convinced that it was timely to start negotiations with Hanoi until the conditions were sufficiently unfavorable to the enemy that he would come to the table more or less compelled to negotiate in good faith and with some celerity -- without foot-dragging.

I think we have the assets now in the negotiations to come out successfully in the sense that we will eventually get a solution which allows the South Vietnamese to choose their own

government, and some kind of, at least, a cessation of hostilities.

The real question, I think, will be whether the of a settlement will be such as t encourage the hoped-for continued stability and peace in the region. It depends upon our own determination here in the United States not to get tired, not to get impatient, and to throw in the hat Just because this business gets dull and boring and unpleasant.

Having made a hundred-and-forty-nine speeches on the subject of Vietnam, I'm quite prepared to go on for another hour or so in this discussion, but I think that probably hits the high points of the Vietnam situation.

Q: Let me just ask you a few more things regarding this. I think one thing that has occurred so much is the speculation of how much the President was running the war -- what the communications were back and forth. Could you give me an idea of how much, while you were Ambassador, you were communicating with the President?

TAYLOR: Well, one communicates all the time with the President in a certain sense, because a mission such as ours in Saigon sent off hundreds of cables to Washington each day. In a certain sense of the word, they were messages to the President -- not that he read them all, nor should he read them all. I was charged, when I went there, to write the President each week my own summary of the situation, which I did, and which I always welcomed because I had a chance to be sure I was dealing directly with the President and not with the many officials that lie between the cable head in Washington and the addressee.

In terms of his control of military operations, there has been criticism, I think largely unjustified, that Washington exercised too much control over military operations. I would not agree with that because insofar as the ground war was concerned -- the operations within the confines of South Vietnam -- I know of no case where there was anything which I would call undue civilian interference in the conduct of the military affairs.

But the bombing of North Vietnam was a different thing. It was moderately risky because we didn't know at the outset just how the Communist world would respond. Conceivably this could have broadened the war in a way that certainly would have been undesirable from our point of view. It didn't turn out that way, but responsible leaders in Washington naturally wanted to proceed cautiously to sense the enemy reaction. And they did.

Actually the bombing of North Vietnam was the use of a military tool for political purposes. We were trying to influence the mind of the conduct and behavior of the political leaders in North Vietnam. That was the primary purpose. Hence it was only reasonable that the President would want to know just exactly how we were doing, what kinds of targets, and so on. So there was detailed control of the air war in North Vietnam, but no place else as far as I have ever observed. And I felt, because of the sensitivity of that air campaign, that a large degree of control was justified. I think perhaps there was too much control, but that's clearly a question of judgment. The fact that control came from here was entirely justified.

Q: We've had growing dissent and criticism of the war, and think it was topped off with the TET

offensive of last year.

TAYLOR: Because of a complete misunderstanding of the TET offensive. The TET offensive was the greatest victory we ever scored in Vietnam. We said so at the time, but there are too many people here who wanted to find defeat. They wanted to drag defeat from the jaws of victory.

Q: What do you think has been the effect of all the criticism and dissent in the United States?

TAYLOR: I think it's very unfortunate. It made it awfully easy for the enemy and encourages him to hang on. It's exaggerated in the press. The impression is greater than the actual fact. This all works against the interests of the United States. There's no question about it.

Q: I have read that President Kennedy did not believe in the domino theory of overthrow in that area of the world. What do you think Mr. Kennedy would have done in this situation? That's sort of speculative, but do you think we would have gone this far? Would we have committed troops? Would it have developed the same way?

TAYLOR: I think you should go back and read what he said in the time he was President. He made some very, very strong statements over and over again. I often quote as one of the most eloquent of his statements -- one made in 1961 to Congress -- where he points out that "the hopes of the people of the emerging nations are going to be resolved in Asia, and, for that reason, in the struggle for freedom in Asia (and he was talking about Southeast Asia). We Americans cannot afford to stand aside." Over and over again he made very strong statements on this subject. Just go read the record.

What he would have done -- I would never attempt to say I have been very impatient with some of his former friends who now pontificate on what Mr. Kennedy would or would not have done. I think it's unjust to his memory to undertake such speculating.

Q: Just one more question on this area. What has been your assessment of our pacification efforts there?

TAYLOR: It's not our pacification effort. South Vietnamese which we assist. It's the pacification effort of the South Vietnamese which we assist. It has been very hard, very difficult, because pacification, which really means rebuilding the nation in the rural areas, depends upon the degree of security. We found that in our frontier days we couldn't plant the corn outside the stockade if the Indians were still around. Well, that's what we've been trying to do in Vietnam. We planted a lot of corn with the Indians still around, and we've sometimes lost the corn. So there've been ups and downs in the whole pacification program resulting largely from the ebb and flow of security. As security becomes greater, as it is now, pacification will move along much better. But it necessarily lags behind; in point of time, the military operations which are necessary to attain security.

Q: Do you think we still could have a military victory in Vietnam?

TAYLOR: I beg your pardon?

Q: Do you still think that we could achieve a military success in Vietnam?

TAYLOR: What does that mean?

Q: Stabilize politically and militarily the country with a military force.

TAYLOR: Not with military force in itself, but you can't do it without military force. This is a combined effort in which we utilize our military resources, our political, our economic, our psychological resources. All have to be used. No one will do it by itself. No one ever suggested the possibility of a pure military victory. This is a straw man *that* the opponents of the Vietnam policy erect over and over again for the pleasure of knocking down.

Q: I think I was thinking in the terms of there not being negotiations.

TAYLOR: Yes, it's entirely possible, but that doesn't mean a military victory. You can have a tacit peace in which the other side simply fades away and never admits he has been there. They still deny in North Vietnam that they have any North Vietnamese forces in the South, although we happen to know that they've had seven to eight divisions. We have prisoner-of-war stockades filled with their troops, but they still deny it.

Q: What do you think has resulted in the U.S. standing in world opinion with our commitment in Vietnam?

TAYLOR: In the immediate vicinity in the countries which have the greatest stake, our standing has gone up enormously. In those countries that have no stake, it has become a political football in which we've been unjustly criticized. Although I must say that many times the criticism of the foreigners has simply echoed the criticism of our own press here at home.

Q: The phrase "credibility gap" has so much centered around our Vietnam war, and the public's lack of understanding of it. To what would you attribute this?

TAYLOR: I'm never quite sure what it means, but I assume it means the uncertainty as to the accuracy of reports we're getting on the Vietnam war. I quite agree that some reports are highly inaccurate, but most of them do not come from official sources. I don't say that necessarily critically of the press and the publicity media, for the fact is the country is divided into forty-four provinces. In every province the situation is somewhat different. So a thoroughly accurate report in Province A may paint one picture which is correct, and a different report in Province B may also paint a correct picture. Both are reported to us, and we don't know which to believe. We assume somebody is misleading us, yet both happen to be telling the truth. It has been a very difficult war, from that point of view, to report accurately, without bias, and avoiding dangerous generalizations. It is easy to acquire one or two facts and then assume they apply everywhere, where actually they do not.

Q: Do you think the fact that we've had such massive coverage of this has perhaps increased the

dissent and criticisms?

TAYLOR: Oh, very much so. Because the very magnitude and the volume of the reporting add to our confusion. We turn on our TV. We get a sequence of pictures all different and apparently talking about different things. I think most of our good citizens are not necessarily pro or anti-Vietnam policy. They're just confused, and just give up trying to understand something that seems incomprehensible.

Q: That about covers -- I know very superficially -- what I had in mind on Vietnam unless you have any further-

TAYLOR: No, as I say, I can hold forth for some time, but I think you've brought out the principal points very well.

Q: Did you have any activities regarding the Dominican intervention?

TAYLOR: Not in the slightest. I was not involved. I was away most of the time.

Middle East -- again, I had no role to play. While focusing my attention largely on the Far East as a consultant to the President, I was very much interested in the Middle East, but I played no part in it.

The Pueblo incident you might want to talk about. There again, I was very much an interested observer, particularly in my role as a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. I was, of course, thoroughly aware of the kind of ship the Pueblo was, the kind of mission it performed -- a very important mission that needs to be done. And that was about it.

When I read about the hijacking, I was, of course, surprised that North Korea had engaged in piracy of this sort, and had a strong suspicion -- which I don't think has ever been verified -- that it was related to the TET offensive which occurred about the same time. In other words, that they were making signals to us that if we weren't careful that there would be a new front opened in Korea. As I say, this connection has never been established, but that was certainly a suspicion I had at the time.

With regard to the Intelligence loss of the equipment, I thought it was very serious. As to the conduct of the crew, I would not make any comment. There's a court-martial going on at this time to determine the facts.

Q: I'd like to go into some more general areas. As you said, you've primarily been working in the Far East, but I did want to ask you about over the years about our relations with Russia and Colonist China -- perhaps emphasize Communist China.

TAYLOR: Well, those subjects are so broad really I can't do justice to them in this short period of time. Communist China, of course, is the dominant power in the Far East in terms of manpower and potential. The cultural revolution, which seems to be dying down, has certainly set back the progress in Communist China to a great degree. One of the China watchers in Hong

Kong, whom I talked to only last week, feels that they're about where they were now at the start of the Great Leap Forward. In other words, they're now lagging six or seven years behind what might have been called a normal schedule of development had the cultural revolution not taken place.

Q: You mean the first Great Leap Forward they had?

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: That was in '57?

TAYLOR: Approximately. I'd have to check my figures.

Q: And they would be five or six years behind that now?

TAYLOR: Well, they're about back to that point in terms of gross national product per capita, levels of food stocks, and things of that sort.

Q: I know this is your area. What brought about this cultural revolution, as they called it -- this upheaval in China?

TAYLOR: It was, so the experts say, primarily Mao's feeling that the revolution, of which he was the father -- that its purposes were being nullified by the new generation which was moving somewhat in the direction of the Soviet relaxation and readjustment of attitude. He felt that the goals of the revolution were being sacrificed and would be lost unless he intervened and threw the rascals out, which he proceeded to do -- the rascals meaning many of the senior Communist leaders who had been his associates throughout many of the years before.

He did this by an alliance between his own power group in Peking, the Armed Forces which have been rather surprisingly loyal to Mao -- in other words, there have been no internal splits within the Armed Forces; and then the militant youth have been utilized -- the Red Guard. The result has been a turmoil, a turbulence, a chaotic condition which certainly must be a matter for deep regret on the part of Mao, who is an old man and undoubtedly wants to leave his country better off than when he found it.

I think that we outsiders, we simply have to watch these developments, hoping that we can domesticate Red China to some extent -- bring it back into the family of nations; but certainly that objective is relatively far off now.

Q: Sir, in your career, have you ever had occasion to speak with Communist Chinese leaders?

TAYLOR: Never. Now, NATO is a subject in itself, and I think you'd better drop that.

I'll just comment on SEATO. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization was established, you'll recall, in 1954 at the time of the Geneva Accords. It reflected our lack of confidence in the Geneva Accords and in the ability to tranquilize Southeast Asia on the basis of those Accords. It

has been a target of criticism during our involvement in South Vietnam because as a treaty organization it has not taken part. This results from the fact that its membership does not coincide with the realities of national interests in that part of the world. You'll recall that the United Kingdom, France, and Pakistan are members of SEATO. No one of the three has any intention of making any commitment of any value to the support of the present objectives of SEATO in Southeast Asia.

On the other hand, the fact that we've had the treaty has allowed us to work freely with as important a country as Thailand in connection with our operations in South Vietnam. So it has been of indirect value, although certainly as a coalition it has done nothing directly to assist our purposes in Southeast Asia.

Q: Do you think that it's going to have a future of strength?

TAYLOR: I would hope that in the review of foreign policy which I am sure Mr. Nixon's Administration intends to make that we would look SEATO over and decide whether we need that particular coalition. I doubt it in its present form. Or whether it would be possible and desirable to put together a new coalition of those countries that really have a commonality of interest and are willing to put something on the line; in other words -- a changed membership.

Now I'm afraid I'm going to run out of time if you're not careful here. Again, national security is such a broad subject I wouldn't be able to deal with it here.

Q: Let me just ask you then -- what do you think our position should be on deployment of ABM systems?

TAYLOR: That, again, is a matter that I would have to study a great deal. I've not believed in the so-called "thin" deployment against the Chinese threat. I think if I restudied the arguments and examined the technical feasibilities that I would still feel that there is a justification for an anti-ballistic missile system and deployment, but one primarily directed at improving the deterrent capability of our strategic forces rather than that uniformly thin kind of protection which is implicit in the present plan.

Q: Part of this proper mix of nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities that I was asking about, of course, reflects some of your own work on which you-

TAYLOR: Well, that's very true. The answer is that we need both. It's a question of judgment just where the right balance lies. I certainly felt that under the Eisenhower Administration the emphasis on nuclear capabilities was out of balance -- over-balanced -- in that direction. I felt that the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations brought it back into about as good balance as I personally could recommend.

I think we're losing the idea that we can talk in terms of superiority in nuclear forces. Some of our public men still seem to think that we can say we're superior or inferior in strategic weapons. I don't think so. I like the term sufficiency. If we get enough, we ought to stop regardless of what that number is in terms of the number we think the other side has. But the question of how much

is enough is perennially the most difficult question for the Secretary of Defense to answer, and also for the President -- not only for nuclear weapons, but for non-nuclear weapons, for anti-submarine warfare, for all the categories of military forces.

Q: The phrase 'massive retaliation' is being brought up again in terms of perhaps we should have more massively, if not nuclearly, committed ourselves in Vietnam.

TAYLOR: Who said that?

Q: I think I've just been reading it in the papers. What is your impression of that?

TAYLOR: I think there's a very good point for a part of the question. I mentioned that we used our air power slowly, gradually, giving Ho Chi Minh ample time to reflect on consequences. There was a certain logic in support of that gradualism. On the other hand, the military commanders would certainly say that's not the way to use air power or any other kind of power. Once you decide to use your military weapons, you should use them rapidly with maximum effect and with the benefit of surprise. I think there's a real question of whether we might not have achieved our end of shocking Ho Chi Minh into submission had we had all our bombing in one month rather than in three years. However, with regard to nuclear weapons I would say I know of nobody with any responsibility ever suggesting that this was a place for nuclear weapons.

All right, what would you like me to speak on next here?

Q: I'd like to ask you what you think the future trouble spots have been, perhaps incorporating in this what have been, besides Vietnam, the major defense-related problems of the '60's?

TAYLOR: I think the history book is pretty clear on that. Today, and throughout most of the decade, in addition to the Far East -- Korea and South Vietnam -- we've had the problem of the Middle East, which is still there unresolved. It's one of those areas where even with the wisdom of Solomon and the power of Caesar, it would be very difficult to know exactly what to do. I'm afraid that problem's going to carry over for some time to come.

Meanwhile, there are endless possible trouble spots. We never know where they're going to turn up. The Dominican Republic Affair nobody ever planned; nobody ever anticipated. All the volatile new nations may conceivably become spots for concern. I think one of our great questions that we'll be faced with in the next decade is when to intervene and when not to intervene overseas. Where is there a true American interest, where there is not.

In a certain sense of the word we have some interest in every square foot of the globe reduced in size as it is by modern communications. On the other hand, we've discovered what it is to try to stabilize one small part, namely South Vietnam -- the cost in men, treasure, and effort, national and international standing. So I think we'll be much more prudent following Vietnam, but still that problem will be with us.

Q: Do you think it has made us wary of this type of commitment?

TAYLOR: I think so, very much so. Having said that, I will then point out that after Korea we had the cry, "Never another Korea," and that was in '53. In 1954 President Eisenhower signed a letter to President Diem offering him aid in South Vietnam. In other words, even while the cry was still in the air, "no more Koreas," we were laying the foundation of our commitment in Vietnam.

Q: Sir, some of your earlier works and writings have talked about Defense Department organization, and of course during Mr. McNamara's tenure there was a reorganization and changes. I'd like to have an assessment of that related to your previous-

TAYLOR: I generally have been a great admirer of Secretary McNamara. I didn't necessarily agree with all the things he did, but he did so many fine things. I think that his balance sheet is very strongly on the plus side.

Mr. Clifford was not in office long enough to leave a lasting imprint on the organization. He kept it the way he found it and left the detailed operations to his very experienced deputy, Mr. Nitze.

Q: Can you offer me a comparison of these two men, having worked with them?

Well, they're quite different. Mr. McNamara is an organization man, a doer, the operator type. Of course, he had been a Ford official -- a Ford president -- and was used to handling large organizations. He'd had a good training in cost analysis and systems analysis and that sort of thing which he put to work -- perhaps some will say overworked -- in dealing with the military problems.

Mr. Clifford's a lawyer -- a very able lawyer. He's an expert in public relations. He had very, very friendly relations with Congress, with the public, with the press, and worked at those things leaving the operation of the Pentagon largely to Mr. Nitze.

Mr. McNamara was the other way. He was oriented inwardly toward his own shop, and was reputedly brusque and metallic in his public relations and that sort of thing. So they both had their strengths but in different categories.

Q: Do you think the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has changed and improved?

TAYLOR: Changed and improved. I don't like to say exactly -- improved against what? I would just say the Joint Chiefs of Staff role was, and should be, a very strong one under any Secretary - - in spite of the undeserved reputation of Mr. McNamara of downgrading the military, as the press would put it. I didn't agree with that at all. He was a very sympathetic listener to the Joint Chiefs. He gave them their day in court. They had a chance to argue their case. He didn't necessarily follow their advice, but he certainly gave them a chance to be heard. How the Chiefs-Secretary relations are at the present time, I'm not really close enough to the present officials to Comment.

Q: I was thinking in terms of your book, The Uncertain Trumpet, where you had talked about the

weakness in the system of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

TAYLOR: I would say things have improved since then. The great weakness then was that there was no Secretary of Defense during most of the time that I was Chief of Staff of the Army who was willing to decide different issues. So the result was it left the Chiefs wrangling all the time with their disputes unresolved. Important issues were pushed under the rug, as we say, and left there for years at a time.

One of Mr. McNamara's great qualities was he insisted on these things being brought up to him, and he would decide them if the Chiefs couldn't. That's all to the good for the general business of the Pentagon.

Q: Do you feel that there is good communication between the Secretary of Defense and service organizations?

TAYLOR: I don't observe that relationship. You're talking now not about the Joint Chiefs, but talking about the Secretary of the Army, Secretary of the Navy, etc. I'm so far away from that area I haven't observed it. Even when I was Chairman, I was only in the JCS area, and not in the service channels, so I was not a direct observer of what went on.

Q: Your position now to President Johnson as his special consultant, was it primarily on the Far East? Could you tell me just a little bit -- ?

TAYLOR: I received a letter from him that made the world my oyster, but I necessarily decided to bite that oyster in digestible quantities. I spent most of my time on the Far Eastern questions, generally on Southeast Asia. Also, as soon as I got back in '65, I worked on the organization of the federal government for overseas operations. That work has resulted in the so-called NASM 341 organization that set up the Senior Interdepartmental Group and the regional interdepartmental groups, and made the Secretary of State the President's representative for overseas affairs. That was consummated in March 1966, and has been in effect until the present time. They're tinkering with that now to adjust it to the requirements of Mr. Nixon.

Q: And could you tell me what other activities highlight -- ?

TAYLOR: Oh, I think that's about all. After that reorganization was accomplished, I attended largely, as I say, to the Far Eastern affairs, making occasional trips out to the Far East; meanwhile trying to run a private business, which has made for a rather complicated life.

Q: About how many trips did you make to the Far East in this position?

TAYLOR: I'd have to get out my diaries. I would say four, perhaps five.

Q: Were these in terms of seeing the situation as it was; or was it communicating -- ?

TAYLOR: Really keeping abreast. And on one occasion I went with Mr. Clifford. We went for the purpose of visiting the other countries who were contributing forces to South Vietnam to

carry a Presidential message to them, and also to review the situation in Saigon.

Q: Could you offer me any sort of a comparison, having worked both with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kennedy during their presidencies? What is your opinion of how these men compare, or do not compare?

TAYLOR: I wouldn't compare them in terms of -- . It's impossible to compare them in terms of the effectiveness of the Administrations, and so on. We're all too close to these events. As individuals, of course, they were quite different in personality; different in age, background, and outlook on life. I wouldn't say one was better or worse than the other. They were just quite different.

President Kennedy had a great personal charm and, I would say, instilled a great loyalty and inspired team play on the part of his associates. President Johnson was more difficult to get to know, but once you got to know him, you could see what a strong character, what a determined man he was, and I acquired a great admiration for him in my association with him. He had the reputation, as you know, of cracking whips over his subordinates. I never saw that. My relations with him were extremely pleasant. And I valued my association with him. Of course, I had a particularly warm affection for John Kennedy and all his family.

Q: I'd like to Just go to this last area of the Johnson Administration and your assessment of it. I think primarily because the Vietnam war has been such a large part of his Administration that it's almost attached to Mr. Johnson and his resultant unpopularity. I'd kind of like to get your ideas on that.

TAYLOR: I think we're going to find a great change, and a surprisingly quick change, in the public attitude toward President Johnson's Administration. I thought even in the last weeks of his Administration that the editorial comments and the attitude in many quarters which had been consistently hostile to him throughout his Administration were moderating. I think we all recognize that he carried a tremendous load, almost alone, in adhering to our policy in South Vietnam, which he was convinced was correct. I'm convinced he was right. I think ten years from now you'll find that the history books given him a very high rating, Just as they have given a very high rating to President Truman for his great courage in the Korean War.

In his domestic accomplishments, the Vietnam war so over-shadowed the public attention that we've missed the fact that his domestic program was one of the most extensive, the most comprehensive, of any President in modern times.

Q: General Taylor, do you have any further comments?

TAYLOR: No. Just thank you for allowing me to contribute, and I hope this will be of some use to the record of the Johnson Administration.

Q: General Taylor, were you satisfied with the forceful response of the United States to the

North Vietnamese attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin in August of 1964?

TAYLOR: Well, first I would say that in Saigon we did not get an immediate interpretation from Washington as to what had happened. However we intercepted the same information that Washington got and none of us questioned the fact that our ships had been attacked by North Vietnamese boats on both days. I can't say we made an analytical study of the evidence, but it seemed an obvious fact that attacks had taken place. True, it had done no real damage to our ships, but nonetheless it was an act of defiance of U.S. Navy to rush out into international waters and attack our ships, even if they didn't do a good job of it.

I was surprised and disappointed we didn't retaliate for the first attack and waited till the second. But I was happy that some retaliation took place, bearing in mind that it was really a symbolic kind of thing that didn't do any great damage to the enemy and wasn't expected to.

Q: Would you have preferred the attacks be more extensive, perhaps, or the targets different?

TAYLOR: I didn't feel strongly about it because I still didn't know really how the navy felt about the extent of the attack, so I accepted it as a reasonable decision.

Q: Now, there were other incidents in the fall and early winter of 1964 which many authorities also felt invited retaliation. There was the attack at Bien Hoa against the B-57s. There was the bombing of the Brinks Hotel in Saigon around Christmas. And we didn't retaliate for those. How did you feel about that?

TAYLOR: Well, I recorded my views in Swords and Plowshares in considerable detail. I felt the attack on Bien Hoa was a turning point because it was the first case where the Viet Cong had directly attacked an American installation. It seemed a warning that henceforth the Americans were going to be targets just as were the South Vietnamese. Hence I recommended at once a retaliatory strike in North Vietnam. Now bear in mind this question of the use of air power had been under discussion for a year at least, so my recommendation wasn't hitting Washington cold. I had cabled several times that I thought we were playing a losing game since the fall of President [Ngo Dinh] Diem and all the chaos which had followed, and that, sooner or later, we were going to have to avail ourselves of this weapon which had never been utilized, namely our air power.

So I'm sure the President would have said he wasn't surprised to get this cable from me recommending retaliation for Bien Hoa. But as you may recall, that was about two days before the presidential elections at home. I knew that my cable was going to be an unwelcome message to get in the White House. I don't know that I bet with myself, but I was not surprised when it was turned down. But it was clear in my mind that we should be ready to retaliate for any future incident of this sort. I should remind you that this retaliatory use of air power was a different issue from the larger question of using air power to reduce the war-making, war-sustaining capability in the North.

Then on Christmas Eve, the Brinks incident occurred -- a clear case of terrorist action against an American officers' billet. It was very fortunate that the damage was light. But I recommended

retaliation again despite the nearness of Christmas. I was much less sympathetic in this case with the negative I got in reply; we should have retaliated then.

Finally when the attack on Pleiku came along, I think I had softened up Washington to some extent by the two previous rejected requests. I had the good luck at the time of Pleiku to have McGeorge Bundy as a visitor from Washington, the first time he had ever been in Vietnam. I had a high regard for McGeorge personally and also knew he had great influence with the President^t. So when the attack occurred with him on the spot, I discussed it thoroughly with him and he agreed to support my request for retaliation. We got on the telephone and called Washington, got Cy Vance on the telephone, told him what had happened and that we both joined in recommending retaliation. He said, "I'll call you back." To my amazement, within relatively few minutes, less than an hour I would say, an approval came back authorizing our first overt retaliatory action against the North with air power. Again, it was a symbolic response. It wasn't expected to do much damage, but it started something.

Q: That was a rather short reaction time from Washington.

TAYLOR: Amazingly so, probably because this had been a current matter of debate for weeks and months before.

Q: Did you get the feeling that someone in Washington had said, "All right, if they do it one more time we're going to go"?

TAYLOR: I don't think that happened, but certainly they were ripe for a decision.

Q: Now, you have elsewhere documented the fact that you were among the more reluctant officials concerning the decision to send American combat troops to Vietnam. That's borne out in the cables in the Pentagon Papers, and in Swords and Plowshares and elsewhere. I have the impression from some of these documents that Washington on this issue was moving ahead of you in the spring of 1965. Is that true?

TAYLOR: Well, I think that is true. It had been like pulling teeth to get the President to agree to the use of air power, but strangely enough, he was more inclined, to use forces on the ground. The former seemed to me a much less difficult decision to make although both were hard. To go back a little, the attack on Bien Hoa had led to the question of how to defend other airfields, and the President had shown a surprising willingness to entertain the use of American forces to guard these airfields. Well, I wasn't for that. I thought it would have been a very bad decision, and won my case by indicating to Washington that an airfield is so big that, if the purpose is to keep mortar fire off it, we would need about three battalions of infantry to defend the perimeter. So counting the principle airfields, we would need a very substantial American force for the job. So that killed the matter.

But nonetheless, the President had revealed an attitude which was to reappear later. He readily approved our recommendation to put ashore at Danang the two battalions of Marines which had been afloat off that port. Shortly thereafter, he displayed eagerness to bring in troops faster than had been agreed in recent conferences in Washington. In Saigon, I was caught by surprise to find

that warning orders were going out to army and marine units around the world, which indicated that the President was thinking much bigger in this field than I was or than the tenor of recent discussions held in Washington.

Q: What do you think was the decisive argument for committing troops?

TAYLOR: For me it was Westy's insistence that he could not guarantee the safety of Danang without the marines who were offshore. It was Westy's judgment, plus Collateral evidence of ARVN weakness entirely consistent with that judgment, that led me to support it.

Q: Well, that would explain the motive to defend American installations with American troops.

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: But it seems to me that there was also an idea right from the first in some circles that we were going to carry out some kind of counterinsurgency activity with these troops as well. I believe that decision was taken as early as April 1.

TAYLOR: I'm not sure I get that clearly.

Q: Well, can we distinguish between a defensive mission for these American troops and an offensive one?

TAYLOR: Not really. I never tried. It may be true that Washington was slow in explaining to the American people why American troops were required. But there can be no question that the first Marines landed to defend Danang. But no thoughtful person would have expected them never to have another mission. When the first army troops came in, it was to improve the defenses of the Saigon region, but again with no inference that they would never pass to an offensive. There was nothing deceptive in the business that I ever perceived.

Q: That's pointed to among commentators who were trying to talk about the credibility gap, that officials in Washington sort of used the defense of the airfields as a subterfuge. The nose of the camel

TAYLOR: Really? I'd never encountered that. In fact, I never heard that charge made.

Q: That the Johnson Administration intended to commit American troops all along and this was an excuse to do it.

Concerning the bombing, which of course is its own controversy, there seems to be a difference of opinion among responsible officials as to what the bombing was supposed to accomplish, even what was the target supposed to be?

TAYLOR: Well, there was absolutely no excuse for anyone near the President in the decision-making field for not knowing exactly what he had in mind. I stated the purpose of the bombing repeatedly in cables from Saigon. When I came back from being ambassador, I made a hundred

and thirty-odd speeches on the Vietnam situation and repeated many times the three reasons we had for initiating the bombing of the North, in order of ascending importance.

The first was to raise the morale in South Vietnam, to give the feeling to the people for the first time they were able to hit the enemy in his home territory who were ravaging the South. I would say the bombing was successful for this purpose at least for a period of time, but no one expected that high morale would last forever. But the bombing was a good thing from the point of view of morale. But that alone did not justify it.

The second purpose was to use air power, to the degree that it could be effective, not to stop the infiltration from the North -- we had no illusion in the world that air power would entirely stop the inflow. But we also knew our aircraft could make it a lot harder for Hanoi's reinforcements, more expensive, more time-consuming to crawl down the trail and not come marching down with bands playing. We accomplished that purpose.

The third purpose was the most important in my judgment. It was to carry out a slow but inexorable barrage of air attacks advancing to the North, capable of convincing the Hanoi government that everything in the Hanoi area was going to be destroyed unless the leaders mended their ways. Unfortunately, we didn't do it in that way, at least not until the Nixon Administration.

Q: What about the argument that we hear from some high-ranking military officers that gradualism, as you have suggested, was quite the wrong way to approach it?

TAYLOR: Yes, that's correct. From a strictly military point, there was little to recommend the hesitancy with which we used our air power -- a series of short advances of the bombing interspersed with pauses of several days to see how Hanoi would react. It was a far cry from the massive attacks we made against Germany to destroy the enemy and his war-sustaining means just as rapidly as possible.

Yet I supported the gradualism at the start, to feel out the reaction not of*Hanoi but of Moscow and Peking. Dean Rusk, by no means a timid man, emphasized the possibility that these great communist powers might be committed by treaty to send forces to the aid of North Vietnam if attacked by a third party. Hence, there was good reason*for us to go slow with the bombing at the outset.

But it took only a month or two of a slow advance to convince me at least that neither Peking or Moscow were paying much attention to it. From that time on I was in favor of increasing the magnitude of the attacks and eliminating the pauses between them. That might give the impression of inexorability that was so important. But it didn't turn out that way because there was a strong group of advisers to President Johnson who kept urging the importance of pauses to give Hanoi a chance to send us a signal -- of what sort I was never sure. We didn't need any signal. We didn't need anything, but capitulation. But each time we stopped the bombing, even for twenty-four hours, we lessened whatever psychological value was in the operation.

Q: Do you think it would have been possible to destroy Hanoi's ability to support the insurgency

in the South?

TAYLOR: We could have flattened everything in and around Hanoi. That doesn't mean it would stop the war, but it would certainly have made it extremely difficult to continue it effectively. North Vietnam was a highly centralized communist state, and we could have certainly scattered the leadership into the jungles from which it would have been very difficult to conduct their war in the South.

No one ever asked me the question, but of course, our strategy was always militarily unsound. We should never have been fighting the war in the South; we should have been fighting it in the North to begin with.

Q: Of course, politically that's another story.

TAYLOR: Now don't bring in these details.

(Laughter)

Q: Red China is not really a detail, I guess.

TAYLOR: Many times in post-war years in the course of lecturing at war colleges, students have questioned the quality of U.S. strategy in Vietnam. It's hard to defend. At the time of my visit to Vietnam in 1961, why didn't I foresee a long, drawn-out guerrilla war and, to avoid it, recommend a declaration of war against Vietnam and an amphibious operation directed at Hanoi?

I have to admit that it never occurred to me to make such a recommendation. We didn't foresee the toughness and endurance of the North Vietnamese or the ineptitude of the South Vietnamese leaders in unifying their own people and in using the many forms of aid the U.S. would give. Nor did I anticipate the domestic divisions in the U.S. that eventually forced us to abandon our allies and come home in humiliation.

Q: Walt Rostow has said that the bombing was more effective after March 31 of 1968 than it was before because it was more concentrated. Would you agree with that?

TAYLOR: I don't recall that March 31 marked any great change in that.

Q: The time when the bombing was limited to the 20th Parallel in 1968.

TAYLOR: Well, I never felt in that period the bombing was doing any real good although it was better than no bombing at all. It was never really effective until the Nixon Administration, when our air force had their new bombs and much greater latitude in using them.

Q: The smart bombs?

TAYLOR: Yes. Creating the impression we could take out any target and do so quickly and with

little pilot exposure.

Q: Were you able to keep track of the bombing after the Johnson Administration had left in any way except through the newspapers?

TAYLOR: I followed the entire situation as best I could. And there's very little you can't follow in the American press. Of course, you get plenty of contradictory bits of so-called information about many events. Since retirement, I think I know about as much about the military problems of the country in a broad sense as I did when I was chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I am ignorant of a tremendous amount of detail, of course. But what I know is the kind of knowledge the decision-maker needs, whereas as chairman I had to have as much of that as I could assimilate, plus detailed knowledge of the technique, capabilities, and administration of the armed forces.

Q: Were there, in retrospect, any crucial personalities, decisions, turning points that you look back on and think, gee, I wish this instead of that? That you wish things had gone another way?

TAYLOR: Now it's all over, I would say that the following decisions and actions on our part are the most regrettable: a) the dispatch of the August 24, 1963 cable from Washington to Saigon without proper clearance, which resulted in the overthrow and murder of Diem; b) our failure to exploit the victory of Tet and, instead, to treat it as a national defeat; c) our failure to declare war instead of being satisfied with the Tonkin Resolution; d) acceptance of the 1973 cease-fire in Paris which, coupled with subsequent congressional actions, obliged our U.S. forces to withdraw prematurely and thus lost us the war.

I have explained the reasons for my views either in our interviews or in my writings and lectures on these matters.

Q: Can I interrupt you right at this point, because chronologically I notice that you didn't mention Laos.

TAYLOR: Laos was not that important. It's true that, as I indicated in my report in Laos, the settlement we accepted there was a great discouragement to the South Vietnamese because they thought it was a sell-out. I was very unhappy at the time because I didn't think that triad of leadership called for in the settlement could possibly work. Yet actually it didn't turn out badly. Laos was never a major problem to us in Vietnam, except as a territory which we could not enter to prevent it being used as a highway from the North in reinforcing the South.

Q: May I posit a thesis with you? Now I'm freewheeling a little bit, but some things that you've said have brought some things to mind. I have seen it said that if the CIA had been allowed to operate in Vietnam the way they operated in Laos, they could have won the whole thing without a commitment of troops. Now, I think I know what your answer to that might be, but I'm going to put it to you anyway.

TAYLOR: It just makes no sense at all. Whoever said that couldn't have understood a) what the CIA did in Laos; b) what the complexity of the overall problem was in South Vietnam. I never heard a CIA representative ever make such a claim.

Q: Well, I'm not sure they said it at the time either. In retrospect it's always easy to.. .

TAYLOR: That sounds like [Lou] Conein. Have you been talking to him?

Q: No, I haven't found him, but I'm going to. Well, General [Edward] Lansdale has told me he's going to put me on to Conein.

TAYLOR: Well, it will be an experience to meet him, but for God's sakes, don't believe all he says.

Q: Oh, well, the people who read the transcripts will have to make up their own minds about that one.

TAYLOR: He's a character. He's worth meeting.

Q: I understand he's in the area. He's in McLean.

TAYLOR: Really?

Q: I think so. I think so. Well, General Taylor, I think we have covered the few things I thought we needed to go back over. Is there anything you'd care to add?

TAYLOR: No, I'm holding nothing back that I know of. I've told you all I know, and that's the time to give up, isn't it?

Q: You've been very forthcoming.

Q: General Taylor, can you tell me the reasons for your trip to Vietnam in 1957?

TAYLOR: By that time, I was chief of staff of the army, and I had not returned to the Far East since becoming chief in 1955. Hence I naturally included Vietnam, which had a growing military mission, on my schedule. I was particularly interested to see my old friend General Sam Williams whom I'd picked for the job for several reasons. One, he was a very fine soldier and a man of great character, also he'd been extraordinarily successful with the Koreans. The Korean army swore by him in the critical last days of the war when they were fighting off the last Chinese attack. So I had the feeling that Sam, while not looking like a diplomat, had something about him the Oriental military men would appreciate.

Q: Was that the battle of the Kumsong salient?

TAYLOR: Kumsong salient, yes.

Q: How did you find the country team state of affairs?

TAYLOR: Well, I found it was doing very well indeed, just as I expected. I spent, I think, only a

day and a half, something like that. I couldn't pretend to know too much about the details, I didn't expect to.

Q: Was that when Ambassador [Eibridge] Durbrow had come, or had he not come yet?

TAYLOR: I don't know. I saw him on one trip. I believe that was the one. Incidentally, this was my second trip to Vietnam. I'd been there in 1955 when J. Lawton Collins was the de facto ambassador.

Q: I see. Was there anything particularly that remains with you from that trip? The earlier trip?

TAYLOR: Yes. That was a very impressive thing. I came down from Korea. I'd been following the war from a distance. Then my war in Korea ran out, and I was very anxious to go down and see on the spot what was taking place in Saigon. Well, that was the time just after the exchange of populations; about a million anti-communists came down from the North and were settled in and around Saigon. There was just one mass of temporary camps, and I could see the kinds of people and get some idea of what the future problem would be in absorbing vast numbers of refugees.

Q: So there was a tremendous refugee problem, obviously.

TAYLOR: There was, indeed.

Q: Did you have any part in trying to deal with that?

TAYLOR: Well, we didn't have the means. We had no MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] of any size at that time so our means were not very great, but certainly General Collins in his capacity was doing what he could and reporting to Washington any needs that might be met.

Q: What was your overall impression of the job General Williams was doing? Were you satisfied?

TAYLOR: Oh, very much so. Very much so.

Q: There has been a lot of controversy about the kind of training that we were giving the South Vietnamese forces.

TAYLOR: I don't recall whether it had come up at that point or not. You see, the JCS viewed Vietnam always within the context of the defense of Southeast Asia, as they should, at least up to a point. And what they were thinking about was, "What should we do in case of a massive attack from the Chinese, perhaps combined with the North Vietnamese?" That concern had been lying around for a long while as one of those, call it a worst possible case if you will which needed serious attention. So that was the JCS point of view. They wanted the Vietnamese forces to be able to participate in the defense of Southeast Asia against a heavy conventional attack from the North. So that gave the initial orientation at a time when the Viet Cong threat was only a nuisance, certainly a serious nuisance, but had not taken the dimensions which it assumed later on.

Q: Were there any voices in those early days trying to tell us that we ought to be doing something other than that?

TAYLOR: Not that I recall, certainly not at that time.

Q: A related issue concerns not the type of training perhaps, perhaps the Joint Chiefs are not faulted for looking for a conventional threat from the North, but rather for attempting to equip and train the South Vietnamese as a sort of image of the American army.

TAYLOR: I would say that no American soldier would ever admit to doing that deliberately, but don't think it doesn't affect him, because you teach what your experience has taught you to a large extent. So the American influence certainly followed the path, generally, of the experience of the officers who happened to be the instructors on the spot.

Q: Were you aware at the time of any dissension in the mission over this particular issue?

TAYLOR: No.

Q: Are we still talking about the time in 1957?

TAYLOR: Yes, sir. The 1957 visit.

Q: Did you visit Saigon again before 1961?

TAYLOR: No.

Q: Of course that brings us to a very big year, in 1961.

TAYLOR: Which I recorded very thoroughly in Swords and Plowshares.

Q: Yes, sir, and I've made a definite effort not to rehash that insofar as I can, but I feel like I have to touch on some aspects of it. What was particularly interesting to you, that you were particularly looking for when you went to South Vietnam?

TAYLOR: My interest was guided exclusively, or virtually exclusively, by the directive I had from the President, which sent me on this mission to look at the situation in South Vietnam and to determine what was needed to be done to make our program successful. It was not to raise the question, "Is there a national interest in continuing our efforts?" That had been determined by the National Security Council the last time in May of 1961. My task was purely a matter of studying a situation which had been reported to Washington by several responsible officials as being deteriorated, and deciding what to do to reverse that trend.

Q: There have been stories of problems within the mission in Saigon at the time. Did you discover evidence of this?

TAYLOR: No, I did not. Now bear in mind, visitors like us going to a place like Saigon or any other Station of that sort, even though we were there I believe around ten days and worked very hard, each one of us -- we couldn't verify anything like the rumors that might be floating around Washington. As a matter of fact, I don't recall that it was [Frederick] Nolting's mission that generated the reports of the kind that were in Washington. It certainly was not on my checklist to investigate rumors. Later on, the internal state of the embassy became a serious question.

Q: I have heard that one of the more colorful members of your mission was an old Southeast Asia hand by the name of [Edward] Lansdale. Was he -- ?

TAYLOR: He was not a member of my mission.

Q: He was not?

TAYLOR: No, indeed. Never was.

Q: Well, then [David] Halberstam's story is --

TAYLOR: He was just getting a ride on my airplane.

Q: Oh, I see.

TAYLOR: No, he was not a mission member.

Q: Well, what was he doing?

TAYLOR: He had had considerable experience in the country. It was well known that he knew many of the personalities. He expressed a desire, I think, and as far as I know it was his request, to have a chance to go back and get a feel of things. And I welcomed his presence, because I realized that here was a man who to some extent at least was an expert, and [I would] be glad to hear anything he had to say.

Q: Well, did he report anything to you?

TAYLOR: No, he didn't come back with us, as a matter of fact. But he had made one of the reports that rather shook up the White House some months before, and I'd read that and I was very much interested. So I looked forward to seeing him when he got back. I don't-recall weever sat down and really talked over what he saw on the trip. I saw his cables so I had a pretty good understanding.

Q: So he didn't go to Baguio, then, after the mission?

TAYLOR: I don't think he came to Baguio at all. As a matter of fact, I had to intervene with the ambassador to get him to be allowed to go into Manila.

Q: Really?

TAYLOR: Yes. He was viewed by that particular ambassador as being, well, not dangerous, but as having contacts that might be misinterpreted if it were known that he were about town. I replied to the Ambassador, "All right, then none of us will come to town if Lansdale can't." We all went.

Q: Oh, really? That's interesting. I hadn't heard that. That's interesting.

As long as we're on Lansdale, let me ask another question which comes up in this context. Didn't President [Ngo Dinh] Diem ask that Lansdale be sent as some kind of a personal adviser or something of that sort?

TAYLOR: You mentioned that in your questions. I'm not sure that's the case. I really don't know but it has a certain familiar note. But then the question is, "Well, why didn't he go?" I certainly had no part in deciding one way or another because I didn't know at the time the request had been made. Of course, if Diem asked for Lansdale or anybody else, certainly if Washington were on the ball -- and they should be -- they would then ask Nolting, "Did you concur in this?" and if Nolting said yes, he'd probably go, and if he said no, he definitely wouldn't.

Q: So you're suggesting then that if he didn't go we might look at the embassy to see why.

TAYLOR: Well, have you talked to Nolting, by the way?

Q: No, sir.

TAYLOR: You ought to talk to him. He's right down in Virginia.

Q: He's on my hit list.

TAYLOR: Well, I'd be interested to know what he says.

Q: What was the relationship between Laos and Vietnam in 1961 when you first served there?

TAYLOR: I would say that from the point of view of Saigon, there was great concern in Saigon about Laos, both in the embassy and among the senior officials of the Vietnamese government. (Interruption)

Q: But the connection was primarily, from your point of view, a military [one]?

TAYLOR: No, it was the impact of Laos, the negotiations there, on the South Vietnamese. Their feeling was that the kind of solution with scotch tape being negotiated in Laos was going to break down, and the commies would eventually take over -- they had a way of doing this kind of thing. That feeling had a definite impact on the morale of Saigon, of the officials, to which were added the big flood of the Mekong and the assassination of the Vietnamese liaison officer with the Americans. This combination of things happening at about the same time as I arrived had created a great cloud of gloom over the whole official front.

Q: Now, when the so-called Taylor-Rostow report of this trip was written, you and Dr. [Walt] Rostow apparently both believed that it might become possible or necessary to apply some kind of military pressures against the North to cut off their support and encouragement. What kinds of pressures were envisioned at this time?

TAYLOR: Well, that was simply a warning we put in to the President, that we were giving him a long list of recommendations which represented in the aggregate something of a change of direction in policy. Actually, it was rather an intensification of effort toward the current policy, staying in roughly the original direction. But we also saw -- and we didn't have to be very perceptive to see -- that the real source of the danger of Vietnam was from Hanoi. While we had at least a chance to be able to build up the internal defenses in South Vietnam to the point of restoring normalcy to South Vietnam, it might not work. So don't think, Mr. President, we were saying, that we guarantee that this is all we have to do. We have a weapon that we've never thought much about using, namely an attack at the source. If this problem had ever been given to Leavenworth [Command and General Staff College] or the War College to resolve strategically, the choice would have been an attack on the North.

Q: This is a fundamental question, I think. In what ways did we see Hanoi giving concrete support and encouragement? Was it by infiltration or -- ?

TAYLOR: Well, I can't tell you just what the state of our intelligence was at the time except that it was very inadequate. I would say that perhaps that the most important message my mission brought back to Washington was that the intelligence we'd been getting on South Vietnam was so unreliable that we'd better start over again and try to erase any impression we had formed until we had reasonably reliable information to replace it.

Q: What was wrong with our [intelligence]? What kind of wrong impressions were we getting? Were we getting too good, too bad -- ?

TAYLOR: Well, it was essentially the weakness of the intelligence system of the Vietnamese. Bear in mind, we had a relatively small U.S. mission of only a few hundred, so that our intelligence people could do little more than ask the Saigon authorities to answer the very tough questions being fired at the embassy from Washington. Our people would get a question, thoroughly legitimate in most circumstances: "What was the Vietnam rice crop last year? How much was harvested and how does that compare to the last four years?" For a question like that, we didn't have [the answer] in the embassy, so our people just walked over and gave it to the prime minister or the minister of agriculture saying, "Please give us a reply as soon as you can." Well, [the] minister didn't have the answer either, although he wouldn't admit it. So he either went out and hastily collected some figures, or just guessed a figure and sent us a reply which we then fired back to Washington. Meanwhile our colleagues here in Washington recorded such data on graphs or charts, and assumed they knew the true situation.

Q: Who was our primary intelligence gathering agency? Was the CIA at that time primarily responsible?

TAYLOR: Yes, but State was responsible for political reporting. The military mission contributed nothing. For years there had been an unfortunate directive out to MAAG chiefs: "Don't use your people for intelligence purposes." So the embassy military attachés couldn't go over and talk to their military colleagues across the hall and ask them for intelligence regarding the armed forces they were advising.

Q: Isn't that rather unusual?

TAYLOR: It's worse than that, it's stupid. I discovered it as army chief of staff and I sent orders out to stop all this nonsense right away. Obviously a MAAG officer doesn't want to go around looking like a spook or anything of that sort, but every bit of knowledge he gets that's helpful to the government, he should report to Washington.

Q: Can you recall about when you took this action?

TAYLOR: No, I just remember my action when I discovered it.

Q: Is this when you were chairman of the Joint Chiefs?

TAYLOR: No. Sometime when army chief of staff. Apparently the directive never got to Saigon.

Q: Oh, I see. [When you were] chief of staff of the army. Oh, I see. Okay.

Of course, everyone talks about the bombing which later became such a big issue.

TAYLOR: Rostow and I weren't talking about bombing targets in our 1961 report. We were just saying to the President: "Bear in mind that the real enemy, the real trouble is in Hanoi. If we can't accomplish our purpose down here, we're going to have to do something in North Vietnam."

Q: Okay. When did General [Paul] Harkins go out, do you recall?

TAYLOR: He replaced [General Lionel] McGarr.

Q: McGarr was there at --

TAYLOR: McGarr was there when I visited in 1957.

Q: Oh, no, that was Williams.

TAYLOR: Oh, Williams, yes.

Q: McGarr would have been there when you and Mr. Rostow went, was he not?

TAYLOR: I guess that's the time.

Q: Because General Williams came back in the fall of 1960.

TAYLOR: I guess that's right. Yes.

Q: So McGarr would have been there just about a year. Why was [he replaced]?

TAYLOR: Well, we decided to upgrade the MAAG to MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] and to put a four-star general there. The question, "Who?" I nominated Harkins because I knew him well. I'd known him in Europe when he was [George] Patton's deputy chief of staff. I had him as commandant of cadets at West Point when I was superintendent, and I'd seen quite a bit of him after he took the command of the army component in CINCPAC. So he not only had the rank, he had broad experience and he was geographically near the spot in Honolulu. He was a natural. I nominated him without any question.

Q: The information from Saigon, intelligence reporting and so forth, did that get funneled through him on the way to CINCPAC, would you say, so that he had a feel for the situation?

TAYLOR: Oh, yes. It should have. He was at CINCPAC headquarters.

Q: Another recommendation of the report was that certain kinds of improved equipment be furnished to the South Vietnamese, including increased numbers of aircraft, I believe.

TAYLOR: And helicopters.

Q: And helicopters. And some armored personnel carriers, I think.

TAYLOR: Well, I'd forgotten about the armored personnel carriers. In fact, I don't recall them.

Q: Well, I have seen in various reports -- I'm not even sure where now -- the new M-113 --

TAYLOR: Not at that time.

Q: Not at that time? Okay.

TAYLOR: I'd say no.

Q: How did that work out? They did get this new equipment.

TAYLOR: Well, first bear in mind that it was expected that the light helicopters would be gradually fed in to the Vietnamese as they could fly them -- but not in the early phase. It gave our local commander great leverage to have helicopters and then loan them to the Vietnamese when he wanted to and thereby control their operations as necessary.

Q: This was leverage that could be used, then?

TAYLOR: Oh, yes. It was a secondary advantage.

Q: Did we get evidence in succeeding months after the dispatch of the helicopters that this was working out?

TAYLOR: Well, I'll just say that for the year thereafter -- we're talking about 1962 -- everything seemed to pick up. We followed in Washington, as best we could, the reports on the various things that we had recommended, how were they going. It took about a year at least to get a noticeable improvement [in] the intelligence connection. But in general, I had the satisfying feeling that we were moving along not badly. That was generally true up until 1963 and the Buddhist upheaval.

Q: Vice President Johnson visited Saigon, I think, in 1961 also. Did you have anything to do with that?

TAYLOR: He preceded us. I'm not even sure whether I ever saw his report as such. I was told parts of it, at least. One of the first things I did when I got back in 1961, at President Kennedy's direction, was to go to the Vice President and tell him everything I found, and frequently he'd say, "Yes, I saw that, too."

Q: So he didn't call into question anything that you observed?

TAYLOR: Not that I'm aware of. He seemed to be quite favorable to everything I recommended. I know of nothing to contradict that impression.

Q: At the time that you went to Saigon with Mr. Rostow, there were rumors that there was trouble in the country team. The press was carrying stories. There were beginning to be hints that all was not well between Ambassador Nolting and General McGarr, for instance. But you've said that you didn't have time to look into that, or if it was true-

TAYLOR: No. But I got an unfavorable impression of McGarr, myself, while I was there. I thought he was, say, throwing his weight around. For example, he was quite irritated that I wouldn't let him go with me when I talked to President Diem. I told him frankly that I had met President Diem, we would be speaking French, and I always had the feeling that in such an interview the smaller the audience, the more you get from your opposite number. He was very huffy about it.

Well, I discovered that if he'd been huffy to me, he'd been even more than that to other people. I think that professionally he performed well. But his time in Saigon was about up anyway, so I was very happy when the occasion came to relieve him and put Harkins in.

Q: Well, now, he'd only been there about a year, I guess.

TAYLOR: I thought it was more than that. I'm not sure.

Q: MACV was formed --

TAYLOR: I'll just say I felt very happy when [he left].

Q: All right, we'll leave it at that then.

Had you ever had the same impression with General Williams, that there was any problem between him and the Ambassador?

TAYLOR: No. Let me say this, though. Whenever you have a MAAG in a country, especially a small country, inevitably the head man in the local government tries to play him off against the ambassador. We found it so world-wide. It depends then on how good the ambassador and the general work together and don't allow themselves to be misused. Diem was always saying, "I can't get along with the ambassador," whichever ambassador it happened to be, "Ah, but General so-and-so, he's fine."

Q: That was Ambassador Durbrow, I think.

TAYLOR: Of course the reason is, the general has things to give that the country wants. He has tangible ways to help the country, whereas the poor ambassador, as I soon discovered when I became one, usually brings only bad news. So it's inevitable that there be an effort made [to divide them], and whether it's successful or not depends upon the character of the two men involved.

Q: I see. Okay.

Would you agree that press relations tended to get worse after 1961, more or less progressively?

TAYLOR: I wouldn't say 1961. I would say it wasn't bad when I was ambassador, because the interest of the American people in Vietnam was [not as great at that time]. The press had some representation there, but nothing resembling the size after our troops came in. That's when the flood came.

Q: Now 1963, I seem to remember, was a bad year with the press because that was when we had the Buddhist troubles.

TAYLOR: That's right. And the media were magnifying everything that took place. Yes, that was a bad year.

Q: Right. That was before [you became ambassador].

TAYLOR: That's why I don't have a direct feeling as [to] the intensity of relations with the media.

Q: I think you said in Swords and Plowshares that some members of the press had a vendetta against General Harkins.

TAYLOR: They developed one primarily because Harkins committed the offense of saying repeatedly that things weren't going to pot, we weren't losing the war and so on, and that

contradicted everything most of the reporters were sending back. And they didn't like Harkins for professional reasons and frequently for personal reasons.

Q: Personal reasons?

TAYLOR: Well, in the sense that Harkins got and exhibited a very low opinion of them.

Q: Oh, I see.

TAYLOR: Bear in mind that up until the army got helicopters, the press men, no matter how they tried, couldn't get any place around the country on their own. They wrote the dispatches at the bar of what was the famous hotel in Saigon?

Q: The Caravelle?

TAYLOR: That's it. The Caravelle Hotel. You could make a much better story there than you could sitting out on a hot log someplace in the jungle. So life was hard for reporters. They were very disgruntled and tended to hold Harkins responsible. Actually, neither Harkins nor the ambassador could do much for them, because until helicopters came, nobody could get around easily.

Q: Now there was a notorious case after the helicopters came -- I think it was in January of 1963, early January -- a battle at the village called Ap Bac.

TAYLOR: I remember there was such a battle, but I don't remember anything about it.

Q: Well, the gist of it was that people like Neil Sheehan and David Halberstam got out there, John Paul Vann was the adviser, and it was clearly a botched battle no matter which side you were on. Halberstam and Sheehan reported that General Harkins told them it was a victory when they saw clearly that it was not, and that seemed to have set everything in concrete after that. General [Earle] Wheeler came back from a visit about that time, I think. Do you remember him saying anything about the affair?

TAYLOR: I don't remember the incident at all.

Q: Okay.

TAYLOR: There were so many incidents in the course of this thing, that one I missed.

Q: Was the mission in Saigon as bad about leaks to the press as we hear it was?

TAYLOR: Well, you never know how to count leaks, or to be sure that something that certainly sounds like a leak is one. Yes, there were all sorts of reports and I have no doubt some leaks came out of the embassy, but again, you never can know for sure how many and who did it.

Q: Can you recall any particularly distressing [incidents]? I don't have one in mind, I'm just-

TAYLOR: No. Of course, the press was full of it. If you had brought -- the newspapers around here, I could perhaps remember the incidents. But there was certainly the strong indication that there were elements within the mission itself that were not loyal to the ambassador. That was my overall impression.

Q: How about the Vietnamese side? Was that pretty leaky?

TAYLOR: They were infiltrated constantly by the Viet Cong. They didn't have to leak.
(Laughter)

Q: I was going to ask you about that, but I'm going to save that-

TAYLOR: Again, you can't prove that. Now, there were just enough cases that you did identify, and it was so easy for the enemy to infiltrate the government in that sort of civil war, that one had to assume the enemy sooner or later would get anything you gave to your local colleagues in Vietnam.

Q: Can you think of any operations that were compromised in that fashion?

TAYLOR: No.

Q: Okay.

TAYLOR: I have been talking about very small operations, not a D-Day kind of thing in which a leak could be truly disastrous.

Q: You've anticipated one of my questions about intelligence and the problems that existed with it. Can you remember how or when, if ever, you first noticed that it was getting better, that you had more confidence?

TAYLOR: You can't measure the quality of intelligence by a thermometer. Little by little you find you are getting credible answers to questions which previously went unanswered. All the while, we were putting a tremendous effort into this thing. Our electronic surveillance of the radio nets of the VC eventually -- and I don't recall what year -- reached a very high peak of effectiveness. And while you could never read the messages, just by the study of the shift of the location and numbers of headquarters, you could infer a tremendous amount of fact which was extremely valuable.

Q: Now, you came back to Saigon in 1963 with Secretary McNamara, I believe.

TAYLOR: I've made numbers of trips, yes.

Q: Was this a subject of concern at that time that you recall? The quality of intelligence?

TAYLOR: Well, we had a long list of matters to check every time. As all my trips were similar,

without seeing the trip agenda, I couldn't be specific about any one of them.'

Q: I would have sent you some, but this is before our Library has documents and I didn't have access to the Kennedy [Library's].

TAYLOR: I never had access to any of these when I wrote Swords and Plowshares. I had a rather limited collection of copies of my own cables and things of that sort -- also a fresher memory than now.

Q: The reason I bring that trip up is because there's been speculation about the fact that John Richardson, who was then station chief of CIA, was recalled or came back just a few days after the mission left. Was there some connection between those two things?

TAYLOR: You'll have to have [John] McCone about that, because he relieved Richardson -- it didn't affect me in any way. I had plenty of other trouble without nosing into the cause of his relief. I'd met Richardson; he acted and talked like a good man. I think his record with CIA was very favorable, but I gathered he had got in a jam with [Henry Cabot] Lodge and that led to his relief. That's adequate reason, because an ambassador certainly ought to be satisfied with his principal intelligence officer.

Q: Was there some dispute between agencies at this time over who was supposed to be the prime intelligence gatherer?

TAYLOR: No, none that I know of. You see, CIA is an unusual situation. It is a collecting agency itself, and yet its director has a coordinating responsibility for all the other agencies in intelligence. Its representatives in the field don't really command. They're supposed to coordinate, supervise, and be sure one agency doesn't get in the way of another. When there are tasks to be done and one or more agencies that might undertake it, the local CIA man is supposed to say, "Well, give it to the army or the navy or I'll take it," or whatever it happens to be. The fact that Washington may get several channels of intelligence has never been viewed as necessarily bad. That's supposed to be reconciled in Washington. CIA does the shaking out, but they're supposed to report -- and as far as I know they usually do -- that "we're interpreting the matter this way, but we should tell you that the army interpretation is different" Which is fair enough.

Q: Was there effective coordination between our advisers at that time and the CIA?

TAYLOR: Advisers? You mean those in the field?

Q: In MACV, yes.

TAYLOR: In the field?

Q: Yes, sir.

TAYLOR: Well, I don't know how they [coordinated in the field]. I would know how they coordinated at the local level in Saigon. So far as I know, it was all right. Very good.

Q: Okay. Of course, when Diem was overthrown, our intelligence has been faulted for not giving us very much warning about that. You say you were surprised, for example. You said -- I think I'm quoting you -- that you were as surprised as anyone.

TAYLOR: Well, Harkins will tell you that he sent a cable about twenty-four hours [before the coup], that he had a rumor to that effect. But he'd sent probably a half dozen other cables, giving similar reports of impending coups at different times, which didn't come off. It was the old business of the dulling effect of too many cries of "Wolf!" It didn't make any difference in this case; we couldn't have done anything about it had we known it was about to occur. But it is true that the day the news came in to Washington, we were certainly surprised.

Q: Oh, yes.

TAYLOR: Because of the absence of any action following the dispatch of the famous cable of August 24, we became convinced that the generals were never going to get together and do anything.

Q: Was the Diem coup a mistake?

TAYLOR: Oh, it was a disaster, a national disaster.

Q: For both sides, do you think? Both for the Americans --

TAYLOR: Yes, both for Americans and South Vietnamese.

Incidentally, when I was in Saigon as ambassador, the period late in 1964 was the lowest point of the situation until the very end when everything collapsed in 1975. I've been asked, "Didn't you ever think of suggesting we pull out in this period? Why didn't you recommend that we Americans come home?" I said, "Yes, I thought about that. But I had at least three awfully good reasons not to do it, not even to be tempted to do it." The first was the Tonkin Gulf Resolution where all of Congress except two senators had said in effect, "This is a vital operation involving the American interest. We must be victorious in South Vietnam." That to me was a message: "Taylor, you've been doing all right, you're on the right course, but pull up your socks and do better." Next was the fact that we'd never used our air arm in a way to get the most from this asset. Finally, we Americans had in large measure created or were responsible for the chaos by our action in the case of Diem. The situation was certainly in part our doing.

Q: I would like to try to reconcile two views of the effect of the fall of Diem on the military situation. One view is that the Viet Cong military units very soon began to attempt to reap the profits created. Another view is that the NLF as a whole, the whole infrastructure, the whole front organization, actually lost about a third of its membership because the new government, while it was extremely weak, was very popular, maybe for the same reason.

TAYLOR: I doubt the latter. If the Vietnamese government was so popular in this period, why did they keep turning over -- five times in one year?

Q: Well, I would imagine because these were generals' coups and not necessarily representative of the population.

TAYLOR: Who could say that, to the peasant out trying to grow a little rice, any Saigon government was ever popular? It never was popular. As the seat of central government, Saigon was necessarily bad news to every peasant. That's where the tax collectors came from. On the other hand, the evidence of a new level of activity on the part of the Viet Cong and Hanoi following the overthrow of Diem was very apparent. It showed in all the records.

Q: Now Secretary [Robert] McNamara went out, I think, in December of 1963, which would have been about two months after the Diem coup. And he came back with a report-

TAYLOR: Was that the time I went out with him and we took [Nguyen] Khanh around the provinces raising his arms in the air?

Q: No, I think this was before Khanh. I think this was just before the Khanh coup. I think [Duong Van "Big"] Minh was still in.

TAYLOR: The Khanh coup came in December. The Big Minh coup, the one that overthrew Diem, didn't last but a week or so.

Q: Well, in any case, Secretary McNamara reported that the country team was having problems. Do you remember what he found.

TAYLOR: From Washington we had been seeing signs for some time that Lodge and Harkins didn't get along -- a surprising development considering their past association.

Q: What was at issue between those two?

TAYLOR: Well, there was no specific issue as far as I [could see], in a way. One of the things I have forgotten to mention was that Harkins had been an old friend of Lodge's. They'd both served in the National Guard together, I believe it was. In any case, they had been together before and when I mentioned to Lodge that we were thinking about Harkins to go to Saigon, he seemed very happy. So it looked like a very good pair to have there. Well, we soon discovered that wasn't the case. I don't recall that Harkins ever complained to me early in his assignment to Saigon. However we chiefs in the Pentagon began to notice that State was getting information from the Ambassador which we never received from Harkins. Raising the question with Harkins on the private cable, I learned that he wasn't getting the information either. The trouble was a lack of communication for which I felt Lodge was responsible. Harkins was not the kind to hold back on information if he had any. But Lodge turned out to be a loner who didn't communicate easily.

(Interruption)

Q: Let's go ahead with General Harkins' difficulties then with Ambassador Lodge.

TAYLOR: Well, this developed into a rather serious schism between the Ambassador and the General. Not over any specific issue, as far as I knew. Neither one ever mentioned a difference of substance. When McNamara and I made the trip to Vietnam we talked to both men about the failure of communications. Both agreed to do their part in correcting the fault but Lodge's performance was never entirely satisfactory, in my opinion. Sharing information was just not Lodge's way of doing business. And we found that his civilian subordinates in the embassy complained about the same thing. He continued to run-

Q: A one-man show.

TAYLOR: Yes, a one-man show. He never had a real country team in the embassy.

Q: Now, this brings up an interesting incident about which we don't know very much. Secretary McNamara also included in this report a ray of hope. He said that a young man by the name of David Nes was about to organize the country team under Lodge and correct all of these faults. And about six weeks later, David Nes came home, having been there only a couple of months. Do you know anything about that?

TAYLOR: This McNamara paper, what form is that in?

Q: Well, it was a report.

TAYLOR: Report of our trip?

Q: After the trip.

TAYLOR: I can't believe I didn't see it, because we always passed our papers around. The name Nes is familiar but I don't recall exactly the connection.

Q: Let me tell you what I have and see if it -- this is a paraphrase, but he said Nes was a bright young man who was then working on an executive committee below Lodge to coordinate mission activities. Now I have indications that shortly after this that Nes got the sack from Lodge.

TAYLOR: I'm sorry I can't recall this episode if I was ever acquainted with it.

(Interruption)

Q: Secretary McNamara's report also said, and I think this is a quote, "U.S. resources and personnel cannot be usefully increased at that time, but we should prepare for more forceful moves if the situation does not show early signs of improvement," unquote. Do you know if he had anything specific in mind or if this -- ?

TAYLOR: No, we were recognizing the game was going against us, starting to turn at least. And we saw the disorder which was following the murder of Diem.

Q: Soon after this come the first big battles I guess you would call them, in 1964, the spring and

early summer of 1964 when --

TAYLOR: Well, there were several.

Q: I'm not referring to any one in particular, but there were a number of large-scale engagements, I think, battalion and maybe even regimental size.

TAYLOR: In the North.

Q: Well, I think there was one at a rubber plantation and several other places, and the ARVN just took a beating in these. What was your feeling?

TAYLOR: First I was anxious to get a clear picture of the situation. So the next time McNamara and I returned to Vietnam, our first question was -- what about the ARVN? And we got a very bad report from Westy [William Westmoreland] and also from some of Westy's officers, including [General William] Depuy, who was G-3 at the time.

Q: He was the counter-insurgency man, wasn't he?

TAYLOR: Yes. He described very clearly the misbehavior of several ARVN units, complete failure of units which had been, we thought, among the most promising.

Q: What was the explanation?

TAYLOR: The picture we received was a general decline of the ARVN, especially in the North. This situation made the safety of Danang a primary concern of Westy in 1965 and led to the decision to bring in U.S. combat troops.

Q: I see.

TAYLOR: The deterioration of the performance of the troops in the North went on for some time. I don't remember what else --

Q: What did we see as the chief cause of this?

TAYLOR: I talked repeatedly to our people on the subject but they had no precise answer. The general feeling seemed to be we may have been pressing them too fast, expecting too much of them. And there was always the question of leadership. If you have a good division commander, you have a good division. Well, that's usually true, unless he happens to be the only good officer in the division. "Well," I would ask Westy, "can you get Diem -- or his successors -- to replace inadequate commanders?" Westy always said he could, but that took a little time. He couldn't just go around ordering, "Can Jones tomorrow."

That raises the collateral question of whether Westy had enough command authority or not. I always doubted it, based on my experience in Korea where the U.S. commander had operational command authority over Korean forces. Most senior U.S. officers in that war felt that such authority was indispensable. But Westy felt that it was not necessary, indeed was undesirable in

Vietnam. He had such close relations with, first, the head of state -- whoever it happened to be -- and then the senior generals that he could get what he wanted while retaining an advisory role. If necessary, he could look any high Vietnamese official in the eye and say, "You'd better do this if you are to retain the confidence and support of the Americans." He had the added argument, it would be a blow to the pride of the ARVN forces to change a well-established advisory system and such action would create hard feelings and a loss of morale that might be reflected in troop performance.

Q: We had a system of blending Korean trainees in with American troops, didn't we?

TAYLOR: We had the -- what did we call [them]?

Q: KATUSAs? [Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army] Was it the KATUSAs?

TAYLOR: That's right. The KATUSAs. They were invaluable, but their purpose had nothing to do with what we were talking about. The procedure was to introduce into each American infantry platoon, or squad, two or three KATUSAs who stayed there permanently. They never got rotated, and thereby became the veterans of the Eighth Army. Most of them couldn't speak English, although it was surprising how well they could acquire a soldier patois after a while. Since they were always there, they knew everything that needed to be passed along to arriving American replacements. A tremendous value to us. The only thing was they got spoiled and pretty soon they too liked their cold beer at the end of the day. (Laughter) It's amazing how the American standard of living can attract adherents very quickly.

Q: So it wouldn't work to try to send them back to a Korean division?

TAYLOR: Well, that's what worried the Koreans. A Korean senior official would say, "Look, you have Korean soldiers that have unusual experience, yet they remain privates with you. Return them to us and we'll make them sergeants. And furthermore, if you keep them too long, they will be no damn good to us at all." (Laughter) And there's a great deal in that. To get KATUSAs back to their own army, you'd have to drag them out kicking, and not only they'd kick, but so would the American commander who had to give them up. But when you added it up, the KATUSA was a very valuable way to use a small part of Korean manpower. Well, Westy knew about it and I called it to Westy's attention, "Don't you think a KATUSA system would be of value to us in Vietnam?" Well, the answer was, "No, I don't think so."

Q: Did he elaborate on that part at all?

TAYLOR: No, not to me.

Q: Okay. Now at about this time, there were some changes in the State Department which I'm not sure if you want to address or not. It's important in the whole total picture. The development I'm thinking of is the formation of the interdepartmental task force on Vietnam which was formed right about this time. Do you know anything about how that came into being?

TAYLOR: No, there was no special reason of any sort as far as I know. The way our committee-

infested government tends to operate, when you have a problem affecting several departments [you tend] to have an interdepartmental ad hoc committee. Well, the task force you mention was ad hoc, but it did have the merit of staying in existence for a considerable period of time. My impression was that it was a very useful clearinghouse for interdepartmental matters at a fairly low level.

Q: Do you know what effect this had on the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern affairs, Roger Hilsman?

TAYLOR: I wouldn't think it would have any. I don't know why it should. It was chaired by State, and bear in mind it didn't make policy, it didn't make decisions. It planned, it followed up on plan execution -- at least it was supposed to -- and I know nothing to believe that it wasn't a useful committee.

Q: Now I know that during 1964, the task force, as you say, was considering all the options, considering everything relevant. Were you consulted on the military options? You were chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

TAYLOR: No, but I'm sure I had a military representative on the committee.

Q: I want to ask another question about the bombing at this time, because the overall picture seems to indicate that some change in attitude toward a possible bombing campaign took place, and I want to see whether that is true or not. We know that there were suggestions made that this committee war game, as it were -- the bombing at this time -- do you know anything about that? Did they go to you?

TAYLOR: The committee?

Q: Yes.

TAYLOR: No, they wouldn't be competent to war game the bombing.

Q: Okay. In case of a bombing campaign, one of the relevant questions was what kind of response can we expect from the other side? What can the other side be expected to do? What did we see as their options? What seemed to us to be particularly worrisome?

TAYLOR: Well, the only worry -- worry may be a strong word -- was that bombing might have some effect on Moscow and Peking. This was the concern at the level of the President and the Secretary of State. [Dean] Rusk was the one who particularly voiced this fear. He said in effect, "We know that both of these communist states have mutual defense treaties with North Vietnam. There may be something in such a treaty that says if North Vietnam is attacked by an outside party, the Soviet Union and/or China will have to respond in some way and we don't know what that 'some way' may be."

That was a cogent argument, I thought, at least at the outset to go rather slow with the bombing, move gradually, not be in any great hurry and try to sense what the reaction was abroad,

primarily in those two countries. Which we did. That was the early justification for extreme gradualism in the bombing program. The trouble was that once we got in that habit, we never got out of it. I would have said that after three or four months it was pretty clear that the Soviets had no real stomach for participation in this war. It was far from home and they were getting no gain from it. It was becoming more and more costly. All they accomplished was to fly communist flag at least as high as the Chinese did since they couldn't afford to let the Chinese look like the leader of the communist world: in the Far East. So I would say that there was very little ground to fear retaliation from either the Soviet Union or China after a few months of the bombing.

Q: I have seen most of the speculations on the kinds of retaliation that were open or seemed to be open to the other side, and I saw one the other day that I'd never seen before, and I want to ask you whether you had heard of it. A man fairly high placed in the embassy said that there was considerable fear that the Chinese would retaliate against the Seventh Fleet with submarines.

TAYLOR: No, I never heard that.

Q: You'd never heard that one before? Well, he wasn't a military man, so that may explain something.

Now you went, I think, to the Honolulu Conference in June of 1964, is that right?

TAYLOR: Probably. I went to several.

Q: That would have been just before you were named ambassador. Do you recall anything of any moment at that conference?

TAYLOR: No, I don't remember exactly why we went at that time. Again, if I had the agenda, it would come to mind.

Q: I know that the bombing was discussed, but that's all I know. Perhaps it was always discussed.

TAYLOR: We were always discussing bombing and the troop requirements of Westmoreland, things like that. They were always on the agenda. I don't recall anything particularly pressing at that time.

Q: Well, the agenda is not in our files. Most things are, most things have been opened, but that apparently has not. So I wasn't sure.

Did you know when you went to that that you were going to be named ambassador?

TAYLOR: I don't know whether I knew my luck at that time or not. I don't think so.

Q: I was going to ask you if that influenced your advice at the conference?

TAYLOR: No. Of course, I became ambassador roughly the first of July, and this was in June,

wasn't it?

Q: Yes.

TAYLOR: I don't know whether it was in the bag then or not. I'm reasonably sure that it hadn't been determined at that time.

Q: It was clear by then that Mr. Lodge was coming back, though, was it not?

TAYLOR: Yes, and we were casting around for a replacement. A lot of nominations had been going in to the President, and I thought the President had plenty of choices to pick a really good ambassador.

Q: Robert Kennedy had volunteered, hadn't he?

TAYLOR: Well, that was in the press. What happened was LBJ probably played some tricks. He never worked directly on me; he always worked through Bob McNamara. He was expressing great distress over the problem of replacing Lodge and he said the names submitted by State never satisfied him. That apparently led to either Rusk or McNamara saying, "Well, Mr. President, I'll go if you want me to." The other one would beat his chest, "Count on me, too." And the Bob Kennedy, so I'm told, got into the act and he came forward to volunteer.

One day Bob McNamara said to me, "You know, the President really hopes the people around him will show willingness to go out there," and then he described what was taking place. Well, he looked at me and I said, "I don't want to go. I have had too many war years away from home already." "Well, do you think that's right? I think the President would feel easier about this if you'd put your name in, too."

I wasn't entirely happy with this. I smelled at least a small mouse. Nonetheless, I said, "That's all right with me. Put in my name," and then thought no more about it until Bob McNamara reported shortly thereafter, "Well, they're narrowing it down, and the President doesn't want to take either me or Rusk." I replied, "Well, of course he wouldn't. He'd be crazy if he did." He dropped the subject and went off leaving me a little uneasy.

He returned a day or two later with the word that the President did feel that I was the man they wanted, and would I take it? Meanwhile, the President had never said boo to me. But I'd been thinking it over so I replied, "it's the last thing in the world I want to do." In the first place, I hadn't wanted to come back to active duty in 1961 and had declined a couple of jobs that they wanted to give me in the Kennedy Administration. I had told President Kennedy that I would decline any job except one that was really a major military assignment that obviously needed to be done. Since the country had spent a lot of money making a soldier out of me, I wouldn't feel free to reject such a position if I felt qualified. Incidentally, one of the jobs that I had turned down was ambassador to France. (Laughter)

Q: Why did you turn that down?

TAYLOR: I had had enough overseas service in military life and my poor wife was worn out from moving. So now, faced with assignment to Vietnam, I told Bob that I'd been five years away from my family in two wars and that the ambassadorship in Saigon was nothing that appealed to me. Further, it seemed to me that with all the foreign service officers we'd been training over the years, there must be a professional that could do the job adequately. But if the President really felt as described, I would take it but for one year only. At that time my mother was still alive. I was the last of the family; I was the only one to look after her. I had plenty of family reasons not to go, and if I went, to return soon. So that was the basis on which I took the job. I pointed out, also, that it was the wrong way to fill it, because that was too important a job to put in a man just for one year.

Q: I don't know why I think of it, but what was your opinion of the one-year tour for combat troops in Vietnam?

TAYLOR: From a military point of view I didn't like it at all, but it was the same problem we had in Korea. Should the government ask a young man to go to Vietnam and stay the duration of the war? We did in World War II. But Vietnam was a limited war requiring limited manpower. Whether a one-year tour was the right length or whether we could have lengthened it without too much damage to morale, I don't know.

Q: Why do you think President Johnson picked you? Now, I know that you've said because you were expendable, and you will excuse me when I ask.

TAYLOR: I really was dispensable. I would say I never had a very warm relationship with LBJ, but I think we both looked at things regarding Vietnam about the same way. Incidentally, we shared a joint honor along with General [Omar] Bradley. We were honorary elders of the National Christian Church of Washington, and once in a long while we'd meet in church. We came from roughly the same part of the country. I'd known him quite well when he was a senator and very active on the Senate Armed Services Committee. There we met when I was chief of staff, off and on. So we'd been together. Certainly from the national defense point of view he was an ideal president, as I saw it. But I never felt that we were warm friends, perhaps because I knew he had one strong thing against me. I had had a Robert Kennedy son named after me.

Q: Do you really think that was a handicap?

TAYLOR: I know it did. I don't think in the sense he really distrusted me, but every now and then he'd say, "How is that Kennedy boy named after you?" (Laughter) I wasn't sure he was joking. The Kennedy-Johnson animosity was very real and very deep. And I must say it seemed to me he tried everything under the sun to be friendly with the Kennedys and bury the feud.

Q: It wasn't reciprocated?

TAYLOR: Not that I perceived. But I told my wife, "That's what I get for the honor of having a namesake."

Q: Well, it's not an honor you can decline very gracefully, is it?

TAYLOR: I would not have been inclined to do so. I'm proud of young Max.

Q: President Johnson never spoke to you about the ambassadorship? This all came through Secretary McNamara?

TAYLOR: Never did.

Q: That's a little unusual for him, isn't it?

TAYLOR: Well, not necessarily. A president doesn't like to be told no to his face, and he shouldn't be put in that position. In other words, he ought to know when he formally presents something that it will be accepted. I had no feelings that the procedure was wrong in this case.

Q: Now, you received a letter of instructions from President Johnson which I'm not an expert, but I interpreted it as being a very strong letter of instructions-

TAYLOR: That's right.

Q: -- naming you specifically, for example, as the chief officer in the embassy for all affairs, civilian and military. Did this make your appointment somewhat different than it might have been otherwise?

TAYLOR: Well, I think the President's directive to me was unique, as far as I know. As you might suspect, I wrote it myself. But I wrote it as I did because the President had said in effect, "I want you to be responsible for everything that happens there." I asked, "You mean that literally, Mr. President?" He said, "I definitely do." So I drew it up that way.

It was unique in the sense that it put the MAAG and all military activities completely under the ambassador. The ambassador's relation to the head of a MAAG has always been somewhat uncertain, although since the ambassador represents the president, he has a certain amount of ex officio authority. Every ambassador used to get, and I presume still does, a letter of instructions which charges him with representing the president. With that authority any strong man can take it as justification to do almost anything to and with the agencies the government represented in his mission. But he has to be sensible about it. If he tries to go into the military business and do things that affect technical or operational matters. he's way off base and will soon get in trouble, as he should. But he certainly has broad general authority. He is responsible for anything that will affect U.S. relations with the government to which he's accredited.

While every ambassador has a certain amount of authority, I never saw it written so clearly as in my directive. I knew exactly what it meant and how it would be read by the Pentagon and CINCPAC. So when the President had approved it, I sat down with all the Chiefs and explained it to them. Then when I got to Honolulu on my way to Saigon, I repeated the explanation to Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, who had succeeded Admiral Felt as CINCPAC. Oley Sharp was an old friend. I explained it to him and then of course I explained it to Westy when I got to Vietnam. I assured them that, being a military man, I would know enough to keep out of military business

with no bearing on my broad responsibilities. However, in the case of Westy, I wanted him to understand the extent of my responsibility and see to it that anything that affected national policy was discussed with me. He would clear it with me if necessary, and in any case, would furnish me copies of his cables bearing on the subject. As far as I know he always followed this procedure. I had no complaint whatsoever.

Q: No back channel problems?

TAYLOR: None. There were plenty of purely military matters about which he could have back channel conversations to the Joint Chiefs and should. But I did not want to be bypassed on issues which might go to the President for decision or cause me trouble with the Saigon government. He never gave me cause to complain. As a matter of fact, I only know of one or two things that he brought to me for clearance that I didn't support.

Q: Can you recall what those were?

TAYLOR: Well, one was the first landing of the troops in Danang.

Q: The marines, the first marines?

TAYLOR: Yes, initially I withheld this concurrence. I don't recall how long in advance of the actual landing Westy had been urging it. My position was that this was the last thing we should want to do. This would be the nose of the camel coming into the tent. We would be starting something, the end of which we could not foresee. Before I would agree, I told Westy that he would have to come in here, look me in the eye and say that "I cannot guarantee any longer the security of Danang without the marines." Meanwhile, there were a number of incidents of failure of ARVN units which shook our confidence in them. This was in the spring of 1965. Then it was that Westy came to me and asked for the Marines in these terms. I finally concurred; we joined in a recommendation to Washington and the marines came ashore.

Q: Someone has noted that when General Harkins -- to regress for a minute -- took over command at MACV that he was given a very strong letter of appointment, which you wrote.

TAYLOR: Oh, yes. I worked that out for him and Ambassador Nolting who concurred in it after considerable discussion.

Q: And then they draw the contrast saying that when you get to be ambassador, you write yourself a very strong letter.

TAYLOR: The letters were not identical nor was the situation. What's wrong with that? It's like when I left the White House to go to be chairman [of the JCS], the President asked me whom I recommended to take my job in the White House. I said, "Nobody."

Well, the answer was that Nolting didn't like the language of Harkins' letter of instructions which the Joint Chiefs had prepared and cleared by me in the White House. Nolting thought that this gave him [Harkins] an independence of action which was not intended. As he was in

Washington, I went over the letter with him word by word, and we made, I believe, some minor changes. Meanwhile I explained all the military jargon in the letter and the way Harkins would interpret it. I promised that in case of any deviation from the text by the military, I would support him if he objected. Then I assured him I'd known Harkins for years and he wasn't the kind that would go hunting on someone else's turf.

Q: Did Nolting and Harkins get along well in fact?

TAYLOR: Yes, yes.

Q: No problems?

TAYLOR: No problems I ever heard of.

WILLIAM G. BRADFORD
Administrative Officer
Saigon (1962-1964)

Administrative Officer
Saigon (1974)

Ambassador William G. Bradford was born in Illinois in 1925. He entered the Foreign Service in 1952. An administrative specialist, he served in Germany, Italy, and Washington before his Saigon assignment (1962-1964). He briefly returned to Saigon as an inspector shortly before its fall. He later served in Africa and was ambassador to Chad. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: In 1962, you went to a very interesting assignment as administrative officer in Saigon.

BRADFORD: There is a definite relation between the two. As I say, Bill [Crockett] had a great deal of respect for my management ability. He was taken with the fact that I had come into the Foreign Service as a regular Foreign Service officer, rather than someone from the management side. When Saigon became vacant, they actually nominated three different officers to go there, all of whom refused because of the war. At that point, one night, on the third refusal, I put a note to Bill. The position was two grades above my personal grade at the time. I said, "If nobody else will go, I'd love to go." So the next day, in Crockett-like fashion, he sent me to Saigon. There was some correspondence with the embassy of why were they sending such a junior officer, and I don't know what the answers were, but the ambassador acquiesced, and I went as the administrative officer to Saigon, a great assignment.

Q: How did you see the situation in Vietnam at the time?

BRADFORD: I think we have to put it in the time frame, which was 1962. I went to the second

counterinsurgency class. We were addressed by Bobby Kennedy, who explained to us that we knew all the things the French didn't know, and we would have no trouble winning this war. All we had to do was study the people and all of these good things. By and large, most of us thought we could do it. There wasn't any great doubt about Vietnam at the time.

Q: This was before the great protests in the United States.

BRADFORD: Absolutely.

Q: Really before the military buildup, too.

BRADFORD: It kept increasing when I was there. I was on leave when the Gulf of Tonkin occurred, and then we started the really big buildup. That was about the time I departed.

Q: When you got into Saigon, how did you find the operation of the embassy at that time?

BRADFORD: Actually, the operation of the embassy at that particular point, in the widest terms, was excellent. We had a very, very fine ambassador, Fritz Nolting. He was the ambassador, he was in charge of things, he delegated well. The American military were not running the country in any real sense of the word; he was running it. The embassy itself, from the management standpoint, I think there were some improvements to be made. It was too divided. This is one that I pushed throughout the Crockett era, and even later, was that I felt that management was a tool of the ambassador, and, therefore, a single administrative section was always desirable. We worked towards that and made a great deal of strides. We were taking in part of the military, which was much smaller in those days, for a good many administrative responsibilities and taking in most of the AID responsibilities.

Q: How did this work? There must have been a lot of opposition.

BRADFORD: There was. I found that initially, you could get over most of this opposition by increasing services. We found, at that time, there were certain things the State Department people got administratively that AID people didn't get. Conversely, there were certain things that AID people got, which State Department people didn't get, whether it was the number of air-conditioners per house, or who got a stepladder and who got garbage cans, and so forth. By pushing everything up to the highest common denominator, if AID got stepladders and we got garbage cans, I gave garbage cans to everybody and stepladders to everybody. This increase in services made it palatable, at least for a while. There are built-in problems in it, problems of prerogatives of the AID chief, who, when he has his own AID section, is top man. If he's part of an embassy section, he may be second or third man. They're human and don't care for that.

The big problem in this, a problem that was never completely resolved, is what do you do about the personnel? The State Department people say the AID administrative staff is over-graded. Therefore, if you fold them in, it's unfair to fold them in. There's no way to put them together and cut out people's jobs, unless you take the people in. This was one of the biggest problems.

Q: Were you able to get anywhere with this?

BRADFORD: I think later on, when we come to the African time, we were able to get someplace. I didn't get very far in Saigon, but as I say, we had an excellent ambassador who believed in controlling these things. It was to his advantage, and therefore, he gave me a great deal of support, and we were able to get some of the things done, despite opposition of the staff and the AID director.

Q: *How did the events of this period reflect on your work? Were you there in November of 1963?*

BRADFORD: Yes, I was there in '63.

Q: *This is when Diem was killed.*

BRADFORD: Yes, I was there when Diem was killed.

Q: *Lodge had taken over by then. From your point of view, could you compare and contrast Lodge, as far as dealing with the administrative work?*

BRADFORD: Yes. I have to be careful of this, because dealing with any work was beneath Henry Cabot Lodge. He didn't like to work. (Laughs)

Q: *He had that reputation.*

BRADFORD: Therefore, administration was something that, "Just please don't bother me with any of that nonsense." I have two or three favorite Lodge stories. One is when he got there, the first thing he did administratively was to have the ambassadorial plate taken off his door and replaced by one that said "Mr. Lodge," because that meant more. That's enough. I did not like Mr. Lodge particularly, nor did I think he was a very good ambassador.

Q: *How did this reflect, though? We are looking from a historical and operational point of view. What did this do to you? Did you find that you no longer had the clout to work because he didn't pay attention? Or did somebody else help?*

BRADFORD: We had two very good DCMs who were career men, both of whom got hurt by the situation, but both of whom were willing to take the brunt of the punishment and let things go on. It didn't affect administration much, as such, because he was uninterested in it. Therefore, things that had been set as a pattern went on pretty well as that pattern, except for one small field, which was the ambassador and how he was treated. He got so much more and demanded so much more than anybody else, it was difficult.

Q: *How about the Vietnamese staff that you had there?*

BRADFORD: They were excellent, just incredible. They learned so rapidly, they were so able. One story that I like to recount is that I was there at this time, and then I went back 11 years later. When I was there, we had an emergency generator in the embassy, and to put it in, we had to fly

in Filipino help, because the Vietnamese didn't know anything about generators, hadn't had occasion to learn. When I was back 11 years later and was at the embassy, there was a section in the embassy that rebuilt generators, not only for Saigon, but for all the Far East. They were the finest generator workmen in the world, and there was only one expatriate there, and he was only there part-time. In these 11 years, they had learned so much, it was incredible.

Q: There was a rather bad bomb blast. Were you there then?

BRADFORD: No, I was not there at the time of the bombing of the embassy. That was a little after I left.

Q: How did the officers that you were dealing with feel about the events, particularly of November '63, and the overthrow and killing of Diem, his brother, then the coup and the beginning of the rotational governments in Saigon? Did that have any effect on you?

BRADFORD: It made me feel like a great prophet, because I sent the ambassador a paper the next morning, saying this was one of the greatest defeats of American foreign policy in history, and that we would now go through a series of military governments. I think we were all disappointed. We had been disappointed in Diem, but nevertheless, there was a case to be made for Diem and for his government. It was one we had supported for several years, in fact, and thought, maybe falsely, that we were making some progress. I think we all thought that if we were going to get into a military situation, where the military kept changing governments, we were going to be in a very fragile situation that we couldn't do much with.

Q: This is an important time. There was not a sense of exaltation, of, "Now we've gotten rid of this guy. Now let's really get to work." I'm talking about the officer corps of the embassy.

BRADFORD: I'm sure that there were a handful that had been caught up in the Buddhist thing and thought, "This is great. Now we're rid of him," particular the brother and Madame Nhu. By and large, though, I think it was sort of, "This is the situation we face. Where do we go from here?" Neither tremendous depression, although there was some, or elation.

Q: The administrative section often has to deal more with the workings of the government where they're attached than any other one. Did you find any difference? How was it during and after the Diem rule?

BRADFORD: It was more difficult after Diem, because no one knew who was in charge, where they stood, or what their authority was. Under Diem, people were well entrenched, the customs people knew what they could and couldn't do, and so on throughout the government. Afterwards, it was much more difficult. Everybody felt they had to get a clearance from somebody, and it ended up with some general who was either too busy or who didn't know which way to go.

Q: You mentioned that three people of American staff had turned down the job you had before you went there. I can recall in 1969, I was at a reception to meet the new head of the administrative section, and he was supposed to fly in that day. Halfway through the reception, they said he got off the plane, took one look, turned around, and left.

BRADFORD: I know. (Laughs)

Q: *Were you having trouble getting competent American staff?*

BRADFORD: I think, actually, during the time I was there, this changed. Originally, yes, they were having a lot of problems getting people to go to Vietnam. It was not on the front page of the American papers. It was a place where a war was going on, a lot of shooting going on, and one wondered, "What kind of diplomacy can you conduct in this kind of a war atmosphere?" During the time I was there, I mentioned that the Kennedys got very strongly on board in counterinsurgency, here was a war we were going to win, and it became clear that career-wise, this was a way to get ahead. Sharp, young officers, therefore, decided they wanted to go to Vietnam, rather than not wanting to go to Vietnam.

It was also during the days that you took your family to Vietnam. I had my wife and three children. My father died while I was there, so my mother joined us. My grandmother had lived with us, so my grandmother joined us. So we had four generations of family out there.

Q: *So you felt that you were getting a good staff?*

BRADFORD: Oh, yes.

Q: *How about after our commitment towards Diem? Was there a change?*

BRADFORD: Actually, I was there so briefly after the buildup started, that I couldn't really comment on it. The kind of officers that went out were officers who later did very, very well career-wise, so I can't see that they suffered. I think there was a change in the nature of the staff, in that with the buildup, there was suddenly this tremendous upgrading of jobs in the embassy. Jobs that had been held by 03s were all 01s. After all, we had an ambassador and deputy ambassador in those days, unheard of in that situation. In my own job, I was replaced by a very experienced admin man, a good admin man. He came out, and we went over my work for two days, and he said, "You're just the administrative officer." I said, "That's right. That's what my job is." "I don't want to do that. I did that years ago." So I was an 03 at the time, he got an 03 to come out as his deputy, who replaced me. So we had an extra 01 on hand.

Q: *You moved from trouble spots. You left Saigon, and then you went to the Congo. It was Congo then, Leopoldville, then it became Zaire.*

EDWARD L. ROWNY
Lt. General
Saigon (1962-1965)

Lieutenant General Edward L. Rowny was born in Baltimore and attended West Point from 1937 to 1941. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II

including a special assignment to Liberia. He has also served in Vietnam, Tokyo, and Korea and participated in NATO Military Committee and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. Lieutenant General Rowny was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: Back to Vietnam, early on you got involved with that from 1962 and variously involved up to 1965. Were you getting reports back of disquiet about our involvement there?

ROWNY: I didn't in the early days. There was what we considered a one-sided view of the press. Halberstam and others were writing from Saigon that the Vietnamese and Diem would never be able to succeed, and we shouldn't be backing him. After the assassination of Diem in 1963, everything went downhill. We never recovered from that. Once he was gone, there was no one to rally around.

Some of us who had been in Korea thought it was similar to the events that happened there. Syngman Rhee was unpopular in some circles in the U.S. but America backed him. Our original thought in Vietnam was that we'd better work with Diem. There was, even in those early days, what turned out later to be a very great opposition to our involvement in Vietnam.

Q: It wasn't felt very greatly in those early days.

ROWNY: No, it wasn't.

ROBERT H. MILLER
Deputy Chief, Political Section
Saigon (1962-1965)

Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1965-1968)

Area Director, Southeast Asia Affairs
Washington, DC (1974-1977)

Robert H. Miller was born in Port Angeles, Washington, in 1927. He graduated from Stanford in 1949 after taking two years out for the Army. He developed his interest in foreign affairs at Stanford. He received his master's degree in international affairs from Harvard. He entered the State Department through a junior management program. He also served in France, Malaysia, and the Ivory Coast. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 23, 1990.

Q: You then go from one place where you are very much involved to another place which certainly was gaining more and more attention. You went to Saigon from 1962 to 1965. What were you doing there?

MILLER: I was the deputy chief of the political section. It was a huge political section at that time -- I think it had 16 or 17 people. I was newly promoted to the old FSO-3, the First Secretary level, and was helping the political counselor manage the work of the section.

Q: What was the situation at the time you arrived in 1962 as you saw it?

MILLER: The guerrilla war, in terms of terrorist incidents, was heating up. This was about a year and a half into the Kennedy Administration. By the time I got there the US Military Advisory Group had been transformed into MACV, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and the Advisory contingent had already grown to about 10,000 US military personnel who were advising the Vietnamese armed forces, sometimes under combat conditions, but were not participating in combat. Fritz Nolting was still Ambassador there when I arrived. I had known Fritz as well as Bill Trueheart, the DCM, at NATO in Paris, as I had Mel Manfull, the political counselor.

We were still trying to encourage Diem to broaden his political base in order to compete politically with the Viet Cong internally in South Vietnam. We had little, if any, success in encouraging Diem to do that. But that was the situation. It was a growing guerrilla war. We were also puzzled as to how to give growing support to the South Vietnamese government without breaching the Geneva Accords even though we didn't like the Geneva Accords -- at least John Foster Dulles didn't like them when they were signed in 1954. We were still trying to find ways to abide by their strict limitations in terms of our military assistance and support. We were trying to get Diem to broaden the base of his government. Nobody foresaw the problems that came up in the spring and summer of 1963, namely the Buddhist revolt which ultimately burgeoned into a situation which caused the Kennedy Administration to withdraw its support from the Diem government -- leading to his overthrow and assassination.

Q: What were the feelings among the officers there in the political section?

MILLER: Most of us felt that we were engaged in an important and constructive effort -- and that it was possible to achieve our objective, which was to preserve the right of South Vietnam to determine its own future. And most of us believed that the Diem government was worthy of our support even though it was to say the least, flawed. Most of us believed that (Communist) North Vietnam was committing aggression against South Vietnam and that this was part of Moscow's and Beijing's effort to extend their domination, weaken the "free world" position wherever the opportunity arose. South Vietnam was one such opportunity. When the Buddhist revolt came in May of 1963 and began to grow into something that got out of control, then there were a lot of different views within the mission. There were those who felt we ought to go all the way with Diem. There were those who underestimated what the Buddhist revolt was going to build into. There were those who felt that Diem was not able to cope and the issue became one of should we stay in South Vietnam and help somebody who was not able to help himself or should we not continue our effort there. Of course, the decision was to brush Diem aside and try to continue because the general judgment in Washington was that the stake we had in preventing the communist takeover in South Vietnam was great -- almost greater for us than it was for the South Vietnamese. I think that was the beginning of the controversial aspect of our effort in Vietnam. I mean it was controversial in the press already and domestically it was somewhat controversial,

but I think that within the US Government it began to get controversial after the decision was made to pull the rug out from under Diem.

Q: Here you were in the political section looking at Southeast Asia. How did you see the threat to the United States of Diem going and the North Vietnamese winning?

MILLER: I think we were all taken with the domino theory argument -- that all of Southeast Asia, with the exception of Thailand, was newly independent and that a number of Southeast Asian countries had already had their bout with communist insurgencies -- the Philippines, Malaysia and of course while we were there Indonesia was having an increasing problem with internal communists -- not necessarily with insurgency, but nonetheless a threat of a growing communist party. I think the way it looked to us as a government, and to most people in the mission in Saigon -- there were exceptions, there were critics -- was that if South Vietnam went, other countries of Southeast Asia could go as well. Therefore, since no other country besides the United States could help South Vietnam prevent this from happening, this was our job to do. This may seem in 1990 to be a mistaken way of looking at the situation, but I think that was the way most people looked at it at the time -- including most people in Congress, and including many of those who became opponents of the effort.

Q: Things could have happened quite differently had we pulled out at that time. This was not just a made up theory.

MILLER: Well, you know, nobody can rewrite history, but there was a coup attempt in Indonesia in 1965 which failed by a hair. I think what is going on in Cambodia today is a continuation of the historic pressure by Vietnam, communist or non- communist, to dominate its weaker neighbors to its west, which in the long term could put pressure on Thailand. If the great Soviet empire indeed collapsed in 1990, I think we will have a different perspective on that problem than we had in 1962 and '63 or even 1965 or '67 and '68. One of the things that sort of boggles one's mind today is that, if you read the record, one of the reasons the decision was taken in the Kennedy Administration to pull the rug out from under Diem in addition to his apparent inability to deal with his Buddhist crisis, was information that his brother Nhu was putting out feelers with Hanoi. We were convinced that this was not in the US interest. That was an added factor in the decision to pull the rug out from under Diem. How dare they negotiate a compromise of some kind with Hanoi! Today that seems almost unbelievable.

Q: When you arrived at the embassy in the political section you were obviously going out and collecting information, how well did you find yourself in communication and being helped by our American military there and the CIA?

MILLER: We had in the embassy a small group of so-called provincial reporters who were Vietnamese language officers -- a group of 4 or 5 young officers -- who were traveling all over the provinces. They were greatly aided by all of the other elements of the mission -- the military, the CIA, AID, the USIS people -- no question about it. My impression is that we were greatly helped by the military and I hope that the military felt we helped them in terms of giving them political insights into what was going on. We sometimes had different perceptions. I think we in the political section always felt the military over-assessed progress and the military felt that we

were always too pessimistic and undermining their effort by suggesting that maybe progress was not as great as they thought. And of course this was one of the terribly difficult things. We developed all these statistical ways of measuring progress, like evaluation systems which were program- directed. You know, the number of fence posts installed, number of privies built or the number of hamlets put behind fences, etc. But none of those statistics captured what really was going on, which was the ability of the VC to come in at night and intimate the peasants behind the fences by lobbing a grenade over the fence, etc. We never really, in our good old American way, were able to capture what the real problems of the insurgency were: which were 1) intimidation by the Viet Cong; 2) a lack of conviction on the part of the non-communist Vietnamese that our side was going to win and 3) that basically the US had replaced the French as, if not a colonial power, a sort of neo-colonial power -- something we never understood or wanted to believe.

Q: How were you seeing the Buddhist revolt?

MILLER: The feeling in the political section was that the situation was getting out of control. On the other hand, there was also a feeling that it was a mistake to withdraw our support from Diem. There was some feeling that if we felt that we couldn't achieve our policy objective with Diem maybe we should liquidate our involvement there. But that from a political standpoint at home didn't seem to be possible. I think that Kennedy probably felt that after the Bay of Pigs fiasco he didn't also want the criticism that he had pulled out of Vietnam which was under such communist threat. In other words, we were sort of caught up in a no-win situation. But it seemed to us that Diem just didn't understand how serious problems were internally in the country because he and his brother acted in a repressive way rather than in a way to try and solve the problems. We were kind of stuck with doing things their way or deciding to get somebody else. And of course that was a disastrous decision.

Q: As far as the political section worked -- Diem-US relations, I assume, was carried on by the US ambassador. Did you have much contact with the rest of the Vietnamese government at various levels?

MILLER: We worked under very great restrictions during the Diem era, because he did not want us to see any opposition figures, he only wanted us to see those who supported him. So we had a lot of contacts at the working level, at the National Assembly and in the government. And we knew a few tame dissidents, people who had spent some time in jail, etc. I suppose the CIA had contacts with the latter as well. I can remember, for example, when there were National Assembly elections in September of 1963, Diem promised Fritz Nolting that he was going to broaden the base of the government and allow more people to run for the Assembly. All the information we were picking up from our contacts showed that it was going to be the same old National Assembly. I remember doing a wrap up report on the preparations for the elections which basically said that there wasn't going to be any more broadening, the same old candidates were appearing and if opposition candidates were allowed to run they certainly wouldn't win. I can remember that Fritz called me up to his office and went over that report with me very carefully because it was so different from what he had been told by Diem. I went over the material with him and he let the report go out, but he kind of shook his head.

Q: What was your impression of Ambassador Nolting -- how he dealt both with the embassy and with the situation?

MILLER: He was a fine human being. He had no background in Southeast Asia -- like a lot of us. He, I think, was convinced that we had to back Diem. Those had been his instructions. We would make a mistake if we didn't. He was very bitter about his experience there and how he was replaced by Lodge. I guess my basic feeling is, and I think in his book he says this too, he should never have gone on home leave in the summer of '63. In other words, he felt this Buddhist revolt was a flash in the pan and he could leave the embassy with Bill Trueheart in charge and, of course, that ruined their personal relationship. I think that Fritz had an impossible job and he probably wasn't flexible enough in seeing what was really happening in South Vietnam. I suppose the Kennedy Administration decided they wanted somebody with a high profile and political moxie and also a Republican to sort of give a bipartisan sheen to the policy and the problem out there and they sent in Henry Cabot Lodge. Anyway, I liked Fritz very much as a human being, but I think he may have made some misjudgments.

Q: What was the difference between Nolting and Trueheart?

MILLER: When Fritz came back after home leave to say goodbye, he was there for a matter of two or three weeks. He felt that our increasingly pessimistic reporting in his absence had misled Washington to deciding to pull the rug out from under Diem -- that we had misled Washington about Diem's ability to govern the country. I think Bill Trueheart was convinced, and most of us in the political section were convinced, that Diem was so isolated from reality that he was not really aware of how bad things were getting in terms of his ability to govern. On the other hand, he was allowing his brother, Nhu, to use actions which were increasingly alienating not just the rank and file of the population, but also members of his own government. The sons and daughters of government bureaucrats and military officers were being rounded up and beaten, etc. because these protest demonstrations were spreading. But Fritz felt that somehow our reporting should have been -- the glass should have been half full rather than half empty. My own feeling was that the embassy was reporting things as they saw it -- that Diem had lost control.

Q: Getting sort of into the internal workings of the embassy -- did you feel at the time Nolting left that you had been under a certain amount of -- the lid had been on and now we can report, or had the situation changed so much that it was a natural evolution?

MILLER: When Lodge came, he was under instructions to determine whether or not we could solve the situation with Diem and if not to encourage the generals around Diem to understand that we were prepared to see a change. Because everybody then understood we were contemplating a change, a lot of different assessments began to appear. General Harkins, who was commanding MACV at the time, was reporting that the war was being won, etc. The embassy was reporting growing unrest and opposition to the Diem government and the body politic. That became the issue for the Kennedy Administration. Which of these reports is correct? The thrust of Lodge's instructions were if we have to do it we are prepared to dump Diem. Therefore, there wasn't the lid on reporting the growing unrest of the political situation. Nevertheless the decision to dump Diem was a very controversial decision even within the

political section. There were people who felt that if you did this you didn't know what you were getting in for. There was nobody who had the strength of leadership that Diem did. And even though he may not be doing so well, we would make a great mistake to dump him. Where the truth lies is still very difficult to say. Certainly after Diem went things deteriorated.

Q: What was your impression of Harkins? One gets in reading books and all that Harkins was way over his head in a very complicated situation. From your feeling at the time, did he understand the type of war?

MILLER: My feeling is that neither Harkins nor Westmoreland understood the kind of problem that the US military faced in South Vietnam. My basic bias after all these years is that one of the biggest mistakes we made was to take the war away from the South Vietnamese. They became a subordinate command in their own war and therefore we took away their stake in their own survival. The next question is, "Was it possible to save South Vietnam in any case?", and I don't know the answer to that. On the other hand, I think in a sense everything we did, and I think both Harkins and Westmoreland, and maybe all of us, contributed to reducing the stake of the South Vietnamese in their own survival as a non-communist entity. On the other hand, if you look at Southeast Asia today, we achieved our larger objective -- that of preventing the other dominoes from falling.

Q: What was your impression when Lodge came? How did you and the political section feel about the arrival of Lodge?

MILLER: It was kind of exciting because he was a national personality. Lodge was a highly political animal. I don't think that he was really interested in objective analysis of the situation. He came convinced that we had to get rid of Diem and I am not sure that he thought very much about the consequences. And, of course, he didn't stay around long enough to live with the consequences. He went back to run for President in 1964. He came back at a later time. As I say he was a highly political animal, not analytical in the least, and not cerebral. I suppose he was looking at these things always more in terms of Henry Cabot Lodge and his role in history.

Q: I assume from time to time you would go up and brief Lodge. Did you find him listening, but feel that you were not making a tremendous amount of connection about the nuances of the situation?

MILLER: We would go up and brief him and very often end up listening to him more than briefing him. I had a lot of contact with him, but I don't think I know how to answer that question. I think that he had his mind made up by other sources of information because he came out with two or three people who were his eyes and ears and I am not sure he really listened to the political section very much. He knew what he thought he had to do to carry out his instructions and what was important to him was Henry Cabot Lodge. The reporting did go out. He fired one DCM for thinking that he could run the mission except for those issues he had to take to the ambassador. Lodge didn't like that.

Q: Who was that?

MILLER: David Nes.

But I think he had his own agenda. We didn't feel constrained by that necessarily, but on the other hand neither did I feel that I or my colleagues had great impact on his thinking.

Q: How did the events of October 1963 impact on you?

MILLER: I was generally aware that there was a coup coming. I was given one specific task to do which I guess made me aware of that. It had been determined at some point that we should have contact with Diem's Vice President, Nguyen Ngoc Tho, to express the hope that, if change was coming, it would be in accordance with the constitution. I went over and delivered the message. He, I think, got the message and responded very little. Of course, what happened was that he was swept out when the generals took over. The day of the coup, October 31, I became aware of firing when I was home for lunch. I hopped into my little Volkswagen and went down to the embassy and saw that there was concertina wire spread around at various parts of the city. I had no trouble getting to the embassy, but then it was confirmed that a coup was going on. Basically we were just there to observe, take reports and do what reporting we could. We spent the night there. I can remember being concerned about my family and trying to get through on the phone. I got a constant busy signal all night because my wife had talked to somebody during these proceedings and the phone had not gotten back on the stand correctly. Anyway we watched the final stages of the coup and the attack on the Palace from the roof of the embassy all night long. Once in a while we heard a zing which would cause us all to duck down behind the parapet of the roof. There was a great feeling the next morning of euphoria when it was all over and some feeling of remorse when the news came through that Diem and Nhu had been assassinated. I don't think that anybody, at least on our side, intended that. I gather that Kennedy, himself, was rather shocked at that news.

Q: Did you have problems keeping up with who was in power? I mean, the generals came in very quickly and the situation turned in to what has been described as a revolving door. How were you operating in this very difficult situation?

MILLER: Once the coup took place and the generals came in, everyone was hopeful that the problems that led to the coup, namely the growing unrest and instability in the body politic, would finish and everybody would pull together and get back to fighting the war. Of course that didn't happen. The generals began squabbling among themselves. One of the generals who had been left out of the coup group, General Khanh was pouting and he managed to overthrow the first coup group. He was a disaster. Meanwhile the progress of the war began to deteriorate with the VC gaining ever greater control over the countryside until Thieu and Ky. By then we had long since sent in our own combat troops and had taken over the war for good.

Q: You were there until '65 so you were there during a great deal of the revolving door. Did the reporting sort of move over to the military side?

MILLER: We constantly tried to encourage whoever was in power, usually a general, to get some kind of constitutional base and some kind broadened political base. There were two or three hopeful experiments in that direction, but they didn't last. At this point I would have to

delve into the record to be accurate as to why they didn't last, but basically they didn't last I suppose because the South Vietnamese had no experience in a democratic form of government and we kept hoping they could somehow build on it under the pressure of the war. And of course it turned out not to be possible. Then there were all these rivalries among the military. One group would get tired of not being in power and felt it could do better and would toss out those in power and then eventually they would become the target of a third group. Until the thing sort of settled down first with Ky, and then Thieu outmaneuvered Ky and Ky became vice president. Then it settled down for a long time, but by then our own body politic began to get impatient with the problem.

Q: How about within the political section? What was your attitude as you saw this thing happening?

MILLER: I think we all got very frustrated at the games the Vietnamese were playing among themselves. Good, bright eyed, bushy-tailed Americans couldn't understand why the Vietnamese would play all these games with each other instead of fighting the war and achieving the common objective of keeping South Vietnam free from a communist takeover. My considered judgment is that we provided the South Vietnamese with the wherewithal to indulge in the luxury of these kinds of games because basically they knew that if it was going to be won it was going to be won by us. That in the end turned out not to be the case. We finally got tired of it ourselves. But I think the atmosphere in the political section was 1) we were very busy trying to keep up with events, but 2) we all did get very frustrated with the Vietnamese who kept blaming us for a lot of things and yet were not able to get their own act together to run a government and to prosecute a war in the way that we thought was in their interests to do.

Q: Were any of you sort of thinking "Well, okay if this doesn't work what will happen"? Did you think the equation within Southeast Asia was changing? Was the domino situation still uppermost in your mind?

MILLER: Yes. At least, for me personally, until I got home and became director of the Vietnam Desk in 1965. I think we were so absorbed by developments in Vietnam that we probably didn't think a great deal about the impact elsewhere in Southeast Asia, other than to be concerned that if Vietnam went the rest of Southeast Asia would be in danger.

I think that my own doubts really didn't set in until I was caught up in the war in Washington as head of the Vietnam Desk and saw the growing protests here. I got caught up with the atmosphere here with LBJ trying to develop negotiating positions and sending out feelers, etc. We tried bombing pauses to try to encourage negotiations. I was doing a lot of public speaking, explaining our Vietnam policy in the increasingly strident atmosphere in this country between hawks and doves. I think that was where my own doubts about how this was all going to come out and whether it was all worth it in terms of US interests and costs began to building up. But while I was in Vietnam, no, we were frustrated with the Vietnamese but I think we began to feel that Thieu and Ky were beginning to get things back under control -- at the beginning of their rule.

Q: Were you there when General Maxwell Taylor came out?

MILLER: Yes.

Q: What was the impression when he came out? It turned out to be another one of those interim things, but did...?

MILLER: I didn't feel that Max Taylor, either, was the right man for that job. Again, a lot of things were going on that the political section, or at least this person who was the number two in the political section, wasn't privy to. Taylor, if you read all the books since then, including the Pentagon Papers, resisted the idea of US combat forces without consultations with the Vietnamese. He got very frustrated with the internal political revolving door governments and was very imperious with the Vietnamese generals. They resented that and at one point tried to get him recalled. I suppose the role of any US ambassador at that point would have been a very tough one. I think that Taylor had a military rather than diplomatic approach in terms of getting the Vietnamese to do things that we wanted to see them do. He tended to be too imperious, I think.

Q: You left there in 1965 and came back to be what, the director of...

MILLER: The Vietnam Working Group.

Q: Which was essentially the Vietnam Desk. What were your functions there?

MILLER: I would say that the function of the Vietnam Working Group was to keep on top of daily developments in Vietnam so that we could brief our superiors, handle queries from the public, and make analyses of the internal political situation in South Vietnam. In other words, we dealt with the mass of routine problems in terms of our involvement in Vietnam without really getting involved in the policy process.

There was a lot going on in the policy process that we were not privy to. I can cite one example. I was asked by my bosses one day to brief a congressman about a certain peace initiative which I knew absolutely nothing about. That was exactly why I was sent up to brief him -- because I knew nothing about it. He could tell within two minutes that I didn't know what I was talking about. He said, "Mr. Miller, I thought that you were an expert on Vietnam, yet you obviously don't know and can't give me the information that I need." "Mr. Congressman," I said, "In the US government today there are many levels of expertise on Vietnam." He said, "Well, you go back and tell Secretary Rusk that I am leaving for my constituency this afternoon and unless he tells me what is going on with respect to this peace initiative, I will no longer be able to support him." I conveyed that message and it got to the Secretary very quickly. I understand he did call the Congressman, and the Congressman stayed on the reservation. We were constantly dealing with this kind of problem where we didn't really know what the Administration was doing, either on the negotiating front or, to some extent, on the internal front as well. So we were really managing the store and doing the routine business and briefing governors, giving speeches -- I went over to brief the NATO Council on what was going on in Vietnam. Just doing the routine business made for very long work weeks.

Q: Obviously this is the period of time when the questioning was getting greater and greater. I suppose in some ways for the first time you were up against the real challenges of not just being involved but also getting outside... How was this affecting you?

MILLER: I was getting very tired. Physically and emotionally it was an exhausting job. I guess that I was rapidly being convinced that we ought to find a way to negotiate an end to it. I was relieved when LBJ [actually by then I had gone off to the Imperial Defence College in London] found a formula for stopping the bombing in the North and getting involved in negotiations with the North Vietnamese. This led to the cessation of the bombing, and paved the way to negotiating some kind of solution which, hopefully, would allow us to withdraw.

Q: Did you get a feeling of where was the driving force between our continued military effort and going all out in Vietnam? Was this coming from the White House, or Rusk? Were their different voices, some saying let's negotiate and others saying....?

MILLER: I didn't have much contact even as director of the Vietnam Working Group at the time with the top levels of the Department or the White House, but it is my understanding from everything I have read and heard that basically LBJ was determined to be victorious, and victorious in a way that would not endanger his Great Society goals. Dean Rusk was pretty much with him on that and it was McNamara who began to have serious doubt. There were plenty of people who had doubts. George Ball, Dean Rusk's deputy, was always trying to argue the other side and saying we ought to liquidate this commitment because we were in a no-win situation. He felt our objectives were wrong. There were plenty of people within the Administration and outside of Administration, and certainly growing numbers on the Hill who were trying to persuade the U.S. government to turn around. I think it was the President, himself, who found it very difficult to turn around. The final blow, the straw that broke the camel's back, was Westmoreland's request in March 1967 for 125,000 more troops in addition to the half million he already had in order to finish the job. The Pentagon said it couldn't do that without going to full mobilization.

Q: Did you have any problems keeping your officers on the Vietnam Working Group on the reservation?

MILLER: No, I don't recall that. Whatever their personal views were...no, I think they were all disciplined people.

Q: You were in EA from 1974-1977. What were your responsibilities?

MILLER: I was responsible primarily for Southeast Asia.

Q: Which included what?

MILLER: For the political and politico-military developments of Southeast Asia which included the Philippines through Burma, south of China and down to and including Indonesia.

Q: Australia?

MILLER: No. Australia and New Zealand and even Papua New Guinea were outside of Southeast Asia. They were dealt with by someone dealing with the South Pacific. Actually in my day the economic deputy had responsibility for Australia and New Zealand and the South Pacific.

Q: Phil Habib, of course, has been around for a long time as one of our ace trouble shooters. How did you find him?

MILLER: I am very high on Phil. He is a unique combination of street fighter and integrity. He could be as irritating as hell, very rough, but underneath he had a heart as big as a watermelon. He was a great guy to work for. I really loved working for him. When I got into that job, 99 1/2 percent of it was the final stages of Vietnam and Cambodia. In fact, I was absolutely stunned when I got into the job about September of '74 to find that we were actually counting the days of supply of ammunition for the non-communist forces in Cambodia, and whether we would be able to provide ammunition with AID monies we had. And of course the Congress was getting more and more restive about providing any money at all. They stopped the AID money and the ammunition stopped as well. All of this came to its end within 6 months in Cambodia and 7 months in Vietnam. Then we began planning for the evacuation of the mission in Vietnam and were concerned about the evacuation of the Vietnamese who had been associated with our effort. So it was a very busy period. When we got through that stage, we got involved with refugee programs and worrying about what was our policy in Southeast Asia post- Vietnam. That was an interesting period.

Q: When the AID money stopped was it the general feeling that for all practical purposes we had written Vietnam and Cambodia off?

MILLER: There was a sense in the Administration that it was not writing Vietnam and Cambodia off; that if anybody was writing them off it was the Congress, the Democratically controlled Congress. But the Congress got to the point where it was determined not to provide any more aid even if the consequences were dire -- namely, even if the country went under. I think they had gotten to the point where they thought it had done so much damage to our society that this was the lesser of evils. But the Administration, to the very end, wanted to make sure that if this happened it was clearly as a result of a Democratic Congress and not as a result of the Administration.

Q: How did you feel about the reporting that was coming out of Vietnam under Graham Martin? This has been a very controversial thing.

MILLER: There is no doubt in my mind based on a visit I made to Saigon in October 1974 that Graham Martin ran the most tightly controlled embassy of any I have ever had any association with. I attended, for example, a country meeting while I was there. Nobody was allowed to speak at that meeting if it hadn't been programmed with the Ambassador before hand. That is not the answer to your question. But I am not sure I can answer the question the way you want, namely

that reporting was managed or distorted. Graham Martin's modus operandi, as far as I could figure out, was that only he had access to the full range of information. He made sure that only he had access to all that information. He would not let information be generally broadcast. Therefore, only he had the full picture and could make judgments about what was really going on. If Joe Blow in the political section reported that this was the situation, Graham Martin would say that that was not the situation at all because, "I happen to know things that you don't know about it." Did that distort the picture? It probably did.

Q: When you were back getting these reports, did you have the feeling that we were almost out of it?

MILLER: As I recall our estimate in the spring of 1975 was that the situation had deteriorated to the extent that the North Vietnamese were likely to capture I Corps and most of II Corps.

Q: These were to the north of Saigon?

MILLER: Yes, that's right. But that III Corps around Saigon and IV Corps could be held. But that was on the assumption that we would continue to provide aid. In a sense the reporting from Saigon was important as supporting or undermining those assessments. As soon as it became clear that the Congress was not about to provide any additional aid, all bets were off. Then we began really concentrating on how to save our people.

Q: Was there a problem with Graham Martin in trying to get this evacuation going?

MILLER: Martin's legitimate concern was not to contribute to the collapse. He was concerned that if we gave signs we were starting to evacuate our people it would show the Vietnamese that we were convinced it was all over and they would, therefore, stop fighting. He was also concerned that if we started evacuating Americans our South Vietnamese allies could in effect turn on us and start shooting down our evacuation planes out of bitterness that we were bugging out. So he had a lot of legitimate concerns about the safety of Americans and about trying to prevent having American actions contribute to the collapse in South Vietnamese. It got to the point where he had to be ordered to prepare for evacuation by providing us with the information we needed in order to organize the logistic support to get people out. Washington had to sit pretty hard on him to get him to do that. Then he had, I think, an idea that he might stay behind and somehow negotiate through the transition. He was ordered not to do that but to get out on at least the last plane. He was always a curmudgeon and he was curmudgeonly until the very end. Then I think he was concerned that he was somehow going to be made a scapegoat for who lost Vietnam. He wanted to have his record clear so he could defend himself. But, to the credit of Nixon and Kissinger, no one was looking for a scapegoat at that point unless they were wanting to blame the Congress for contributing to the final collapse.

Q: I might point out since we are putting this on the record that evacuating Americans in any situation is always a very tricky thing. If there is civil disorder and you say don't come in that can be a body blow or an insult or what ever you want to call it -- a political act, not a minor little matter.

MILLER: That is what I wanted to say -- that Graham Martin had some legitimate and difficult concerns that he was trying to deal with. One, the collapse of the government that we had been supporting for so many years, two, the safety of Americans. And how to manage all of this without some massive tragedy taking place.

Q: How did Kissinger get along with Habib?

MILLER: He liked Habib, although I have heard them shout at each other. I think he felt Habib was one of the few career officers that was worthy of Henry Kissinger. He trusted Habib and felt that he was a disciplined career officer who would carry out instructions with class.

Q: Going back to the Vietnam and Cambodia when we were pulling out in the spring of 1975, before it actually happened what was the prognosis of the future of Vietnam and Cambodia?

MILLER: Our assessment, and this was an operational assessment, not a long term assessment, was that probably the Mekong Delta which was the most populous part of South Vietnam could be held indefinitely, provided we were willing to continue aid. My recollection is that we were less concerned about Cambodia, although Cambodia being next to Thailand, with which we have an ongoing security commitment was of concern. But our principal concern was whether or not the southern part of South Vietnam could be held.

Q: When it became apparent that it was really going to go, what did we think? Did we think Vietnam was going to be a blood bath?

MILLER: There was concern about that and therefore there was concern that we provide a lot of shipping to allow Vietnamese who were trying to escape a blood bath to get away and save themselves. So we did have a lot of ships positioned off the coast. We were concerned about a blood bath. We were certainly concerned that those who were associated with the joint US-South Vietnamese effort were very much in danger if they stayed behind. And we know that many who did stay behind or couldn't get out got put into re-education camps and were treated very badly for a long time.

Q: Were you able to do any coordinating beforehand about what to do with refugees?

MILLER: Yes, in addition to planning for evacuation, we began to plan how to handle up to a million Vietnamese refugees and it very quickly became apparent that this was a job too big for the East Asian Bureau because so many domestic US agencies were involved in terms of setting up camps, etc. So very early in the game an interagency task force was established as an adjunct to the Operation Center which plugged into the White House and into domestic agencies and also voluntary agencies who were called upon to provide clothing, shelter, organize family sponsorships, etc. This effort was underway pretty quickly after the collapse if it wasn't started before the collapse. Julia Taft was named as the first permanent head of the task force. She was excellent -- a real mover and shaker. She had people like Bob Keeley who had come out of Cambodia, and Frank Wisner, who had come out of Vietnam as her senior deputies and they were plugging into all the agencies and we were getting appropriations to be devoted to this. What the legal situation -- getting them into the country -- was I don't recall. We set up camps

around the country and proceeded to get voluntary agencies to find sponsors for refugees. It became a very major effort.

Q: What about Cambodia?

MILLER: Well, Cambodia was important, but secondary to Vietnam. It was kind of Vietnam's flank. I visited Cambodia in 1974 while on a trip to Vietnam and remember coming back feeling pretty good about South Vietnam but that Cambodia was really on the ragged edge if it couldn't get ammunition from us. My recollection is that we really focused much more on what would happen to Vietnam than we did on Cambodia, because Vietnam was the prize really. Cambodia was important but really secondary to Vietnam. It was clear that Cambodia was going to collapse sooner than South Vietnamese would collapse. I think what we overlooked with respect to South Vietnam was the psychological impact on the South Vietnamese regime and people when they finally realized that the Congress wasn't going to provide any more aid; the place then collapsed like a house of cards.

Q: Cambodia collapsed, South Vietnam collapsed, what did your organization do then?

MILLER: We continued to deal with the refugee problems although the basic action responsibility had gone to the task force. We had a fairly immediate problem with Thailand because we had about 40,000 troops there, mostly supporting our military operations in Vietnam. The question was, would they stay or go? We had an negotiation with the Thai where we ended up taking out all the troops except for the military attaché and military assistance group. We would have preferred to leave a small residue of people there, about 3,000, but we couldn't get agreement with the Thai on that. The Thai were very sensitive, once we failed in Vietnam, and did not want to irritate the North Vietnamese anymore than necessary. It was a fairly quick negotiation.

And then we began to try and think further ahead about what our policy should be toward Southeast Asia in the aftermath of Vietnam. In the East Asian Bureau, we were anxious that the U.S. government not make any rash decisions to "turn tail" and ignore Southeast Asia. We spent some time on policy papers and thinking about our relations with the new regional organization - the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which includes the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and now Brunei. So a lot of our attention was focused on how to preserve a constructive relationship with that remainder of Southeast Asia.

There was another set of problems we were dealing with -- residue problems concerning Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. One, would we maintain an embassy in Laos, and we finally did, at the Chargé level; two, we imposed trade and finance embargoes on Vietnam and Cambodia; and three, we had to testify before the Congress on a number of issues. There were many Congressmen who felt we had made a mistake in imposing the embargoes. I testified on our rationale on imposing these embargoes. Then there were people who were pressing us to provide humanitarian aid to Vietnam and Cambodia. That was a policy decision that Kissinger had to make. The issue was work-intensive because he wanted to look at every request, every Band-Aid, etc. that humanitarian agencies wanted to send to Vietnam. It was a busy post-Vietnam period.

Q: While you were there did you see any possibility of developing relations with the new Vietnamese government?

MILLER: When the Carter Administration came in, which was shortly before I left, they would have developed relations with Vietnam very quickly if it hadn't been for Hanoi's gluttony in insisting on the alleged 3 1/2 billion dollars in aid that Nixon had "promised them" for signing the Paris Agreements. When Hanoi insisted on getting its 3 1/2 billion as a price of diplomatic relations, even the Carter Administration, which was eager to overcome hatreds and tensions of the Vietnam era, could not agree to that demand. I suppose you could say that Hanoi outsmarted itself in that regard. So there was a point when relations could have been quickly established with no conditions attached, but the Vietnamese attached such impossible conditions that it just fell apart.

Q: How did you view the role of China, the People's Republic of China? The rationale for our being in Vietnam for a long time was that we wanted to keep the communist Chinese out. As the Vietnam war wore down did we see China becoming a non problem in the area?

MILLER: In my view, we over-interpreted the Sino-Soviet bloc as a monolith and in doing so we almost made the Sino-Soviet bloc a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more I think about this question the more I am convinced, with the great benefit of hindsight, that the first strategic error was made by the Truman Administration in allowing General MacArthur to go to the Yalu in Korea. This triggered a major Chinese military confrontation with US forces and made China an adversary twenty years beyond what might have otherwise been the case. If you read the record, after the fall of China in 1949 there was consideration given to nearly reconciliation with China; there even was some consideration of this after the Korean War during the Eisenhower/Dulles era. But the fact that the Chinese had become military enemies of ours in the Korean War, I think, so skewed our perception of this Sino-Soviet bloc that we didn't exploit the tensions and potential tensions between Moscow and Beijing. Had we done so, we might have been able to put the problem of Vietnam into a much more limited perspective. We may have done the same kind of things and made a lot of the same kind of mistakes. But if we had done it as a problem limited to Vietnam, rather than making of Vietnam the front line between communism and the free world, we might have avoided some of the mistakes that we made. It might not have become such a vital interest to us that we felt it was at the time.

LEONARDO NEHER
Commercial Officer
Saigon (1962-1964)

Leonardo Neher was born in Ohio in 1922. He received a BA in 1948 from Green State University and a MA from the University of Chicago in 1952. From 1943 to 1946, he served in the U.S. Army overseas. He joined the State Department in 1954 and his overseas posts included Morocco, Vietnam, Syria, Zaire, Chad, Dominican Republic, and Burkina Faso. He was interviewed by Charles Kennedy

on October 18th 1989.

Q: Let's move on then to your next assignment. You went to Saigon and worked with what could only be called interesting times. You were there from '62 to '64, which covers basically probably the most critical period of the time there. Could you explain how the assignment came? What you were doing?

NEHER: It came unexpectedly. The cable came and said, "You're assigned as Commercial Officer to the Embassy in Saigon by way of the Mid-Career course." Did you go through that yourself?

Q: No, I never did.

NEHER: It was very much like the Senior Seminar but aimed at mid-career people. The quality of the speakers, and presentations, was exactly the same. They were the leading sociologists, and journalists, editors, politicians, Ambassadors from foreign countries, academicians and politicians. The format was very much the same. They'd come and they'd talk for a couple of hours in the morning, and then we'd take them out to lunch, with an ad-hoc committee as the host, allowing us to continue the conversation. It was very nicely done, three or four months, as I recall. But the Saigon assignment came because I had had, in Tangier, really very little to do. Then, when a Department of Commerce trade mission came through I had a perfect program for them. I had it laid on just right. I had the lists of all the people who would be in the group discussion with them, and I had the recommended languages to speak. The reason for this excellence was that I had plenty of time and very little to do. I could give it all the energy and time it needed.

Q: This is one of the little tricks of the trade. Talk to the person who has time and can really set things up, and give a much greater and better impression than somebody who is so busy they can't spend the time.

NEHER: And unfortunately for me, I made such a good impression that the Department of Commerce grabbed onto me and wouldn't let me go. So they got me for Commercial Officer in Saigon. You can imagine what commercial affairs were like in Saigon at the time, when the Diem government was falling, there were coups and demonstrations, Buddhist monks self-immolating, changes of Ambassadors, the CIA everywhere, terrorism attacks. It wasn't the right place to be. It may have been the right place to be, but it was the wrong job.

Q: What did you think about going there? I mean to Saigon at the time, '62?

NEHER: I welcomed it because my purpose, again, was to see the world. And if you've been in Turkey your first assignment doing consular affairs, and then you go to Morocco and do economic affairs -- and in the second two years in Morocco I did economic and political Affairs - - then you're going to go to the Far East and do commercial affairs, not bad. I didn't care much for commercial affairs, but it was the Far East so I welcomed it because it would allow me to see more of the world.

Q: What was your view of the situation in Saigon? This is '62, before you went. What did you think about it. What were you getting from your colleagues?

NEHER: Well, you know everybody now is saying, "I was always opposed to the U.S....," but, in fact, I was. I was very much opposed to the U.S. approach to Vietnam, to the current assessment of the U. S. interest there, and the kind of investment we should put in to protect that interest. I thought it should be proportionate. I argued as much as I could against direct and open involvement in Vietnam. The last dinner...I guess it was when Bill Trueheart was leaving, we had a dinner at the home of head the head Economic Section, and I remember arguing vociferously there that we really didn't understand the problem, that the Vietnamese understood it better than we, that we didn't have an important stake in the country. One of the reasons probably...well, I'm not sure it's a reason, whether it was a cause, or an effect, but because I was fluent in French, having majored in French as an undergraduate, I had the literary background as well as the conversational, I had a number of friends in the French community that I think other people in our Embassy didn't have. Some of them were *cooperants*, somewhat like our Peace Corps volunteers. They were people who were serving as teachers, social workers, and so forth as an alternative to military service. I saw many of them, and both their immersion in Vietnamese life and their consciousness of the French military failure, convinced them that our efforts were destined to fail. Some of that certainly rubbed off on me. But rationally I really could not see an outcome to that involvement that would satisfy the American government, American planners, the military, the political leaders at home, and the American people. Because there was no clear agreement, as far as I could see at the time, on what the goals were. If it was democracy and freedom of choice in Vietnam, what were we doing with Nhu and Diem? I mean his family didn't have any commitment to democracy at all. And if it was stopping monolithic communism, well, it was not monolithic at that time. China and the Soviets were very much at odds.

We had one young officer there in the Embassy, Bill Beachner, whose job was reporting on north-south relations. And nobody wanted to read what he was writing, but it was good stuff. He was not an imposing person. I think he didn't have the family and education, an elitist kind of background that most of the other young officers had. Most of them were Ivy Leaguers from all the right families, and so he was not one of the "in" people. But he kept looking at the tensions between North Vietnam and China, for example, and the traditional animosity that continued to exist. Nobody wanted to hear that. I mean, you had to talk about communism, and you had to lump together China and the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam, and not look for nuances at all. Not look for tensions or changes. And once you had the military there, all those not aligned with the government of Vietnam became simply "Charlies," short for Viet Cong.

Q: How did you find the atmosphere in the Embassy as far as the relationship between the officers? We have a large Political Section and were they pretty much unanimous, on how they felt on the situation?

NEHER: The new officers coming in, the young ones coming in, who had been trained in the language, and who were going to go out and work in or with the provinces -- although we didn't have any CORDS at the time, or any U.S. structure in the countryside, were reporting back to Saigon that there were problems. They were not happy with military assessments of one kind and

another, with the statements that supported our effort and were uncritical. They were quite critical, but the top levels in Saigon had to reflect the policy emanating from the White House. And that policy, elaborated by the White House, the Pentagon and the CIA, and by very hard liners at the top in the State Department, and supported by strong Congressional interest, was very hard line. It's a little like the people now who are shouting about Noriega.

Q: *You're thinking about the dictator in Panama.*

NEHER: That's right. You have one enemy, let's get rid of him. You can't even ask at this time, suppose we had put our forces in there, and they had met the full Panamanian army, and you had a war. You can't even ask it. You have to give Jesse Helms honor and respect even though he's completely nuts on this issue.

Q: *This is the Senator from North Carolina who is extreme right -- who is continuing mini crises with Panama should we intervene and oust this dictator or not?*

NEHER: At any rate, at that time there was no way to find an audience for the observations that Beachner was writing. Nobody wanted to sit down and do thoughtful analysis, looking at the forces in play and then recommend where to put our efforts and our resources in order to improve our prospects. We were going to solve the problem. We were prepared to force a solution on Vietnam. We were going to solve the problem by calling in the military. But with the military, who have to distinguish between friend and foe, all nuances would be lost. It would now be us and them. And that was an oversimplification that would not allow for thoughtful analysis and indicate diplomatic means to deal with the problem.

Q: *Did you have any contact with the American military at the mid-level or something? What were they thinking about?*

NEHER: Not very much. I did have one colonel -- colonel or lieutenant colonel, I think he was a full colonel -- who was a little like John Vann. I didn't know Vann, but my colonel was a little like that. He was out in the boonies all the time, had candy in his pockets for the kids, and he knew them by name in some of the villages. Did you read Vann's...

Q: *Yes. A book called A Bright and Shining Lie.*

NEHER: A Bright and Shining Lie, John Vann. This colonel's attitude was very much like Vann's was at the outset. He saw the complexity of the problems, the ambivalence of our goals, and was skeptical about the ability of a military force to accomplish very much. At that time we had no combat troops in Vietnam. We had 17,500 advisors who helped with planning, training and who accompanied Vietnamese troops into the field. Another military contact was my own brother-in-law, well, the brother of my brother-in-law. He came out as a young Captain, as an advisor on his first tour, while I was there. He came back later on at least once occasion as a commander of a unit there, and finished his career as a full colonel. When he was in Saigon he stayed with me, so we had a lot of good talk about the military operations. He, too, was skeptical about the effectiveness of the military's role in the conflict.

Q: Just trying to get a little of the atmosphere. Say the younger officers trained in Vietnamese affairs, were sitting around saying "Sam has to go," or something like this. Or were they saying, "If Diem goes, what happens after this?" obviously speaking before November 1963.

NEHER: The loudest voices were those echoing the official policy of the U.S., taking a hard line in support of more vigorous U.S. involvement. Henry Cabot Lodge came to replace Frederick Nolting just before the coup against Diem, in the summer of 1963, and he came with a mandate from President Kennedy to do something, or so it seemed to me. You know, get the show on the road. Tell me what you need. At that point the people who moved to the top and were closest to the Ambassador's ear, were those who were saying, "Yes, damn right, right on, let's go." I remember hearing at one of Lodge's first staff meetings an embassy officer saying, "Give us 50,000 Green Berets, and we'll clean up this mess." And those who said such things got the applause. Not literally applause, of course, but that was the "right" thing to say.

Q: That was the Kennedy thrust. Special forces were the answer to really everything.

NEHER: And another expression that I heard there that I'll never forget, was when we were talking about dependents, whether they should stay or be evacuated. One of our embassy officers in the meeting said they should go. "We've got to clear the decks for action." That, it seemed to me, was what the U.S. leaders, both at home and in the embassy, wanted to hear. What they didn't seem, to want to hear was, "Yes, but...." The speaker might not be invited to the next meeting. I was duty officer one Saturday when the Embassy was preparing its hottest, most comprehensive report, the weekly status report when we got a cable, probably flash or NIACT, to change the title of the report from that to the weekly progress report. I often joke that that was the turning point in the war.

Q: This gives the...

NEHER: The wave was rolling and it was going to go its course and I don't think these young officers who may have had doubts about the wisdom of that policy, or the possible success of it, were heard very much. And they didn't have much success in getting their doubts conveyed to decision makers.

Q: What about the CIA? Again, this as an unclassified interview. Did you find that the CIA had any particular influence in the discipline, in the atmosphere of the place that you were aware of from your own perspective?

NEHER: I knew a number of the CIA people very well, and went to parties with them where I was sometimes one of the very few non-CIA people at the parties. They were gung-ho because they were having the time of their lives. They had resources, they had everything they wanted; they had access to Ngo Dinh Diem and, especially, to his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, and to the family. They didn't need the Embassy. They were doing a lot of things that nobody really needed to know about, and they were really having a ball. They were pilots doing air drops and rescues of one kind and another in Vietnam and the neighboring countries; they were under covers as varied as film and drama producers and industrial salesmen; they were trainers, weapons experts, merchants. Theirs was entirely an operational role, not an analytical one, as far as I knew. They

had people on the payroll, agents they were running. They had unbelievable funds. Only one of them, whom I knew quite well, was given to much doubt about the wisdom of the involvement. The others were not thinking about doubt so much. I think maybe at higher levels they were, but at the lower levels they were in a full court press. That was not a time to be thinking about anything except the game. That's what they thought about.

Q: How about...did you have much contact with the Vietnamese at the time -- government or otherwise?

NEHER: Not so much with government, but socially very good contact with Vietnamese. That is, professional people, lawyers, doctors, scientists. I had very good contact with them.

Q: What was your impression? Did you feel that we were sustaining an elite, or did you feel this was a group dedicated to building a nation, or how did you feel about that?

NEHER: I'm not sure I remember how I felt. I'm certain I must have had pretty clear feelings about it, but looking back on the individuals that I knew, I generally liked them as individuals, they were very meritorious people. I respected and admired Vietnamese on the professional and social levels. I think that was the feeling I'm searching for, not so much, can these people maintain an independent country? are they the ones for whom the government should take action? is this where the future of the country lies? I don't know. I really don't remember what I thought about it to be perfectly candid.

Q: I was in Saigon five years later, and I don't think it really was a relief. There they were and this is a nice people with whom we were dealing. Let's come to how did you see the events -- it was November of '63 wasn't it? Again from your perspective.

NEHER: November was the assassination of Kennedy.

Q: I mean October of '63. How did you see this at the time, I mean the situation just prior to it within the Embassy, and afterwards.

NEHER: Well, having very early in my tour of duty there I thought that we really didn't know what we were doing in the country, and that we were in fact replacing Vietnamese judgments, analysis, thinking and programs with our own. We wanted Vietnamese officials who would be cooperative with us, officials who would say "yes" instead of "no". It was my understanding that the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem signaled that an impatient U.S. was going to push recalcitrant Vietnamese out of the way and get in and do the job by itself. It was my impression that we'd just lost control of it entirely. Now, of course, we still didn't have military forces in the country, and the debate was raging at the time as to whether we should and, if so, how many, what types, how soon, and where. Big Minh had been in power only a short time before he was overthrown by Nguyen Khan, and not long after that Cao and Ky came on the scene. I had certainly not been unhappy to see Diem and his very authoritarian family, including his brothers and Madame Nhu, to leave the scene. I wasn't happy to see that they had been killed in a coup that was, if not sponsored by us, at least condoned by us -- I mean, encouraged. I think it was inevitable they were to go. But I had seen enough of Vietnam by this time and decided that I would leave at the

first opportunity.

Q: Just one thing. How about the American community? I assume there was an American Chamber of Commerce?

NEHER: No.

Q: Because when I was there five years later there was a very active American Chamber of Commerce. So American commercial interests were sort of minor?

NEHER: Yes. They were, or they were being handled at a level other than mine. For example, some of the key people, the representative of PanAm, had direct access to the Ambassador. And the big trading companies, those people knew the Ambassador and they didn't even pass through the Commercial Section in the Embassy. If they had a problem they discussed it directly with the Ambassador, and very often if there was any kind of political intervention necessary, or pressure to bring on somebody, or an interest to defend, very often it was defended elsewhere in the embassy or the huge aid mission, and I didn't even hear about it.

Q: One of the things, at least during the time was, that there were all sorts of reasons put forward why we were in Vietnam in all of this. We kept changing our stance. But from the far left, a sort of democracy interpretation, at least at one time it was, that we were in there because -- I think it was tungsten -- Vietnam as a source of important material, or something. So I'd like to ask you as a Commercial Officer in the Economic Section, did we have much of a strategic or economic interest in Vietnam?

NEHER: None that I could see at all. We had very little activity there. Most of the activity had to do with the importation of goods paid for with American aid -- materials of one kind or another, supplies, food, and so forth. There was a lot of big business being done, but most of it was under our own commercial import program run by AID.

Q: That was so, I mean we were paying for imports so as a practical measure, our interest in the area, your rather important viewpoint had nothing to do with the economics of the place.

NEHER: I would dismiss out of hand any thought that even a small part of our motivation for being there had to do with protection of commercial, or financial, or industrial interests. It did not at all. I remember one amusing event there. I got a visit of somebody from one of the clothing manufacturers in the United States. He'd come to the Commercial Section because his company, the manufacturer of Arrow shirts, was thinking of filing a suit against a local Chinese shirt manufacturer. The Chinese manufacturer was producing a similar dress shirt, and I went out and bought one as part of my little investigation. The name was ALLOW and running through the logo was an arrow. The Arrow shirt representative said "This Chinese is selling Allow shirts. So when you go into a place and you ask for an Allow shirt, that's what you get. You get his instead of ours." I advised him to forget the case. How was an attorney going to enunciate and differentiate "allow" and "arrow" in a courtroom where nobody could tell the difference.

WILLIAM R. TYLER
Assistant Secretary for European Affairs
Washington, DC (1962-1965)

Chief of Mission
The Hague, The Netherlands (1965-1969)

William R. Tyler was born to American parents in France in 1910. He received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Oxford and Harvard University respectively. He joined the Foreign Service in 1945 and worked in the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs for three years. His subsequent assignments mostly dealt with European affairs. He served as ambassador to The Netherlands in the 1960's.

Q: I'm skipping around a bit, but I would like to go back to the problem of Vietnam, which was boiling up, of course, both during Kennedy and the Johnson Administration, and the impact on Europe. I wonder if you could speak on it?

TYLER: I can wrap that up very quickly. I, through my wartime experiences, came to be on very friendly terms with General -- later Marshal de Lattre de Tassigny, and he used to bend my ear on Vietnam. I saw him just a day or two before his death in 1952.

Q: He had been sent out to Vietnam earlier for a while when the French were in Hanoi.

TYLER: But also, he went out again as military commander. He asked to see me, and I didn't realize then that he knew he was dying. He died within a few days after we saw each other. He talked to me at some length, saying, "The last thing I have to tell you, you are going to get bogged down. Don't get involved with a large territorial military force in Vietnam. You won't be able to come out of it." And he said, "With your massive organization and military power, it's not possible for you to fight the kind of war necessary to achieve a military solution in Vietnam."

Q: In dealing with Vietnam, in the first place, as the Assistant Secretary, you must have been tasked with selling the need for us to be there.

TYLER: Yes.

Q: But the European governments, for the most part, didn't want to see more, not out of theory, but, basically, they saw . . .

TYLER: A dilution of the American . . .

Q: Dilution of American power. Actually, we were taking arms from Europe.

TYLER: We were squandering our military effort.

Q: *Did you find it difficult . . .*

TYLER: Very.

Q: . . . *to sell the . . .*

TYLER: Impossible. I went on selling, but nobody was buying.

Q: *Was this a dual thing? Was Assistant Secretary Tyler sold on this, or were you selling it because you were a good soldier?*

TYLER: Because I was a good soldier. I can't say I foresaw how it would end, but I feared that it would end badly for us. It was difficult to be giving talks to groups, and to sound convinced and optimistic. However I did my best. I would invite young students to come and talk with me about Vietnam, which was about as popular as finding a skunk in your bedroom. I talked in Rotterdam and Amsterdam and in The Hague, and got nowhere, because people were just firmly convinced that things were already pretty bad. Well, after all, an ambassador isn't only there to give out good news and take popular positions. When Clark Clifford came over . . .

Q: *He was Secretary of Defense at that point?*

TYLER: Yes, then he was at CIA afterwards for a short time. But he and Mrs. Clifford came over to Holland and stayed with my wife and me at The Hague. One evening when the ladies, Mrs. Clifford and my wife had retired, he and I left alone, had a very candid talk, in which he asked some straight questions and I gave him straight answers to the effect that I could see no way for us to come out whole out of this thing. Not that I had any particular knowledge; I just felt absolutely sure. This was in April 1963, just before I left the Hague. I said, "I think that it's a hopeless proposition, and I think we've got to drink the cup to the dregs. I don't think there's any way out. We can't retire defeated on the battlefield of our own volition. If we have to get out then let us get out in time and salvage what we can. But I see no way in which we can ever have the West with us on this, nor can we, from what I gather from a military point of view, look forward to any other outcome." And he said nothing, but he nodded. I said, "That doesn't stop me, obviously doing all I can to explain our policy as convincingly as possible". I think that was the only time I spoke to somebody at that level in that way.

In my mind, I heard the words of de Lattre de Tassigny ringing: "Don't commit yourselves militarily overwhelmingly..... Your concept of warfare is not valid in these circumstances. You can destroy, you can burn, you can shatter, you can bomb, you can do 1,000 things, and you'll still find the enemy everywhere." This was what was being said just before his death in 1952, 16 years earlier by perhaps the most brilliant military leader that the French had.

FREDERICK W. FLOTT
Special Assistant to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge
Saigon (1963)

Frederick W. Flott was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1921. He entered the Foreign Service in 1946. His career included positions in France, Iran, West Germany, Switzerland, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Mr. Flott was interviewed by Ted Gittinger on July 22, 1984.

Q: Mr. Flott, could we begin with the first question: what were the circumstances of your assignment to Saigon in 1963?

FLOTT: Well, it was a position as a special assistant to Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge. I was brought out there by him at his choice and his decision. Mind you, if I had wanted to decline the assignment, I probably could have, but I was very interested in going; I was honored that he asked me, in part at the suggestion of his son George, who had been the assistant secretary of labor and with whom I'd worked. Ambassador Lodge knew that I'd traveled in the Soviet Union with Bob Kennedy, who of course had defeated his son in their Senate race in about 1962, I guess. He thought -- partly because of the duties he had in mind for me, which we'll get to later -- it would be very useful to have somebody who had good personal access to Bob Kennedy and was a known quantity to him and President Kennedy, and also whom he knew to be loyal to him, Lodge, both on Republican Party grounds and family friendship grounds.

Q: How were you contacted? Did he call you, or -- ?

FLOTT: His son called me and said, "Look, the old man is worried about staff, and I think you ought to go out there with him." And they invited me up to the family home in Beverly, north of Boston -- I was in Washington -- to go sailing with them on his yacht. Some of this is a little comical, but Lodge had me take the wheel of his yacht, which I guess is how New Englanders analyze character. I didn't drive the boat into any rocks or anything. But, more seriously, we talked about the mission and his plans, and I think it was largely just a question of being personally acceptable to Mrs. Lodge and to him. But it was that kind of appointment. It was based on all of those things.

Lodge said he had had very bad experience with the State Department and with the Foreign Service -- he thought it was bad experience any-way -- when he was up at the United Nations. And so his first inclination was to choose his own staff, when he had the clout to do it. President Kennedy did tell him he could take anyone to Saigon who was willing to go, and he could send anyone home whether he was willing to leave or not. And so he thought, "Well, anyone the State Department assigns to me may be hopeless, so therefore I will pick my own people among the State Department crowd," and he was making his own decisions. Later he learned and adjusted to the fact that the State Department assigns some very able people, and that, all things considered, he would do just as well by their assignments as by his own selections.

He told me when he was interviewing me for this position that he was very disturbed by what he saw in Paul Kattenburg, who was the country director for Vietnamese affairs, who's presently a professor at the University of South Carolina, after early retirement from the department.

Q: What was he disturbed about?

FLOTT: It was sort of ad persona observations; the guy seemed to him a little bit flighty, a little bit fuzzy on the mission -- you know, not hard-line mission oriented, and he just wasn't comfortable with it. He didn't think he was especially wise or especially committed to the goals of the administration, which he, Lodge, as a Republican appointed by a Democratic president, was about to serve loyally and well, and more gung ho than anyone else. It was that sort of reaction, I think. I know Paul Kattenburg personally and have high regard for his knowledge and judgment, but I can see how Lodge might quite honestly have had some concern -- and of course, this was in July of 1963. I suppose it would be fair to say the State Department had not quite yet put in its first team on Vietnam. It did later, but at the time, there were there some people who were available for assignment to what at that time was something of a backwater, or at least a place that traditionally had been something of a backwater.

Q: Did you know Ambassador [Frederick] Nolting?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: Was there any kind of feedback on how the job he had done was being received back in Washington? Was he in bad odor or good odor or -- ?

FLOTT: Like many of these things -- because Americans high in public life are usually very decent people; they don't want to hurt anyone, but also they tend to think that anyone that disagrees with them just doesn't understand the problem -- there were a lot of reservations about whether he understood the problem, whether he was too committed to [Ngo Dinh] Diem and [Ngo Dinh] Nhu, whether it was time for a change, whether he was hard-charger enough; there was all that. And on the part of people like Averell Harriman and [Dean] Rusk and all, I'm sure it was handled with total gentility. With Lodge there were some rather abrupt incidents in dealing with Nolting.

Q: Really?

FLOTT: Yes, at CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific], when we were on our way out to Saigon, we stopped in Honolulu and Nolting was there and offered to brief us. He was on his way back to Washington, and it was very much understood that he would be out of Saigon before Lodge got there. But it's common practice to do that; that was certainly not an ad persona phenomenon. But at Honolulu, Ambassador Nolting very graciously offered to be debriefed and to talk at any length that Lodge might want, and Lodge simply remarked that he had nothing to learn from him and was not seeking the interview, and I'm not even sure there was a polite handshake for the photographers. If there was, that was all there was. That was the Ambassador coming back from Saigon on his way back to the department.

Q: That's a little abrupt, isn't it?

FLOTT: Yes, abrupt, and to my mind, unwise, because even if you thought Nolting was a failure and totally wrong in everything he ever did or said, you'd still want to get a feeling for the guy for damage assessment, if for nothing else. But it was Lodge's manner, in cases of that sort -- but

again, there was some purpose in his method. He thought he was on a game plan, too. which was to convey very dramatically that it was a new team taking over and new emphasis, A lot of things he did where people thought he was insensitive to other people's feelings and all, there was perhaps that more than an extenuating set of circumstances, a very real game plan and purpose that he thought he had a charter to do.

Q: What sort of charter did he think he had? Now this is before the famous August 24 telegram from Washington.

FLOTT: Yes, this was when he was on his way out to Saigon.

Q: Yes. Was he supposed to convey to Diem that we were getting tougher or that policy was changing, or what?

FLOTT: That the American ambassador was no longer so committed to Diem, and that Diem had to fly straight and level and meet our policy requirements, and that he could not presume that just because somebody was the American ambassador, that Diem already had him persuaded and in the bag.

Q: Which, I take it, is what the opinion of Ambassador Nolting had been.

FLOTT: Well, it was a certain perception of Nolting. I have enough respect for Ambassador Nolting and Paul Kattenburg and Bill Trueheart and all these good people to think that they probably knew the pros and cons of Diem and the limits of his government. The truth of the matter is that a career foreign service officer in an ambassadorial position does not operate in the same way that a former member of the U.S. Senate does.

He operates under different footwork and different rules. So I would hesitate to evaluate just how much Nolting or any of the others knew about the limitations of Diem, but by and large my personal view was that anything that was apparent to me was surely apparent to any of these other players, who are just as perceptive as I am and who had had a lot more time in country, and whose judgment and patriotism were just as high as my own.

Q: What was the nature of your specific duties when you got to Saigon?

FLOTT: I suppose I should begin by saying what the concept was for which I was recruited, and what we were supposed to be doing. I must say -- to tell the end of the story first -- it did not turn out anywhere near what we had planned, partly because the contingencies that we had anticipated didn't quite arise in the form we thought and then the whole coup made a new ball game of it.

But what Lodge really chose me for was the following, and here he was drawing on his UN experience and experience with other countries. And I must say the concept was realistic; I'm certainly not criticizing him for having seen this as a worthwhile mission, and I certainly liked the idea as he spelled it out to me. There were a number of things. One was he understood that there was a significant emigre community of Vietnamese who'd fled Diem, who were living in

Bangkok, Hong Kong, Washington or Paris. Now Lodge knew, and he was very disciplined about what the rules of the game are for an ambassador, that an ambassador accredited to a friendly government cannot flit around spending long hours being spoken to by opposition types, and cannot seek them out, at least not aggressively, and that sort of thing. And he was going to have me do some of that for him. And it made sense, because at my level, coming from his office, I could credibly do that and they would have talked to me. I know what my skills and limitations are, and I would indeed have been the right person for that kind of a job. So he came to the right person, and he had a real job in mind.

I think another part that's inseparable from this -- and this gets back to almost Lodge lore -- was that he hated to fly transatlantic or transpacific or to fly in airplanes, even, and I think he thought, "Oh God, Vietnam is a hot spot. They're going to want me back there in the White House about once a month. I hate jet lag in planes, so I'm going to have a guy who is of confidence to me and privy to all my affairs. who can go back and answer their questions, at least part of the time."

Well, for one thing, I'm not sure that would have been acceptable to the administration anyhow, but maybe for some things it would have been, conceivably, because I did indeed have good relations with Bob Kennedy, and Lodge knew this. So he thought that if he did take the route of having a leg man whom he could send back to brief on what was going on, viva voce, that I would be personally acceptable to them. That was certainly true and correctly perceived, that I'd probably be the right one to do it, that I was personally loyal to him, that I would be loyal to him in my reporting to them. All this was correctly perceived. The only thing is that as things turned out, there didn't prove to be a great need for that function. When I mentioned earlier the emigres -- as you may know, on the Taiwan scene, which was recent history, there was the whole third-force phenomenon. Somebody has to talk to the third force, which was neither Chiang Kai-shek nor Mao Zedong-oriented. But if Lodge couldn't do it, well, he had me on tap to see these people wherever they might be.

But in general, it was special missions and in-house advice, sort of an in-house counselor of his choice and in his confidence.

Q: No administrative duties.

FLOTT: I personally did not. Mike Dunn did. It was very clearly understood that Mike Dunn was going to be the honcho for administrative affairs, for mission management and for liaison with the U.S. military. And I was the honcho for non-routine political affairs. Now Lodge did, of course, have a counselor of embassy for political affairs, but he wanted somebody closer to him, of confidence to him, a known quantity to him. And again, one of the reasons my mission changed direction was that Lodge saw that the State Department had put a thoroughly competent fellow in as political counselor, and continued to, and continued to do so.

Q: This was who?

FLOTT: That was Mel Manfull, when we got out there. But he had a good team of people, even then. And Lodge gradually thought, "I don't really need my own private political counselor. I've got a perfectly good political section in the embassy." So he encouraged me to integrate my

efforts with the embassy political section as quickly as possible and become another line officer, another first secretary in the political section. This arrangement made sense in the eyes of all concerned.

But it was also true that anything I did had the imprimatur of Cabot Lodge. The Vietnamese knew that. When we got out there, I lived in the Lodge residence for some weeks, and I had arrived on the same plane with him and Mrs. Lodge and Mike Dunn. So there were certain things that I was personally well situated to do, in part because of the imprimatur. For example, as a modest first secretary, I was routinely in direct contact with the foreign minister of Vietnam, and could have access to the vice president of Vietnam when I wanted to. Also, I had been assigned by Lodge to handle the whole French account, and had very friendly collegial access to the French chargé d'affaires. For most matters at my level, anything where it was just a question of getting something done, the French were perfectly willing to deal with me, because they knew -- and I'll mention this later -- that Lodge had established me as his honcho for all French affairs. I could give you more detail on how that came about and all, but that was one of my duties. and if Lodge assigned you to any duty, people accepted you at it.

For example, Lodge was invited to join the Rotary Club. You may know that the top rule of Rotary is you've got to be the number-one man in your profession, and only one man from each profession can be in the local Rotary. Well, Lodge was simply too busy to do it, and it was basically a French-speaking, French-oriented Rotary, and since I was bilingual in French, he said, "Fred, why don't you take on this chore and represent me there?" And the Rotary people were delighted. They would, of course, rather have had Lodge himself, but they knew that wasn't realistic, and they knew I was very close to him and had lived at the residence and all and came out with him. The fact of the title of special assistant to Lodge enabled me to do things that other first secretaries probably could not do. I also did virtually all of the French-language interpreting, with the GVN and for high-level American visitors.

I wouldn't suggest at all that my mission fell apart once we got there; it's just that things evolved, things changed, and of course the biggest thing was the coup comparatively shortly after we got there. We were no longer receiving entreaties from emigres about how the Diem government should be changed.

Q: How would you characterize the state of affairs in the embassy and the country team when you arrived? Was there dissension, was -- ?

FLOTT: Oh, yes. There was a strong diversity of opinion and sharp disagreements among various elements of the mission. All of this was handled, for the most part, very professionally; nobody was attacking people ad persona for their views, or very rarely. But some people disagreed sharply with the views of the situation held by others, and different people had their own "clients" among the Vietnamese, their own sources, and some thought, "My source is better than your source and more reliable." But they worked as a team. I would say there was no flagrant leaking of Stuff; the embassy didn't leak like a sieve. It was occasionally seething with disagreement and dissent, perhaps, but it wasn't leaking like a sieve.

Q: The disagreement was over what should be done about Diem?

FLOTT: Among other things. But also about the Special Forces, about --

Q: You mean Diem's Special forces?

FLOTT: -- Colonel [Le Quang] Tung -- yes -- his special forces regiment or whatever it was, and what should be done about the Nhus, whether we should avoid the Nhus; whether we should cut so-and-so off at the knees, or whether we should not, and all of that sort of thing. Different people had many different views.

Q: Could you draw lines between the agencies on these things, or was it strictly -- was it between field operators and mission headquarters?

FLOTT: I would acknowledge that I suppose the conventional wisdom might have been -- and I characterize it as the conventional wisdom because it certainly wasn't something I knew, because I'd just gotten there -- was that yes, the CIA was perhaps more for Colonel Tung and his group, and MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] was very much for the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam]], and MACV was very loyal to Diem, whereas the political section would be characterized by some as being fuzzy, and perhaps not as tough as they should be. All of these were very superficial perceptions that I'm not even sure were well founded. I think the CIA people -- history would tell us -- knew what they were talking about, and not much escaped their gimlet glance. Now, that doesn't mean that the case officer who was handling Colonel Tung didn't think that his little project was the best game in town, but I'd say all the agencies had good and responsible views of the matters with which they dealt. The station chief was Jocko [John] Richardson.

Q: Right. Did he have a position in this debate?

FLOTT: You know, I wouldn't really pretend to know, because the CIA people, wherever they serve, report to the ambassador directly; they're responsive to command, they do what the executive branch, the White House, tells them to do. I certainly wouldn't want to suggest that Jocko Richardson was following one line and Lodge another. It wasn't that at all.

Q: But he got sent home.

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: Do you know what was behind that?

FLOTT: I think it was, very frankly, because at that point in time, Lodge wanted to convey, "Look. A new team has landed; we're performing in a different way; we're pursuing different lines if not different objectives, and if Nhu thought that he had Jocko Richardson's ear to the exclusion of all others, well, now he can digest the fact that Jocko Richardson's no longer in country and Lodge has moved into his house." Which Lodge did. But I think Jocko Richardson was sent home as a device to convey an impression and to make a statement. I happen to know that Mr. [John] McCone, who was the director of CIA, waited for something like three hours to

get a minute alone with President Kennedy at the time that took place, saying, "Look, this man's a very good officer. He's coming home in what outwardly is a cloud, if not disgrace. I won't say it's outrageous, because maybe it's being done for a worthwhile purpose, but this man has been a very good officer and is a great patriot and should get a commendation from you directly." And Mr. McCone waited for three hours to get President Kennedy to agree to do that. But I elaborate on that in some detail because there were a lot of decisions of that sort made, where nobody was evil, nobody was bad, nobody was necessarily wrong, but it was a question of projecting certain images in order to serve a perceived political purpose.

Q: There was a shift in the tide.

FLOTT: Yes. Yes. And they wanted it symbolized, and all the more so when this person had been working very close to someone who was perceived as a big obstacle, namely Ngo Dinh Nhu.

Q: Right. Well, now, you've mentioned that there was a lot of dissension -- well, maybe that's the wrong word -- disagreement, within the embassy, and that the embassy was not leaking like a sieve, although when you have that sort of disagreement, the likelihood of leaks, I suppose, increases. What was the status of our relations with the press in Saigon at this time?

FLOTT: I think the mass of the foreign press in Saigon thought that Ambassador Nolting, and probably Jocko Richardson, were too uncritically pro-Diem, and even pro-Nhu. Again, I personally would challenge whether these two very able people would be very far off the mark on anything they looked at, and I would also question whether some of the press people who were there at the time knew anything any better than these people did. But anyway, that was the perception.

The press was also -- as it so often is -- in an adversary role. People were trying to keep some things secret; the press was trying to penetrate these secrets. The press traveled around the countryside more; they knew a lot of horror stories, and they knew a lot of fantastic things that they felt others in Saigon didn't know as well as they did. They thought the U.S. government was blind to certain weaknesses of the GVN, the Government of Vietnam, and perhaps the press was not as conscious as it should have been of the fact that an ambassador accredited to a friendly government has to deal with that government within the accepted lines of diplomatic behavior. And even his staff will do the same, which doesn't mean they're any less perceptive than the press who think they've missed the mark.

Q: Was there a press policy for your guidance or the guidance of the embassy?

FLOTT: The press policy, I would say, was very clear and it was enunciated by Cabot Lodge. He said he was his own spokesman. Among your telegrams there, there is one when he agrees to the assignment of Barry Zorthian to Saigon. He said, "I want him to understand that he will not deal with the press or be the spokesman, that I'm the spokesman and I deal with the press myself." Now, whether that's really possible, that was certainly Ambassador Lodge's position. And again, I'm not suggesting that that was a mistake on his part. He wanted to deal with the press: he'd had a lot of experience with the press in his various political campaigns and as a senator and at the

UN, and he was very skilled at dealing with them. As I recall, and correct me if I'm wrong, he had not had a particularly favorable press back in the United States.

Q: Lodge?

FLOTT: Right?

Q: Perhaps not.

FLOTT: My impression is he had a very good press in Saigon. I would say in general he did, yes. Was that due to his skillful handling? He worked on them very hard. I don't know if this gets into more detail than you're really interested in, but you may know that he allowed Keyes Beech and one other journalist to fly with us and arrive with us when we first flew into Saigon. In fact, if it doesn't interrupt your planned chronology, we could do the chronology of our trip out, because it illustrates things that -- I'll get back to the subject of the press on this in an anecdotal way as we move toward Saigon.

We left Washington, whatever the date was, and Lodge was concerned about jet lag and being tired, and he wanted to be very fit and up to form when he arrived in Saigon. He'd heard that the climate was very tiring. So we crossed the Pacific in very gentle laps. First of all, he flew out from Boston to San Francisco, stayed a day or two, recovered those three hours, then went on to Honolulu where Mike Dunn and I joined him. He spent a couple of days there, two or three days recovering, and then we flew the leg by jet from Honolulu to Tokyo, which wasn't backbreaking. And there the plan was we'd rest for several days in Tokyo. Mind you, this was not all resting. We consulted all along; we consulted with CINCPAC in Honolulu and we consulted with our embassy in Tokyo and with the regional military commands in Japan. The plan was to spend several days in Tokyo, and this was not frivolous time: Lodge had in mind seeing a lot of his old friends, distinguished Japanese ambassadors or foreign ministers from the United Nations period. Lodge would have been putting in many good licks for the administration's programs with all these stops. Then, not to move too fast, go from Tokyo down to Manila and Hong Kong, possibly even Taiwan. I'm not sure Taiwan was on the list, but do it in small bites, not to get too much jet fatigue, and then eventually fly into Saigon, when all the ducks were in line and with proper notice.

Well, we got, with this program, as far as Tokyo. We arrived in Tokyo, at 5:00 p.m. Japanese time, had a meeting with some former Japanese ambassador to the U.N. who was a personal friend of the Ambassador, and Mike Dunn and I sat in on that. And because we'd had a long flight and all, Lodge soon excused himself, took a walk, and about seven o'clock in the evening, Tokyo time, retired. And the plan was, we were going to have several days there, and one thing he was going to do was he was going to interview the Buddhists the next day. Now, there were a couple of Vietnamese refugee Buddhists there, and the political section of Embassy Tokyo had arranged to bring them in, and Lodge was going to have a leisurely talk the next day with them.

That's all I remember of the plans for several days in Tokyo: talks at the foreign office, the embassy, the military, all that. Well, Lodge went to bed about seven o'clock, and about nine o'clock I got a call from the embassy. We were staying at the Okura Hotel, which was right next

door to the embassy, and they called me over and said we had an immediate telegram from the White House, and to charge over and get it. So I got over there quickly, and it was from the President to Lodge, informing him that there had been one more egregious development on the Buddhist thing; I forget whether it was one more immolation -- no, I guess Nhu had raided the pagodas. The pagodas had been raided and President Kennedy said, "Lodge, cancel your step-by-step plan; get down there tomorrow. Leave Tokyo tomorrow morning. However, do not leave Tokyo without first talking with the two Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns who you're supposed to see in the next few days anyway. See them, then leave, and the military will put a plane at your disposal." We'd been traveling commercial jet until then.

Q: Why was he supposed not to put off the meeting with the Buddhists?

FLOTT: Because it was a statement that President Kennedy, to whose political instincts I'd certainly defer, wanted to make. He wanted to make it very clear that the incoming American ambassador was touching base with the Buddhists, and that the United States of America was not having any part of kicking around Buddhists or raiding other people's churches.

Q: Okay.

FLOTT: It was a good Kennedyesque statement that Lodge agreed with completely. They were both sort of on the same wave length in terms of political footwork and conveying impressions.

It was then about nine-thirty in the evening. I had the job of belling the cat, and that at great risk of getting my head lopped off: I had the job of waking up Ambassador Lodge at nine-thirty in the evening and telling him that. He was grumpy at first: "Why are you waking me up in the middle of the night?" And I said, "Well, sir, it's a telegram from the President with instructions about what we're to do tomorrow morning early." So he reluctantly acknowledged yes. I was probably right in waking him up. Mrs. Lodge was very gracious, saying, "Fred! How delightful to see you! Won't you come in? Won't you have a glass of orange juice with us?"

{Laughter} That sort of thing. She, as usual, was delightful and treated me almost like one of her sons, trying to get me off the hook. So, we agreed on certain things. Then I went back to my room.

Mike Dunn in the meantime was putting a plane together, making arrangements to get a plane. We had a -- what was the old four-engine Lockheed called? Lockheed Constellation. It was a good turboprop or prop plane, and this was a VIP-configured Lockheed turboprop. I think it even had a few bunks in it. And that was made available to us to fly down to Saigon. When Lodge heard that, he objected: "Well, this is a prop plane. Why do they give me a prop plane when all those Democratic politicians (the Kennedy cabinet) are flying around in jets?" That was his observation to me; I don't think he made that as a general statement. I explained to him that the Lockheed was a very safe, proven plane that had been around for a long time and maybe it was safer after all. Well, he agreed that that might well be right and that was certainly the way to go.

{Laughter}

So after establishing to his satisfaction the airworthiness of the Lockheed Constellation we went back to bed. Mike was working very hard, making all kinds of logistics arrangements. The next thing was I got a call about three o'clock in the morning. Lodge was getting more and more irate with all these interruptions of his sleep, and Mrs. Lodge was running out of new bases on which to be cheerful and seeming delighted to see me. So about three o'clock in the morning Mike Dunn came in and said, "Fred, there's a problem. It's in your department. Two press people, the UPI guy and the AP guy -- the wire services -- have learned of Lodge's trip tomorrow, and they want to ride down with him on the plane, but they have to know, so they can phone their offices and all. Will you please go in and get Ambassador Lodge's permission?" So I had the honor of going in and waking him up one more time to ask him for something that might have been controversial. But Mike was right; that was in my area of responsibility, anything that was political operating or judgment of that sort.

I went in and said, "Mr. Ambassador, sorry to wake you up, but the UPI guy and the AP guy have heard of the trip, and they would like to go down and they asked if that would be possible." Lodge was very relaxed and he said, "Fred, I'm glad you came to me with this; you showed good judgment. I think it's a good idea. Yes, we will take them. But tell them this. Tell them this very firmly: two and no more! If anyone else comes around saying 'I want to go on the Ambassador's plane,' the whole deal is off. These two and no more. It's up to them to keep it under their hat and not to tell anyone about it. But yes, we can go with it." That was about three o'clock, three-fifteen.

Then about five o'clock in the morning I got a frantic call from the press attaché, or the chief of USIS [United States Information Service] there, whoever he was, who said there was also a very respected writer for the *Chicago Daily News*, Keyes Beech, who had heard of the thing and wanted to go. In the meantime I think there was also a television crew. Let's see; I guess the first group that wanted to be added on was the television crew, and I went to Lodge with that, and he was again very cordial and friendly at the idea of getting some press, and he said, "Look, I thought I told you clearly no more." And I said, "Yes, sir, but this was presented to us by the press attaché." And he said, "Well, I don't care. I'm the ambassador." And I said, "Sir, the press attaché is a black. He's doing his job. I don't think we'd be serving the administration well if we failed to support a black officer trying to do his job and represent his country well." Lodge said, "Quite right, Fred. Tell them they can come. But that's it, no more. Besides, I don't want them bringing a lot of heavy cameras and stuff on the plane. I don't want that plane to sink."

(Laughter)

"So no heavy equipment, but they can come themselves and talk to me." I said, "Well, sir, could we agree that it's all right for them to bring cameras for their personal use?" "Yes, that's right, keep it light, cameras. I don't want to sink the plane." We already were up to about eight people on a four-engine transport.

So I went back, and then the last person to get in on the thing was Keyes Beech, who'd heard of it, and I found some reason why -- again, the press officer had felt he owed him one or had promised he'd get him on, or something, and Lodge very quickly agreed to that. So we had a television crew, plus Keyes Beech, plus AP and UPI, and Mike Dunn and I talked to them all the way down, and they of course talked with Ambassador Lodge as well. And from their point of

view, and indeed from our point of view, it was good government all around. They got a very good story; they got eight hours, because the prop planes mercifully fly slowly so we had eight hours elapsed time from Tokyo to Saigon. They knew Lodge's staff; we'd had drinks with them, we'd had meals with them, and Lodge had told them everything he wanted to tell them. They got the feel for the thing and sent in stories that certainly did not deserve our mission.

I get around to that long story, which also gets us to Saigon, as to how Lodge was. He knew the power of the press; he took it seriously, and he wanted to deal with it properly. But he also wanted to do it himself.

Q: What if a reporter came and talked to you? Did you have any guidance on what you could tell him, or did you have to report on press contacts, anything of that sort?

FLOTT: Well, there's always a discipline of reporting what you say. In my case it was on again, off again, sometimes yes, sometimes no. Like if Dave Halberstam would come around to the residence -- Mike Dunn and I lived at the residence, at first -- and Dave Halberstam would come around and, for example, if Ambassador Lodge had received him for a drink or tea or a chat, and then Lodge got called away on some emergency, he'd say, "Fred, will you talk to Dave while I'm away?" If I were doing it on direct instructions, that would be all right, or if Dave Halberstam, say, were to have sought me out for something that was appropriately of my competence, or if I had told the Ambassador, "Look, I'd like to talk further with Dave, just to see what makes him tick, what bug he's got in his bonnet, and to hear his story," sure, that was fine, pursuit of my mission. But in the long run, I don't think Lodge would have wanted anyone other than himself being the spokesman. It was just not his style of working, and again, like so many things that Ambassador Lodge did, and so many ways in which he approached his mission and how best to serve the President, he did it with the style of a senator or a very political ambassador in a very political place, like the UN.

Q: This next question is not in this vein at all, but we can pursue it. Were you involved in any way in the [Victor] Krulak-[Joseph] Mendenhall visit in September of 1963?

FLOTT: Yes, I saw them when they were there. Joe Mendenhall was a colleague, a career foreign service officer. And I knew of, I guess it was General Krulak, as a very knowledgeable marine corps general of whom they spoke highly at CINCPAC. We'd also looked forward to meeting them all, and we did. I didn't go out in the field with them on all their visits or anything, but I had a number of occasions to talk with them in Saigon. I eventually got back to Washington the day of the assassination of President Kennedy, and one of the first people I talked to when I was back there was Joe Mendenhall. First I talked with Bill Sullivan, who is, again, a very dear friend and colleague, and Joe Mendenhall.

Q: I was wondering if you had any insight into the way they developed what were apparently two very differing reports on the general direction that things were going in Vietnam, that prompted President Kennedy to ask, "You two did visit the same country, didn't you?"

FLOTT: Yes, I remember that incident, and it's true. There -- at the risk of sort of opening a long-winded parenthetical remark -- I would make this observation about General Krulak, but

more generally, it's an observation about the American military in general. And that is, without wanting to throw stones. First of all, I know this first hand, because I went to a military prep school myself, and I was an officer for three and a half years, an infantry officer in World War II. I know something about how the machine works and how the mind works. I know, for example, that as a young cadet and as a junior officer, I was taught what every single cadet or junior officer would say, "I'm commanding the best damn platoon in the best damn company in the best damn battalion of the best regiment of the U.S. Army, which of course is the best in the world." These logically are rather uncritical judgments, because not everybody is necessarily commanding the best platoon, and people of a more inquiring mind might even admit logically of the possibility of luck of the draw. You get good troops, good replacements out of the repple-depple or bad, but not necessarily everything is the best just because you're in command of it.

The military, on the other hand, seems to have a way of equating unquestioning, almost irrational optimism with loyalty and with suitability for command. That is one of the characteristics of the type, and having been trained that way myself, I know that's how they're trained. I do not question the fact that if your most important task is to take that hill with these thirty-six tired soldiers, that's not even bad training. I'm not questioning how the military trains itself; I am questioning their suitability as a group for making political assessments. Some of the military would acknowledge that, at least to the limited extent that one did in your telegram of General [Paul] Harkins saying that, "My officers know what's going on in the countryside" -- one might question that, parenthetically, but he said, "They know what's going on in the countryside, but I'm not suggesting they know what's going on in the palace. They aren't experts at palace gossip." Well that, indeed, they were not. So General Krulak comes out there, reporting to the Commandant of the Corps and to CINCPAC - and with his particular orientation he would see set of things, whereas I would that Joe Mendenhall, as a personality, was perhaps even more analytical and even more inclined to critical judgments and weighing both sides of a question than would even the average foreign service officer or civilian be. So naturally there's a gulf between the two.

Q: Did you talk to Mr. Mendenhall about this?

FLOTT: Sure.

Q: What were the things that bothered him about the situation in Vietnam?

FLOTT: He just thought that seeing what he could see, it just didn't strike him as inspiring confidence or looking very good. I probably shouldn't try to say what he said, because I don't remember it all that clearly and I don't want to put words in his mouth. But my guess would be that that would be the range of his comments, and General Krulak would have figured that he ran into some guy out in the boondocks who also thought he was advising the best ARVN battalion, and his brass was well polished and his shoes were shined and his shoulders were back and his stomach in and chin in, and head up, so General Krulak would report with confidence that things looked good out in the countryside.

Q: When that party went back, John Mecklin and Rufus Phillips went back with them. Do you remember any of the background of that, why they went? Did they go at the instigation of

Ambassador Lodge, or what was behind that?

FLOTT: I may be wrong on this, but I know that Mecklin very simply was fired from one day to the next, told to leave. That might have been the occasion on which he went back. Or he may have been returning from that trip, before he was fired. I forget which was which.

Q: What was he fired for?

FLOTT: I would really characterize it as a firing very much like the firing of Jocko Richardson. It was just a way of making a statement. Lodge did not do it with personal vindictiveness, but he wanted to make clear a new team was there, and the message came through louder and clearer if the guy left the next day. But I know in a personal way, the Ambassador and Mrs. Lodge invited both Mrs. Richardson and Mrs. Mecklin to dinner the nights of their respective husbands' departure, and these ladies understood that there were perhaps reasons for doing things the way they were being done, and personally everybody took it reasonably well, or as far as outward appearances went, anyway.

Q: Did you know Rufus Phillips?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: Did he talk to you about the opinions that he expressed later in Washington when he got back?

FLOTT: You know, I just don't remember in that much detail. We had so many things to talk about. I knew his wife; she was an old friend from Washington, and when Rufe was away on the trip, one of the first meals I had out of Ambassador Lodge's residence was when she and I went to have lunch at the Caravelle Hotel, if I'm not mistaken, or the Brink or someplace, and we just talked about mutual friends and family. When I saw Rufe, if I asked him anything, he would have, I'm sure, replied in giving me his best judgment on anything I asked him. But I just didn't have many substantive dealings with him, and I retained the impression that he was regarded as being very well informed. He'd been out there since 1954, and considering we were only off the gangplank since about four days, he came on as quite a regional expert. And I'm sure by any standard he was.

Q: Do you know where he tended to come down on this debate that was going on?

FLOTT: I don't happen to be all that clear on it.

Q: What about the [Robert] McNamara-[Maxwell] Taylor visit which followed almost on the heels of this one?

FLOTT: Yes, well, I worked very closely with them; I interpreted for McNamara when we went in with Diem. Lodge and Taylor spoke adequate French and understood most of what was going on in French. Secretary McNamara did not, and for that reason I was there as an interpreter. We also had CINCPAC with us on some of these meetings, too. CINCPAC, Max Taylor, Lodge, and

myself, talking with Diem. And my memorandum of that conversation is a matter of record. That was my first interpreting job for McNamara, and I interpreted for him on many other occasions.

Q: You're handing me a picture here --

FLOTT: That was taken when Lodge presented his letters of credence, some days before the McNamara-Taylor visit -- that was the first time I met Diem. See him shaking hands.

Q: You're shown shaking hands. Was this in the presidential palace?

FLOTT: Yes. That was several days after we arrived, whenever Ambassador Lodge went to present his letters of credence. And Diem was wearing that white suit that, I guess -- well, I have seen him in mandarin garb, but I think every other time I've seen a picture of him, he's in a white suit.

Q: Now again, nine people went with Lodge; Lodge plus eight others, and that was clearly the totem pole of the American establishment in country, and quite properly, the Ambassador, the deputy chief of mission -- That would have been Ambassador [William] Trueheart?

FLOTT: Yes, subsequently Ambassador Trueheart; then Minister-Counselor Trueheart. And the political counselor. The head of AID [Agency for International Development] was there, and General Harkins. We were all going from the residence at ten o'clock in the morning. We all arrived with our *protocolaire* white suits on, and General Harkins was in his white uniform, and all ready to go, and Ambassador [Lodge] called him by his first name and said, "Look" -- whatever his first name was-

Q: Paul, wasn't it?

FLOTT: Paul, yes. "Paul" -- or he might even have said General -- "my plan is for you to stay here. I want one of us to be outside in case the phone rings or there's some message" -- he didn't say, "If the phone rings," but that was the tone -- "or in case something comes up or there's some message. And I want a senior officer outside the palace for any contingency, and I'm asking you to do that."

So, again, it's sending signals. The next thing that was very clear was that General Harkins was not in the group that was with Lodge when he presented letters of credence. And I don't think this was petty; I don't think it was personally vindictive. They were, after all, friends and neighbors in Massachusetts. I don't think it was wrong. What I would say was that it was Ambassador Lodge using the tools that he was used to using in pursuit of his mission and what he understood to be the requirements of the situation.

Q: I think General Harkins and Ambassador Lodge were schoolmates, weren't they, at Boston Latin?

FLOTT: If they're not -- in prep school -- yes, something like that. I knew they were good friends, and both came from the same side of the tracks up in Massachusetts and all. There is so

much ad persona criticism of Ambassador Lodge about having been vindictive or putting down people on purpose or something; it wasn't that at all. He knew what he was doing; he was doing it with the tools he was used to using in the way he was used to doing it. Now, admittedly, a different ambassador would have proceeded in different ways with the same problems, but that doesn't mean one was wrong and the other was right.

Q: Did this cause strained relations between General Harkins and the Ambassador?

FLOTT: It made it very clear, if it was necessary to make it clear, that General Paul Harkins was not an independent theater commander or anything even resembling it and that he was about one notch above a military attaché, about which I could give you another anecdotal account.

Q: Please do.

FLOTT: You probably know that in every embassy, every American embassy anywhere in the world, they always have the service attachés, sometimes more, sometimes fewer, but basically all three services have to have a piece of the action. So there's an army, navy, and air force officer, and the senior of the three is designated the defense attaché, depending on how well he fits into the local situation, which gives the United States the most weight where it's needed with the host-country government and military. And I suppose of all things in life, the thing that was most unheard of was having an embassy without having military attachés. Well, one day Lodge was sort of wondering to himself, "Why do we need these military attachés, who take up office space in our embassy chancery?" The office building of the embassy was very small, and there was a shortage of space. The attachés, for good and proper reasons, had good and proper office space. They had their own requirements for what are loosely called code rooms, the communications centers and all, and they had staff and they had cars and all, and they were entertained. Lodge said, "Why do we need this? We have all these sixteen hundred advisers, however many we have; we've got enough military in the country. Why do we need these people?" He just raised the question, and it was slowly being disputed and shot down.

My office was in a small office right next door to Ambassador Lodge's big embassy office, and he could open a side door in his office and pop right into my office. Mike Dunn's office also opened on the Ambassador's, or you'd go through the deputy chief of mission's office to get to Mike's. I think on this occasion Mike was out. But anyway, this all happened, say, roughly two weeks after we got there. And at two o'clock in the afternoon, Mrs. Lodge was alone back at the residence. We had no proper security arrangements at the time; there was a retired Vietnamese policeman, perhaps, pulling guard duty at night or something, and a gardener during the day. It was very relaxed, and no real security around the embassy that would guarantee the well-being of anyone. We were constantly getting death threats, and CIA was getting messages from sources to which they attached some importance, at least, saying there was a plot to bump off Ambassador Lodge, Bill Trueheart, Mike Dunn and myself, and one other person. Everybody who wasn't on the list had their nose somewhat out of joint at not being included! I must say, I didn't lose a lot of sleep over it, but on some nights when Mike Dunn and I thought of how insecure the whole setup was, Mike and I took turns guarding the door to the Ambassador's personal quarters.

The way the embassy residence was, in the sleeping quarters on the second floor, there was what could be described as a private apartment for the Ambassador and Mrs. Lodge, with a big sitting room and two bedrooms, all off at one end. Mike Dunn and I each had very adequate rooms and baths near the stairs. And Mike said, "You know, Fred, I think you and I ought to guard this place, just to make sure," and I agreed. So we took turns sleeping on a rug, for four hours on and four hours off, in front of the door to Ambassador Lodge's private apartment, with a submachine gun or a carbine or something, just in case. Because you never knew what might happen. We were getting so many reports about how the government of Vietnam itself might try to assassinate Lodge, or how Colonel Tung, or how somebody thought they'd heard some generals were going to do it. There were all kinds of rumors, and the only way that Mike Dunn and I could proceed in good conscience was just to make sure that there'd be some noise before they got into Lodge's apartment.

Q: Did you mention a Schmeisser submachine gun before we began?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: Where in the world did you get that?

FLOTT: I didn't bring it out to Saigon with me. There was a time, as you know, when the American military involvement in Vietnam was supposed to be nonattributable. So I suppose it was the CIA that was doing it, or the very earliest stages of the advisory effort. They had a lot of non-attributable weapons, including Schmeissers in prime condition. I had used the Schmeisser before and was familiar with it, and they had lots of ammo for it, and it was heavy but I didn't have to carry it anywhere. Lou Conein was an old friend, and kindly offered to give me any weapons I wanted. And I didn't bring any weapons with me from Washington, because I knew I might as well leave my own at home and collect more out there and subsequently perhaps acquire them. So Lou said, "What kind of weapons would you like?" This was in the day when you had to be a politically important province chief to rate an M-16, what was then the AR-15. So I didn't ask for that; it wasn't fair for a garrison soldier to draw down one of those. But I said, "Well, I'd like to have a Schmeisser, and I'd like to have a folding stock paratrooper M-1 carbine, without the selector on it." I never liked the carbine with a full automatic selector.

Q: That was the M-2 carbine, I think.

FLOTT: Yes. Anyhow, this was an M1A1, with a folding stock for paratroopers. That means you could do aimed rifle fire at up to three hundred yards, if that was what the situation called for, or you could make lots of noise with a Schmeisser and if you had the fire-control discipline of shooting short, five-round bursts, it's a very good weapon. It's not a good weapon for an untrained man; for a trained man it's good. And I was used to it. So I had one of each, and we'd take turns, and Mike or I would sleep there in front of Lodge's door. We only did this a few times. Gradually we got much better organized, because it was clearly not the way to run a railroad. But I thought, and Mike felt, that if by sleeping on a rug in front of the Ambassador's door, if I can do that and the American Ambassador, who's in command of the whole effort in Vietnam, gets a good night's sleep because he trusts us, there's no better way to earn your pay. So we did it. And soon, of course, they had the marine guard shacks, and marines inside, and

marines on the roofs of the adjoining buildings, the works!

Q: I was going to ask, the marines traditionally guard embassies, don't they?

FLOTT: Yes, they guard embassies, more exactly, chanceries -- the embassy office building - but they did not traditionally guard residences. At this time the embassy security guard people -- there was a good marine complement, I'm sure, but they were spread pretty thin. Some Buddhist priests had taken refuge in parts of the embassy, so they had to give them almost bodyguard protection around the clock; that made claims on their resources. There had been a threat to the AID compound, because that's where one of the Buddhists was hanging out, and Lodge had visited there. So when it became high profile, the thought was, "Gee, we'd better put a couple of marines over there," which means you've pulled six men off the complement, even on a surge basis, and it finally got to the point where that meant there weren't any for the residence. The first time around, Ambassador Lodge said, "No, we want to be a perfectly open mission. I don't want policemen standing in front of my house. We don't need marines here." Then when these death threats came in, and good CIA serious telegrams that people whose judgment we trusted thought something was afoot and that an effort might be made to bump us off, we didn't want to suddenly put a platoon of marines there. We didn't have a platoon in country. So Mike and I improvised. But quickly other arrangements were made, in two or three days.

But anyway, to get back to the story about this day; I was in my office at two in the afternoon. I've given you the atmosphere in terms of security at the residence: there was none. And the naval attaché came in. The attachés were very inclined to do lots of busy busywork, and make themselves very busy. One came in, and he had such a hot piece of information that he felt it was appropriate to tell the Ambassador immediately. He rushed into his office and said, "Sir, we've just received a telephonic report that there's a mob out in front of the Ambassador's residence and that the mob is charging the residence." So Lodge said, "Okay, take off." Lodge came running into my office, said, "Fred, I've just got a report; there's a mob in front of the residence," which was two miles away. He said, "Emily's there alone. I want you to go there with me." I said, "Yep, off we go."

He said, "How do we hit this kind of thing?" because he regarded me as being good at emergencies of that sort. I said, "Okay, the first thing we do, take off your tie so nobody has anything they can get hold of. Secondly, if there's a big mob there, we'll hit them: I'll go first, you follow behind. Don't fix anybody with your eyes. Use your elbows and just steamroller right through to the door. Don't talk to anyone or argue; just plow through and don't fix anyone with glance, and we'll hit it that way after the car has driven us as close to the epicenter as we can get. Don't fix anyone with your eyes, and loosen your cuffs and loosen your collar." That was while we were driving over there. We got to the residence; there wasn't a soul there. (Laughter) He and I really prepared to hit the line. (Laughter)

And so he went back to the office and said, re the attaché who had reported the mob, "This guy should be fired. And as a matter of fact, all these attachés should be fired." Then he was able to make an even stronger pitch. Secretary McNamara, guided by staff, demurred as long as he could, but ultimately Ambassador Lodge prevailed, and for the first time in history, as far as I know, a military attaché post was terminated. So that's the kind of fun and games we played.

Q: That's a good story.

FLOTT: That's what I mean about anecdotal stuff that isn't strictly jokes; it illustrates an atmosphere.

Q: Can we talk about the coup of 1963?

FLOTT: Sure.

Q: You mentioned Lou Conein already; you said he was an old friend. How long had you known Lou Conein?

FLOTT: Oh, I think I'd known Lou Conein since 1947. My first diplomatic post was in Paris in 1947, and like all beginning young diplomats who came out there as a vice consul, I was put in the consular section. Lou was already a legend in official circles. Well, this was my first contact with the legend of Lou Conein. Later, on trips up to Germany to see diplomatic colleagues up there, I met Lou Conein and heard all his stories and got to know at first hand this colorful person. So I guess I met Lou first in 1947.

Q: He would have been in the army then, I suppose.

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: But was he detailed to CIA, or -- ?

FLOTT: Something like that. He was probably seconded to CIA. I'm not sure of that, but I wouldn't be surprised to learn that such was the case.

Q: Right. Was that the last time you saw him until the Saigon days?

FLOTT: Oh no, I saw him frequently on other occasions. And during World War II I had been very peripherally involved with the Free French, and I'd been technically -- I don't want to exaggerate this at all, but I'd been behind the German lines in occupied France, very much toward the end of the German occupation and for a comparatively short time, and not with great, great hazard to life and limb. But of course, Lou Conein had done heroic things for two years before in occupied France. So we had this bond, or sorts.

Q: He had enlisted, hadn't he, in 1939?

FLOTT: He'd been in the French Foreign Legion, among other things, so we had in common the fact that we knew France well, we spoke French well, and were interested in things French, and each had war stories to tell the other. Lou had many, many more stories, of course. And as you know, subsequently, after he was through with getting the French Forces of the Interior through the war, he went out to Hanoi and dealt with Ho Chi Minh and all that.

Q: That is interesting. Now, back to the coup. The reason I brought up Conein was, of course, he is one of the central figures; as far as I know he was, anyway. There's a lot of uncertainty in my own mind about when a serious coup plot was under way. Some people date it as far back as July of 1963. When were you aware that there was really something afoot, more than a rumor?

FLOTT: Immediately on arrival in country and perhaps even from our stay at CINCPAC. I wouldn't swear to it. But I was certainly aware of it the minute I got in country. But again, I'd like to qualify that response. And that is, if somebody asked me today, "Did you know that the coup was coming?" really, and without trying to talk out of both corners of my mouth, really, with equal sincerity and honesty, I could say I did not know it was coming, or I did know it was coming. You could cut it either way. There were so many coups talked about by so many different groups, including some that talked to me, that we certainly knew that the idea of a coup was not being mentioned for the first time. We'd been hearing nothing else for weeks or months, and from many different and disparate groups, even. But I did not know an hour before it happened that it was going to happen. In fact, one of the times I interpreted with Diem was an hour before the coup started-

Q: Was that on the occasion of Admiral [U.S.G.] Sharp's visit?

FLOTT: No, Sharp came later. This was the Admiral Harry Felt, CINCPAC, visit. Yes. Admiral Felt and FSO Ed Martin, who was the POLAD [political adviser], the career diplomat official at Honolulu.

Q: What was that last name, sir?

FLOTT: Ed Martin. The political adviser, the State Department adviser to Admiral Felt, accompanied him and sat in on the meeting. The meeting was about ten o'clock in the morning. This was October 31, 1963, and as you know, Lodge was planning to go back to the States then. He'd only just arrived in country, but he was going back to consult, and had an airplane out there for him. And in the limousine riding over with Lodge to our meeting with Diem and Felt and his POLAD and Lodge and myself, on the way going over, I said, "Mr. Ambassador, you're going back; I've just received a message from my family that my mother" -- she was eighty years old -- "has had a severe attack of phlebitis. If you're going back and flying right back here in fairly short order, I'd sort of like to ask for a hop on the plane. I'll fly out to Chicago, see my mother, and get back and help you in Washington." He said, "Yes, that's all right; that makes sense. Touch base with somebody in the embassy, but, yes, you can come along with me. That's fine." So I asked the political counselor if it would be all right for me to absent myself because of this family illness, and also making clear that the Ambassador had said he had no objection. And the counselor said he thought he could spare me for five days. It was all fairly relaxed.

But anyway -- I don't know what got me on that subject.

Q: We were talking about the meeting with Felt and Diem.

FLOTT: Oh, yes. So at this meeting various things came up, and to catch a plane or to keep an engagement, Felt and his POLAD had to go over and meet some Vietnamese generals, and

actually, they were trying to be polite to the generals before they left the country. And the generals, who were all up to their neck in the coup, found it very embarrassing that they had to be polite to this CINCPAC. But they did; they waited for everything until he shook hands with them, and everybody made their salaams. And when Lodge and I were left alone with Diem, Diem said, "Look, I'm very disturbed at the behavior of some of your junior officers. There are all kinds of rumors about a coup and movements of troops against me, and all. You know, there's nothing to this. My army's completely loyal to me; nobody would raise a hand here without my approval. These are vicious rumors that are being spread by junior officers of the CIA." He was very categorical about that. And Lodge said, "Look, if you can find any officer of my country team that is saying disparaging things, things that threaten stability, I promise you I'll fire him out of the country that same day. Just tell me who it is and prove it and they're on their way. That kind of stuff clearly doesn't go. But I can assure you that no one on my instruction is doing anything like that."

Well, we discussed a few other things, and took leave of Diem. And as the junior man of the two of us, I was the last to shake hands with him, and I was probably the last person to shake hands with Diem in his life, because the coup started an hour later and he was dead the next morning.

Q: And nobody was shaking his hand in between times.

FLOTT: Vietnamese practice and deference to a mandarin personage is such that it's safe to say that nobody was.

Q: Yes. That's fascinating, especially in light of what Lodge knew was going on at the time. Were you privy to any of the information that Lodge was getting from Conein about the progress of the plot, and so on, in October?

FLOTT: You know, in a way I can really honestly say that while I was privy to bits and pieces of a number of things, I didn't have a really complete picture of anything, and I'm not sure anyone else did, either. I knew, sure, that Conein would report, "So-and-so said such-and-such to me," and he and Lodge would develop a telegram, and the telegram would go back to the States -- all the reporting from the embassy or to the embassy I was generally aware of. That doesn't mean I was in the back of the brain of all the Vietnamese generals who were doing it.

Q: I don't think anybody was that.

FLOTT: And I wouldn't claim that I knew all the beasts that ran in the jungle, either. But I knew a lot was going on; I suppose I realized that if the United States had really wanted to stop it, it probably could have. On the other hand, maybe not. I know that the United States avoided direct action originating involvement, did formally at least avoid that. I knew that Lou Conein had a close personal relationship with General Tran Van Don and Big Minh and others. I personally did not, at that time. I knew them socially; I'd see them whenever there was a big reception. I'd pay my respects to all of them as senior officials and all, but I didn't really know them. So Conein was regarded as the man who handled that group.

Q: Were you present when Conein would brief Lodge about the --

FLOTT: No. No. Typically enough, Lodge liked to deal one on one; he'd do it that way, with Conein alone.

Q: Did Conein talk to you about what was going on?

FLOTT: More or less, yes. If Lodge had said, "Look, I don't want you to mention this to anyone, including my own staff," I'm sure Conein would have obeyed. But just because Lodge talked to him privately doesn't mean he would duck telling me something. It also doesn't mean he would. The situation was moving so fast and we had other things to talk of; I'd really be much more inclined to talk with Lou Conein about where we'd have lunch and who some interesting Vietnamese women were, or what kind of a gun he could scrounge for me next.

Q: I hear he had quite a collection.

FLOTT: He did, at his house, at his little in a little pavilion outside his house. And we'd go there, and over some good bottles of authentic San Miguel beer from the Philippines, he'd say, "You like the AR-15? (It was still in very short supply in Vietnam.) Well, this is mine. I've got one, and we had five others, but we gave them to five key province chiefs as a prestige piece -- like getting a two-inch barrel .38 Police Special, with a concealed hammer, no visible hammer, hammerless model."

Q: I think General [Nguyen Ngoc] Loan had one of those, didn't he?

FLOTT: Yes. In the photo. Lou would say, "I'm sorry, I can't get you one of these right now. Actually you aren't missing much, because I don't have much ammunition for it. It's very hard to get caliber .223 ammo." And the ammo at that time was all marked "Remington UMC commercial-experimental" ammo. I was in the palace one minute after the cease-fire the morning after the coup, and there was all kinds of stuff around the floor. I remember filling all my pockets with cardboard boxes of twenty of these .223 caliber rounds, because I knew my old buddy Lou was short of cartridges for his "weapon," so I was picking it up -- I didn't think until later on that there were probably better souvenirs one might have picked up in the palace!

Q: This was ammo that the palace guard had had? They were armed with these?

FLOTT: Yes, the palace guard, these Nungs from Nhu, as a very elite force, did indeed have M-16s, yes. And there was a lot of ammo; not buckets and buckets of it, but if two hundred men had been in a firefight for eight hours, there's bound to be, say, a thousand rounds still in boxes of twenty scattered around. And I busily picked up all I could hold, because I understood it was in short supply and I didn't like waste.

Q: Where were you when the coup took place? When did you become aware that the thing was under way?

FLOTT: There was an old friend who was leaving the country, from whom I got a butler, named Larry Connel, C-O-N-N-E-L. And again, I had known him from -- he had been a colleague at the

Laos conference, in the conference on Laos in Geneva, where I had interpreted for Governor Harriman and Secretary Rusk. So he was an old buddy from that conference, and I knew him when I arrived in country. He was one of the comparatively few people that I knew personally, and I just happened to be having lunch with him the day of the coup, up in his apartment. I'd been busy with Lodge at the palace, and I was going off to the States, I thought, the next morning, flying with Lodge when he went back to consult. And I had just moved out of the residence, got a place of my own, my own apartment very near the residence with line of sight for commo [communications]. And Larry Connel, who was leaving, very kindly agreed to supply me with his old servant, Nam. So we had to get together and have a working lunch up at his apartment to plan logistic details, because I was going to be gone for a week. And Larry suddenly got a phone call. I think some of his people notified him that something had started. About one minute after his phone call all hell broke loose with shooting of twenty millimeter and forty millimeter and .50 caliber anti-aircraft guns; all the Vietnamese Navy ships along the harbor were opening up, without anything at all to shoot at. But they just wanted to prove that they were on the side of whoever might win, and there was a terrific barrage going up from the ships, although they were not under attack.

So we rushed into the embassy, and I went in, went up to the top floor, in this very old, rickety apartment building with the usual sort of colonial outside passageways, these walkways outside the glass windows, then walkways inside the glass windows to keep you out of the rain. And all the secretaries were running around watching the big shoot-em-up down at the river. And I said, "Look, the most important thing you can do is get in your offices and shut your doors and get away from the glass. Because the one thing that is really disfiguring -- if you get a five-hundred-pound bomb with a near miss, and you're standing near a plate glass window, you may have scars for life." So that was about the one useful thing I did. Of course, nothing happened; we didn't get any bombs, but the first thing that occurred to me was get the troops out of the hot sun as far as being near glass.

Then I was in Lodge's office when he had the telephone call from Diem, that four-o'clock-in-the-afternoon call that you probably know of.

Q: Has that been accurately reported, as far as you know?

FLOTT: What, in a nutshell, is your version of it?

Q: That Diem called and asked what the attitude of the United States was toward this coup, and Lodge replied that he couldn't possibly know because it was four o'clock in the morning in Washington, and no one could have formed an opinion, and that he understood that Diem had been made an offer of safe conduct and he was concerned for his personal safety. Diem said that he was trying to restore order. And Lodge, I think, said, "If there's anything I could do to secure your person, let me know." And that, as I recall, is about it. Is that accurate?

FLOTT: That's very accurate; it's not quite complete. I'll perhaps add one thing. But that's exactly what happened. Diem called in and said, "What's the explanation for this?" And Lodge said, "I don't know." And Diem said, "What would be your advice?" Lodge said, "Well, you are a chief of state; I cannot give you advice, but personally, and as a friend, and as somebody who is

concerned about your health" -- probably about his getting a good night's sleep and all -- "my suggestion would be you think seriously of getting away. Now, if I can be of any help on that, I'm prepared to send my driver with an officer of mine -- "

Q: Meaning you.

FLOTT: Yes -- "to escort you to safety. And we can get you on my jet aircraft, and I'm sure I can deliver on that. One of my officers will ride in the front seat of my limousine with the chauffeur." And of course, I was known as Lodge's special assistant and as an interpreter at the palace. I think that both the military and civilian staff around the palace would be rather likely to defer to American diplomats and the people who were occasionally seen with the President, as I had been in my interpreter role. So I think it is perhaps quite fair to say that there was indeed a very good chance that I could have talked the car into the compound, even though it was under siege. And who knows, maybe something more orderly could have been worked out in the meantime, like getting both commanders to agree to a safe conduct departure in advance or something of the sort, although Lodge had told me he didn't anticipate that they would.

But he had in mind my doing that kind of thing, and occasionally made flattering remarks in contexts that weren't quite clear, such as, "Well, Fred, you're a very brave man, and I'm sure you'd behave well under pressure and under fire." I said, "I hope so, Mr. Ambassador." But then when the question was of assisting President Diem to get out to the airplane, Lodge said, "Now, this is what I have in mind. I want you to ride in the car, and it'll have American flags. You go up to the gate and go in and get him and bring him out if he agrees to being evacuated." So I was definitely tabbed to do that, and that in fact was why I happened to be in the Ambassador's office at the time Diem telephoned Lodge.

And who knows, you know, there might have been some other game plans as well. For example, it might be that General Harkins could have gotten permission from the generals to get in there with a helicopter. But there was a plan and a well thought-out effort by Lodge to save Diem's life. If Diem had accepted our good offices to assure his escape to security, Lodge was prepared to assist and was prepared to have me up in the front seat of his automobile while doing so.

Q: But the upshot of that would have been that Diem would have left the country.

FLOTT: Yes. And Diem said, "No, I cannot agree to fleeing, because this is all a tempest in a teapot; it's a couple of hothead generals who don't speak for the army, and I know that the real troops are loyal to me and will soon have this all straightened out." And Lodge said, "Well, Mr. President, that is your decision, certainly. I cannot advise you one way or the other. But as I've said, if I can ever be of any assistance in looking after your security, I would certainly do so." Then Diem said, "Well, I want you to tell Washington that this is being done, and that I want them to land the BLTs [battalion landing teams], the two marine BLTs on the aircraft carriers offshore, I want them to land and protect the palace." And Lodge said, "Well, you know, it's four o'clock in the morning in Washington; we can't do that." Sort of a Lodge-like answer! He was always concerned about getting a good night's rest and allowing others to do so as well.

Q: Were you interpreting?

FLOTT: No, no. Lodge was speaking with Diem. I was just listening. You see, Lodge spoke very good French, but because of his position he could not interpret for CINCPAC or other visitors, which was why I did it.

Q: I understand, I was just wondering how you knew what was coming from the other end. Was this a radio conversation or a telephone-

FLOTT: No, it was telephone. It was not one of these old French phones with an *ecouteur*, where you could pick up another headpiece and listen. No, the phone was far enough from Lodge's ear so I could hear Diem. Of course, I was used to his voice. I didn't get it all, and I didn't make a transcript, but I could certainly hear everything that Lodge said to him and much of what Diem was saying. Like many people, Diem sort of shouted over the phone; Lodge would hold it away from his ear, and I was seated right beside him, so I pretty much heard him. Lodge filled me in currently, and later, too.

Ambassador Lodge was perfectly willing to send his car and driver and you to -- I think there's no doubt about it, that Lodge was willing to do anything he could to get Diem out of the country alive, if Diem wanted to do it. I also think Lodge could have delivered on it, and I know he no doubt had other plans, but one plan he had was for me to go in the front seat of his limousine, which was a big old Checker Cab, and go to the palace with the American flag, and talk our way through the thing, or hopefully with arrangements already having been made between the commanders of the coup.

Q: Do you think you would have been let through?

FLOTT: On balance, I do, yes. Taking Vietnam as it was in October of 1963, I think there was a good chance, yes.

Q: You say you got into the palace only an hour after it was taken.

FLOTT: That was the next morning.

Q: I see.

FLOTT: Roughly at 6:00 a.m. I stayed up all night at the embassy, watching as the situation developed, and incidentally, hearing Lou Conein reporting in from the coup's command post about every five minutes.

Q: Could you judge his state of mind from what he was saying?

FLOTT: Not so much. Now there -- I wouldn't swear. Where I actually heard him, I went down to wherever the CIA office was in the embassy, and the acting chief received me there, and said, "We're getting all these reports from Lou." They might have been sort of broadcast within the office by a loud-speaker system on the phone. I may have heard him directly. Maybe I was just getting secondhand accounts from other people; I didn't spend much time with them anyway. But

there's no doubt about it, Lou Conein was with the coup leaders and giving the embassy excellent blow-by-blow accounts of what was going on, timely and accurate.

But the embassy had good reporting, too, of junior officers in the political section who'd been caught out by all the various fire fights going on, and the movement of troops and all, and would call in saying, "On such-and-such street crossing, and the following is going on: three APCs [armored personnel carriers] going this way," and so we had a pretty good feel for what was going on in town.

Then there was a lot of practically bombs-bursting-in-air stuff, because the palace was brought under fire by some, I believe, 105s, and maybe 155s, from about six or eight miles away, out toward Bien Hoa or something, and the Vietnamese were good artillerymen, just as the French were traditionally good artillerymen. They'd learned that, and they were lobbing shells right into the palace there, practically on the front doorstep. We were watching that from the roofs of the embassy, and sometimes there would be a lot of shooting and a lot of fireworks. And I stayed up more or less all night doing that.

One time in the middle of the night, another officer, Jim Rosenthal, who's presently our ambassador in Conakry, and I got into his little Volkswagen bug, and we drove about four blocks out from where the embassy was, and got to a square where there was an ARVN tank, and it turned its turret around and pointed the gun right at our car, and we decided we'd better get out of there. So we, with slow, deliberate speed, moved out.

Then the first thing the next morning, I forget even who I went with, but some other guy wanted to go over and have a quick look at the palace the minute the cease-fire went into effect. I went, and I thought if I ever had to justify why I did it, I had a good excuse, which was that because I was known at the palace and the guards were used to seeing me and all that, and if there were some kind of situation where one side or the other were going to start shooting their prisoners in the back of the neck or something, with luck I could perhaps have talked them out of it. I wouldn't want my own fate to depend on that, but with luck and right timing I could have perhaps done something useful. So I thought I'd go in for that, and of course I was curious just to see what it was like.

I walked in one minute after the cease-fire, with the first wave of Vietnamese marines who entered the place once the firing had stopped. I thought I was pretty early in the process, when I looked up and coming down the marble staircase from above was *New York Times* correspondent David Halberstam, carrying an ivory tusk about ten feet long that he was hauling out. And I contented myself with picking up some M-16 ammo from the floor that Lou Conein needed, I thought he needed for his gun. And besides, it was U.S. government property anyway. And I did take a couple of souvenir ashtrays, which I still have.

Q: Where is the best account of the coup?

FLOTT: Oh, and incidentally, one other thing at the palace: while walking into the palace up the steps to get up to the second floor, I also saw the body of the first man I ever saw who was shot in the head with the M-16 rifle, and it looked just like a tomato that somebody had stepped on.

He was being hauled downstairs at the time. And there were soldiers doing a little bit of looting, but there was also some semblance of discipline. They'd looted a real good Austrian hunting rifle, a high-priced type Mannlicher, and somebody offered to buy it from the soldier. He said, "No, we can't sell weapons." Somebody grabbed a bottle of wine and I think the guidelines were if you tried to buy it, they'd say no.

If you said, "I want to drink it right here with you," they'd say, "Well, since you insist," and they'd drink it. But it was pretty well-disciplined.

Q: You said these were marines, primarily?

FLOTT: I remember marines being there, but there were various units.

Q: [Nguyen Van] Thieu's troops were there, were they not, also?

FLOTT: Probably. I don't remember the order of the battle exactly, but I thought there were. I do remember about an hour later -- well, I'll give you the whole personal chronology. Five minutes later, walking back to the embassy from the palace, which was close by, we came to one building which was pretty well shot up. It was, say, on the periphery of the palace, where there had been some shoot-'em-up, and there was a totally burned out APC, M-113. It must have had about six jerrycans of gasoline on the back, and got a tracer in it or something, and everybody in it was just completely incinerated. And I remember walking around the outside. It blew up, I guess, and was partly blown open, and probably a lot of people were burned inside. But I was walking around sort of looking at what had gone on, and I remember hearing a priest with a Very Irish brogue, behind me, saying, "Watch where you're going, mister, you're walking on human remains." Very sternly, he was saying [it]. He meant business, and he was right. I just didn't realize it, but there were small fragments of human remains on the ground and I was walking over them, with no disrespect intended. I just hadn't even noticed them. You know, pretty well burned, but not completely powder.

I went back to the embassy, saw Lodge --

Q: What was his reaction to all this?

FLOTT: Shock at the fact that Diem and Nhu had been killed in the way that we had just learned they had been, and certainly no gloating over it. Just shock that this man who had done so much for his country for so long a time had been killed, and especially in that manner, as part of the succession process. I told him I'd picked up a couple of ashtrays from the conference room in the palace where he and I had worked so many times before. I asked him if he wanted an ashtray. He definitely did not. He said, "Well, Fred, my trip to Washington is clearly off now," his planned departure on that plane on which I was going to have a ride. He said, "I've released the plane; it's going to wheels-up in two hours. If you want to fly back to Washington, you are certainly free to go on it. I've given you leave, and you can take it if you want." And I said, "Well, I appreciate that very much." He said, "This thing is all over. It's over." Well, I said, "Are you sure you can spare me and there's nothing you want me to do here now?" because it wasn't a good time for me to be leaving. And he said, "No. It's all over. It's all over; it's finished. Go back and see your

mother and get a hop back here as quickly as you can." I said, "Okay. I certainly appreciate that, and I'll do so."

Just at that time, there was a sustained burst of small-arms fire. Some machine gun, some rifle; clearly there were several participants. And I said -- you know, I was very close to his sons and all, and they had asked me to look after their parents, and I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I just can't quite be sure that this thing is over yet. It doesn't sound -- who knows what's going to happen next. I think I'd probably better stay around." He said, "Well, my boy, that's your decision to make. Do as you wish," and he brushed it off. And so I said, "Yes, I'll do that."

He said, "Well, go home, get a night's sleep." This was about ten in the morning.

So I went home and went to bed, not having had any sleep that night. And as you might imagine, woke up in about one hour, unable to get back to sleep. And then I began to think, and I began to kick myself for not having gone back to Washington. I thought, "Good God. I would have seen Bob Kennedy; I would have renewed my contact with him, and everybody would have been picking my brains and I would have been the first guy back from Saigon after the coup. How crazy can you be? I really zigged when I should have zagged."

So I went back to the embassy; there was no reason to hang around my apartment with insomnia. So I went back to the embassy to see what was going on and get up to speed on what all had happened, and when and how and where do we go from here. So I was there about five in the afternoon, just at dusk, and Lodge came into my office and said, "How are you feeling, Fred? Did you get some sleep?" I said, "Well, I have the most awful feeling that I've made a big mistake. I should have taken you up on it when you said go back to Washington. But now nothing's happening here, and I should have gone out on that plane. We could have done some useful work in Washington and I would have seen my mother." He said, "Well, my boy, don't come to me with your problems. I've got enough problems of my own," and very breezily went out of the office. He said, "Why don't you come and have supper tonight with Emily and me, and we'll talk about all this," because I was no longer living at the residence; I had my own little apartment nearby.

So I went there, and had dinner with the Lodges. We just talked about things and what was going on. The next morning, I went into the office, and about five o'clock in the afternoon, the day after I'd missed my plane, Lodge and Mike Dunn came in my office saying they had a mission: they wanted me to fly back to the States. It was a totally different airplane; the big bird from the White House, the KC-135, had left, but the following had happened, Lodge explained. This shows how he operated and also shows how he doesn't draw a picture of something he wants you to do; he doesn't even admit that he would want you to understand what he wanted you to do. He said, "Look, the following has happened. Madame Nhu" -- was in Los Angeles with her eldest daughter, Le Thuy. Her two sons, who were younger, and one baby daughter had been up in Dalat. And the people who were responsible for protecting them in Dalat had sort of hid them out in the woods nearby for a day or so, and then brought them down to Saigon. Lodge said, "I prevailed upon the generals to get these children back to their mother. And what I want you to do is, one hour from now -- you've got an hour to pack and get out to Tan Son Nhut. The children are out there. We've got General Harkins' C-54, which will fly you to Bangkok, and then I want

you to fly commercial with them to Rome, and turn them over to Archbishop [Ngo Dinh] Thuc? the brother of Diem," and he gave me a couple of other errands to do. It was the time of the ecumenical conference at the Vatican, and whoever the archbishop of Boston, or cardinal -- was it [Francis Cardinal] Spellman, or -- ?

Q: [Richard Cardinal] Cushing?

FLOTT: Cushing, maybe it was. He said he was there. And he said, "When you're in Rome, after you've given your press conference and explained the situation here" -- without telling me what to say, of course -- "call on Cardinal Cushing, give him my respects, and tell him that I asked you to stop in to see him and brief him on the situation." Well, there Lodge is, a good politician who didn't want to be misrepresented by possible detractors as a man who'd got a couple of Catholic statesmen assassinated, and he figured he might as well set the record straight with Cardinal Cushing in Rome. And he said, "Explain to him what the new junta's like."

So I got out to the airport, pitch dark, curfew, and the driver I had had difficulty finding it. I probably wasn't much help, because I wasn't used to driving around myself at blacked-out airports. Got out to a special military hangar and got on this C-54, and there were the Nhu children. The CIA station chief had designated one embassy wife who was a nurse to ride with us as far as Bangkok on General Harkins' C-54, and I had the option of taking her all the way to Rome if I had wanted her help with the children. But she was working part-time as a secretary in their station, I think. So when we got to Bangkok, this lady would have been glad to go on to Rome, but I said, "Look, I really don't need any help, the way this thing's handled now. Mission accomplished; go back to your post." Which she did, and took it in good spirits. It was the only decision to make.

Anyway, we got on the plane, and there was the eldest son of Nhu, who looked just like him, who was a kid, say, of eleven or twelve. Then there was his younger brother and the baby sister, and they all had, of course, different levels of awareness. And they'd been hiding out in the jungle for about a day or so, just as the first precaution that the people with them took, and once they saw that the coup was successful -- they were just army officers who happened to be detailed to protecting the family up in Dalat, so they brought the kids in and reported in to the generals. And Lodge did make the pitch, "I want to rejoin those kids with their mother in Rome." Well, of course the consequence of that was hopefully it would draw the mother out of Los Angeles, which, as you've seen from the telegrams, there was some desire to do.

So we flew immediately to Bangkok, two hours by prop, or so, hardly had time to talk to anybody, just collecting my wits, and looking at what I had in my musette bag, and we got there. There arrangements had been made. They had a public health officer who gave the kids a quickie physical, made sure they had no fever, gave them the usual antimalarial prophylaxis and all that stuff. And they were in perfectly good shape.

We'd rushed out of the C-54 and were just about to load them on the Pan Am commercial jet going on the milk run Pan Am route that stopped everywhere, Bangkok, Rangoon, Calcutta, Delhi, Karachi, finally getting to Rome. Again, the Pan Am station manager was very cooperative and handled it very well, and the Bangkok embassy was supportive, and all the right

players were there and did all the right things to get the kids on their way with minimum trauma. They did put us all in first class, four of us had seats in first class, and the younger brother, the nine-year-old kid, sat with the baby sister and I sat with the eleven- or twelve-year-old, who was -- they were all bilingual in French, except the baby, and the twelve-year-old kid I really had a lot of respect for, because he rose to the occasion very well. He wasn't crying, sort of an Asian outward passivity or composure on the thing. And once we got rolling, our main concern was for nobody to notice them, and I didn't get off the plane until we got to Rome and they didn't either.

And I remember with the elder son of Nhu, reading the paper, and there was already an English-language paper in Bangkok that somebody had picked up, maybe in India, with accounts of the coup. And the kid read the account of the condition in which his father and his uncle had been found in the back of this armored personnel carrier, with their heads squashed by rifle butts, and all kinds of bayonet wounds in them and everything else, all cut up, and their heads squashed. And he was reading this with complete calm. He read English quite well, although we talked in French. But he didn't understand the word "squashed," so he said to me in French, "What's the word for squashed" I said, "Ecrabouille." I said, "It means squashed, but you don't want to pay too much attention to the details, because the reporters probably didn't even see it, and it's the way they write their things." And he took it very calmly, went on and talked and eventually I got them to Rome, having avoided the press and the public along the way.

Archbishop Thuc met us there, at planeside. He was very hostile, because he knew I was sent by Cabot Lodge to accompany the children. There were about a hundred and fifty Italian newsmen there and other press people. I went up to the Archbishop to pay my respects, pay my condolences, and tell him I'd been asked by Ambassador Lodge to deliver the children to him, so they could rejoin their mother, so their mother could rejoin them. He wouldn't speak to me, wouldn't shake hands, nothing. Total distance, total ice treatment. Packed them into the car, not a word of thanks, nothing. No attempt at courtesy to the crew of the Pan Am plane. I had told the captain of the aircraft what our trip was about. He probably knew from his channels, anyway. And we had protected these kids from all possible trauma; there had been no scene, nobody came up and talked to them during the whole trip. But not a word of thanks to Lodge, to me, to Pan Am, or anybody. Archbishop Thuc packed them into a big limousine he had and tore off.

Well, then the press of course wanted to talk to me. I was very glad to answer their questions. They said, "Are you the Scarlet Pimpernel? Have you saved these children's lives?" I said, "No, not at all. The children were in no jeopardy at all. Their guardians took understandable immediate security measures the minute the coup started, but the officers who were charged with their safety in Dalat knew that the officers who were behind the coup were responsible officers like themselves, and they quickly turned the children over to them. Ambassador Lodge suggested to the coup leaders that the children should be allowed to rejoin their mother, and the generals in the coup, responding to the same humanitarian concerns themselves, said 'Why not?' And simply because I'm one of Lodge's staff, he asked me to accompany the children here to make sure they didn't have any problems along the way. But there's no Scarlet Pimpernel; they were in no danger in Saigon, either." And I answered questions in that vein. Well, of course, Madame Nhu hated my guts for that. She hated my guts for working for Cabot Lodge, for that matter. There was no love lost between the Nhus and Lodge.

I got there, if I'm not mistaken, about on a Tuesday, in Rome. We thought Madame Nhu was coming, but I waited around until Friday, and she hadn't come. She just wasn't leaving Los Angeles. But she, in the meantime, continued her tirades, saying that Lodge was a monster with blood dripping from his hands, who had arranged the murder of her husband. And I was explaining to all the press, and it got quoted in the *New York Times* and everything else, that this was a Vietnamese coup, that the generals were certainly not ogres; they thought they could run the war effort better than Diem and Nhu, that they seemed to be taking things pretty well in hand, and we were optimistic about the outcome, and that Lodge's only concern was a purely humanitarian one of getting the children back to their mother. And having it emerge, "Well, why doesn't the mother come to the children?" And I said, "Well, we did the best thing. Pending her return, they are in the hands of their uncle the Archbishop, which is fine."

Then finally after waiting four days, because of my instructions, if you can call them that, I left. I had been told by Lodge to go and do whatever is necessary and proper. The way I interpreted my mission, I would have waited a few days for Madame Nhu, to pay his condolences, to touch whatever bases could be touched, not with any illusions about it being well received, but just to extend the courtesy I'd wait three days. She didn't come back, so I eventually went back to the States and joined Lodge there.

I flew first to Boston and stayed overnight with his two sons and their wives, and had a good talk with them. That was mid-November. Later, George Lodge had a business appointment in Washington, so we flew down together on the shuttle. I'd arrived without any overcoat or anything, and his wife gave me an old overcoat that George had had in prep school. Since George is six feet six, it was about six inches too long for me; it fit like a tent. But I took it; I was glad to have a coat in Washington in November. We got down to Washington about noon.

I went over to the State Department and just on the way up in the elevator, somebody who'd heard of the assassination told the tragic news. I remember there was a secretary standing next to me in the elevator, and a girl friend of hers who'd just heard the television told her that Kennedy had been shot and dead, and this girl let out a loud scream of grief. So I walked into Bill Sullivan's office, and he was watching the TV and getting the word that President Kennedy was indeed dead. I tried to engage Bill Sullivan in a serious discussion of the situation in Saigon, but he was so sickened by the loss of President Kennedy he said, "Fred, this afternoon I'm afraid I really can't talk shop very well." So I had nobody to talk to.

The next day I gave Joe Alsop a call, because I'd had a lot to do with Joe Alsop in Saigon. He was sometimes a house guest at the Lodge residence when I was living there. When Joe came to be house guest, Mike Dunn and I would double up in one of our rooms and Joe would take the other one. So I called Joe on Saturday morning, and he was a good newspaperman, figuring well, the world goes on. So he said, "Well, I suppose we shouldn't do this, but why don't you come over and have lunch and have a talk?" So I went over to his house in Georgetown and had a talk.

But another interesting vignette from that period was: I stayed in Washington while Lodge was there, and he was going back just the opposite way I was. I'd come from Rome and was going back to Saigon through the Far East, partly to buy some furniture in Hong Kong for my house and all, and I also had things to do in Japan, and I was making my way back that way. Lodge was

going through Europe. So we were together a few days in Washington, then went our respective ways.

I got out to Chicago to see my mother, and went into a friend's office, who was a businessman on La Salle Street, and asked if I could use his typewriter, because I wanted to send a letter of condolence to Bob Kennedy. So whatever day Kennedy was killed, it was about five days later. You can imagine all the things going on in Washington in the life of the Kennedys. I wrote a letter of condolences to Bob Kennedy, and mailed it. In Saigon about eight days later I had an answer from him, in his own handwriting, which you can't mistake; it's a very small scroll in black ink, and a copy of the mass card and all that. Just a few words acknowledging my condolences. "Many thanks, Fred, for your condolences. By the way, keep your head down and watch out for yourself over there." And this got to me about eight days after I'd mailed my letter in Chicago. Of course, the APO [Army and Air Force Post Office] to Saigon was fabulous, but it just shows how well organized the Kennedys were. Obviously their staff had screened tons of mail; they thought, "Well, this one sounds like someone who knew Bob, and who had met the President" -- because I'd met with him. Lodge took me in with him to the Oval Office to meet President Kennedy when Lodge finally took leave of him, going out to Saigon in August, because I was supposed to be a possible liaison channel, or as a legman-courier, basically. And Lodge wanted me to meet President Kennedy and he wanted it known to the White House staff that he brought me in to wire me in with the President, too. I had met the President before, with Bob, after our trip to Russia, and he knew I was Bob's interpreter going through the Soviet Union. And President Kennedy -- this was in early August of 1963 -- looked me up and down in mock shock, said, "Hey, you were with my brother [in Russia]. What are you doing coming in as the chosen instrument of a Republican who picked you because he trusts you? What's going on here that I don't know about?" or words to that effect. He made a little joke out of that. And again, pat on the back and kick in the tail, and good wishes, the best possible way.

So in late November we went back to Saigon and started seeing how the country was going to be governed by the MCR, whether the Military Council-

Q: Oh, gosh, I can't-

FLOTT: The CMR, the *Consell Militaire de la Revolution*.

Q: Revolutionary Military Council.

FLOTT: Yes, whatever. And then I started meeting a whole new set of players, and seeing more of different people, and this goes on. If you have a thought or a question-

Q: No, no. I was just going to ask if the changed situation in Saigon put new requirements on you.

FLOTT: Yes. It was, well, a number of things. All such things as dealing with the Vietnamese third force, dealing with emigres, flying back and forth to say what we were up to and all; that was clearly not needed now. To some extent it would have been overtaken even in the normal course of events, but it was all the more overtaken because of the coup and the new government,

so I concentrated on other things.

I must say, further to these memories of the coup -- I mentioned how after the coup I went home, had insomnia, thought I'd zipped when I should have zagged by not flying back to Washington at once. So I went back to the office about five in the afternoon and started reading telegrams. This concerns the French embassy, and I'll get back to how I was dealing with them, but the French embassy was pretty much cut off from information about the coup. Because after all, they were rightly or wrongly regarded as closer to Diem somehow, and the presumption was that they were well wired in. But immediately after the coup the French just didn't know who was in the new government, etc. at that time, that particular day after the coup. And the French charge, who had been told by Cabot Lodge that he could do this when he had an emergency, came over to the embassy, called on me, and said, "Look, I just don't know what in hell is going on. We hear all kinds of rumors, but do you know anything?" And I said, "Yes, we're pretty well informed."

We had a pile of telegrams -- it was literally a foot high -- of reports to Washington that had been going out every five minutes or so, and they were all of low security classification, unclassified or restricted, maybe. Almost press bulletins, announcements, etc. All stuff that -- for one thing, was all overtaken by events, it was by any common-sense criteria no longer secret, but it was a blow-by-blow description of everything that had happened, in the public record, in the past two days, plus a lot of Foreign Broadcast Information Service, everybody's monitoring of everything. These were my copies; I routinely got individual copies of all the traffic.

This French chargé d'affaires came in, and he wanted to have sort of a collegial, *tour d'horizon*, discussing who was on what base and what was going on and what did we think of all this. And I discussed it with him and answered all his questions; he really was in the dark that day. He claimed all his sources were out of touch, which I'm sure they were, while they were waiting for things to be clarified. I said, "You know, I've told you as much as I have time to discuss, but I have here a pile of telegrams which I'm not going to be reading tonight. If you want to borrow them, I'm afraid I have to ask to have them back, because I may need the copies. But you're welcome" -- this was, say, at two in the afternoon -- "you're welcome to take them home with you and peruse them, and then try to bring them back for me sometime tomorrow, if you can." He was very grateful, because the French, who were temporarily completely cut out from everything, were thus enabled able to know what was happening. What I was doing was essentially on instructions from Cabot Lodge. So I gave him all this stuff, and he brought it back the next day, with his visiting card and with the note, "*Avec mes tres vifs remerciements personnels*," "With my very warm personal thanks." It was one of the more useful things that I did, because it made him look good in Paris; it didn't cost us anything. His name was Georges Perruche, P-E-R-R-U-C-H-E, and he died about six or eight months ago. He later became the French ambassador in Mongolia and Kabul. He did many things to repay the favor in the years that followed, and was a good and wise colleague indeed.

The background of the relation with Perruche was that when we first arrived in Saigon, when I was living in Lodge's residence, everybody had tales to tell, horror stories to tell, about the French, accusing them of all sorts of things. One French military attaché remarked to me that the French were really in a difficult position, "Because if the Viet Cong fight well, they (those who blame the French for everything) claim they're getting French advisers, and when the ARVN

fights poorly, they say it's because they were French-trained. Logically, they can't have it both ways!" (Laughter)

But the French were blamed for being in cahoots with the Viet Cong and all that, and there were all sorts of lower-level French types in Saigon, who thought the sinister Americans were really there to take their place. I didn't see many Americans who wanted to stay there and rival some Corsican over who was going to be in charge of a small restaurant or something. And there'd be complaints about noise from American generators and complaints about MACV trucks and everything else.

I was still living at the residence, and one Saturday, when we weren't too busy -- this was about two weeks after we got there -- the French chargé's wife was absent from country at the time, but Lodge invited him over to lunch. And of course he was delighted to come. It was just Cabot Lodge, Mrs. Lodge, and myself, and of course the French guest. The fact that both Lodges spoke excellent French helped set the stage. And Lodge said, "Now, look. As you see, Fred is very close to me; he's a friend, he lives in the house with us, and all. I want you to know that I am pro-France. I know Fred is very pro-France. Now, that doesn't mean I agree necessarily with everything General de Gaulle would say. I don't like some things General de Gaulle has done. Perhaps you do; perhaps you don't. In any case, you can't say, and I can't say.

"However, I would like to, as much as we can, avoid any unnecessary damage to longer-term Franco-American relations because of the situations in which we both find ourselves here in Saigon. So I have asked Fred to sort of honcho the French business, and if ever any French person has any complaint about anything the American military are doing, the American civilians are doing, commercial people, anything, they go to him with it and he will refer it to the proper authorities within the country team. And by the same token, if you ever have to see me -- as you might imagine, I'm very busy: try to solve most of your problems with the American embassy directly through Fred, but if ever you feel that you absolutely have to talk to me for something -- I can imagine how some cases might arise -- then he is well situated to get you in to see me, and my instructions to him are to do so." So Perruche was delighted at that, and that was why he felt it was not out of bounds for him to come to me and say, "What do you know about this?" and, "Please fill me in." We had a very good working relation, thanks to Lodge's initiative and to Perruche's reception of it.

As a result of my ties to the French, really, because I was handling that French account, months later, when the American Embassy got blown up on March 31 of 1965, I guess it was, I happened to be out of my office. That day I was going out to visit a French plantation; it was up-country, well behind the Viet Cong lines, to whatever extent anyone had lines, and the deal was that these French plantation types were going to be there -- the European Frenchmen who were there -- would know who I was. Well, they'd know I was an American who spoke French and was a friend of theirs. The Vietnamese employees would not know that I was anything other than a Frenchman from the company headquarters in Paris, who was visiting in Vietnam and for whom a luncheon was to be given.

So I went out from Saigon on a French airplane, an old bucket of bolts, a single-engine biplane, one of those puddle jumpers the plantations had. The pilot who flew it -- about nine o'clock in

the morning -- had such shakes or DTs that he couldn't get the ignition key into the switch. So he took out his flask of whiskey, had a shot of whiskey to pull his nerves together a little, then put in the key. We flew first to one place where we visited one plantation, then we went over to the one where they were having this luncheon.

While we were there, we first got the word over their plantation wireless that there'd been an incident in Saigon. "*On a plastique l'Ambassade des Etats-Unis.*" *Plastique* can mean anything; it can mean one set off a light explosive, or made a racket, or set off a big firecracker, or small explosion -- at the American Embassy. We sort of laughed a bit, and they said, "Well, everybody's going to blame it on the French, and they'll blame it on you, and they'll say a day was picked when you weren't there. And that'll prove you're guilty and that your sinister French contacts have done this." We sort of joked about that, not yet knowing how serious it was, and then we had a good lunch. One of the officers of the plantation who'd been in the Foreign Legion mentioned that there was an old Foreign Legion mess hall nearby -- left from the 1954 war, and we went over to look at it and read the graffiti and all, and came back for a siesta in a little air-conditioned bedroom. I had a nice siesta, for about half an hour. When I got up from that they said, "Look, we've got bad news. This embassy thing sounds as though it's pretty serious. It was quite a big bomb and all, and apparently some people were killed and injured." I said, "Well, look," -- I had planned to spend the weekend with them -- "in that case, I better ask you to fly me back to Saigon." So I got back to Saigon an hour later.

Q: In that same airplane?

FLOTT: Yes. And got in to the embassy, and went into my office, and I had a big leather upholstered chair in my room where I usually sat; at my desk there was a big leather chair. The windows were all blown out and there were three big chunks of plate glass about a foot and a half by a foot and a half stuck right in the chair where I would have been. Or more likely, when the embassy got blown up, like everybody else, I would have rushed to the windows, and there I would have got a whole face full of glass. It just shows that sometimes you're lucky and sometimes you aren't. That's all for the moment.

Q: Now after escorting the Nhu children out of country, you were gone then for how long?

FLOTT: Oh, I was out of country for about two and a half weeks. I went from Rome back to Washington; as I mentioned earlier, I arrived there the day of the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas. Then I went back via the Far East, stopped off and saw our embassy in Japan and the people in Hong Kong. [Henry Cabot] Lodge went to Rome, and I got back to Saigon, oh, I would guess it must have been about the tenth of December. Well, now, Kennedy was assassinated on the twenty-second, was he not? Okay. Well, then I got there about the tenth of December. I got there about two weeks after the assassination.

Q: Okay.

FLOTT: When I got back to Saigon I obviously had a lot of catching up to do because I was out of touch, you might say, with the members of the new military council, and the atmosphere was definitely one of being supportive of them. The embassy was doing everything they could to be

supportive, to help them both image-wise and substance-wise, advice, support, everything, and there was some question about how well they do their job, and at the outset the impression was positive. Big Minh [Duong Van Minh] was perhaps a bit phlegmatic, but he commanded a lot of loyalties. and our impressions were positive.

Q: How long did that last?

FLOTT: Well, as long as the group did, as far as we were concerned. We were quite surprised by the [Nguyen] Khanh coup on January 30 of 1964.

Q: Well, before we get to that, can we talk about the [Robert] McNamara visit of December 1963?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: From what vantage point did you observe this? Were you interpreter for him?

FLOTT: Yes, I was, but perhaps more importantly, I was sitting in the office with Cabot Lodge and McNamara and one or two other officers, and we were discussing what we were going to do on various subjects. I do remember definitely a little bit of a number game. They were very much interested in being able to announce that the number of advisers was dramatically reduced from sixteen thousand to fifteen thousand, because at that point in time it had been up to sixteen thousand, and they sent back to the States certain categories of advisers, saying their mission was completed and they can leave country. And there was the usual talk about improving the Vietnamese war effort and getting them to have a draft and that sort of thing. And then, of course, we also had conversations with the Vietnamese, for which I interpreted in French.

Q: What was McNamara there for? Was this just one more fact-finding trip or -- ?

FLOTT: Yes, I think so, and of course MACV, the military people, were the main hosts -- well, not the main hosts for his visit, but they had a heavy claim on his time. There were lot of things that went on, I'm sure, between McNamara and his military constituents that I wasn't privy to or just didn't happen to rub elbows with.

Q: One of the telegrams I think I sent you has Lodge asking McNamara for one hour of his time alone. Do you have any idea what transpired between the men? There have been reports that Lodge was trying to convince McNamara that the military reporting was not what it should be.

FLOTT: That would be very plausible. It could easily be the case. The one hour alone might have been that meeting I sat in on because it was a pretty small group, and I could imagine how Lodge might have got him alone and then invited in, say, Mike Dunn and myself. Or Lodge is a very courteous, attentive man on most matters, and it's quite possible that he figured if he had to give McNamara any bad news, he'd give it to him one-on-one, and it's quite possible there was indeed such a meeting. I know all of us felt that the military, as I mentioned at the outset, had this way of equating unquestioning and unreasonable optimism with being the equivalent of loyalty and suitability for command. And that, however good it is for taking hills, isn't the best

way to deal with delicate Asian political equations, and that inherent failing of the military, I suppose, was made all the more harmful because of the nature of McNamara's own background. He was essentially an engineer, and now he'd be a computer whiz and a managerial whiz, and he was very much out of his element in Southeast Asia. You know, I have the highest respect for his integrity, intelligence, ability, everything else, except that if there was ever a fish out of water, it's the decent, forthright, hard-working personality of McNamara dealing with the opportunistic, self-serving leaders of successive Vietnamese coups.

Q: Someone said that Mr. McNamara was the smartest man he had ever met but he had no wisdom.

FLOTT: Yes, I saw that quote somewhere. I wouldn't go that far. I'd just say he was very much a fish out of water personality-wise, temperament-wise, and especially background-wise, in Southeast Asia.

Q: Some of the cables from this period refer to Long An province and province representative Earl Young and some reporting that was coming out of there. Did you have any insight into that?

FLOTT: I'm sure I must have at the time. That doesn't ring a bell, and I don't recall that. Long An, I went down there once myself. It's south of Saigon, isn't it?

Q: Yes.

FLOTT: I went down there once, and that for a while seemed to be a more hopeful place, if I'm not mistaken. Or at least we hoped it would get better, but it was just par for the course, and I don't remember the details.

Q: Okay. Anything else on the McNamara visit that we need to get into the record?

FLOTT: No, I don't think so on that one.

Q: Okay. Did you at the time have some evaluation of the performance of the new junta?

FLOTT: I thought they were -- it was our impression, because basically most of my impressions were secondhand, a condensation of what other people had told me -- I thought they were doing rather well, yes.

Q: What vantage point did you have to observe the events of the Khanh coup in January? Let me ask a specific question first of all. Did you have any hint that the coup was coming?

FLOTT: Oh, none at all. And that was one coup during which I did not happen to be duty officer. I was peacefully at my apartment, came into the office at seven o'clock in the morning and learned that there had been a coup. Even Mike Dunn had only learned about it about half an hour before himself because Lodge called him for some arrangement with the military or something.

Q: How was it possible for Khanh to keep such secrecy? Surely some Americans must have

known. The American advisers to the troop units, perhaps?

FLOTT: Not really. First of all, the American military advisers, you might say, were also fish out of water in that environment. I'm sure they were doing a very good and conscientious job of advising, giving perhaps tactical advice or training advice and all that, but my inclination would be to doubt that they would really get through to and establish buddy-buddy relationships with conspiring Vietnamese who'd talk to them. In other words, the military did not have a Lou Conein in its quiver of arrows, which may be one reason why the military don't like Lou Conein.

Q: Do you know who Khanh's adviser was?

FLOTT: Yes, and that was a personality. There was indeed some American general -- I'm sort of backing down from what I've just said now, when you mention his adviser. If I remember correctly, there was some American officer. It may even have been a young general or colonel who was very close to Khanh and with whom -- I wouldn't say Khanh leveled with him on the preparation -- but whom Khanh sought out the minute the fat was in the fire, yes.

Q: You don't recall the name, do you?

FLOTT: I don't, but it's a matter of public record. It was in the press at the time.

Q: Was it Jasper Wilson? Does that name ring a bell?

FLOTT: It doesn't, but I wasn't very good on American military names so-

Q: Okay. What was Ambassador Lodge's reaction to this development?

FLOTT: Well, in the first place, I don't know all of his reactions. I think like any man with an inquiring mind -- one of the main burdens of Khanh's argument was the reason, the justification, the *apologia pro vita sua* for having the coup was because the four generals were about to betray everything to the French. Lodge approached that, I think, with some instinctive skepticism, just wondering, "Are things really that simple?" and "Okay. Fine. You say that's it. What are the proofs? It would be very helpful to have evidence in support of these things."

It just happens that that day, that same day for lunch, I was invited to the residence of the French chargé d'affaires, Georges Perruche, and I went into Ambassador Lodge's office just before going off to lunch with Perruche, and General [William] Westmoreland was there. Westy had just fairly recently arrived in country and was just meeting all the players, and I told him, "Well, this is a funny, fortuitous time. The luncheon invitation has been planned for about a week or ten days, I guess, but it's a funny coincidence that I'm having lunch with the French." And I sort of got my last-minute instructions, which probably weren't any instructions because they figured I already knew what I was supposed to do. I said, "Well, it's really going to be fun going over all these charges." Because Khanh had already gone on the air with flagrant charges against the four generals for selling out the country to France and alleging that France was behind the plot and all that.

And you know, in a way, where there's smoke, there's a little fire. But the way I would situate that is, of course, that some French instinctively resented the American pre-eminence in Vietnam, which had been their turf. In an emotional way they resented it. Now, to carry that to say the French government was planning coups is, I think, ridiculous and untrue. But you can see, in terms of generally known attitudes, where somebody had a straw to grab on in embroidering on this issue and making these allegations, even if it weren't warranted or not fully warranted and not even 3 percent warranted.

But anyway, when I remarked I was having lunch with the French charge and it was going to be fun seeing what he had to say in reaction to Khanh's remark, Westy's remark, which I remember was, "Boy, this is going to be quite a lunch. Your host doesn't realize yet just how bad a luncheon this is going to be." He thought that was a good joke, and I went off to lunch and, of course, had my conversation with the French charge. And as usual, we just were awaiting more information and more facts, and nothing of great significance came out of that luncheon. I think from his point of view, if I can presume to judge what he was trying to do, he, I'm sure, was trying to look to see if the Americans were beating anti-French drums, which we were not, and I think I may even have had authority to tell him that Lodge had asked for proof of all these allegations and was willing to look at evidence, but so far we had none. I would imagine that Perruche was relieved to see that the Americans -- especially Lodge -- were not uncritically accepting the line of the Khanh coup about French intrigues.

Q: You see this French involvement or alleged involvement. It crops up over and over again in the Vietnam story, and you get the impression that people were using it like a red herring.

FLOTT: Yes. On balance, I don't want to be accused of being soft on the French or anything, but I think I am objective, and I think I know as much about it as anyone because that was one of my principal responsibilities, that and Free World Assistance. People were using it as a red herring, and some military adviser who wasn't very effective with the Vietnamese he was advising, perhaps through no fault of his own -- but it was very easy for him to blame his difficulties on the alleged fact that all the French rubber plantation managers were selling information to the Viet Cong and that sort of thing. There were a lot of allegations made at a low level, and on the French side, there were a lot of low-level types who thought, "Well, the Americans want to take our place here and take over our pizza parlors and things," which of course was not the case.

Q: Let me ask you a hypothetical question on the French business. If the French charge or the ambassador could have written his own ticket for Vietnam's future for a resolution of the conflict and so on, what do you suppose it would have looked like?

FLOTT: Well, I think it would have been the Quai d'Orsay line, leaning towards neutralism. But, as Ambassador Lodge pointed out wisely many times, you can't settle for neutralism when your military affairs are going downhill. Lodge mentioned many times, "If the French had had a conference on neutralism with the Germans, who were occupying France in 1943, it wouldn't have been so good." It was not the moment to do it. But I think the French had a feeling, which ultimately proved to be correct, that real national fiber in South Vietnam just wasn't there. The human qualities, the will to sacrifice, the ability to forge a popular political base, just weren't there to win the thing, and that rightly or wrongly, all things being relative, the communists were

the more attractive party to many of the people whose views would be determinant, namely potential recruits for the Viet Cong and the highly motivated North Vietnamese army. And of course the French attached great importance to a continuing French presence, cultural and economic, in Indochina.

Q: Right. Okay.

FLOTT: The French were closer to that reality, and the Americans still had a sort of ebullient can-do, which impression was enhanced by all these bright, young military advisers who had learned at West Point that any platoon they commanded was the best in the world and all that sort of thing.

Right. Okay. The Khanh coup generated a rather unique problem, and that was the problem that was referred to as the "plight of the Dalat generals," I think, in a few places. What is that all about? Well, the Dalat generals, the first thing that should be said about them is that they were the artisans of expelling [Ngo Dinh Diem in the November 1 coup] ...

Q: Except that Big Minh was not with them in Dalat.

FLOTT: Yes, but Big Minh was sort of a sacred cow, and the Khanh group simply isolated him. He was so passive anyway that they didn't have to put him under house arrest. They could just shove him off to a side and not give him copies of all the telegrams, and he was just as much out of action playing tennis in Saigon as he would have been under house arrest in Dalat. The other four were more active, and they were accused of having French ties.

Now these are all men who, from their previous military history, had indeed been close to the French, but they were not pro-French to the extent of being anti-American. I very much doubt that they were engaged in any plot with the French, but it depends on what you mean by plot. They might have had a drink with some Frenchman who subscribed to this sort of neutralist line, or the theory that rather than bleed the country white, you should make an agreement or settle something, but that doesn't mean the French were pushing an agreement. What I am saying is, there were a lot of Frenchmen who were, perhaps, inclined to seek to foresee that kind of a solution. These generals might indeed have talked to some such persons without necessarily buying what they had to say, even. But that would be my gut feeling about what the extent of the problem was. But from our mission point of view, these Dalat generals were highly *persona non grata* to the Khanh government, to which we were trying to be supportive because after the January 31 coup it was the government in power.

Q: But did their plight present some kind of a problem, an attitudinal problem for the mission or -- ?

FLOTT: Yes, Lodge was very concerned that these four men, good men with whom he had been dealing the day before, were suddenly under house arrest. And Lodge made the predictable representations that any high American official would have made: well, these men should get a fair trial, and if they're accused, the evidence should be presented, or if there is no substance to the evidence, that they should be acquitted and released. Lodge did that, as much as he could,

without running into problems of intervening in Vietnamese internal affairs.

Q: Was there fear that these men might be done away with, executed?

FLOTT: No. Not quite, because Khanh wouldn't have dared go quite that far. In fact, the following Christmas after it all happened, I happened to have Christmas Eve dinner with them and with the French charge, in Dalat. Now, again, he drove up to Dalat two days before Christmas of 1964 and offered me a ride to go along with him. It was a chance to drive through about three hundred kilometers of country that embassy officials didn't usually get a chance to drive through, so I touched base with the appropriate people. Ambassador [U. Alexis] Johnson and General [Maxwell] Taylor were there. They approved it. I asked colleagues like John Burke, who was another first secretary in the political section. I said, "Do you see any reason why I should not do this, any perception that it would be misunderstood or misinterpreted?" I just touched base with everybody, and everybody was for it, so I went up with this French charge, who, in a very thoughtful way, brought to the Dalat generals the appropriate trappings for a French Christmas Eve dinner and all -- *buche de Noel* and champagne.

Q: Wasn't that contested country at this time?

FLOTT: About half of it was, yes, that we drove through. I flew back. You see, I figured it was quite safe to drive up if the plan to do so was kept under wraps -- and then presuming that, if we had been stopped by a Viet Cong patrol, I could have successfully passed as a Frenchman. I had no weapon, no American clothes or papers on me. The Viet Cong wouldn't have questioned it. I figured it was reasonably safe, but once I was there and once the secret was out of the bag, so to speak, I would come back by plane. Arrangements were made for a plane to bring me back.

Q: But the Viet Cong would not have bothered a Frenchman if they knew he was a Frenchman?

FLOTT: That's right. At that point in time and that stage of the game, a Frenchman, even if stopped, would simply identify himself as a Frenchman, and they would probably wave him on. That doesn't mean that the French were helping them. It simply means that the Viet Cong had enough of a fight with us and didn't want one with the French as well. As it turned out, we weren't stopped. I had worked all night and the night before, and going through the worst part of Zone D or the hairiest part of the road, I fell asleep in the front seat of the car through much of it, I was so tired from being up all night before translating something for General Taylor.

Q: Who drove the car?

FLOTT: The French charge.

Q: So there were just the two of you?

FLOTT: Well, we had his two servants in the back seat, but one was Chinese and one was a trusted Vietnamese. They had no advance knowledge of my plan to travel with Perruche. I did not feel in great danger, but I prudently would not have driven back because the word could have gotten out, "There's an American from the embassy up here. You can catch him on the road

back," so I flew back. But the first pass at a target you can get in for free, and I did.

Q: So what transpired at Dalat then?

FLOTT: Well, we had this very pleasant Christmas Eve dinner, and they had talks, and I'm sure that Perruche, the French charge, did, from his point of view, some good political reporting. He heard out these people who were, after all, under house arrest because of being accused of plotting with him. Again, the fact that he took them a Christmas cake and had this Christmas Eve dinner and took me along sort of suggested the relation was something less than conspiratorial or sinister.

Q: Yes.

FLOTT: And these four generals were behaving in a very collegial, buoyant way among themselves, getting on very well and being very nice to everybody. But I'm sure Perruche heard everything they had to say, and my guess would be that they probably concluded that Khanh was just sort of a low-level opportunist, who had to accuse these people of something. There is a French proverb, "Qui veut noyer son chien, l'accuse de la rage." "Anyone who wants to justify drowning his dog says he has rabies." And Perruche, who was very concerned about improving my French and making it more distinguished and literary, taught me that expression in that connection. I think it was probably a point well taken as far as Mr. Khanh went.

Q: Was that what Khanh was, a low-level opportunist?

FLOTT: Essentially, yes.

Q: What was he trying to do?

FLOTT: Put Khanh in power and then get the Americans to win the war for him. Well, that certainly puts it in a nutshell.

Q: Did we intercede for these generals in any overt way?

FLOTT: Yes. Ambassador Lodge, with a very fine sense of style and integrity and the art of the possible, made all appropriate representations, and Lodge did this just enough to convey the impression that they had better not go off the deep end and really hurt these people, and their conditions of captivity were certainly not terrible if they were hosting dinner parties and things up in the most pleasant part of Vietnam.

Q: Right. Okay. Did you know these men personally, Tran Van Don and -- ?

FLOTT: Yes, I happened to know all of them quite well.

Q: Would you characterize them for us?

FLOTT: Tran Van Don is now living in Orlando, Florida, and eventually became vice president

of Vietnam and all, very French-oriented, very smooth, very sociable. He was the kind of person that a French-oriented American would like very much, as I did, because he was easy to talk to. He spoke perfect French. He was pleasant socially and everything else. Having said that, I would say he was not a man of iron will or driving commitment to duty. He did his duty, he put in his time on his watch, but he wasn't the kind of driving force who could weld a nation together.

Let's see. Le Van Kim was his brother-in-law. Le Van Kim was a really brilliant man by any standard. He would have been Phi Beta Kappa and top of his class at MIT if he had gone to it. Offhand, I don't remember if Le Van Kim spoke English, but he was very, very bright, and his son graduated at the top of his class from one of the best universities in France, one of the so-called *grandes ecoles*. Kim was just a brilliant man who saw all the problems, I thought, pretty well, but again, he could not really lead the country.

And Ton That Dinh was sort of a Mexican jumping bean, pod-of-pepper who had been attacking the Americans before the anti-Diem coup, then who was sort of the last man to join the October 31 coup against Diem. He was sort of an amiable lightweight, unpredictable, but perhaps with some leadership qualities. As inspector general of training, he probably would have been all right to that extent. He would have made sure the platoon leaders had fire coming out of their nostrils, at least, although a great intellect he was not.

Mai Huu Xuan was a more withdrawn figure, who had been the chief of the Secret Police in the old days. When we had this dinner with them, there was a field generator in the villa -- the generals were under house arrest -- one of those that you turn with your hand knob, and as you may know, there have been allegations that such generators had occasionally been used to facilitate interrogation. I made a crack to Perruche that "out of deference to the presence of Mai Huu Xuan, the other three generals didn't ask anyone to use the electric generator." (Laughter) They thought that was very funny. But Mai Huu Xuan did have a Secret Police background, and-

Q: Did he have a Surete background as well?

FLOTT: Yes, whatever it was. I don't know the names of those intelligence agencies exactly, but it was that kind of thing. And there were stories going way back to 1952 where there was a problem in some marketplace, and he left fifty dead people there as an example that he was not a man to be trifled with, and if that may be partly apocryphal, it is perhaps not entirely apocryphal.

Q: I see. So he had something of a sinister reputation?

FLOTT: Yes. Yes.

Q: Do you know what became of him?

FLOTT: I don't. Offhand, I don't.

Q: What finally became of these people?

FLOTT: Oh, they were eventually released, and Don, when Lodge came, you remember -- this is

getting ahead of our chronology -- but Lodge came back to Saigon in March of 1965, and he was going to be -- well, history shows that three months later he was reappointed ambassador. That was for his second term. But he came back on a visit, and Ambassador Taylor, typically of his good sense of organization and style, assigned me as an aide to Lodge for that visit, knowing of our past relationship. I was sort of running Lodge's temporary office and running his message center and facilitating his mission on his visit there, which had many facets. This is all in roughly March of 1965, and among others who came in, Don wanted to come in and see him.

Don by then had been released, and when they met Lodge apologized, so to speak, or explained the circumstances to Don of why he had not been able to be more active on his behalf when he was under house arrest, which Don understood perfectly well. Everybody understood, and I had already covered that ground with the four generals, making sure that they knew of Lodge's goodwill and protective instincts for them. And Don said that he wanted to get back into a job; he absolutely had to be doing something. He wanted to get into the war effort in any way that he could be fitted in, and Lodge said, "I know how you feel. I've been out of office myself, and it's just like giving up smoking. It's terrible, but my advice is, don't make waves. Wait two weeks. Wait until they find something. Make haste slowly." And Lodge gave him good and friendly advice which Don accepted in the spirit in which it was offered. I was present at that meeting with them.

And the others, in one way or another, were fitted into something. I don't remember the details. And Don, of course, eventually became vice president of Vietnam.

Q: Right. I heard that Xuan lost his mind.

FLOTT: Yes, Mai Huu Xuan. Maybe he did. I don't know.

Q: What shall we move to now?

FLOTT: The third from last line there.

Q: Okay. David Nes. You know David Nes, of course?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: What was his position in the embassy? It seems to me that he was in a rather ambiguous spot.

FLOTT: Well, his formal position was very clear-cut. He came out as deputy chief of mission (DCM), appointed by various official telegrams, and they rushed him out there after he had been chosen and everything. One of the problems he had was he was used to being number-two man in a clear-cut situation where the number-two man is the alter ego of the ambassador and has instant access to him and can discuss everything, and, in private, can disagree or suggest to the ambassador alternate courses of action. That's the normal position of a DCM. He found himself cut off by what he probably regarded as a whippersnap lieutenant colonel, Mike Dunn, who clearly not only had the confidence of the Ambassador but perhaps even more, had a charter from the Ambassador to screen people. It's hard to tell just to what extent Mike Dunn was acting

on instructions or to what extent he perhaps overdrew on a vague guideline; these things are awfully hard to adjudicate. But rightly or wrongly, Mike Dunn at one point apparently told Nes that he could not see the Ambassador without first getting Mike Dunn's permission, and that was not David Nes' old-line foreign service officer notion of how a number-two man has access to his chief. I think that was the inherent difficulty, and I'm not in a position to judge either of them because I don't know to what extent Mike was acting on Ambassador Lodge's instructions.

Q: Neither man confided in you, I gather.

FLOTT: Well, I got peripheral observations from both of them, yes, but nothing that would add anything significant to what I've already said.

Q: Okay. Well, what was Mr. Nes given to do exactly?

FLOTT: Well, on paper he was functioning as a DCM, and he did indeed become chargé d'affaires when Lodge was absent from the country. Cables went out in his name and that kind of thing. When he had less and less access to Lodge, he took up other duties like dealing with Cambodian-Vietnamese relations and things like that. He supervised all the career foreign service bureaucracy in the embassy, which Lodge certainly did not supervise directly. Nes, as far as I could tell, was a man of good, professional conscience. I recall an incident where there was a need for somebody to go out and represent the United States at some major dedication of a bridge that was symbolic of a reconstruction effort in a province and all. This was something that he thought the United States should be represented at, and everybody did, and he had a fever of 104, went out there for two days doing that, at some risk. He was a very conscientious officer. Now he may have somewhat missed the boat on how to deal with Ambassador Lodge, or it may have been a hopelessly intractable thing.

Q: I've heard that he was supposed to be the chief administrative officer, that he was going to run the mission, and Lodge was going to be the man-

FLOTT: Well, that to a certain extent is always the case with a DCM.

Q: But this is supposed to have gotten him in trouble with Lodge. Lodge was not willing to relinquish his control over AID and so on.

FLOTT: I'm sure there's something to that, and I would also submit that David Nes would have been as good as any foreign service officer I know, you know, to handle these complex relations with other constituent parts of an embassy, of a country team. I did the same job myself in Indonesia, and I know something about what a DCM does. I was acting DCM out there for about nine months. Yes, logically, that would have been part of his duties, but by then, the AID mission, instead of being a group of twenty-seven people who specialized in water pumps for irrigation or something, suddenly was a massive force in the thousands dealing with pacification and things in support of the GVN [government of Vietnam]. And they had prima donnas at the top who wanted direct access to Lodge, and maybe Lodge wanted direct access to them to make his own judgments.

Q: Right. When did you learn that Ambassador Lodge was leaving Vietnam?

FLOTT: Putting all this on whatever day it was on Saigon time, I believe he told the press the story in confidence at 6:00 p.m. By then, I'm sure the President had been notified and all that. I did not see those telegrams at the time. They weren't my business directly. I was busily working on Free World Assistance, the More Flags business, and there was no good reason why I would have seen those telegrams.

I think when Ambassador Lodge discovered that I did not know about this, or hadn't known it, he very thoughtfully called me up about one p.m., about five hours before he talked to the press and said, "Look, old man, you came over here with me. I just wanted to take leave of you and let you know that I am going home very quickly for political reasons that I have already discussed with you in some measure," as he had over, say, the previous two weeks, his view that it would be very unfortunate for the Republican Party if Barry Goldwater were nominated candidate.

He would have preferred, I am sure, to have seen Governor [Nelson] Rockefeller named, but [William] Scranton, he thought, was the better choice, and he was going back to campaign for Scranton. Then the next morning, he got us all together -- you know, a staff meeting of his principal officers -- told us that he really felt as a question of conscience, that he had to go back and get into the Republican convention to see to it that the party of Abraham Lincoln did not become the party of Barry Goldwater, and he would be leaving in a day and a half. He was going to have a farewell reception that night, and I was very much involved in making the arrangements and last-minute guest lists and making lots of last-minute telephone calls to get people there who might not have received their invitations by messengers.

Q: I can imagine.

FLOTT: Mike Dunn and I both worked very hard putting that together.

Q: How did the Vietnamese react to Lodge's sudden departure?

FLOTT: I think they were puzzled by it, but in a way, it figured. When a man of that background, a very political background, goes back to help one of his political friends, not only did the Vietnamese understand it pretty well but LBJ understood it very well.

Q: There was some talk that Mr. Lodge was wanting to run himself.

FLOTT: Well, it wasn't a question of that at all. He was not a candidate. I remember once there was this volunteer primary effort on his behalf at some point, and people were running through the hills of New Hampshire voting for him. I remember one day he had flown on a prop plane -- he'd flown up to Hue and back in one day and came in the office about six o'clock, soaked in perspiration, covered with dust, which was all the more visible because he had on an open-collared, white shirt just covered with red mud dust. And there was a telegram, just a report, a wire-service report about how he had won the New Hampshire primary without even running in it, and he said, "There's a lesson for you, my boy, in this. There are two lessons for you in this. One is, stay out of your country and keep your mouth shut!" He said, "This time I did not

campaign, and I was nine thousand miles from home, and I won. It makes me think of all those hard, cold winters when I tramped around in the snows of Massachusetts or New Hampshire trying to get votes, and here I stay away and keep my mouth shut, and I win a primary." He just made that sort of an in-house joke, but he was clearly touched by the outcome.

Q: Well, I wonder if the press had anything to do with that. We've already mentioned that he seemed to have had a very good press in Vietnam, but he had not had a good press in the United States when he was a candidate.

FLOTT: Yes, that's true. I know all those horror stories from the Nixon-Lodge campaign, but, well, I think the press did very much respect the job he was doing in Vietnam -- trying to do. They respected certainly his patriotic motivation in being there, but I am certain he did not go back to the States to run. He went back to shore up what could be called the Rockefeller-Scranton wing of the Republican Party. And that he had discussed with me over a period of perhaps two weeks before, just as an informed citizen observing, without tipping his hand at all that he was going to go back.

Q: Well, what effect did this have on your situation, on your personal position?

FLOTT: Well, the duties he had given me some time before this, the duties I had sort of drifted into, were -- my main jobs were responsibility for this Free World Assistance. It was originally called Third Country Aid or More Flags. I think LBJ put the More Flags name on it. He was very keen on the project. He literally sent out telegrams of guidance, or prodding us, or kicking us in the tail about once a day, and I was made officer in charge of that. That figured because of my closeness to Lodge and everything. Lodge obviously had to delegate the nuts and bolts to somebody, delegated it to me, and that was a full-time job. I also had the secondary duty of keeping track of the French community and handling our relations with them. And that was enough on my plate, and when he left, I continued to do the same. Lodge very thoughtfully helped arrange this. As you know, Ambassador Johnson, U. Alexis Johnson, arrived there three hours before Lodge left, and they had a quick meeting, and after the meeting was over, Lodge called me in and said, "Look, I've got everything fixed up with my successors. You're going to continue to be in charge of these same programs." He then called me in to introduce me to Alex Johnson and sort of pass on the mantle in his presence and with his blessing, and my transition with the new group was perfectly normal. Two days after he arrived in Saigon, U. Alexis Johnson was flying up to Dalat to see Khanh, and people in the embassy had recommended me as the best person to go along to be his interpreter, which I did. When General Taylor got there, he said, "I understand your French is good. I speak some French myself. Whenever I make a mistake, I want you to make a note of it and correct me. Teach it to me correctly when you get a chance." And General Taylor really meant this.

Q: And he prided himself on his linguistics skill.

FLOTT: Oh, yes. Well, he was a good linguist. Considering that he had also been chairman of the Joint Chiefs and doing other things than speaking French, he spoke very good French. It was the kind of French that was so good that what I did was: if I saw that he was systematically, repeatedly making a rather important type of mistake, I'd say, "Look, you consistently do this

wrong. The way you should do it is this, this, this," and I'd solve the problem. If he just mispronounced some little thing or something or had the gender of a word wrong, or something, I wouldn't bother him with that, but Taylor was a very good man to work with. He worked me very hard. If he'd received a long, detailed instruction from LBJ to raise certain points with General [Nguyen Van] Thieu, who, at the time -- or Khanh or whoever it was -- I forget the older man who was president for a while, he used me to help get the message across.

Q: Gosh, there were so many.

FLOTT: Yes. Anyway, so a lot of these people didn't read English, and in the diplomatic business, there's such a thing as giving a person what's known as "a piece of paper" -- "un bout de papier" -- and that is in effect you give them an outline of your talking points, so they can remember them and get it straight. So if there was a twenty-page telegram message from LBJ to give the President of Vietnam, Taylor would come into my office at 6:00 p.m. and say, "Fred, I've just received this from the President, and I wonder if you'd translate it into French so I could leave a copy with President" -- whoever it was -- "tomorrow morning?" And I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "I'm going to see him at seven-thirty a.m. I'd like to have it by six-thirty. Why don't you come and have breakfast with me then, and we can discuss it?" Well, he was decent enough to invite me for breakfast. He kept me up all night and I'd sure be hungry by then, and also, I was really honored to be asked to stay up all night working for Max Taylor. He had kept other people up all night before in his career, and I was glad to be part of the distinguished group. That was the nature of our relation. And if he ever had a sudden cancellation at one of his official dinners, he'd very often call me to fill in and fill up the table. He was a very good man to work with, and he occasionally took me back with him on his trips back to the States.

Q: How would you compare or contrast his style as ambassador with that of Mr. Lodge?

FLOTT: He had all the best qualities of the American military and applied them to his work. He was also a man of unusual intelligence and breadth of interest and that sort of thing. And Lodge had all the best qualities of the United States Senate. The two types operate in a different way. A senator, at most, commands perhaps as many as fifty people, whereas if you are chairman of the Joint Chiefs, you are commanding more than that, and your modus operandi reflect it.

I remember there was one incident. There was a certain friendly ambassador to whom Lodge personally had been very close during his tour. When Lodge came back on this March of 1965 trip before being renamed, when Taylor was still ambassador, Lodge remarked that this friendly European ambassador had complained to him that he didn't have the same kind of close relation with General Taylor that he'd had with Lodge for the simple reason that Taylor didn't really have any important business to do with him and spent his time on things that were directly related to his mission. Lodge said, "You know" -- he told me privately; we were riding somewhere in the car -- "You know, it's a pity this difference came up between the two. It's not important, but it's a pity because Taylor could have handled this differently. You know, when I was up at the UN, there was always a certain body of information that was not really secret. There was no real national security reason to keep it secret, but I didn't release it. I didn't throw it out on the open market. Why? Because I'd save it as tidbits to give from time to time to people just to improve my relation with them. And now Taylor could have done that. There are a lot of things he could

have told this particular ambassador with no harm to security and all, just to maintain a better relation with him. Taylor didn't realize that. He doesn't know that." Then Lodge threw his arms up in the air and said, "But, of course, I don't know how to run an airborne division!" (Laughter)

That was, I think, a pretty good illustration of the difference between the two. I respected both of them, and I liked both of them.

Q: But I think you're saying that it's very hard to compare them.

FLOTT: It is indeed. Yes. But they were both first-rate in their ways.

Q: And both effective.

FLOTT: Yes. As much as you can be effective at nailing jelly to a wall, which is trying to do such things as making South Vietnam into a cohesive force with fire coming out of its nostrils.

Q: Well, in that vein, let me ask you this question. It's not on the paper, but it's certainly relevant, and perhaps you won't mind addressing it. I think Taylor tried to nail the jelly to the wall in December of 1964, didn't he, when we had the coup that -- ?

FLOTT: Where they said they wouldn't deal with Taylor? Oh, yes.

Q: He was almost declared persona non grata.

FLOTT: He almost was, and that was, of the telegrams I saw, that was the only time I saw a telegram from the State Department, possibly from Bill Bundy or [Dean] Rusk -- I don't know who, one shouldn't speculate on the actual authorship of those things -- but there was a telegram from high places in Washington saying, in essence, "Look, if the Vietnamese keep up this business of having a coup every two weeks, it makes it impossible to win the war, and we may have to conclude that the thing can't be won and that we shouldn't participate in it any further." It was the only time that I saw a speculation of the cut-out-losses-and-get-out sort that was in print from high places.

Q: Were you present when Taylor called the generals in and chastised them?

FLOTT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That was one of these Sundays when I was duty officer. We'd just had another coup, and he was getting tired of it, and he called them in, and as the popular story goes, dressed them down like a bunch of West Point cadets. And I think that was probably pretty much what he did. I was ten feet away from where he was doing this. I was not in the room and quite properly not. He wanted to have it a meeting among equals or peers, but I was going in and out of the office, and I was sitting at a little desk right outside his office doing my command post function of being duty officer, keeping track of where which armored column was as of that moment sort of thing -- we were getting reports, but nobody was systematically trying to keep us informed.

Q: Yes, but you could overhear, more or less?

FLOTT: Well, yes, Taylor told me what had gone on, and I, of course, saw his written reports of the thing. I was generally very much up to speed on how he was conducting his mission, and again, I thought he did a first-rate job of it.

Q: The Vietnamese did not react well or take this dressing down very well-

FLOTT: Well, they don't like it. They'd much prefer to have a soft boss rather than a tough boss, and if they had some gullible American who was very concerned about respecting their sovereignty and all, they'd rather have that than have a tough-minded partner. I wouldn't fault General Taylor at all for the way he handled that. I'm just glad he handled it the way he did.

Q: Mr. Flott, what was the nature of your responsibility for the Free World Assistance side of our operation?

FLOTT: This was a program that went into very high gear in about May or June of 1964, and it was a program in which President Johnson himself was personally very interested. We literally got three telegrams a day from the White House giving his latest advice on areas in which he could bring support to bear to help our efforts. The program was originally called Third Country Aid, and it was basically aid from other countries, other than the United States, to help the government of Vietnam. It was very open-ended. The more aid we could get the more we liked it. I changed the name of the program from Third Country Aid to Free World Assistance because of the obvious favorable political connotation. The U.S. government welcomed it and the Johnson Administration welcomed it, because it was a way to show that what we were trying to do in Vietnam was not just an American idea, or an American problem, but also it was a concern of the whole free world, and that in some measure -- and taking into account their different resources or levels of involvement -- just about all of the free world countries were trying to do something to help Vietnam.

My job on the Saigon end of it was what we call generating requests for aid -- to get the government of Vietnam, which was spread very thin, to request aid from countries that we were in a position to know would be willing to help them if they received requests for aid. Then we would make representations to these friendly governments that had embassies in Saigon or if not Saigon, at least in Bangkok, telling them that the U.S. government very much hoped they would see fit to do something to help Vietnam. I made a few trips not only to Bangkok to see embassies for countries that didn't have embassies in Saigon, but also went out to Iran and Paris, Israel, trying to get aid for Vietnam.

And as I say, President Johnson was personally very much interested in the program, and if he had a visiting head of state from a potential donor country coming in to see him in the Oval Office, he'd ask us, "Just what should I ask this fellow for?" He was trying very hard to help.

Q: You mentioned Israel. Were there any special problems associated with getting Israel to contribute something to the effort?

FLOTT: Yes, with every country there was a special problem of one sort or another; either the

political forces at home didn't like it or something. In the case of Israel, the biggest problem was that the government of Israel did not want to be seen as doing something that would antagonize the Russians unnecessarily and therefore compromise even further the position of Soviet Jewry. The main concern of the government of Israel, of course, was to get their people out of the Soviet Union.

Q: Right. So did they eventually give some aid to South Vietnam?

FLOTT: Almost nothing. Rather than adopt a posture of totally saying no, they offered at one point -- just to show how far this was from being useful or supportive -- to teach agricultural subjects that the Israelis of course are first-rate in, very knowledgeable on. They offered to teach desert or dry soil agriculture to trainees who would have to take their training in Israel of course that posed problems of how do you get draft-age young men out of Vietnam to go to Israel anyway, especially if it's to learn something that's not really relevant to most of Vietnam. But even that limited offer we were willing to talk about at least, hoping we could get more from them. And they took the position that with two or three million Jews sort of hostage in the Soviet Union they couldn't do much more than that. I pointed out that the Federal Republic of Germany might be excused for thinking that there were seventeen million Germans hostage in the German Democratic Republic, and nonetheless the West Germans sent us all kinds of hospital ships and hospitals and civic programs and everything else. But the Israelis just made the minimum of a token offer just to avoid saying no categorically.

Q: Right. How about the Filipinos?

FLOTT: The Filipinos put in a large program. They sent a lot of people there. Mind you, the people they sent were on per diem and there were perhaps other incentives than fighting the fight for freedom. But the Filipinos did have a large program and of course the Filipinos had many very skilled people and people who worked well in the English language and interfaced well with our own people.

Q: Was there a problem with Asian countries not being particularly interested in helping?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: What was their position?

FLOTT: They just didn't quite see the urgency of it in the same terms that we did. I think a lot of them probably had the feeling that the Viet Cong did after all have a popular base of a sort and that they just didn't want their country in the long run to be associated with having fought against the Viet Cong.

Q: I see. What was the attitude of the Thais on this question?

FLOTT: The Thais sent a lot of people, but of course we were able to make very direct representations to the Thais and ensure that we got delivery of quite a bit of aid from them because they wanted things from us. So our leverage with the Thais was pretty good.

The Japanese of course always begged off from anything with military implications, but they sent some aid and hospitals and things like that.

The French, who would never say that they were doing this in response to the Free World Assistance Program, nonetheless sent an awful lot of aid to Vietnam. They had four hundred high school teachers or whatever the number was there.

Q: And the Koreans, were you involved in that?

FLOTT: Yes, the Koreans were big in that, too.

Q: Of course, they also had a lot of troops there.

FLOTT: Yes, and there was also lots of reimbursement for what the Koreans did, and Koreans are very willing to do things if they are reimbursed for them.

Q: The Australians, the Anzacs [Australian-New Zealand Army Corps]?

FLOTT: Yes, the Australians and New Zealanders both had first-rate medical programs and did very good things, and of course they also had troops there.

Q: Right. Were you also responsible for handling any problems that might arise in the course of the aid being given?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: Can you think of anything in particular which posed a problem for you in this regard?

FLOTT: Well, we were, for purely political and image-building reasons, so glad to get any aid that we could point to as broadening the base of our effort there, that almost anything they gave us was welcome. But even though we were very inclined to be thankful for small favors, some people were worse than others about not wanting hands showing. The Greeks, for example, offered to give us what I think was an acquisition value of a hundred dollars worth of surgical equipment that was rusted and they would give it to us as long as we didn't say that they had done so. Well, that was I guess the lowest point of those who said reluctantly yes to joining the effort.

There were problems of that sort. There was also the problem that once these people arrived, foreigners like Spaniards, Iranians, it was a problem to support them, but it was usually solved. It was something we had the resources to do. We'd fix them up with housing and all. I suppose one of the worst problems was that the government of Vietnam itself, which obviously should have been interested in getting all the aid it could, both for material reasons and also for image reasons, didn't push the program as much as we did.

Q: Why was that?

FLOTT: It was just simpler, they thought probably, to get everything from the Americans than it was to be nice to a wide group of foreigners. And again, saying that, you have to take into account that their government was stretched very thin and already had very much on its plate.

Q: Yes. Is it possible to describe a typical or prototypical sequence in which a decision was made to ask a country for a certain kind of aid and then I suppose he would go to the Vietnamese government and say, "Why don't you ask for this?" Is that the way it went?

FLOTT: Yes. First of all, we limited ourselves to that which appeared to be positive, or possible I should say, and secondly, we looked, quite frankly, for those things that had the most psychological and political impact. But typically a country like Iran, for a variety of reasons, did not see fit to send armed troops there. On the other hand, the Iranians, as part of their close relation with the United States, were willing to send a group. So we said, "Okay, supposing you send a medical team or a small hospital team and we'll put it out in one of the provinces," and they did. The Iranian equivalent of the Red Cross Society is called the Red Lion and Crescent. They sent a good group commanded by a retired colonel and did medical work. The Spaniards did the same thing. For their own domestic reasons, they didn't want to get too involved with sending troops or anything, but they sent a military medical team and they'd be put out in a province.

Anyway, when we determined that they were -- see, President Johnson was leaning on all our embassies around the world to be supportive of this program and to try to find donors. When we learned for example that Iran would be willing to send a team, we'd generate a request, that is, stimulate the bureaucratic and paper process of getting the government of Vietnam to request the aid. Then I'd follow up on the project with the intended donor country's ambassador in Saigon, to ensure that it moved forward.

Q: Was there any problem with providing security for such teams?

FLOTT: Yes, but not unmanageable. They'd have two or three Vietnamese bodyguards living around their house, maybe.

Q: I think some Germans at Hub were scooped up at Tet.

FLOTT: Yes, they got caught up in the Tet offensive, but that was an extreme case.

Q: Was the Filipino -- what was it called? -- Operation Brotherhood, was that still extant at this time, or had that been terminated before your time?

FLOTT: I think the specific Operation Brotherhood was over by then, but the Filipinos sent stuff in response to this request for free world assistance. And of course the minute they were doing something useful and the minute the Filipinos themselves saw that the U.S. government wanted something from them, there were a number of enterprising individual Filipinos that arrived at my office in Saigon saying, well, if you can make such and such a contract for barges or floating cranes or something from my firm, or if you can buy so much San Miguel beer for sale on the PX or whatever the line was that they were touting and the special interests that they were

representing, they'd say, "We, of course, can be very influential and we'll certainly see to it that you get the free world assistance." But that happened. I remember particularly the Filipinos in that connection. On the other hand, the Filipinos did send some very able people there. They had a good counterinsurgency sense: they'd had relevant experience in their own country. And, you know, because of our close ties between the two countries, a Filipino medical team would proceed very much like an American one would, so it was much easier to integrate them into our effort.

Q: I see. How did you deal with these offers of assistance involving the purchase of San Miguel beer or a floating crane or whatever?

FLOTT: I would tell them that from my dealings with their government it was not my impression that their government would wish to proceed that way and while I was certainly going to look into their remarks and share them with their government, that I could not promise them anything.

Q: That would end it?

FLOTT: But that if their country knew what was good for them in view of President Johnson's strong interest in this program, they'd be well advised to cooperate on sending aid. That usually worked. It was very simple. We had a clear charter to lean on them hard and twist arms hard, and with LBJ behind you on this thing, it was very easy to be persistent and get tough with people.

Q: Right. Any instances of initial refusals followed by acquiescence as a result of pressure?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: Your pressure? LBJ's pressure?

FLOTT: Ultimately certainly LBJ's. I could occasionally select targets for his wrath, but I couldn't apply any pressure myself in the same way that he could. It's not even entirely fair to describe it as putting pressure on them. It takes more than one conversation and one go-around to make a case on what's obviously a complicated and difficult and sometimes expensive effort.

Q: Right. How about the British? Did they send -- ?

FLOTT: They did a lot of very good things.

Q: Did they? But the war was not popular in England.

FLOTT: No, but the British were of course committed to their special relationship with the United States and they were always willing to send medical aid and surgical teams and that kind of stuff.

Q: You mentioned last time -- I don't want to leave Third World Assistance until you're satisfied that --

FLOTT: I can't think of anything more I have on it.

Q: When the Pleiku incident took place in February of 1965, you said that you had lunch with [John] McNaughton at that time. Do you recall that?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: Was McGeorge Bundy there or was he out of the country?

FLOTT: No, Mac Bundy had actually gone up to Pleiku, and I had lunch with McNaughton and with Chet Cooper. They were the two on the Mac Bundy party who for various reasons stayed in Saigon. I think McNaughton had business at MACV headquarters and Chet Cooper was doing something. Chet, whom I'd known for a number of years, said, "Look, I'm free for lunch with McNaughton. Let's go together." We just went over to one of the officers' clubs or bogs and had lunch and talked. That was at noon that fateful Sunday and then Mac Bundy came back from Pleiku and didn't even leave the airport. He landed from Pleiku at Tan Son Nhut. McNaughton and Cooper and I were out at the airport and McNaughton and Cooper flew back to the States with Bundy.

That was the point at which Mac Bundy said, "In view of these shellings of American installations, we'd better get the dependents out." Then LBJ made a very categorical order that all dependents were going to be out within a week. The biggest no-no in that theater of operations would be for wives or other dependents to come back into Vietnam once they were evacuated.

Q: They'd been discussing whether they should evacuate the dependents, hadn't they?

FLOTT: Yes, but the straw that broke the camel's back, I suppose, was the Pleiku thing.

Q: Yes. I know some of the arguments pro and con were what impression this would make on both the South Vietnamese and their enemies.

FLOTT: We were conscious of that and we figured that we could represent it as being battening down the hatches and clearing the decks for action. It was done in that context.

Q: Is that the way the South Vietnamese interpreted it, do you think?

FLOTT: Yes, I think it was pretty much, yes.

Q: Okay. Did you talk to McGeorge Bundy about his conversation back to Washington during the Pleiku incident or immediately after? Because it's known now that at that time he also recommended that we begin the bombing.

FLOTT: Yes. I think out at the airport on the tarmac just talking with Mac Bundy and McNaughton and Chet Cooper, Mac Bundy took the position that we clearly could not take attacks of that Pleiku sort or of the earlier Bien Hoa sort lying down, and we had to study ways

off reprisal in kind.

Q: Well, how do you interpret his later and rather cynical remark that's been cited in a number of cases when he was asked about what it was that triggered his recommendation. He said, "Pleikus are like streetcars," meaning there's one by every ten minutes; you just pick the one you want to use as your excuse and you go ahead and do what you want to do. That was not the way he seemed, though, at the time, is that right?

FLOTT: I wouldn't claim to have any really valid insight into what was going on inside his mind. It might well be that he meant to say he would not allow one incident to rush him into premature or unwise action, timing-wise.

Q: But that was not the impression that you got, I gather.

FLOTT: My impression was that he quite lucidly and correctly figured that if the Viet Cong were going to bring American installations under attack that we would have to make reprisals in some suitable form.

Q: Right. When you came back, you were given duties involving trying to explain our Vietnam policy; is that right?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: What sorts of places did you go to in this effort?

FLOTT: The most basic underlying guideline and square one of the whole effort was that this was done in the context of the Department of State supplying a spokesman in those situations where a sponsoring group had requested a State Department spokesman.

Q: I see.

FLOTT: Now, just about anyone could request it. Any university could request it, and I went to many universities. Also, public service groups like the Louisville, Kentucky Rotary Club would request it, and I'd go out for that. The State Department made it very clear that the sponsoring organization paid the bills. For example, my plane fares were always paid by the sponsoring organization. My travel expenses were kept to the modest level covered by government per diem, but the host organizations were always billed and had agreed in advance to pay for the per diem of travel as well. Admittedly, they did not pay for my time. But the State Department feels it has a public policy obligation of a sort to make speakers available where it's something they're willing to do. As a practical matter, most of my work seemed to be on Saturdays and Sundays anyway when it was my own time and not the department's.

Q: I see. Do we conclude that most of your audiences were at least neutral on the subject, or -- ?

FLOTT: They varied widely. I had some audiences in California right at the time of the Cambodian incursion that were very hostile, and where literally there was some concern about

my physical security, I mean making at least contingency plans for what you do if you get a mob scene. Other audiences would be more friendly to our policy in Vietnam.

Q: Did you ever feel that you were in danger, or apprehensive?

FLOTT: I think if I had played it very stupidly and had angered a big crowd of anti-war people and if I had added to normal differences of opinion by making them want to take it out on me personally, I could probably have gotten kicked around, yes. But I avoided that. I had occasion to speak at the student union at Berkeley.

Q: Well, that doesn't sound like a very friendly place to me.

FLOTT: No, but after Berkeley I went out to California two weekends in a row at the time of the Cambodian incursion, which was 1970 or 1971, during the Nixon Administration. But first I went out to California once during the Johnson Administration because the State Department had a request for a speaker for Berkeley and the public affairs office -- the bureau that more or less managed these speaking engagements -- advised me not to go into this one, because it was a really violently hostile audience.

Q: I can imagine.

FLOTT: I talked to Governor [Averell] Harriman and said, "Governor, it seems to me we ought to talk to the people who disagree with us on this thing." And he said, "Well, I see no reason why not to do it. If you're willing to do it, it's your neck." So I went out. But even there, there were some positive situations. I mean there was the good thing that on an American campus there's still enough sense of fairness left, regardless of how high the passions ran, there was a feeling of, "Let this fellow be heard. Let's hear another viewpoint and see what he has to say." I had a couple of things helping me. The local regent at Berkeley was Tom Sorensen, the brother of Ted Sorensen, and Tom, whom I'd known from the East Coast and who had served in USIS, knew that I had been the escort officer and interpreter for Supreme Court Justice [William] Douglas and for Bob Kennedy in 1955 when they went to the Soviet Union. So I told Tom Sorensen that I would agree to come out to Berkeley and talk to their five thousand students in the student union at high noon, if it were made very clear to the audience that I'd come out there in response to their invitation. Tom picked it up from there and said, "Yes, and what's more, when I introduce you I'll tell them that you were Bob Kennedy's interpreter," and that of course was a big plus.

I think on the part of the real hard core of troublemakers, not just ordinary citizens who for their own reasons were angry with our policy but people who really deliberately wanted to make trouble, they tended to wait until -- they were waiting for me to make some bad mistake to slip or stumble on something, in which case they could pile on and have the audience with them. I said a lot of things they didn't like and a lot of things that they almost decided to lower the boom on, but they kept waiting for something a little bit better and more clear-cut. In time, of course, I got the audience to listen to what I had to say and addressed all kinds of difficult subjects and got away with it.

Q: That's remarkable.

FLOTT: Things like napalm and that kind of thing they asked about.

Q: What was the concern about napalm? We'd used it in World War II; we'd used it in Korea.

FLOTT: Well, we didn't use napalm in World War II until the very end against the Japanese, but if we'd had napalm in World War II for the Normandy landing, things would have gone much better on Omaha Beach. We didn't have it. In Korea of course we did. It just lent itself, I think, to almost symbolizing hellfire and damnation and big fire and of course the horrible wounds it inflicts. Rightly or wrongly, it was a big emotional issue. The troublemakers in the audience would figure they had a good enough case just saying, "What about napalm?" And I'd say, "Okay, let me tell you about napalm." I said, "Napalm is, first of all, a rather limited weapon. It burns up everything within a hundred-yard radius, but it doesn't do much beyond that. If you're attacking, advancing, and you're held down by a hostile machine gun nest, there are a number of ways to take out a machine gun nest. You can storm it frontally -- in which case you'd lost twenty GIs dead on the ground -- or you can maneuver around it and maybe lose time and two or three people trying to get a bangalore torpedo or a grenade into the thing. Or you can pull your company back three hundred yards and ask for an air strike with napalm, kill the crew inside and save all of your side's lives." Then I asked the audience, "Now, if your brother were to be in the rifle company in the attack, which approach would you prefer that his company commander took? All I'm doing is supporting the choice of weapons of these company commanders who knew what they were doing. Incidentally, whoever it kills, it doesn't kill them any deader than one bullet or one grenade would kill them anyway." With a basically objective audience, even an audience that was hostile to the war and all, they would reluctantly agree, "Well, this guy seems to make sense on that point."

Q: What other kinds of questions did you tend to get from an audience like that?

FLOTT: Oh, arguing over just exactly what the historical record was, the agreement to hold elections one year after 1954. That would be hashed over a lot. Then the fact that it was their country; it was all one country. Oh, yes, the biggest thing other than napalm, I guess, was that we were supporting colonialism. You'd usually get a question from some black African exchange student from somewhere in sub Saharan Africa drawing on his country's experience with their struggle for independence. And I said, "Well, my dear fellow, you overlook the fact that South Vietnam has had its independence since 1954. A communist government is invading them and trying to deprive them of that independence, which certainly hasn't been put to any vote, the communist incursion. So it has nothing to do with your country's glorious struggle for freedom and independence." That would usually settle the matter.

Q: How long did you perform this duty? How long did that go on?

FLOTT: Off and on for two years. Let's see, I got back from Vietnam from what had been three and a half years out there. I got back in the late fall of 1966. I was immediately put on the road with the program of the Federal Executive Service. There are around the United States twelve major centers, sort of Civil Service Commission branch offices, which are also regional headquarters for the U.S. government civil service. I believe Dallas was one, Denver was one,

Kansas City was one, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle come to mind. LBJ had issued instructions that he wanted the top levels of the federal bureaucracy to know more about our effort, to be brought up to speed on the whys and wherefores, so he sent a team out, and I was the State Department man on the team. There was a man from the Pentagon, a man from the Agency for International Development, AID, and myself, and we went around and spent a couple of days at each of these places. Then after that I, oh, seven days a week, thirty-one days a month, I was accepting speaking invitations all over the country.

Then something happened. Hubert Humphrey, as vice president, was in Brussels, and he got booed because of the Vietnam War. Humphrey's friendly conclusion was, "Anyone who's booing me must just not know what the problem is, or doesn't know why we are doing this." So he said, "You people in the State Department should do more about telling our story abroad." Well, of course the State Department had been making herculean efforts for two years to tell our story and USIS had and everybody else. But when Humphrey said, "I want you to do something more," quite rightly the Department of State was responsive to command and sent me over to Europe on a roving mission of visiting European foreign offices and parliamentary foreign affairs committees and any student groups or interest groups that they suggested. I based myself in Geneva, partly because of the favorable image that city gave, and frequently visited the Paris peace talks and Embassy Saigon.

Say I'd get a request from the embassy in The Hague to come up there. I remember how the embassy in The Hague under Ambassador William Tyler, I thought, made particularly good use of my time. They all made good use of my time, because it made them all look good with the administration, after all. Any American embassy wanted to be responsive to the administration, to LBJ's guideline of "tell our story and tell it effectively." They'd set me up with programs and I found my time was fully scheduled and very well used, with good sense of priority. Then I did some of that in North Africa as well. I made a number of trips back and forth to Saigon, to keep up to speed on the subject.

Q: How long did this go on?

FLOTT: About two years.

Q: All of 1968?

FLOTT: Yes. Then after the Vietnam peace talks started, although I was not a member of the peace talks delegation as such, Governor Harriman asked that I be brought over to Europe again to resume that speaking mission. There I had the job of going around basically to people that Harriman wanted to inform about what his delegation to the peace talks was doing, but didn't have time obviously to do it himself; he couldn't be every where at once. So I was given the job of traveling around briefing these foreign affairs committees of the European parliaments and foreign offices.

Q: Did you have to work with Bill Jorden a little bit on that?

FLOTT: Yes.

Q: Yes, I see.

FLOTT: And I would talk with Bill Jorden and tell him what kind of questions we were getting, and he'd give me any late juicy tidbits -- information that might be of interest to these friendly governments.

Q: I see. And you were doing that until when? Until the team changed over there?

FLOTT: Until about March of 1969 or so. Yes, until the change of administrations.

Q: Well, on these missions of explication, if you will, were you booed like Humphrey was?

FLOTT: Oh, on occasion. I would say not when visiting friendly foreign offices and friendly parliamentary foreign affairs committees, no, there'd be no booing; there'd be maximum courtesy, understanding and decorum. With European students generally or political parties and things, I can't remember any outright booing. There was some very hostile questioning.

Q: What was the source of the hostility? Who were the hostile groups?

FLOTT: Well, the hostile people were people who were otherwise perfectly normal people who disagreed with our policy and thought we were killing a lot of Vietnamese needlessly and that we should stop, and people who thought that they had the answers and that the United States government had it all wrong.

Q: Did you go to Sweden?

FLOTT: Yes, and that was a very difficult situation. That was one case, for example, where the embassy did not schedule me to talk to students because they were afraid it would have been counterproductive and would have been a donnybrook. But I did talk to the foreign office and sometimes we did briefings in the embassy, too; they'd invite people into the Embassy to hear our story.

Q: The Swedes were out of sympathy pretty solidly, weren't they?

FLOTT: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay. Did this coincide with the instances where the deserters were given sanctuary in Sweden?

FLOTT: Yes, there were deserters there at the time I was doing this in some countries.

SAMUEL B. THOMSEN

**Political Officer
Saigon (1963-1964)**

**Consul
Hue (1964-1966)**

Samuel B. Thomsen was born in Minnesota in 1931. After serving in the US Army from 1952-1954 he received his bachelor's degree at University of California Los Angeles in 1956. During his career he had positions in Vietnam, Laos, Washington D.C., Botswana, Nigeria, and an ambassadorship to the Marshall Islands. Mr. Thomsen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996.

Q: So you arrived in Vietnam in April of '63. You had this period of three months of study there. How did that work out?

THOMSEN: The embassy was in the business section near the river, and a compound which later became the compound where the new embassy was constructed was the home for about five bungalows, and Tony Lake and his wife, and Judy and I, and Joe Luman were in three of the bungalows, and the fourth bungalow was reserved for the language training. The compound was large enough so we had almost a football field size play area. I remember one day breaking my little finger on my left hand trying to catch a pass from Dick Holbrooke. We were engrossed in our studies, and getting to know the community. There was no war as we got to know it later in the late '60s. Saigon was a beautiful city. It still had all the trees on the main thoroughfares. Not a lot of traffic, the cyclos were the major vehicle. It was an attractive place to be.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when on this tour?

THOMSEN: April '63 to July '66.

Q: What were you getting before you got absorbed by the embassy. What sort of contacts were you able to make with your language, and how well did you use it? What type of people would you getting in touch with?

THOMSEN: At first we were limited to our own tutors. Then we became involved with the Vietnamese-American Association which was bringing Vietnamese in for our English primarily, but college students and small scale entrepreneurs who for good capitalistic reasons were trying to learn English. So we developed a relationship with a cross section of the private sector. But not much in the way of the bureaucracy or the military at that time.

Q: What was the American military presence like at that point?

THOMSEN: It was modest. In Saigon it was noticeable but not certainly as overwhelming as it became. Then if you moved past my training into my provincial reporting duties in the provinces the provincial sector advisory team would be a colonel, a couple of majors and a few captains. Well, I shouldn't even say it that way. There would be a colonel, lieutenant colonel, a major and

a couple of captains, and a lieutenant, a total of six officers, and maybe four or five NCOs to support them. That was a very small presence even in those days. And that was about it. Military units at a battalion level would have a captain and maybe an NCO. I visited the Ranger battalions because I covered the area south and west of Saigon, and there were a number of Ranger battalions and the Americans serving with them lived pretty exciting lives.

Q: Let's move to the time when you finished your language training. You were assigned where, and who was your boss?

THOMSEN: First of all I should say that during my language training from April until July things started falling apart. The first Buddhist riots, demonstrations I think probably initially, in Hue occurred in early May. By the time I'd finished my training, my first reporting assignment was to cover the declaration of martial law by the capital district commander, General Ton Thuc Dinh. I sat and listened to him deliver in Vietnamese a long diatribe about the "damnable Buddhists", and how the righteous government had to protect itself and freedom and democracy, and so had invaded the pagodas the night before, and had arrested Buddhist Monks from all over. And two of the prominent Bonzes, Tri Quang and Tam Chou had sought refuge in the embassy. Part of my job was their care and feeding, along with Jim Rosenthal, and Lyall Breckon. In any case, Jim Rosenthal was head of the provincial reporting unit in the political section. Bob Miller was the deputy chief of the political section. Mel Manfull was the chief of the political section. Bill Trueheart was the DCM. It was a first rate team. In addition to that provincial reporting unit, there were folks like John Burke in political external. Dick Holbrooke was next door with USAID as a special assistant. Tony Lake became Lodge's staff aide. Joe Luman took the job of the press attaché which was an O-1 job, and Joe was an O-7, but did a superb job at it--put a cot in his office and a bottle of whiskey in his desk drawer, and was a buddy of all the press from then on. But that was kind of the structure.

Q: At that time how many people trained like yourself in Vietnamese were there around?

THOMSEN: I would guess under ten that had the full training. Tony Lake and Dick Holbrooke, and Joe Luman and the others had had only six months of introductory training. Ralph Moore, Doug Ramsey and I had the nine months. Then there were others like John Helble Ted Heavener and Tom Barnes, who had preceded us over the previous years also were Vietnamese language officers. But it was a small cadre at that time.

Q: What was your initial assignment?

THOMSEN: The Third Vietnamese Army Corps, around Saigon to the north and west. In the north, Binh Dirong and Tay Ninh, the area closest to Cambodia and the environs in the capital area itself, was kind of my beat. The way I would execute that would be to travel to the provincial capitals on a fairly regular basis. I would stay with the U.S. sector advisers. I learned over time, the lieutenants and captains were probably the best sources of information available to me in the whole province. I would certainly call on the province chief. I would call on the sector commander, I'd call on some of the subordinates. I'd get to know the Chieu Hoi (Viet Cong returned) people...

Q: *Chieu Hoi being?*

THOMSEN: The returnee program.

Q: *This is the people who were in the Viet Cong and surrendered under, you might say, honorable terms, came back and they were reeducated, or whatever you want to call it.*

THOMSEN: Those were very interesting programs, and the people who ran them were often returnees themselves and had tremendous insights into what was going on in the province. But it would be the young American lieutenant who was the sector S-2 adviser, that is the intelligence adviser, would have tremendous understanding...

Q: *This is an American?*

THOMSEN: This is an American. I'd spent time with them in the evening and it would be as useful to me as anything else, because in some cases what they would tell me in the evening would be 180 degrees from what the sector official report to MACV would say. The embassy would get this report, then I would be able to come in and make comments about it, and tell them the true story. It was really an important job.

Q: *Why did this happen? I mean, both institutionally, but within Vietnam where you often have this split between the top people within any organization, and the people who were actually doing the work.*

THOMSEN: Anecdote, and this comes from what was then a young S-2 lieutenant.

Q: *S-2 being...*

THOMSEN: The intelligence. When Paul Harkins leaves, his last order...

Q: *He was the commanding...*

THOMSEN: Commanding General of the military assistance command Vietnam, MACV, his last instruction was: I want you to give me the 25 indicia of why we're winning. So all the people down the chain of command are put through their procedures, and it ends up at the lieutenant level and he's got to write down 25 ways we can tell we're winning. And that goes back up the chain of command as amalgamated and compressed, and summarized, and finally Harkins before he departs is able to give a speech in which he gives the 25 indicia of victory. Then Westmoreland appears on the scene and the first order he gives is, I want you all to give me the 25 indicia of why we're losing. So the order goes down through the chain of command and ends up at the lieutenant level, the lieutenant has got to figure out, actually somewhat easier, how you can identify the problems that we were facing and causes not to be a success for us. So that goes back up the chain of command, and Westmoreland says, I just started my new task here in Vietnam, it's an enormous task all the things I've got to overcome, but victory is assured, our hearts are pure. Well, that's why, because of command requirements. And the Army in those days, and those of us who kept track of friends, the Army I think has changed a great deal, but

essentially it was the management style. It was called the management style, the Army was managing itself instead of leading itself, and it was a victory through management. I think they learned their lesson. I hope they did. But that's why...

Q: In the first place, your reports and were the other officers getting more or less the same type thing?

THOMSEN: Yes, pretty common. I had direct access to the ambassador. When I'd come back from a field trip, Tony Lake would call me and say, come on up, Lodge wants to spend a few minutes with you. I would just give him anecdotally my reaction to what I'd seen in the past several days in the field. Now, that seemed to have some influence in the way Lodge saw that war, for better or worse. And that was what Kennedy wanted. That was his original intention. He had a bunch of people who had no axe to grind, who had independent thought, who could get their views known at the higher levels.

Q: Essentially what was the story that you were bringing back?

THOMSEN: From my area, the story I was bringing back was that there was arrogance and aloofness on the part of most of the GVN authorities, but that was a cultural thing. It was kind of built into the system. There was a true war going on, it wasn't a sympathetic Viet Cong subverting an imposed upon populous, protecting them from a totally evil government. The governor could be well intended generally, but not very effective. The old story of the the emperor's writ ends at the village wall, which goes back to ancient Mandarin times, was still true in Vietnam. And again the government's structure was such that traditionally the central authorities went only to the village level, and the village wasn't just a little hamlet, it was a series of hamlets, but that the village was its own self contained unit, and that a group of village elders, traditionally the land owners and the prestigious, would make decisions if there was a levy on people, they were the ones who would call out the young people to go out and dig the ditches. If there was a tax, they were the ones who would collect the tax.

The Viet Cong system was essentially to destroy that authority system, and to replace it with a younger, merit based because it was essentially based on the young dissatisfied who would run off into the bush and find a way to counter its elder leadership. And the Viet Cong were able to profit by that.

But by and large the population was willing to go along with the government as long as the government could provide security. That was to me the equation. When the government could not provide security, then the Viet Cong would assume authority.

Later on, when I was back home, I spoke at colleges in the '65-67, 66 period. I was at Brown, I would say, you're at college, you've got a president in your university, you've got deans and faculty, you've got a small security force, you've got professors who you like, some you don't like, and you're a student population of about 6,000. Now if 60 of you, one percent, if 60 of you were given arms, the first thing you did was kill the president, and the next thing you did was kill the chief of the security organization, the third thing you did was kill the most popular professor whose views you didn't like, then you issue an edict, saying anybody who opposes what we're

doing is going to be killed. How many of you would voluntarily organize yourself and go out and hunt down those 60 people with guns, and you knew there was 60 of them, not 2 or 3, but 60. How many of you would do that?

Bernard Fall was one of the great French Journalists and really a great analyst. I had a few opportunities to be with him. He asked me a question one day, "what is the most important and pervasive element of a national government to the private citizen?". I scratched my head, the police and the medical. He said, the postman. The guy who delivers the mail in any culture, in any situation. He said, who are the Viet Cong popping off? They're popping off the people who are the communicators between the central government and the villages. He said, when you go into an area if you want to know what the security situation really is, look for the medical deliverers, the guys who are doing the DDT in the huts, look for the folks who are delivering the mail. If they're gone, then there's a problem. If they're still doing their job then there's no problem. It was a fascinating analytical tool for me.

Q: Were the other provincial reporters reporting more or less the same type of thing?

THOMSEN: Within broad parameters, yes. It would vary from province to province for a variety of reasons including geographic. But in some cases it was the effectiveness of the province chief. A tremendous security factor. I mean the question of what had happened in '54 was a very important question. I had one province which was fascinating, Tay Ninh. I don't know if you ever got to visit Tay Ninh, but it had a fascinating religious organization called the Cao Doi, an eclectic religion which included Jesus, Gandhi, and Buddha in its Pantheon of holy ones. They had a gaudy temple in Tay Ninh City. They had pretty strong support from their followers, and the Viet Cong were simply not effective within those regions. Where there was really a strong counter philosophy. But in say Binh Long which was almost next door, around the Parrot's Beak corner...Earl Young, a friend of mine, was the AID provincial guy there, Earl did some really fascinating analysis early on in the early '60s. Binh Long had historically been Viet Cong, or Viet Minh. The government was losing the war as early as '62 in that province. So it depends a lot on the geography and the history.

Q: What was your impression...let's take it up before October of '63. What sort of reaction were you getting by body language, facial expression, or by talking, that you were getting from Ambassador Lodge on what was happening?

THOMSEN: Lodge was a pretty, I won't call it simple, but like many successful senior folks he like to categorize things fairly much in black and white. Good guy, bad guy, winning, losing. Part of the problem of giving him fairly subtle stuff was he'd pick it up and then throw it in one can or the other. It wasn't a matter of being willing to put it in one of the sub-cans. So if I told him I'd spoken to a couple of Vietnamese lieutenants who were from Catholic families that had been refugees in '54, and they were afraid that Ngo Dinh Nhu was negotiating with the North Vietnamese over a neutral solution, which I did pick up at a Vietnamese Army headquarters, that resonated with him real quick. And, of course, he didn't like Nhu anyway. Now that just one more big piece of information to throw into his bad guy can, and probably right. But I might have been a little more careful with it. But that's kind of the way he was. He made decisions and then he went with them, he didn't question, or he didn't get subtle with them.

Q: Did you have the feeling that you in this reporting unit were almost against the American military advisers. I mean, what was coming out although you, of course, had been using information from down below. But did you find yourself almost an adversary?

THOMSEN: We were in an adversary relationship with the senior MACV leadership. I remember, I think it was before Harkins left, I attended a briefing at MACV for a senator--I've forgotten the name of the senator--in which Harkins briefed the senator absolutely diametrically opposed to what Lodge was saying. Telling that senator a story about Diem, I think it was in that time frame, maybe September-October, that was diametrically opposed to what Lodge was saying in his cables and publicly. You can imagine then when I got back to the embassy, and reported this to Tony, and was immediately ushered into the Ambassador's office, he was not happy with what he was hearing. But there was a strong struggle between the military...I don't think it ever ended actually. It was at the senior level, even the colonel on down level, were grateful for us because we could get the story out that they couldn't get up through their system.

Q: Could we talk a bit about the events. I guess its October of '63.

THOMSEN: November 2nd.

Q: Because that all fits together with the Kennedy assassination. Could you talk about the events that preceded it, and how you at your level and your colleagues were seeing the situation, and then how things developed? First, before I get to that, again a little bit chronological. What was your feeling about the Buddhists? And the suppression of the Buddhists?

THOMSEN: First of all, the Buddhists came to us, and we had Tri Quong and Tom Chou, the two leaders were in the embassy on the fourth floor, and Lyall Breckon and I and a couple of others were responsible for making sure they got fed, and passed notes to them and got notes out. They were comfortable, but they were not in any kind of luxury situation. We felt that the government had been pretty stupid to create a situation like this. We didn't regard the Buddhists as being communists. We'll get into this later but I was accused both face to face by Colonel Loan, who was later Ky's national police chief, and by Ky himself in his book (although I'm not named) as being a Buddhists lover. We regarded the Buddhists as being a significant political force that ought to be dealt with reasonably rather than simply dismissed, and put upon. We'll get into this substantially later in '65 and '66 when I was the consul in Hue and POLAD for the Marines in I Corps when we had some real hairy things going on. But this time, the Viet Cong threat was really more incipient than real for a lot of the country. Saigon certainly was not yet a city at war. My wife had gone to the market and a hand grenade had exploded probably 50 feet away. I shouldn't say we're not a city at war. In February of '64 there was a terrorist attack on the Army movie theater, two Marines died heroically to get the doors closed and (it was a kids matinee) and to protect the kids. So there were some events like that happening but they were pretty spread out, one every few months, it wasn't something happening at all times. And the hand grenade was not aimed at Americans, we're not even sure it wasn't a drunken Ranger.

But leading up to the coup, I got more and more signs of disaffection, and finally even in the mid-October period, even young Catholic officers were expressing tremendous concern to me at

what Diem was doing harm for an anti-communist victory. They were mainly mad at Nhu, but that Diem was really tearing the country apart by his actions, and by the way they were prosecuting the Buddhists. I had one young Vietnamese captain, whose younger sister had been thrown in jail. She was a Catholic, she'd been with some friends and picked up and thrown in jail. He said, I had to go on leave from here...this was in Binh Tuy way out in the boonies, to go back to Saigon to get my sister out of jail. It was that kind of an attitude which was developing. Real pessimism that Diem could carry it off.

Q: You were of course passing this basically on to Lodge, you and the others.

THOMSEN: We were doing cables and airgrams, and certainly briefing Lodge.

Q: Was there a feeling that if we're going to get anywhere, we've got to get somebody new in?

THOMSEN: No, I don't think we would go that far. We would have said we've got to get Diem on the right track more than anything else. Until I began reading some of the retrospective accounts of the coup, I would not have believed that we were as deeply involved as we were. Clearly we sent the signal. A guy named Conning, you may have done your reading too. I knew Conning, I would never have guessed...I won't call him a slob, but this guy was in a position to be making these decisions, not making decisions, but passing these decisions on to the senior military and the Vietnamese. But apparently we were. A kind of a pregnant thing did develop. The guy who led the military into Saigon was Colonel Nguyen Van Thieu, who later became president Thieu was then a colonel, he was the Fifth Division commander. That was my area. I knew the senior advisor, he gave me his own biographic report on Thieu. That bio said that "Thieu is so ambitious it probably wouldn't matter to him which Vietnam he became head of state of, if he could become head of state. That his driving ambition." It was certainly a prescient statement. I later gusted in my biographic report on Thieu.

The day before the coup I was in Bien Hoa at division headquarters. The advisers told me...you know I haven't really thought this through up until this moment. The advisers told me that the Fifth Division was moving out to Vieng Tan which was from Bien Hoa across the Saigon road and then on to the coast. And the advisers were not going to accompany them. The Vietnamese had forbidden them from accompanying them. I flew back to Saigon in a helicopter and reported this to the embassy. I said the Fifth Division is moving out to the coast without its advisers. And a few people kind of looked at me and nodded their heads with a serious look on their face. The Fifth Division turned on to the Saigon road and moved into Saigon. That was the lead element, the Fifth Division tanks were the tanks that stormed the palace.

I got back to Saigon, spent the night, the next morning a guy from an investment company came over for lunch. I remember at lunch with him hearing what sounded like someone walking on the pebbles in the driveway next door, and I knew it was small arms fire. I got a taxi and went back to the embassy and halfway back to the embassy I was watching T-28s strafing the naval headquarters.

Q: The T-28 a small training aircraft.

THOMSEN: The T-28 was designed as a trainer but it was also used...we give it to the Vietnamese to be used as a small tactical support aircraft, it had machine guns. Got back to the embassy to discovered that the coup was in process. I made my way home because my wife didn't have a telephone, and I was concerned about her. So I had to drive through Cholon and all the way around to come in the back way and got home. My wife was hiding in the closet with our daughter because she had seen red things flying over the house, and they were tracers and she didn't know whether they were tracers or artillery coming over the house. But there was no danger because they were way, way away from us. There was a small American compound across the street.

Q: *Where did you live?*

THOMSEN: We lived on Ba Huyen Thanh Quang, on the way to the airport but just off of...the name escapes me, but just off of the main artery to the airport. We were a little further out than the USAID mission and not too far from the Xa Loi pagoda, which was the main Buddhist temple. In any case, I then went back in, and spent the night watching the artillery going against the palace, and then about 4:00 in the morning Jim Rosenthal, who was an ex-Marine officer said, let's see what's going on. So we went out to the main street and watched the first tanks go by. We stood out where we could be seen so they wouldn't be confusing us with someone trying to resist. The first tank stopped, and an officer popped down and we said, where are you coming from, and he said. Bien Hoa, I said, oh, you didn't go to the coast after all. And then shortly after the palace was taken, Jim and I went in and kind of looked around at the damage.

Q: *What was the feeling among you, Jim Rosenthal and all, about this coup? I mean, as it was going on, did you think, oh God, we don't need this.*

THOMSEN: Oh, my feeling, we don't need this. No sense at all that we'd had anything to do with the...that there had been any U.S. involvement. We were devastated by the death of Diem and Nhu the next day.

Q: *What were you picking up from the ambassador's office?*

THOMSEN: Nothing, pretty silent.

Q: *Tony Lake being very quiet?*

THOMSEN: After it was over Tony kept this to himself too, and we were very close in those days. So he was doing his duty. It was obviously very close hold. If you know the evolution in retrospect, it was Roger Hilsman who actually triggered it in Washington. There was still not an absolute decision to go until with Rusk in New York, and Kennedy in Hyannisport, and MacNamara somewhere else, a cable was kind of pushed through the system with everyone else thinking that everybody else had already approved it, that said go.

Q: *Roger Hilsman, Assistant Secretary.*

THOMSEN: He was the director of INR at that time.

Q: He, of course, was an old OSS...and kind of a reaction oriented, don't stand there, do something, which is a rather dangerous thing.

THOMSEN: The antithesis of a diplomatic process. He was, I think, a former military too, don't just stand there, do something. Whereas the diplomats would say, "don't do something, just stand there."

Q: I think these things are important to get out, the spirit of the times. I think in many ways, you might say the problems...this is my personal opinion, many of the problems we've had, particularly CIA covert action and all, have been as a result of the generation that grew up in World War II where no matter what you did you could run around with a jeep and blow up things, and do something. I mean it was a great feeling of doing stuff where I'm not sure how much that really helped. It was really the Army in the field that pretty well settled the problems, but it was a great feeling, and you were almost immune from anybody saying, that was a stupid thing to do.

THOMSEN: I think that's right. I think Vietnam was one of maybe the last echoes of that attitude, although I think it's still with us to some extent. There are no Foreign Service echoes that you kind of grew up with as a child, and are inculcated with, but I think we do tend to be more prudent, maybe over prudent sometimes. But I think by and large you don't have to do something. And sometimes it is better to do nothing and let the dust settle, and let the situation revolve itself. In the case of Diem, I don't know what the alternative would have been. I do know that the day after the coup Saigon was in total disarray. The police were totally disarmed, literally and emotionally. The young people were running wild, and it was a good thing the military kind of got control again. But in doing my notes, I noted there were probably nine different governments within a about a 19 month period in South Vietnam after that. The disorganization in retrospect was almost total.

Q: Well, one of the things you must have been doing in the political reporting section was, were you trying to figure who is in, who is on top, what does this mean. Could you talk a bit maybe both what you experienced, and also the process.

THOMSEN: Well, it became clear very quickly that Big Minh, as we called him (and we had a lot of respect for Big Minh. I don't know if you remembered this, but he was a big guy first of all) and the group around him Don, I had a lot of respect for Don. Some of the others were pretty heavily tarred with various kinds of corruption and in fact as they were all involved in various activities that we call corruption. But the Army quickly reestablished itself, and it became quite clear very quickly what was going on. We didn't have to spend a lot of time hypothesizing or trying to understand how it was going to work out. I mean, it was over pretty quickly.

Q: Was there a feeling once it was over that, okay, now let's get on with it?

THOMSEN: Yes, absolutely. And that emanated from the top down.

Q: Did you continue this work you'd been doing?

THOMSEN: I did until July of '64. And let me just comment because you mentioned the Kennedy assassination connection. "Where were you when Kennedy died?" I was in the sector's advisor's compound in Tay Ninh City at about five am. I think this is really important. The first thing I did after finishing cleaning up, was to call on the province chief, and inform him that my head of state had been assassinated. On the way to see him, I walked, it was a couple of blocks, and it was a beautiful fall morning. A little boy, could not have been more than eight or nine years old, a little Vietnamese boy came up to me crying, saying in Vietnamese "your president has been assassinated, I'm so sorry." I've carried that with me ever since because this was a little kid, in a provincial town, he was not my enemy. He was not my country's enemy. He was not just waiting for the chance to bushwhack me, or to drop a hand grenade in my car. He was a little kid who loved my president, and who was devastated by his death.

Q: I was in Austria on leave, and I was told, and I went back, and I was in Yugoslavia and the whole God damn country was in mourning. Flags were at... It was a communist country. And people would stop me, I mean the guards and the custom people were shaking my hand, and looking mournful. It was a very emotional time for everybody. Was there any feeling...were you beginning to pick up any feeling of certain elements within Vietnamese society were saying, you're responsible for the death of Diem and all of that? Or did that come later?

THOMSEN: It was sparse. It existed, but it were sparse. There were a few people after Kennedy was assassinated who said it was the result of the curse falling on Kennedy's result of caused Diem's death. There was that feeling among a few. Mainly though the impression I had from November on was that, I'd said that the army reestablished itself, but there was a pick up in the war. The insurgents had become more effective. Maybe there was a loss of effectiveness on the part of the Army, but I think it was more an increase in emphasis, and increase in activity, increase in support from North Vietnam of events from South Vietnam.

MacNamara started visiting, which didn't help matters any, and around this time the provincial reporters became more and more editors and coordinators of the reporting from their areas. I spent a lot of time between December and June and July of '64, in meetings preparing for MacNamara's visits, and trying to come up with joint views on what was going on. We would disassociate ourselves sometimes. But more often than not we would find ourselves trying to create a mission-wide view on what was going on province by province.

Q: What were you getting from your American lieutenants and captains out in the field after the coup?

THOMSEN: Well, first of all there was a mixed reaction in the Vietnamese military ranks. There were those that had been desperately loyal to Diem, not to Nhu, but to Diem, who felt very, very badly about what had happened, and they had really bad morale. There were others who didn't feel as strongly but were pleased at it. They may have been the majority but they didn't have the strongest feelings, if you follow me. But essentially everyone continued doing their job pretty much as they had done in the past. There were no attempts at provincial level coups, and there was no rebellion in the ranks against what had happened.

I'm trying to recall. There may have a couple of attempts. We know there was an attempt coming

in from the Delta. Some folks in the Delta had started moving towards Saigon as a counter coup, but that was squashed pretty quickly. From the time of the coup until I went to Hue in July of '64, my general sense is that I got more wrapped up in the bureaucracy of reporting. The kind of a Lone Ranger going out and doing his thing didn't stop, but it was kind of superceded by being more active in Saigon to make sure that the AID stuff, and the military stuff, and the CIA stuff was all making some sense, kind of an editorial responsibility. Which is good. I mean, it was good in its own way. It was a different kind of thing, but it meant that there was someone at the embassy level looking at this other stuff and making sure that the reporting going back to Washington made some sense. And at the same time things were going downhill, and MacNamara would come out and tell us what we need to do now. I remember one day, for example, with an AID/MACV/ embassy meeting trying to come up with the figures on how many armed Viet Cong there were, which was kind of like throw a lot of numbers at the ceiling and which ever one stuck out face up, is the number, and that sort of thing. There became...what was it called, the "critical province program" where you were going to get about a dozen provinces throughout Vietnam that really needed high level attention. I remember one of my great bureaucratic successes was getting Tay Ninh taken off the list, so they could go about their business and not have to worry about all the reporting requirements.

Q: This, of course, was MacNamara's approach to numbers, quantify everything. I mean, once you'd identified the problem you could overwhelm it with statistics. By the way, you had your Buddhist leaders sitting in your embassy.

THOMSEN: A couple of days after the coup they said, I guess we can go now, and we opened the door and they walked out.

Q: There was a feeling I suppose then among the Buddhist community that having gotten rid of this very strong Catholic ruler, Diem and his brother, that things would get better.

THOMSEN: Well, if you follow the history of that following period, the Buddhists kept getting upset with different things and putting the students on the street again, and the more often it happened, the more effective they got. And I think there was no question that there was Viet Cong infiltration and they began taking advantage of it. This I started seeing in Hue and Da Nang, and because it was so far from the capital, it became really out of hand. We'll talk about it when we talk about my time up there, but essentially they burned the USIS building across the street from my residence and they finally burned the consulate itself. By that time I was in Da Nang full time.

Q: We might stop at this point. One last question I'll put on tape and we'll pick up before you go off to Hue, and that is since you were doing this editing, and filtering, your impression of the reporting from CIA and information they were getting, and also from the military. Could you talk a bit about that next time?

***_

This is the 30th of September 1996. Sam, at the end of the last tape I asked if you could...what was your impression of what you were getting from first the CIA, and then from the military as

far as a product from your area?

THOMSEN: Stu, we got not much from the CIA. They gave us a little bit of operational support, and a little bit of intelligence on their views on the infrastructure. But the bulk of our material either came from our own eye witness, that is our interviews and on the ground stuff. And then the copious military intelligence operation reports from their provincial, or their sector advisory teams. We'd go out and confirm that material, but they really provided the bulk of the grist for the mill.

Q: What was your impression of what the military was reporting?

THOMSEN: The military, in reporting through channels, that is the product that would be seen in Saigon, was essentially a very filtered product to prove one thing or another.

Q: You say the things that came up were filtered to prove something really which would mean there would be a tendency...you'd almost have to deal with this the way you would in dealing with Pravda or Izvestia in the Soviet Union. Say maybe there's something here and learn to read between the lines, and say maybe we better check on this. If they reported great progress in such and such a sector, or something like this, that would mean you'd probably want to go and check the sector.

THOMSEN: Absolutely. But I would give it credit for being a little more on the margin than maybe Pravda or Izvestia. They were putting a spin on it rather than being totally dishonest. But the best way to do was always go out to the field and talk to the lieutenants and captains who had to generate the reports, and get the detail from them and then put your own spin on it, either confirm what had come up, or qualify it as necessary.

Q: So you went up to Hue when? And you were in Hue from when to when?

THOMSEN: I was the consul in Hue from July 1964 to July 1966, but from about September '65 I was in reality the POLAD, the political adviser to the Commanding General, Third Marine Amphibious Force, headquarters in Danang. They sent a third officer up to Hue. Finally Tom Corcoran who was a very senior officer came up to Hue, and stayed in Hue while I was in Da Nang. It was an anomalous situation since I was still the principal officer but Tom was on TDY in Hue and was running that show while I was working in Da Nang.

Q: What was the consular situation as far as posts in Vietnam in what we're talking about now?

THOMSEN: In '64 the only consulate was in Hue.

Q: And Hue was more of the focus than Da Nang at that time?

THOMSEN: First, it was the old imperial capital, and secondly, it was still the headquarters for the civil administration on the part of the Vietnamese, although the Army Corps headquarters was in Da Nang. When AID expanded it headquartered its I Corps efforts in Da Nang. So everything except the consulate and the Vietnamese civil administration was in Da Nang from

before I arrived. So being in Hue was an anomaly. And when the focus of the consul's responsibilities became political advice to the Marines, it was clearly required that I be present in Da Nang. But the anecdote I think I should tell is, the old story. And this is a little bit jumping ahead but I was wounded in the embassy explosion in March of '65, and was on home leave and doing public speaking from then until July. Now the Marines had pretty well established themselves in Da Nang during my absence. When I got back and got myself sorted out by mid-August I had recommended in an "official-informal" letter to Mel Manfull, the political counselor, that I stay in Hue as the consul, but that a senior Foreign Service officer be despatched to Da Nang to act as political adviser to the Marines. And on the first of September Phil Habib had taken over as political counselor sent me a cable saying, go to Da Nang, and as your primary duty become the political adviser. I would retain the consulate responsibility.

Q: I'd like to bite this off in bits. You were in Hue, was it '64 to '66?

THOMSEN: Right.

Q: What was the situation in Hue at that time, both military and the political situation there?

THOMSEN: It was pastoral, I think that's the only way to describe it. My wife came with me, we had a daughter just 14 months old. My wife was pregnant with our second child, our son. She used to bicycle around Hue with our daughter on the back of the bicycle, swim in the Circle Sportif. At the same time we would see dive bombers dropping their pay loads in the far west towards the mountains. So it was an anomaly. My predecessor, John Helble was able to drive from Hue all the way to the mountains in Second Corps to tiger hunt. But within weeks after I arrived, I drove in the Consulate sedan with a driver to Quang Ngai province, and when the I Corps senior adviser heard I had driven without escort to Quang Ngai (this now is the fall of '64), he sent a helicopter immediately and demanded for security reasons that I return by air. He was doing it as a favor in a friendly way, but insisted that I was not safe on the roads, and probably he was right.

Q: Quang Ngai is in what direction from Hue?

THOMSEN: Quang Ngai is way south of Hue. Hue is only about 50 miles south of the DMZ. Quang Tri is the northern most province, then Thua Thien, which was the province that Hue was in, and then Quang Nam which was where Da Nang was located, and then Quang Tin and then Quang Ngai. Quang Ngai was the farthest south province in what was called the I Corps. That was my area of responsibility.

Q: You had that whole area. What were you doing while you were in Hue?

THOMSEN: Essentially, the consulate had been set up to be a provincial reporting platform, if you will. My primary responsibility was to cover the counter insurgency in the First Corps, with special emphasis on the farther north part of this north provinces. Not long after I arrived, the Buddhists, who had succeeded in toppling Diem, began their activities again. By the fall of '64 the Buddhists were becoming active again politically, and I was covering the Buddhist activity, but the students who were very strongly Buddhist influenced were also becoming active.

Q: Could you talk about your contacts? I mean how you went about your business. First, with the government, and what was the government entity that you dealt with in Hue? And then contacts, as you say you were covering the Buddhists and the students. How did you go about that?

THOMSEN: First of all, my primary contact in Hue was the provincial administration, a lieutenant colonel in the Vietnamese army who was both the sector commander and the province chief. We had rather traditional diplomatic/Consular relations. Hue had been the capital, they had a residue of the diplomatic life. The Nationalist Chinese had a consulate there. So we weren't alone. The French had a consulate in Da Nang. So we formed a very small consular community. There was social activity. We were always dignified by being on the platform at special events, and that sort of thing. I took advantage of the USIA, distributed books to high schools, conducted myself as a consul in many ways. Since I had been the escort of the venerable Tri Quang while he was in the embassy, I had a good basis for relations with him. He was the leader of the Buddhists, and who was from Hue. Tri Quang was essentially my point of contact with the Buddhists in Hue.

Q: Had he been released?

THOMSEN: He was released immediately after the coup. As soon as Diem was overthrown, Tri Quang and Tam Chou, the two venerables, were released from the embassy where they had been in asylum, and then went to their pagodas, and became active again. And Tri Quang would come to Hue, and when he was there I would be made aware of it, and I would be invited to see him and I would call on him. Actually that relationship remained reasonably friendly until I left, and he gave me a very fine going away reception, and gave me a Buddhist gong clacker that I keep to this day. In his own mysterious way he seemed to have something of an affection, or respect, for me. I found that fascinating.

Q: What were the Buddhists doing while you were there? Because earlier on which was almost the whole thing it was the Buddhists burning themselves. Was that type of thing going on, or was it a different type of thing?

THOMSEN: It wasn't that violent. Not long after I arrived, about the middle of August of 1964, the first Buddhist demonstration occurred in Saigon. And not long after that this spread to Da Nang and to Hue. This was the regime of Nguyen Khanh who had taken over and the Buddhists didn't like it. About that time I should say, Tony Lake...

Q: He's National Security Advisor.

THOMSEN: National Security Advisor to the President, and who had been staff aide to Ambassador Lodge, Tony as staff aide to Ambassador Lodge had created what would normally be expected a lot of bureaucratic enemies in Saigon. And when Lodge left, Tony had not fulfilled the two year assignment, but Tony was offered a transfer out of the country because Lodge knew how vulnerable he was. Tony chose instead to come to Hue as my vice consul. So Tony and I worked together until he finished his tour. Tony also spoke good Vietnamese. The USIA had a branch public affairs officer, Bill Stubbs, who spoke fluent French. The communicator who was

a former Navy man, Joe O'Neill, who later became chargé in a couple African countries, worked his way up from an FSS-communicator to the senior Foreign Service. We kind of covered the town. Joe would get in his jeep and drive around late at night, and just make sure there wasn't any untoward movements.

Tony and I taught a class at the law school on international relations. We taught it in English, and we taught it both to...as English is a second language, and to talk a little bit about world affairs. But that put us in touch with the real student leaders. We knew them on a first name basis, and although I don't think they entrusted all their secrets to us, they were willing to share with us their concerns, and even be critical of American foreign policy. It was an attempt by us to get an insight into the student mind as much as could be expected in Vietnam.

So we were plugged into the Buddhists, to the students. We had a kind of a general overview of the city through Joe O'Neill. The MACV unit for the First ARVAD Division was just a few blocks from the residence and we would spend time with them, and I would spend time at First Division headquarters, and go out to the district towns and talk to people. I was fairly mobile, and we think we were pretty well plugged in. AID was very useful to us. One of the finest insights I got into the insurgency...remember '64 it hadn't really exploded yet. I remember one of the public health advisers for AID saying let's take a look at the villages in the geographic unit within which are hamlets, let's look at the village map of Thua Thien, and see where we have had to stop doing the DDT spraying. He said this is probably the best indicator of security that we've got. Think about it, and he was absolutely right. What was happening, is from the mountains, down toward the Piedmont, and then toward the lowlands, slowly village by village the Vietnamese DDT sprayers were refusing to go into the hamlets because of lack of security. In 1964, that was happening in the summer, and there was a deterioration in security, even as I had arrived in Hue. I arrived in the first week in July. I recall a Fourth of July party which was combined to be a welcoming party. It was outside in the garden of the public affairs officer, and we could hear small arms fire. I think it was about the 7th of July. The next morning we were told by the First Division advisers that two battalions of North Vietnamese troops had attacked a special forces camp southwest of Hue. Gerald Hickey, who was a well-known anthropologist/sociologist from Cornell was in the special forces camp, and I interviewed him a few days later when he got back. The evidence was absolutely clear that two North Vietnamese battalions had attacked the camp. The first multi battalion North Vietnamese attack had occurred in South Vietnam in early July 1964. Most histories don't reflect a North Vietnamese presence in South Vietnam until the end of at least the end of '64, maybe into '65. But it had really occurred in that month.

Another affect of that attack: John Helble was still the consul, I was reading in. John sent a normal cable the next day, once he had his facts straight, action SecState, info Saigon, a few other info addressees. Westmoreland had just taken charge of MACV in Saigon. The fact that a small consulate in the northern part of the country had been the first to report to Washington a multi battalion North Vietnamese attack, blew him away. He went to Lodge, and then to Taylor, and by the time I took over I had been prohibited from sending action messages to Washington. My only addressee was to embassy Saigon, and they would forward my messages to Washington as they saw fit. So it essentially had removed the consul in Hue from being a true reporting post, to simply being an appendage of the embassy, which probably fit the pattern for Vietnam the

way it should. I always felt a little badly about it though.

Q: How about your relations with the local government, the provincial government?

THOMSEN: They were friendly. In early '65 after the USIA was burned I was given instructions to make a demarche on the province chief, sector commander, to chew him out for not giving us proper security. As a result they became a little more arms length. The corps commander, Nguyen Chanh Thi, who later came into national prominence was somewhat erratic, but I think a patriotic soldier, and he had good personal relations. But from time to time acting on instructions I'd have to take him to task. He was probably at least 15 years older than I was. For him to accept that, in the Asian pattern, from me was I think difficult for him. But when I was wounded in the embassy bombing in March of '65, he wrote me a fairly long personal letter of regret, and gratitude for the American presence, and for the sacrifices we'd made. It was an unnecessary thing; I was struck by it.

Q: Had troops been inserted in '64, we're talking about you arrived around July of '64 to Hue. Had American build up started at that point?

THOMSEN: No, the American build up, that is beyond helicopter units, began in March-April of '65. The Marines again were the first. I was aware of the beginning of the build up, in fact, I pull an anecdote Stu.

Q: That's what I want.

THOMSEN: In the fall of '64...remember this is a tiny consulate in an old French bungalow, all of a sudden Joe O'Neill comes to my door and says, "Sir, there's a Marine captain to see you." I'm sitting behind my desk with my flags, and this Marine comes in in full battle gear, and "Sir, I've just come from Task Force 77 in the Tonkin Gulf, and I've come to ask for an intelligence briefing." It was kind of curious, but that's the way the Marines are, as I later learned. So I gave him about 45 minutes or an hour of my appreciation of the situation. I had a map of I Corps and I went through the drill, and toward the end of the conversation he said, "sir, one of my basic missions is to determine the secure rear area where we might establish a permanent base if that's called for." And I must tell you, Stu, I chuckled and I said, "Captain, you left it when you left the aircraft carrier." And he said, "what do you mean?" I said, "there's no secure area unless it's established in this country." And he said, "I understand, and saluted and walked out." And when the Marines arrived they set up their main installation within the perimeter of the Da Nang airbase and they immediately established a significant security perimeter around that airbase. They secured themselves as my briefing had indicated they would have to do.

Q: Did you have at all the feeling that, God if the Marines are going to go here, I hope they're staying away from Hue? I mean, nobody wants a large military installation.

THOMSEN: In fact, I did say Hue would be the least appropriate place to put an American installation. They ought to isolate themselves. But, yes, in my briefing to him I made it clear that Hue was not a particular appropriate place to put Marines. When I did learn the Marines were coming a year later, I suggested they needed to be in the Delta. Marine activities in I Corps were

kind of a contradiction in terms. In any case, that would come later.

But the first significant Marines arrived in March, a battalion and then later on a brigade, and then finally they built up to two divisions and two Marine air wings. They had a huge presence in Central Vietnam.

Q: You said the first ARVN division, was that it, was stationed where, was their preeminent division too, wasn't it? What were your relations with this? ARVN means Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

THOMSEN: Well, on a kind of a protocol basis I had a good social relations with them. I would entertain senior Vietnamese officers as part of our normal social life. I had good relations with the MACV folks, the Army colonel who was a senior advisor to the First Division, and with his subordinates, the intelligence advisor and the operations advisor primarily, and the civic action advisor. And I maintained this on a pretty much a daily basis. I would go to division headquarters probably twice a week at least, and just get a feel for what was going on. I would drive up to Quang Tri, and get briefings from the province chief there. Essentially I had face to face contact with most of the senior Vietnamese military in my region.

Q: You were in Hue. What about out towards the Laotian border, because that became rather than the North Vietnamese coming straight down against Quang Tri, which they did later on, but there was sort of flanking movements, and we had siege at Khe Sanh, in '68, but I mean in that time what about the hinterland. Was there mountain Montagnards out there?

THOMSEN: There were Montagnards in the mountains to the west, and there were special forces camps. Generally quite peaceful. I had been, as the provincial reporting officer around Saigon, I'd get to see special forces camps along the Cambodian border. So I had a sense that these kinds of under populated areas that were up for grabs, or under Viet Cong control because they essentially had no population to try to protect. When I got to Hue, some of these areas had rubber plantations, old French farming of some kind, Montagnard camps, a couple special forces camps, and then a few Americans who were there with the Summer Institute of Linguistics translating the bible. There were Americans up there, can you imagine translating, or creating Bibles in the native languages, creating even written languages in the first place, all the things that Summer Linguistics does. So it was again, the term pastoral is not too much of an exaggeration. The war had not yet hit its stride.

Now while I was there, within the first six months that I was there, things changed dramatically in the mountains. And as I think I mentioned earlier, the AID reference to using DDT distributors as a guide. Bernard Fall had said, in a conversation I had with him a year or so before, that the postman, the guy that delivers the mail, and if the guy stops delivering the mail, then you know there's a problem. Well, DDT in that sense was almost delivering the mail. This was what kept the lice out, mosquitos, and malaria down. Villagers knew that, and they accepted it. But when the DDT guy wouldn't come, it was because of lack of security. But that was beginning to happen in August-September of '64. And I recall the Summer Institute of Linguistic headquarters for that area was just a block away from the residence. And I got to know an American couple. They were beginning to get concerned, but they were just beginning to get concerned about their

young people who were up in the mountains. And in September-October they began bringing them back, and by the end of the year it was vacated. Shortly after the beginning of '65, when we went north, we were evacuating civilian Americans from that area generally.

Q: You talk about these special forces camps. These were American Green Berets. They were sort of the apple of the eye of John Kennedy. Were you getting any impression of what they were doing, and any reports you were getting in from them. What purpose were they serving?

THOMSEN: I have a couple of stories to tell about the special forces camp. I have to tell one story about a special forces camp in Tay Ninh, near the Cambodian border. While in camp I needed a hair cut. So I went to the barber in the camp, and I asked him for a hair cut in Vietnamese. And he looked at me like my Vietnamese isn't...your Vietnamese isn't all that hot. But the problem was that he was a Cambodian. So I finally figured out...I went back to the camp commander, I said, do you know you've got ethnic Cambodians in your camp? He kind of looked at me as if I had discovered a dark secret. Essentially we were training the Khmer Serei. I went back to Saigon and reported it to Col Richard Stilwell, who later became the head of U.S. Army Forces in Korea. He was head of operations at MACV.

Q: In charge of operations.

THOMSEN: I think it was operations, in fact, not training but operations. I briefed him on this, and he expressed great surprise that this was happening in northern Tay Ninh province, but I'm not sure he was all that surprised. I reported that to Ambassador Lodge, and he was surprised. But that was the kind of thing that was going on. We were doing things in all sorts of funny ways out there. And for me to discover that was what I was supposed to be doing even though it wasn't necessarily what some people wanted. And sometimes I think that the reason they created a kind of bureaucratic requirement that we coordinate reporting was to try to keep us in Saigon because we were kind of troublesome when we'd get out and talk to captains and lieutenants, and even the Vietnamese.

Q: Well, there really was a real dichotomy wasn't there in the reporting? The military has a normal filter. I've watched their briefings where it starts off with a lieutenant giving the briefing, then a captain, then a major, and finally the colonel will give the briefing and it's a well rehearsed thing of which all of his senior officers will sit in on. So nothing untoward is said. And some reporting has somewhat of the same thing. I mean a lot of people are watching it. Whereas the State Department, in those days, things kind of come in and go right up to where they might be acted on without a lot of filtering. The people involved almost won't allow everybody to sit on top of a story.

THOMSEN: The judgement I came to finally was that for the military reporting is essentially operationally based. They want to know what's important for them to know to get the job done. So it's sort of a "can do" kind of reporting with emphasis on what works. Similarly when something doesn't work, they want to know that too. But essentially it's an upbeat kind of reporting. Whereas a Foreign Service officer should be skeptical when he reports. Not negative. It's the old story of whether you report the glass half full, or half empty. The military report the glass half full. I've always said that a good Foreign Service officer doesn't report a glass half full,

or half empty. He reports it as being 50% full, or 40% full. He doesn't say it's half full, or half empty. He simply gives you the quantity, and then makes a judgement about it. And that's what our job was as far as I was concerned. And if I found out something that didn't seem to be generally known, I felt that was an important thing to make sure somebody knew. And a lot of that did happen. But that was the difference, I think, in our reporting styles.

Q: Was anything happening out in the Quang Tri DMZ area?

THOMSEN: No. It was very quiet. I recall around Christmas of '64 General Thi, the Corps commander taking a delegation of us, including the Chinese consul, the French consul, and we had a kind of a picnic on the southern bank of the river, the Ben Hai. There was a bridge across with a guard on either side, and we had a big picnic on the southern side and Thi had loud speakers set up with Vietnamese music playing. He once said he wished he had huge fans so he could blow the food smells across the river. It was entirely a peaceful situation. That was on Route 1 as it crossed the Ben Hai. Quang Tri city was beautiful, it was a small citadel, beautiful pastoral situation in '64-'65.

Q: Bernard Fall whom you mentioned was a reporter, then he was killed in Vietnam, but he had written his book, Street Without Joy.

THOMSEN: That was the area from north of Quang Tri to Hue. That was the Street Without Joy.

Q: What was the situation along the Street Without Joy?

THOMSEN: My experience was that it was safe, but that as time went on it got less safe. The heart of the war in Vietnam was the Communist Nationalist Party fight that had gone on throughout...I guess going back to the 40s. The Nationalist Party (VNQDD), which if you marked it out, is exactly the same words as the Kuomintang in Chinese: and there was a connection between them-- the VNQDD and the Kuomintang. If you go back far enough, as far back as the 20s or 30s, you find that Chiang Kai-shek was actually at a training camp where both Ho Chi Minh and VNQDD leadership were being trained. One of the stories goes that the Vietnam Communist Party was smarter than the VNQDD, and they would turn over photos of VNQDD returnees to Vietnam to the French security in Hong Kong. So that when the VNQDD trainees came back across the border, they were picked up immediately. This always to me has been a litmus test for whether the Viet Minh was just a truly nationalist party, or whether it had something more sinister. I think the fact that we were willing to betray fellow revolutionaries, because they were in a different party, was an important litmus test. The VNQDD had strength in Quang Tri province, and that was a part of the Street Without Joy issue. They also were very powerful in Quang Nam province, and in Quang Ngai province, and had created really by their presence almost like a toxin, a stronger Viet Minh. So that Street Without Joy was essentially a Viet Minh stronghold.

Q: You might explain what the Viet Minh...

THOMSEN: The Viet Minh was the Vietnamese Communist Party fighting the French. But in 1964, I could drive down to Quang Tri city in a black State Department sedan with a driver.

Q: Should we move to when you left? Is there anything more we should cover on this Hue time before you moved down to Da Nang?

THOMSEN: The late summer and into the winter toward the end of the year.

Q: Which year?

THOMSEN: '64. From the time I arrived in July through the end of '64 was the time of our beginning to think about building up and it culminated in the bombing of North Vietnam, and the Tonkin Gulf incident. That created a different situation for us. It was also a time of greater unrest among the Buddhists. And, for example, this is when they first burned the USIS. That called for the American dependents in Hue being brought into the MACV compound. At that time I was in Saigon and Tony Lake called me from Hue to report to me what was happening. I guess I'll just tell the anecdote--he said, Sam, it's your vice, it's your vice. And I thought he was saying, it's your wife, and I was terrified. But he straightened me out. He was telling me that USIS had been burned, and that all the American dependents were being evacuated into the MACV compound. I got back and that was when I was instructed to make a demarche on the province chief and sector commander. This is the first demarche I've made in my Foreign Service career. I knew how to spell it, but I wasn't sure what it was. But I did what I was told, and he was properly chastised and promised he'd improve the security. But the fact is the police weren't in a position to provide adequate security for any of our installations against students demonstrating.

Q: Why was USIA burned?

THOMSEN: What the Buddhists told me was a fascinating story. It had beautiful plate glass windows. This was after the time when USIA facilities being harassed in Latin America, and the Middle East. One of the students said that they kind of understood that the reason we put big plate glass windows in our USIA was so it would be a way for them to demonstrate, express their views to the United States government. They were trying to embarrass us, and trying to attract our attention. I think they thought they could have an influence on us by doing that, and bring us to be more critical, and heavy handed with the governments.

Q: Was there any aftermath to the burning of the USIA?

THOMSEN: It was rebuilt, that's one thing you can say. I found a charred book which I decided to carry with me as a souvenir called "Communism in Southeast Asia." It was a book written in the 40s, and it was almost naive attempts to kind of create categories. It was virtually worthless as a guide to the reality to the world, but it was a nice symbol of what had happened in Hue.

Our second child was born in Hue on December 28th. The reason I mention this, my wife was instructed to leave in late November to give birth in either Bangkok or Manila. That was the medical office in Saigon embassy. She refused. It was too close to Christmas, so we got the local hospital to provide us with an extra delivery room facility, a little table, the MACV doctor and a French trained Vietnamese doctor became the team, and on the 28th of December our son Samuel was born. Two weeks later the village chief and his village council came and delivered to us 13 copies of his birth certificate in Vietnamese, since the law said that he had to return to

the village of his birth if he wanted another copy. Then six weeks after his birth all American dependents were evacuated from Vietnam. That was in January of '65, and that was an important event. Tony Lake did a superb job as...both of us on first assignments. We took control of the evacuation process along with the military, and Tony performed a wide variety of critical tasks. I just really want to make the point, he was a very fine Foreign Service officer in his time in the Foreign Service.

Tony and I were still trying to work with USAID, and working with the students, to try to find some way of connecting in a way that would allow us to really be communicating, and not just talking past each other. I went to Saigon in late March of 1965 to meet with Alex Johnson, the deputy ambassador, to try to get some money from AID to do a few projects that would allow us to really get close to the students to really begin talking to them. It was at that time on 30 March 1965 that the embassy was blown up, and I was wounded. By good fortune I wasn't more seriously wounded. I was sitting at a desk right next to a heavy plate glass window and I heard noise outside, ran to the window, saw a Vietnamese father throw his small daughter to the ground in the gutter and cover her. There were pops of pistol shots, and I went to the two secretaries who were in the room with me, and told them to go into an inner office. And as I followed them out the explosion occurred. The medal frame went right by my head, and I was hit pretty hard by a lot of the glass but I was just superficially wounded.

I returned to Hue but was given R&R leave shortly thereafter and returned to the United States, to Washington for briefings, and made some presentations in Washington, and then was allowed to go home on R&R kind of as a recuperation leave, and was told that I would have another day of leave for every day I made a public presentation. It was about this time that we were beginning to gin up a public affairs program on Vietnam. By July I was so tired of giving speeches I said I don't care if it is worth another day of leave, I'm going to go back to Vietnam. This is now '65, I'd spent my two years in Vietnam but had been asked to extend, and agreed. So that was the end of '65.

Q: When you were giving these talks on Vietnam, this is prior to the American student opposition.

THOMSEN: That's right...Before the major effort.

Q: So you weren't being heckled.

THOMSEN: Well, I was actually. It was an ambiguous time. This is now the spring of '65. I went on the David Frost radio show. David Frost did not have a TV show he had a radio show, and he was very friendly, and I was upbeat that we were going to make it, I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. But I said that we had the capability of maintaining ourselves, and that the Viet Cong who I had seen when they were only 25,000 strong, were not going to be able to push us out. At a Hollywood high school I was on stage with Congressman Brown. He brought six of his folks out, and the moderator said that each of them could have a go at me, and then I could respond. So it was six to one on that stage, and I must say I got a little bit of sympathy from the audience just by being so badly outnumbered. One day I was invited to speak at a college campus in East Los Angeles. A broadcaster from one of the radio stations called me...this was a

different era, to say that he had heard me speak in Hollywood. He wanted me to know that a demonstration had already formed at the college I was scheduled to speak at, and he had been told by some of the leaders that they intend to harass me physically, as well as to try to intimidate me. He suggested that I not come. I called Washington and was advised not to go within ten miles of that place. They were right. They did not want a confrontation. But that was beginning, that's what I'm trying to get at. It was beginning in the spring of '65.

Q: When the families were evacuated, where did your family go?

THOMSEN: Sammy was the youngest evacuee. Katy, our daughter, who was now two years old, and had only been six weeks when she came to Vietnam, was now a young lady of two, she had a sign on her back saying, Katy Thomsen, which appeared in *Time* magazine. They went to Hong Kong first, and then flew back to Torrance, California where Judy's folks live, rented a house and stayed there until I came back in July of '66. So we were separated for about 14-15 months.

Q: You came back in the summer of '65?

THOMSEN: I came back in July.

Q: So you stayed until July of '66. Did you feel an intensification of pressures, incidents, or anything else like that?

THOMSEN: Oh, yes. It was now a different war entirely. By the spring of '65 the North Vietnamese were now present in South Vietnam in force, and they were destroying the South Vietnamese army. There was battle after battle where the South Vietnamese troops were being decimated. And that's really, if you recall, one of the triggers for bringing the American forces in. And yes, it was a totally different war now, one in which the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were coming down closer and closer to the coast where villages east of Hue were now occupied...I shouldn't say occupied, but had significant infrastructure so they were not secure.

When I got back in August of '65 I made my fatal mistake and wrote the letter recommending that a political adviser be assigned to the Marines, and in September of '65 I was assigned to the Marines. I moved with a couple of bags to Da Nang, moved into the Marine compound, bunked in the General's quarters, that is general officer's quarters. They issued me two sets of utilities, combat boots, and I put U.S. Consul on the right side of greens. I later had a lovely and funny farewell letter from the senior Army advisor, General Hamblin in which he denounced me as a traitor for working with the Marines.

Q: Did you find working with the Marines something new? Was there a different way of operating? A different approach?

THOMSEN: Absolutely. I would get up at 5:30 and my first briefings at 7:00. If a political situation had developed, I would brief, but essentially I would sit through a series of briefings on intelligence, operations, supply, and logistics. I would get briefings from young majors who had just come back from long range patrols up to areas I had driven in a year and a half before, in which they would talk about the land mines, punji stakes, and booby traps. The Marines were

beginning to move out of Da Nang, and their perimeters were broadening. It was a different war entirely.

General Lewis Walt had been a fullback at Colorado A&M, was 6 foot 2, and 240 pounds. One of the finest, nicest people I have ever known, he took me with him everywhere. He'd get in a Huey (and the Marines only flew with one pilot, so I could sit in the co-pilot's seat and look straight down). And Walt would be in the back with one of his aides, and we'd fly up to a special forces camp, or to a Montagnard village, or to some isolated place, and we'd drop down and he'd get a briefing. And I'd go off and talk to the Montagnard chief, or to the young Vietnamese special forces commander, and we'd come back and he'd ask me what I had learned. That was often more important than what he'd learned. So I was kind of his eyes and ears in a different way. I was also all over Da Nang trying to keep down anti-Marine...I shouldn't say anti-Marine, but I should say Marine depredations which resulted in anti-Marine demonstrations. I recall one day being informed that Marines had urinated in a Buddhist pagoda. I went out and visited the pagoda. I talked to the citizens who were around there. The Marines had dug their security trenches outside the pagoda, but when it came time to relieve themselves had gone in. When I briefed Walt the next day we flew into the Marine headquarters near Monkey Mountain. The entire battalion of which these two soldiers were a part, was on the tarmac at attention. The commander of that battalion later became a commandant of the Marine Corps, but in those days he was a young lieutenant colonel. They stood at ease while I addressed them on the importance of the Buddhist religion in Vietnam, and why you don't urinate in pagodas. And General Walt stood with me while I did that briefing. He gave me carte blanche as far as the Marines were concerned. They sent out their chief chaplain from Hawaii to spend a week with me. I briefed him daily on various aspects of Vietnamese culture. He took copious notes, sent back to me a field manual in draft for review before they distributed it to the Marines to tell them how to deal with the people in Central Vietnam. They took this very seriously. I was very impressed, and, of course, it kept me busy. Since I felt that I was being paid attention to, I worked hard at this.

Q: The Marines later, I'm not sure if it's later, or when, but more than any other of our military were sending, at some point, small teams out... platoons, CAPS. Did that have its genesis about this time?

THOMSEN: It did, in fact I knew the young lieutenant who started it, and maybe I even had a hand in encouraging him to try. But essentially the Vietnamese defense forces were at three levels. One was the regular army, the second was called regional forces--they had different names at different times. These were equivalent of a civil guard, or home guard, or a national guard recruited at the province level, under the province commander's command, and mobile forces, reasonably well armed. Then you had the so-called village defenders, and these were folks recruited from the village who would stay in the village. They were generally not as well armed as the Viet Cong, but they were the ones responsible for providing local security. Now, in the Marine area, this lieutenant started in one village to put his platoon in the middle of the village defenders. He trained them, and they stayed with them. And two of the critical aspects...training was very important, but also the use of the radio for both medevacs and artillery support. And the villages where the Marines began staying, where the villagers began feeling comfortable, that at night if there was an attack they'd have artillery support, and actually air support if necessary, called in by the Marines, but the Marines would stand and fight with

them. That if someone was wounded, not just a Marine, but if a villager were wounded, there would be a helicopter to take him or her to a hospital. These villages developed tremendous reputations for being strong bastions. And in fact, in Quang Ngai province toward the west, the North Vietnamese started sending organized regiments against these, trying to destroy the Marine presence. There were really heroic, and sometimes terrifying stories of the Marines and their village defenders standing off incredible odds, while waiting for reinforcements. But they also did a lot of civic action. There was a medic with each of the platoons who would perform sick call every morning in the village. They would send home and send back care packages, and bring them in, books and pads and stuff for the little villages. It was really a fascinating experiment. The problem was you could not possibly cover South Vietnam with a platoon of American forces in every village. But where they were located, they were superb. And the Americans learned to speak a reasonable amount of Vietnamese.

Q: You were there early on when they started doing this. One would think the Marines would be the last to do this. I mean, the Marines usually are hard charging. Ten days on the ground, and then off and the Army takes over. Was this because of Walt, or was this something built in, or was it just happenstance.

THOMSEN: I might even have played a part in it. Let me describe Walt's senior staff. His chief of staff was Joe Platt, who was a colonel, later became a two-star general in charge of Marine personnel. Joe was a brilliant man who you'd never guess would be a Marine. He was tall and rugged, but essentially he was well read. John Chaisson, who was the "three"- operations, was a Harvard graduate, later became Chief of Staff of the Marine Corps. Lou Walt became the deputy commandant of the Marine Corps. They appointed a young lawyer judge advocate general corps, a lieutenant colonel, as their first J-5, their first civic action officer. That was at my suggestion. Chuck Kever was his name. Kever sat on the senior staff although he was a lieutenant colonel, and everyone else were colonels. But he would sit with me and with the chief of staff, and with the J-3 and the J-2, as a part of an inner circle for Walt, and advise him on civic action, on intelligence problems, operations problems, and everything they did had a civic action component integrated into it. I was invited to comment on all of this from a political-cultural point of view. Walt was very complimentary to me. He called me "one of the finest professionals" he'd ever known in his book.

Q: Did you find that you were having a problem serving two masters?

THOMSEN: Oh, absolutely.

Q: Could you talk about that?

THOMSEN: Sure, and we could go into the detail later on of what happened in '66. '66 was quite a national crisis. My instructions had been in September of '65, to report to Da Nang and take on POLAD as my primary responsibility. But if I wasn't doing political reporting, I would get shots from Saigon. In fact, I was called to Saigon a couple of times to help draft country-wide materials in the middle of situations which, in my own judgement, said I should have been with the Marines to help deal with one issue or another. But I was treated by the political section as being a part of the political section when they saw fit, and was called back to Saigon, or taken off

what I thought were my critically important primary duties with the Marines. The epitome of this was, during one of the real crises...Da Nang was in chaos, troops which were more loyal to the Buddhists than they were to the leadership in Saigon had taken control of some of the installations. General Ky, who was the acting president, sent his T-28s to bomb the rebel installations. Some of them were right next to Marine installations, and in one morning at the briefing, we're told two Marines have been wounded, one seriously in the neck, by VNAF aircraft.

Q: *VNAF means?*

THOMSEN: Vietnamese air force. General Walt, with his wing commander at his left said, I want F-4s airborne immediately, and I'm going to call the...

Q: *F-4s being?*

THOMSEN: F-4s, are the best, the work horse of the Marine Corps- Phantoms. Walt said that he wanted the F-4s airborne, and circling above the VNF aircraft. He told me he wanted me to call Phil Habib. I called Phil and told him that there was a real dangerous situation, two Americans had been wounded. If an American is killed here, a serious situation would ensue. And I said the Marines have sent up F-4s above the VNAF aircraft. Well, Habib was a strong supporter of Ky, who was the head of the VNAF as well as the president. The person was causing all the trouble was Thi, who was my Vietnamese Corps Commander. He told me to tell Walt to get those airplanes out of the sky. And I said, "Phil, I'm not going to tell him to take his Marine aircraft out of the sky and stop protecting his Marines." He repeated the instructions And I said, "I can't do it, Phil." At the same time Walt was on the phone with Westmoreland, we were in the same room at opposite sides of the desk, and Walt was telling Westmoreland what he was doing, and Westmoreland was more understanding. He said he would tell Ky what the issues are, and how dangerous this is in terms of the alliance. So then I was able to say, Phil, Westmoreland has said it's okay, and then he's going to talk to Ky. And Phil said, he would talk to Ky too and see if they could resolve this. So that ended ok. But essentially, I was torn very badly in situations like that. On the other hand I had a lot of fun. I sent NODISs to Dean Rusk every night, as part of the Marine Sitrep. I wrote the first section on the political situation, and they wrote the rest. That went to two officials: the Marine Commandant and the Secretary of State. So I was able to say anything I wanted. I had a telephone conversation with President Johnson about General Thi. Johnson called one day and was talking to Walt about something, and Walt said something about "my political adviser" here has known Thi for a couple of years. Johnson got on the phone and said, young man tell me what you think about General Thi. I said "he's naive, not well educated, but I believe he's a strong anti-communist, he's fought against them for 30 years, and I think he's well intended. He needs good advice, and he needs support, but he's erratic and he can go off in the wrong direction." He said, "thank you very much."

Q: *How did that thing resolve itself, with Thi, and Ky.*

THOMSEN: By the end of May '66, Thi was invited to go abroad for study. Other people were exiled or moved around in different places, and the Central government finally installed control over Central Vietnam. At its height armed rebel forces were holed up in two or three Buddhist

pagodas in Da Nang, the Vietnamese Marines finally went in with recoilless rifles, and put a couple holes through pagodas, and they finally came out, and gave up essentially, and were allowed to return to their old lives. There were no mass arrests or anything like that.

Without going into all the details, what was fascinating to me were two things. One, in spite of this incredible situation, partly because of the Marines being there, the Viet Cong were unable to take military advantage of this incredible dislocation. Secondly, no one, including the Viet Cong or the rebels, was able to generate any significant anti-Americanism among the population, although there were some attempts. Tri Quang made a statement about the foreigners, where he was alluding to us, that was interpreted to me as criticizing us. Third, there was in fact within the system a lot of...I won't call it flexibility, but a lot of ability to survive. The South Vietnamese system survived all of this. Other systems might have cracked and broken under this incredible strain. They survived and went on, this is in '66, to live for another nine years. And, in fact, to go from strength to strength in some ways.

I went back in '73 which will be a later chapter to tell how having seen the first Marines arrive, I had a glass of champagne with the last Marine to leave, and we'll go into that later. I think there were some very interesting implications of that really traumatic event, instead of events in mid-'66.

Q: How did Walt deal with Thi.

THOMSEN: Very respectfully, but very firmly. He ostentatiously treated him as an equal, but he made it absolutely clear when he needed something, or when he required that something happen. And Thi respected that on his side. We had some tremendously successful joint operations. Unfortunately, in one case an American general who was Walt's deputy had given bad orders resulting in casualties of dozens of Vietnamese and Americans. He was relieved by Walt and was out of the area in 24 hours. In other words, Walt showed the Vietnamese what happens in the American system when someone is responsible for a major failure. But that person, before he left...it resulted in the death of a Vietnamese lieutenant colonel...this general came to me, and asked what could be done to show his regrets at the death of this lieutenant colonel? I advised him to send something to the ceremony, and a letter of condolence to the wife. I helped him draft the letter. What he did was tremendously well received by the Vietnamese because they knew that he had suffered personally, professionally, from that, but that he hadn't overlooked the lieutenant colonel's tragedy. It was very interesting. Relations were oddly good between the Vietnamese and the American Marines.

Q: You were saying in part of '65 and in '66 the North Vietnamese were taking apart the South Vietnamese army, or was it the Viet Cong? What was the analysis?

THOMSEN: There were several pitched battles in early 1965, and I forget the names of them all but they're very prominent, in which South Vietnamese forces, in some cases they had to fly in the Vietnamese airborne. The three elite units were the First Marine Division...in those days it wasn't a division, it was a brigade, and the airborne brigade. These were their elite units. The First Division, of course, sat on the DMZ in the north, and then the airborne and the Marines were mobile forces operating out of Saigon. What you saw in the spring of '65 were units being

mauled so badly that the airborne and the Marines were being flown in to try to save the situation, and these were pitched battles between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese units. These were not Viet Cong units.

Q: What were you getting from the American military in looking at why the South Vietnamese were losing these battles?

THOMSEN: Mainly senior officer incompetence. They had a pretty good regard for the guy who carried the rifle, but morale was bad. It appeared not to be quite so much in central Vietnam because there were a lot of traditional ties associated with it. A part of the South Vietnamese problem in general...I'll get philosophic for just a moment. They operated under the old Mandarin system of putting both civil and military people out of their own areas, moving a person from the central area to the Delta, and not just military but even district chiefs who were critically important as far as being a communicator between the central government and the village or the villager, would come from a different part of the country. Now, this was not true so much in central Vietnam. They seemed to have some sort of...I don't know why they were able to maintain pretty much central Vietnamese in central Vietnam. But throughout Vietnam you'd find central Vietnamese. You'd find Catholics in Buddhist districts in the Delta, for example. Just a breakdown in communication from the highest levels to the lower levels. Whereas the Viet Cong recruited from the village. And the successful Viet Cong leader would be promoted up to the district. So your Viet Cong district chiefs were all from the district. It was a ladder to success. It was much more effective than the government. And the government was operating on that old traditional Chinese Mandarin system of you had a very strong central authority that delegated things out without regard to local circumstances. That may be too broad to answer your questions specifically. But you had good units, and bad units, and the good units had good leaders, and the bad units had bad leaders. There are notorious examples of South Vietnamese generals who were incompetent, disinterested, on the take, corrupt. You could buy your way out of a combat situation by paying them off. I know more of that by reputation, that is by story, than I do by personal experience.

Q: Later, at least in my time...I was there '69 to '70 up around Da Nang the Vietnamese general...Lam was it?

THOMSEN: Lam, one of the corrupt ones.

Q: He was notorious for being really corrupt.

THOMSEN: Terrible. Lam had been the second division commander and I had known him in that capacity, and when they finally resolved the situation in Da Nang, Lam was called from the second division to become the corps commander. That was June-July '66. Lam stayed as corps commander for I don't know how long, and stories of his corruption reached me in Laos. I was there in '67 to '70, and I was hearing stories about Lam all that distance away.

Q: What about when you were in Da Nang, also Hue, what about corruption? From your perception in your area of responsibility?

THOMSEN: First a comment on corruption. What we call corruption, and what might be understood to be corruption in that environment were slightly different. I remember a district chief, a captain, telling me, you call what we do being as corrupt, but let me just tell you. I get the equivalent of \$40 a month as a captain. I've got AID officials, I've got you, I've got my counterparts, I've got people from Saigon coming to see me every day. I have to put on a lunch, I have to provide scotch, I've got to find income to do that. So I'm using some of the development funds to do this, otherwise it would be impossible to do it. Now, you call that corruption. He said, I've been in the Armed Forces Staff College at Leavenworth, and I know your definition of corruption. He said you tell me how to do my job without availing myself of some of the resources. You know the house I live in...this was a guy who I had fairly good respect for, you know how my wife is living, am I corrupt? Well, the answer is he's not living a corrupt life, but he is misusing government funds by our definition. That's one form of corruption. The fact is from the time you get any position of authority at all, you have to look for...and there's plenty of examples around as to how you do it, other sources of income. So at some point all of a sudden you do have a bigger house, you do start using the cement to add on a bedroom, and then pretty soon you're gone. The senior people, and Lam is a good example, were absolutely without any restraint on their use of what was available to them.

In Hue and in Da Nang, the mayors were civilians. The mayor of Da Nang, for example, had been a professor of medicine at the University of Hue Medical School while I was in Hue, and I knew him in that previous incarnation. He took advantage of his new position to enrich himself within boundaries I suppose of some kind. He wasn't flying off to Paris, and he wasn't driving a limousine, but he was certainly living beyond the means of a mayor's salary. It was endemic, I guess is the way to say it. And the only difference was how grossly you took advantage of your position.

Q: Apparently it remains today under the communists. Is there anything we should talk about in the '66 period, or not?

THOMSEN: Some of the kinds of things I did with the Marines: one stands out in my mind. In early August of 1965, Morley Safer, who was then a correspondent in Vietnam, came across what became a cause celebre story about the Marines burning villages. He had television coverage of a Marine holding a zippo lighter against a thatched roof of a village hut. That story has stayed the course. It was a kind of media example of the coarse, brutal American...I had only been with the Marines a couple weeks by now. But I discovered a notebook, a little thing you put in your breast pocket that I had decided would be the beginning of a diary I would keep and of course managed to keep for about four weeks before it got put aside. But this little event is in that notebook, and here's how it went. Cam Ne was the name of the village, it was about five miles off of Route 1 towards the mountains south of Danang. You had to walk in. On August 3 the Marines in Cam Ne with CBS television looking on, used a zippo lighter to torch a hut. The next day I visited with the J-5, Chuck Keever, I spoke to the village chief, and to the sector S2, this is a young Vietnamese lieutenant intelligence officer.

Here's the story that I got. In '54 100 men went north, they were Viet Minh and when the exchange occurred mainly Catholics came south, from various parts of South Vietnam really hard core cadre went north. Well, 100 men went north from Cam Ne. Six or seven had already

returned by August '65. But they were just beginning to come back. The French could never enter Cam Ne. There are still secret cells and guerillas in Cam Ne. There were sniper holes in the huts for VC to fire from. Cam Ne was in fact a place where the Marines had gone in, had received fire, and had destroyed what they regarded as enemy facilities. And I think the Marines had a right to do that.

That's the report I took back to the commanding general, General Walt. I'd been on the ground, I'd seen the sniper holes in the ruins of the huts that were burned down. But Morley Safer never came back to do an after action report, and say, "By gosh, I talked about the defenseless villagers but maybe there was more to the story than that." But that's the story of Cam Ne. It's one in which I regard the Marines as having behaved responsibly and been judged unfairly.

I think probably, without trying to go into an awful lot of detail, that I've given you a lot of what was going on during that period. By July of '66 I was pretty beat, smoking three packs of cigarettes a day, getting to bed at 2:30 after writing the political section of that Sitrep, and getting up at 6:00 to start the next day. I was thin, I was wiry, I was tough. I'd gone through probably what is as intense an experience as most Foreign Service officers will experience in a good 30 year career, but I was ready to come home. Well, there are other stories too, a couple of them on the Marines that I'd like to tell.

One on Walt. In mid-May of '66 so-called rebel units really had become organized, and one fanatic Buddhist warrant officer with an engineer unit had mined a main bridge out of Da Nang to try to prevent the government forces from using it to come in. Walt was apprized of this by the American advisor to that Vietnamese unit which had done the mining, and he had decided that that bridge had to be kept open. It was a main logistic route (MLR). Walt's strategy was to walk to the middle of the bridge and ask the warrant officer to come to him. The warrant officer came to him and they had a consultation in the middle of the bridge. At the same time the American military advisor to the engineering unit slipped under the bridge and disconnected the wires to the explosives. Walt asked the Vietnamese engineer commander to please remove the explosives because of the bridge's importance to the success of the war, and to protect the people of Da Nang against the common enemy. The officer refused. He said, I will die on the middle of this bridge with you General if you try to prevent me from destroying it. By that time Walt had gotten the signal the wires were cut, and he told the engineer he had one minute to disperse his forces and to defuse the mines underneath the bridge. The warrant officer said no. They stood there for a minute. Walt said, you now have to leave this bridge immediately. The warrant officer raised his hand and lowered it as an instruction to his men to blow the bridge with Walt and himself on it. They pushed the plunger down and nothing happened. And Walt in his book says...he briefed me as soon as he got back. In the book he says the man shriveled up as a shrimp drying in the sun and slunk off the bridge and they had ended that.

There are about five of these episodes with various senior Marine officers, Colonel Chaissem, and General Walt, facing down either pro-government or pro-rebel units to stop them from confronting each other. The air force confrontations I've already described. The Marines used incredible patience, and incredible courage to dampen what could have been an incredible bloody situation in the Da Nang area, and they did it with quiet, matter of fact...Chaissem went out one day and landed his helicopter right in front of artillery pieces that were aimed at the air

base, and told the colonel that he had to take away those artillery pieces. He was putting himself essentially in the path of the shells.

I really found that one year with the Marines a tremendously, exciting, and stimulating.

Q: Do you think when you would go back to the embassy, they were able to get the flavor of this? Because so often the Marines are looked upon as great people to attack a beach. But almost like big kids who've got a lot of guns. Do you think you were getting across to our people in the embassy and elsewhere the importance of the job the Marines were doing?

THOMSEN: I think at the Lodge-Taylor-Alex Johnson level I was. But as far as my political section colleagues were concerned, they couldn't believe some of the stuff I was saying. They couldn't believe the Marines were really trying to do this or that. I think Terry MacNamara won't believe some of the stuff on this tape because he came later with a different general who apparently paid little attention to him.

Q: This is it. Terry, whom I have interviewed has told quite a different...it really does depend on the generals as you were saying with the South Vietnamese army too.

THOMSEN: Oh, yes. Absolutely. We'll get to this later but by the time I got back in '73, the commanding general of I Corps was General Truong, who was probably one of their finest military leaders. I only had a short experience with him but he was superb.

Q: You left there when?

THOMSEN: July '66.

**E. ALLAN WENDT
Operations Center, Watch Officer
Washington, DC (1963-1965)**

**Bureau of Personnel
Washington, DC (1965)**

Ambassador Wendt was born and raised in Illinois. He was educated at Yale University, Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Paris) and Harvard University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1959, he specialized in international energy, Economic and Commercial Affairs at his various assignments in Washington DC and abroad. His foreign posts include Saigon, Brussels, Cairo and Ljubljana, where he served as the United States Ambassador to Slovenia from 1992 to 1995. The Ambassador was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

WENDT: I left there in '63. I came back to Washington and was assigned to the Operations Center—the State Department's around the clock watch office, which had just been created

around that time.

Q: I think the Cuban missile crisis, more or less, in 1962, had spurred its creation...

WENDT: Yes. I remember, John Kennedy was president when I was in Düsseldorf. I think the Wall was built around that time, wasn't it?

Q: That was '61, I think.

WENDT: I believe it was while I was in Düsseldorf that the Berlin Wall was built.

Q: We're talking about the Berlin Wall.

WENDT: Right. Anyway, I came back to Washington and was assigned to the Operations Center in the summer of 1963 as a watch officer. The job was all right, but I can't say that I carried it out with any great enthusiasm. I fielded telephone calls at all hours from everybody and anybody. It was interesting for a while. Then, still in the Operations Center, I became a writer and then an editor of the top secret "Morning Summary" that was sent to the seventh floor principals, including the Secretary. That activity in some ways was more interesting and useful than just being a watch officer. You really learned how to write in a disciplined manner because you had to reduce a long cable, say, to three or four lines covering just the key points, and you had to edit other people's materials. Again, very broad exposure -- cables coming in from all over the world. You were responsible really for what information in capsule form went to the Secretary of State.

Q: Were there any crises that you particularly think of when you were either watch officer or editor that were really memorable?

WENDT: Yes. The coup against Ngo Dinh Diem in Vietnam.

Q: This was in October or early November of 1963.

WENDT: Yes. Actually, I was scheduled to take delayed home leave at that time. But I happened to drop by the Operations Center the night before I was due to leave. I was going out to the West Coast, to San Francisco, which I was excited about because I had never been to California. I had never even flown on a jet aircraft, believe it or not. In the early days, remember, we traveled by ship -- far more enjoyable than what we do today. Anyway, I stopped by the Operations Center -- I forget why -- to pick up some papers or something I had left there -- and I quickly learned there was a coup in progress in Saigon against the Diem regime. So, I was drafted into service on the spot. I recall I postponed my departure on vacation for a day or so -- those were the days when you could change an air reservation without penalty. Anyway, I pitched in to help the people on duty. That was very exciting, trying to figure out what was going on in Saigon.

I remember people streaming in and out of the Operations Center -- very high ranking people. When you're a junior officer, it's impressive to see all those people coming in and out. I don't

think I saw the Secretary of State, but I saw just about everybody else. That's another thing I remember about my early days in the State Department, exposure to people of great stature -- at least, that's what I thought at the time -- people whom one could look up to, people whom one might emulate, people like Chip Bohlen, Averell Harriman, Livingston Merchant, Llewellyn Thompson. I sometimes ask myself if we have people quite like that in the Foreign Service today. Or maybe it's because I'm much older myself and they're contemporaries. This is an aside, but if there are such people, I have the impression some of them may have left the Foreign Service. I think one would be hard put to find the equivalent of people like Bohlen, Merchant, and Thompson in today's Foreign Service. For sure there are some—Tom Pickering and Bill Harrop come to mind. But that's another issue we might come back to.

So, there was the coup against Diem and that was exciting. It was interesting enough, my job in the Operations Center. I definitely thought it was worthwhile.

Q: I never served there, but I was told that sometimes this was really quite a good way to get ahead -- you were talking about the fast track. You kind of learn where things are done in the Department. And also there is a selectivity about getting the people who go into that area, which usually makes you sort of a slightly marked person or something like that. Did you find that to be the case?

WENDT: I'm not sure. I know that was alleged at the time, but I was never convinced it was really true, that it marked you for the fast track. I think that the whole assignments process was so haphazard, I'm not sure there really was a fast track. There were people, obviously, who did very well. Sometimes they did well because they really were talented and demonstrated their talents. Other people did well because they were lucky or had the right contacts. Some people who were very talented did not do as well as one might have expected. Other people who were not very talented did not do well and shouldn't have. But it was a very mixed bag. Anyway, I'm not sure that the Operations Center was the ticket to the fast track.

Q: Were you in the Op Center when Kennedy was assassinated?

WENDT: Yes and no. I was assigned there, but remember I said I was going on leave. I stopped by and the Diem coup was going on in Saigon and, as I said, they drafted me into service. After a day or so of doing that, I flew out to San Francisco. As I recall, this was deferred home leave. Anyway, while I was in San Francisco, I was standing on a street corner waiting for a cable car, and suddenly I saw some people clustered around a radio on the steps of the hotel that I was standing in front of saying Kennedy had been shot. So, although I was assigned to the Operations Center at the time, I was in fact on leave in San Francisco when the Kennedy assassination took place.

Q: When did you leave the Operations Center?

WENDT: I left the Operations Center in 1964—or maybe it was the beginning of 1965. I don't quite recall. I was there for about a year. Then you won't believe what happened to me after that. I was reassigned to the Bureau of Personnel.

Q: Oh, my God.

WENDT: Yes -- this time it was in connection with the buildup in Vietnam. They wanted somebody to work full-time on Vietnam. Somehow, they landed on me -- I suppose because of my prior experience in Personnel. So, I set about recruiting people essentially from within the Foreign Service to go to Vietnam.

Q: I invite you to talk about this in as much detail as you can because I think this is very important. We're working on trying to get a history of the Foreign Service in Vietnam and this recruiting effort in particular. In the first place, what was the attitude around there about getting people for Vietnam? Was it considered a good thing or a bad thing or was it just a job or what?

WENDT: On balance, I thought it was a good thing, although I experienced bouts of skepticism about it, about whether or not we should be involved in Vietnam in the first place and whether we were going about the whole thing in the best possible way. But I supported the program, and I thought it was a very good professional opportunity for people in the Foreign Service. I must admit I didn't necessarily think that at the very beginning. But after I had had a chance to talk to a few people who had been to Vietnam, I rather quickly reached the conclusion that we were doing the right thing. There was a massive buildup of the American civilian presence in Vietnam and there was, of course, the buildup on the military side that had begun in 1965.

Q: We can add that in. How did you go about doing your job of recruiting people to go to Vietnam? What were the criteria for selecting them?

WENDT: By and large, we looked for single people -- you couldn't send families at the time -- who spoke French. French was still quite useful in Vietnam at the time. So, personnel technicians would put together lists of people throughout the Foreign Service who spoke French and who were single, both in Washington and at overseas posts. We had carte blanche from the White House directly from Lyndon Johnson to take everybody and anybody we wanted. We landed on them like a ton of bricks. .

Q: How does one do that?

WENDT: It was very straightforward. I spent a lot of my time recruiting people for the rural pacification program. Most of these people, even though they were Foreign Service Officers, were actually detailed to USAID, which was running the program. These FSO's received something like 10 months of Vietnamese language training and some other kinds of training to equip them to serve in a war zone. Then they were sent out to Vietnam -- usually to the provinces. I was also responsible for staffing in the embassy.

We would simply send a telegram to the FSO in question. I'll give you an example -- Frank Wisner, who is today ambassador to India. Frank was a good friend. He was ideally suited to go to Vietnam. He was single at the time and knew French. But he had also been trained in Arabic and was serving at the time in Algeria. He hadn't been there very long. So, we sent a telegram out to him saying "Report for training prior to assignment to Vietnam." His ambassador -- I believe it was William Porter -- came back with a cable saying, "This is impossible. This makes

no sense. Wisner has been trained in Arabic and hasn't been here very long etc..." But we had our marching orders as well as solid backing for what we were doing in terms of the Government's priorities. Our priority was Vietnam. That was beyond doubt. So, we sent a cable back to Ambassador Porter saying "Sorry, but you will have to take it up with the President if you're unhappy. We are operating under a White House edict." So, Frank went off to Vietnam. I don't think that he regretted it for one moment. He did extremely well there. He was involved in fascinating activities and assignments. So, that was the situation as regards Foreign Service personnel and assignments to Vietnam.

Believe it or not, just about everybody we approached agreed to go---some very reluctantly, but I can recall only one person who managed to weasel out of the assignment, and one person who resigned rather than go. That was the choice. Can you imagine trying to do anything like that today?

Q: It's ridiculous to even think about it. Did you have anybody coming up and saying they didn't approve of the policy, of our engagement in Vietnam?

WENDT: A few, but not many. I think a lot of people actually viewed the assignment as a very interesting and challenging opportunity. Here was a war going on -- maybe not a declared war, but manifestly a war. It was an opportunity for relatively young civilians in the Foreign Service to get involved in very interesting and often difficult and exciting work. I would say the majority of people saw it that way -- not everybody but clearly the majority.

Q: I went to Vietnam as a mid-career officer. I was also in Personnel. I got myself assigned later as Consul General in Saigon. I wanted to see the elephants.

WENDT: That's right. When were you there?

Q: '69-'70, just after...

WENDT: You were there when I was there! That's another matter we'll have to come back to. In any event I found this second assignment to Personnel a very interesting job. I not only had a chance to talk to people who were on their way out to Vietnam, but I interviewed everybody coming back, or people who had been there and who were maybe on home leave and then returning to Vietnam. Note that this was after the bombing of our embassy had taken place, which was a pretty devastating experience. That was in 1964, wasn't it, the bombing, or was it 1963?

Q: I believe so, something like that. What were you getting from the officers who were coming back from Vietnam? What were they telling you about what they were doing and how effective it was?

WENDT: If I could generalize, I think the majority of the people I talked with liked their work. There was some skepticism as to how much progress we were making in achieving our objectives in Vietnam, which was understandable. I think everybody shared a degree of skepticism -- or most people. But what I found interesting was that people liked Vietnam. They

liked the country. They liked the people, although, as I say, there was a degree of skepticism and cynicism. But they all kind of got caught up in their work. They did it with more enthusiasm than one might have predicted. Certainly, in retrospect, when you consider the virulence and the bitterness in the anti-war movement, it's very hard to square that with what I experienced among the professional Americans who served there. Maybe the military was more skeptical or even cynical, I think, in part because of the way the military conducted the war. Also, for the military it was only a 12 month tour of duty, which I think was too short.

Q: Yes, very much so.

WENDT: So, the military, even those who were not in actual combat, tended to see the worst aspects of Vietnam. The civilians usually saw it in a more favorable light.

Q: I think also the military had a one year tour, but often that was reduced to only six months. So, they were sort of like tourists hopping back and forth.

WENDT: That's right. That part of it was regrettable. I had a chance to go to Vietnam for the first time myself in August of 1965, when Henry Cabot Lodge went to Vietnam to become our ambassador for the second time. The Far East Bureau wanted somebody to go with him as an escort and they chose me. So, I accompanied Lodge to Vietnam. I had never been beyond California at that point. It was fascinating because there was a White House aircraft at his disposal for the trip. We took off from Andrew's Air Force Base outside of Washington, picked up Lodge in Boston, flew to Travis Air Force Base in California, and then to Hickam Field in Honolulu, where he wanted to stop overnight and go for a swim. We stayed at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. The next morning we flew on to Anderson Air Force Base in Guam. That was a SAC base, a Strategic Air Command Base. That was the first time I had seen a B-52.

Q: That was our major bomber at the time.

WENDT: Yes. That's where a lot of B-52's were stationed. As I recall, at the time they were used only against enemy targets in South Vietnam, not the North, and I think also in Laos. The Philippine Government wouldn't agree to let the B-52s overfly their country—so, the bombers had to fly way north above the Philippines and then back down towards the Indochinese peninsula.

From Guam we flew to Hong Kong for a day or so and then on to Saigon. For me, this was really a new world. I had never been to East Asia before. I had been working on Vietnam in the personnel area, but actually to see the country was fascinating. I was there a week. Lodge stayed on as ambassador, as you know.

I went all through the embassy interviewing people. Phil Habib was the head of the Political Section at the time. We talked about personnel, what kind of people he needed, where the weak spots were in the embassy. I found the whole scene very interesting.

Q: Did you get any feel for Cabot Lodge at the time you were with him?

WENDT: I had a favorable impression of this man. I knew him before only as a public figure. But what impressed me about Henry Cabot Lodge was that he had quite a good knowledge of the history of the region. I remember when we were flying over Cam Ranh Bay, he pointed it out below and told me about the whole history of Cam Ranh Bay and the Russian fleets and how the kamikaze...you know, this is where the term “kamikaze” originated—it means divine wind in Japanese---how this “divine wind” had saved the Japanese from Kublai Khan’s fleet...this was going way back to, when, the 13th century?

Q: Yes. This was when Kublai Khan’s fleet was coming out of Korea and it was wiped out by a typhoon.

WENDT: Which the Japanese labeled “divine wind.” And the “divine wind” in the form of kamikaze pilots was supposed to save them again towards the end of the Second World War. Anyway, Lodge, I thought, had a very good appreciation of the history of the area and the culture of the country. Beyond that, he was very nice to me personally throughout the trip—though I must admit with some amusement that he was rather capricious in some of his requests. In retrospect, I was essentially a personal assistant. For example, when we were in Hong Kong -- we spent the night there after leaving Guam -- all of a sudden he announced, “I need some toothpaste” and then he named a particular brand of Swiss toothpaste that I had never heard of. It was seven or eight o’clock in the evening -- maybe even later than that. Everything was closed. I thought, “How on earth am I going to get this toothpaste for him?” He didn’t want just any toothpaste. He wanted this particular brand. So, I managed to get hold of the assistant manager of the hotel, and I said, “Look, this is the situation. Can you help me out?” He said, “Well, there’s nothing I can do right now, but I’ll see if we can’t get somebody into the pharmacy early tomorrow morning.” We were scheduled to leave the hotel at 7:30 am.

You know how it is with military aircraft. You have to have your bags ready and right in front of your hotel room door. If it’s a VIP flight, the bags are set out ahead of time and you just walk from your hotel room directly into a waiting car, which takes you right up to the aircraft out on the tarmac.

So, with the cooperation of the assistant manager of the hotel, I stationed myself right in front of the pharmacy in the hotel at 7 am sharp. As soon as the girl came to open the place up, I said, “Ma’am, I’m in a very difficult situation.” I took 30 seconds to explain it to her. “I need to have the toothpaste right away.” She said, “Well, okay, let’s see.” She opened the door and fumbled around inside a drawer and miraculously came up with not just one tube of toothpaste but about half a dozen. I bought them all, raced back up, and stood in front of Cabot Lodge’s hotel room door. I didn’t knock on the door. I waited until he opened it, more or less at the appointed time when we were supposed to leave. I said, “Sir, here is your toothpaste.” Well, after that, he thought that I was pretty effective. In truth, I was just lucky they had the toothpaste in the hotel and that I was able to get into the pharmacy before it officially opened. Anyway, occasionally Lodge would come up with requests like that. It was always a challenge to see if you could accommodate him.

I stayed in Saigon about a week. It was a very useful trip. By that time, my responsibilities had expanded and I was no longer dealing just with personnel for Vietnam, but also for a number of

other posts in the East Asian region as well. I was part of the Far East Bureau at State and responsible for all our posts in the region, though Vietnam was always the top priority. So, from Saigon I went on and visited our missions in Taiwan and Japan before flying back to the US.

Q: Did you get any feeling talking at the embassy in Saigon of any division at the embassy? In talking to the officers, often a personnel officer ends up as father confessor or brother confessor or something like that. Did you get any impression of any division within the embassy over how things were going or any problems?

WENDT: Not really. By and large, it was a very capable bunch of people who had gone out there. Most of them were quite positive about their work. There was, of course, skepticism about how well the whole war effort was going and whether we were going to achieve our objectives in Vietnam. But this was not an embassy where morale was low and people were at each other's throats. A good number of people had actually volunteered to go there. Vietnam was considered a top priority, as I said earlier. In a way, it was a badge of honor to serve there -- which is not to say that everybody we sent was able and well qualified. Some people got caught up in this dragnet who may have been marginal performers. But on the whole, it was a very good group of people. Maybe you recollect otherwise.

Q: No, not at all. Most went on and did well. These were people, for the most part, who were interested. They were inquisitive and intellectually challenged. If you've got a major foreign policy preoccupation, you don't wash your hands of it and say "I won't touch that thing." You want to get out and see it.

WENDT: Absolutely, though occasionally I thought some people were perhaps overly enthusiastic about the programs they were involved in, to the point where they just couldn't see any risk factors, and that maybe a measured dose of self-interrogation or a little more questioning of what was going on and how it served our objectives might have been appropriate. But better to be motivated than simply to be cynical about it. Vietnam was where the action was, and that's where a lot of people wanted to be. In a way, I felt sorry for people who struggled so hard to get out of the assignment and not go there. There was a war going on. It was fascinating professionally and personally. This was clearly the place to be.

Q: From the personnel, professional point of view, did you have problems with marriages, liaisons? I mean, most of our people were unmarried. Maybe you could talk a little about that because this was also, as we all know, a difficult place in a way.

WENDT: It was a difficult place because we were sending mostly men. That became a matter of controversy later on, the fact that we didn't send as many female officers out there as we might have. We did send some. But a lot of the men were there without their wives. I think that did generate problems because inevitably many of them got involved with the local women, even to the point where they weren't in a great hurry to go back home and they would extend their tours. I think these circumstances generated a lot of problems in people's family lives.

Q: Did personnel take note of this or get concerned about it?

WENDT: No. This was considered a private matter. We didn't get involved in it. I don't see how we could have done so productively.

Q: How long were you doing the whole personnel thing?

WENDT: I think for about a year and a half -- first concentrating exclusively on Vietnam and then branching out and covering other posts in the Far East area, as it was then called. I should say that I didn't just deal with Foreign Service personnel. We were also bringing in people from the outside, including a lot of people who had had previous exposure, but who were now doing other things. I'm talking about people like General Edward Lansdale. We processed his papers and got him onto the embassy payroll. I recall also Lou Conein, the famous CIA operative who had been there earlier during the Diem period. And Daniel Ellsberg. A lot of people came in from the outside. I got to meet most of them, too. So, my horizons were not confined to the Foreign Service.

Q: Did any of these strike you... I am thinking particularly of Ellsberg and Lansdale -- they both became quite well known--

WENDT: Were any of them controversial? The truth is, I didn't know much at the time about what Lansdale was doing. But I came to know more later on.

Q: He was quite famous, in a way, because he was the prototype of a character in the novel, "The Ugly American." It was a rather seminal book as far as American attitudes towards foreign policy went.

WENDT: Yes, indeed. I did occasionally think that maybe there were too many of these different programs and activities going on at the same time, and I wondered, "Who's pulling all this together? How is it coming together?" You know how America tends to smother a problem, just overwhelm it, and that's what we did. We had a huge number of people in Vietnam. Where I think, in retrospect, I became somewhat cynical was whether or not all these people were really engaged in activities that mattered that much as far as achieving our objectives was concerned.

Q: I think this is where I came out, too. It wasn't so much that I thought, you know, you could put a nation together. I mean, look at South Korea. But when I found young officers involved in beautification programs for Saigon, I thought, "Wait a minute."

WENDT: That was a problem. We overwhelmed the place. I think sometimes it was too much. It was more than the country could absorb and went beyond what we could usefully accomplish. But I nonetheless remained committed to the basic idea of the US being in Vietnam and preventing the country from falling to the communists. That was my view at the time, and I feel it very much today with hindsight. My view hasn't changed.

VLADIMIR LEHOVICH
Rural Affairs Program Officer, USAID

Saigon (1963-1965)

Provincial Reporter Saigon (1965-1966)

Vladimir Lehovich was born in New York in 1939 and received his Bachelor's Degree from Harvard University 1961. He was positioned in Saigon, Brussels, Bonn and Vienna. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Lehovich on March 25, 1997.

Today is the 2nd of April 1997. Vlad, let's start. You were in Vietnam from when to when?

LEHOVICH: From approximately May of 1963 until the summer of 1966 and then back again for a few months in early 1977.

Q: We'll come to that in time. What was the situation as you were told and that you picked up by osmosis in the corridors of the State Department in Vietnam in May '63 when you went out there?

LEHOVICH: The situation was depicted by and large in Cold War terms and was seen by people like me by and large in Cold War terms. The depiction was of a country that after 1955 had in the South created a non-communist government. The government was not painted in particularly rosy terms in anything I heard. Its main virtue was not being virtuous; its main virtue was that it was a non-communist government which had a chance of, one, surviving and, two, of reforming itself as time went on. Ngo Dinh Diem, who was the leader of the government and the President of South Vietnam, was a person who was described as somewhat aloof, somewhat isolated, generally a rather fastidious Roman Catholic bachelor in a non-fastidious Asian society which was not predominantly Roman Catholic -but nonetheless a man of high ethical standards and great person discipline and one who could lead a government that, it was recognized, was considerably less upstanding than Diem himself was. It was a government that was harsher and more corrupt. But the most important feature was that the situation was cast in terms of an effort to have, and maintain, a non-communist government in South Vietnam and stop a deliberate communist movement to destabilize and to take over the South. Those were the basic dynamics.

There was not an awful lot of false or naive worship of the Diem government. There was the policy that many of us remember under the slogan of "Sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem." I must say, I found a very, very great lesson here because I see us since that time quite often having a policy of sinking or swimming with somebody. My advice is, as soon as you hear that policy, be prepared to hear it reversed with no prior warning. "We're no longer sinking or swimming with them. He's sinking; we're swimming with someone else." That, of course, is exactly what happened with the Diem family, the Ngo family.

Q: When you arrived, what was the situation? You went to the embassy. Could you tell me what happened?

LEHOVICH: I and one other colleague of mine, Dick Holbrooke, were assigned to the Agency

for International Development. We went to join its Rural Affairs Program. It was called "Rural Affairs Program of the United States Overseas Mission (USOM)," run by AID. At that time, already a very large AID mission. The Rural Affairs part of it, which I was assigned to, was very unusual and a very controversial operation within AID and within the American official community in Vietnam.

It was a special counterinsurgency program with its own budget. The budget came from the White House and was approved by President Kennedy and some of his closest advisors. It was run by a young man, 32 years old, called Rufus C. Phillips. Rufus Phillips was a young businessman who had been an athlete and a scholar at Yale. He had then taken part with Edward Landsdale, with Colonel Landsdale, later General Landsdale, in the counterinsurgency campaign in the Philippines against the Hukbalahaps when he was a young Army lieutenant, and, I believe, at that time seconded to the CIA - a CIA man with the assigned army rank of a lieutenant. In any case, Rufus Phillips was the young leader of this group of people with an almost unfettered budget of \$10 million and a *carte blanche* to recruit.

He did his own recruiting, picked up a stable of people, some of whom were very gifted, a lot of whom were very unusual and original types whom one met in international work, and a number of whom were from voluntary organizations. At that time, the leading such organization was the IVS (International Volunteer Service), which in many ways is the predecessor of the Peace Corps.

It was a very fine organization. I'm still very fond of it. In a word, USOM Rural Affairs was a very unusual outfit run by some absolutely unorthodox and very gifted people - in particular by Rufus Phillips, who is one of the finest natural leaders I've ever worked with and who, at age 32, was able to lead us with great leadership skills, with great self-confidence and with great personal courage.

What we did, what the attempt was of that program, which was a precursor of the later counterinsurgency programs in Vietnam, was to seek to make local government work better, be more responsive, and be in a better position to meet popular needs than it was and to do so by working locally. We were a totally decentralized operation. We went to all 40 provinces in South Vietnam at that time, set up small operations there and worked with the local officials from that level. Some of that worked well. Some of it worked less well, but it was a very unusual effort at that time. It was a very original effort. It was probably conceptually the best counterinsurgency program that the US or South Vietnam had during that whole period. I could go on at length about this. It's a favorite subject of mine. But for our purposes here, let me just say that I think it was a very promising program. I don't think it could have changed the course of history. I think the long arm of history was evident in Vietnam over a period of time. But I think it could have done better and done better for longer than the intensely Americanized programs that followed afterwards.

Q: Let's get this down to your level. What were you doing? Any stories you have. I don't mind detail.

LEHOVICH: Absolutely. After several months of working on different programs in Saigon, I

finally managed to get myself out to a province, which is what I wanted to do from the day I arrived. I went out in a car with a briefcase, checked into a hotel. There had been a US Army major who had been doing this before. He had been part of the 12 man advisory team in that province.

Q: Which province are we talking about?

LEHOVICH: I was in the Mekong Delta in the province of Vinh Long. At that time, an American presence in a large province was very small. This was a province of almost 600,000 people. The American presence was approximately 13 official Americans. Twelve of them were military. When I arrived, I made it the 13th. I was a civilian. I lived separately. The American military were my good friends, but we were not dependent on each other in any way. There were two and later three volunteers from the International Voluntary Service who also lived separately and worked separately on their own programs. Among the other foreign presence in Vinh Long province was one American missionary who lived some miles away. He was from the Christian and Missionary Alliance and had no connection with other American activities, which were either governmental or voluntary, supported by the U.S. government. The other foreign presence was a small Roman Catholic convent operation for what were called "fallen girls." These were very nice Irish sisters, also out in the countryside. Then there were a couple of French Jesuits who worked there, also far in the countryside. That was it as far as foreign presence in this province of 600,000 people, comfortably under 25 people, I think.

What did I do? I started working with rural school programs of a very simple kind which involved school construction. Does school construction guarantee education? No. But it requires a community commitment. It requires a concentration of interest, excitement. It's very good for complementing education. It helps it. It doesn't provide it.

Rural health. Rural health involved helping to organize clinics where traveling doctors or medics could come on a scheduled basis. That, again, does not guarantee medicine, but it can facilitate it and raise consciousness and make it a popular weekly or biweekly event in a particular place. We had limited refugee programs to the extent that there had been some people who had been relocated in the area where I was working. We had some other education programs. We did a little bit with vocational training, in trying to support it. Mainly what we were doing was working with rural programs in education, in health, and in some basic agricultural areas. The basic agricultural area was trying to supply certain good brands of rice that were not otherwise available in terms of seed, facilitating storing, trying to introduce some vegetable and gardening projects that were very profitable at that time, and offering a little bit of seed money to finance better ways of breeding pigs and composting pig manure and having a program that would raise corn as feed for pigs.

Now, what is a guy from New York who doesn't know a hoe from a hoot in Hades do in a situation like this? Well, the answer is you use a lot of common sense, you ask a lot of questions, you ask your peers, and you find the people locally, the Vietnamese, who know everything in the world there is about pigs and hogs and you get them to work with you.

Q: In a way, the question might be, if they know everything there is about hogs, what are you

doing anyway?

LEHOVICH: We were helping them with a little money, a little attention, and with an idea that wasn't at all known or customary there. The idea was that one can work on a communal and voluntary basis, on a self-help basis, and pitch in a lot of resources locally on something that is locally popular; and that it's part of good local government to facilitate the kinds of programs that I was talking about. That second thing I did, and others like me in our program did, was work with senior officials in the province. The senior officials accepted us as people who had an idea that was perhaps good, perhaps not, but as people who couldn't be shoved away. So, if I spent five nickels on five different occasions with a senior official in Vinh Long province on the subject of pigs or rural schools, I wasn't thrown out. I was listened to with at least the appearance of a great deal of interest at my wisdom - I being about 23 years old at that time - and the merits of the programs that I was describing. Amazingly enough, within a few days, we very often got confirmation that the head of the province or some of the senior people working with him had gone around saying, "Why isn't such and such being done better with these important programs that the Americans are interested in." We would go in and say, "That's wonderful. We heard you were supporting these things. Maybe you could support them not as American programs, just tell people it's the right thing to do to produce better schooling or better health or better pigs." We worked as stimulators and catalysts, partly because we were the big important foreign presence at that time - America; partly because we had a good idea (it was an intrinsically good idea.); and partly because we had some money. In terms of cash and resources, I recall the first year, I had about \$2 million. Most of it was in resources which was grain, cement, and certain other types of things, fertilizer, certain kinds of simple equipment. But a fair amount of it (several hundred thousand dollars) was in cash. This was not mine alone to dole out by any means, but it was very much for me there to stimulate, help, and advise, and then to say, "We have some funds if you're prepared to draw on them." Having a few hundred thousand dollars in a place where a low monthly subsistence wage was eight or 12 dollars, having a few hundred thousand dollars to help promote your ideas can make your ideas go a very long way. I thought we had a remarkably worthwhile and remarkably cost-effective program going there.

Q: What were some of the problems you had to deal with?

LEHOVICH: One problem we had was that as time went on, by the time we got into late '63 and 1964, it was pretty clear that a lot of what our program was doing was kind of built up by day and pulled down by night. We were getting into a little bit more of a guerilla warfare situation. We were also getting into a fairly coercive strategic hamlet program, an effort which preceded a lot of other similar things later on. In its crudest form it was an attempt to put some fences around villages, to train some militia forces within the village, and also to train some political action forces within the village. In its better, more evolved form it was the basic security plus other improvements in living. I wasn't involved in the fences or the militia or the political action forces, but we were very much involved in working to try to make these villages attractive and prosperous places. But it really was becoming pretty much of a polarized operation. Our program was not a program that stood purely on its own. It was part of a government campaign that was often physical, often repressive, against an organized opponent who was even more repressive, even more unpleasant. We were also in a situation where the central government of Vietnam was basically coming closer and closer to collapsing. Every province at that time was led by a direct

appointee of the president of Vietnam, a person responsible to him, with direct control. So, what we were doing, like it or not, was a very political thing at that time. Standing back, I don't really think that it was adequate to do the kinds of things we were doing in a situation like that.

Q: *The government wasn't?*

LEHOVICH: Our program wasn't adequate and I don't think making it twice as big would have made it more adequate. I simply don't think that at a certain point, material benefits like education and better agriculture make a big difference. The real thing in that kind of a situation was that there was a fair amount of force being applied. The lot of the Delta, incidentally, certainly the part of the Delta that I knew the best, was pretty sheltered at that time from the civil war in Vietnam.

Q: *What was the capital of Vinh Long?*

LEHOVICH: It was Vinh Long City. It used to be the town on Sadec, but with some reorganizations, two provinces were merged into Vinh Long. It was not a terribly violent place. One could drive around all over, and "all over" means a couple or three hours in one direction until you got to the end of that province. Rarely would you have a problem and, if you did, you sort of knew the areas where it might happen.

I was shot at on two occasions. One was very tragic because I was with a group of civil guardsmen, as they were called, sort of local forces, who would always be in certain parts of the province accompany me if I was down there. Overkill by local officials. There were 80 or 90 of them that day. It was a company. Anyhow, one of them got killed by some assailant whom we could never see from some distant place a couple of hundred yards away across the river or from a swamp. A very sad story. I had to go see the fellow's family later in the day and talk to them. Very trying for them and certainly a very difficult part of the day's work for someone like myself.

The other time, a wholly different time, was driving from Vinh Long to Sadec with my Vietnamese associate, a man from AID whom I worked with closely who is still a good friend of mine, incidentally. My last contact with him was about a month ago. He's in America and runs a restaurant in Florida. In any case, this fellow and I were driving and we got fired at a number of times from what was called simply the "banana line." The banana line begins 50 or 80 yards to one side of a road and there are a lot of bananas growing there. You can't see through the bananas, so it was a good place from which to shoot people you don't like. What we did on the way back was, we drove very quickly. We did our business in the town of Sadec and we had to retrace our steps. We simply drove very quickly. At that time my Vietnamese associate, incidentally, asked me to do the driving. It was axiomatic that among two 24 year olds, the one who had started to drive at 16 was going to be the better driver than the one who had started to drive at 21. I was. So, I drove the car faster than it had ever been driven before. I had it repainted a different color. I thought that was just the beginning of wisdom. I did it out of my own pocket. I mention this only because a couple of months later, an AID inspector came down, inspected my operation while I was away on a field trip, made some judgments about whether I was doing a good job or not without having interviewed me, and left me a bill for having defaced government

property without permission. That was repainting my vehicle. I'm simply mentioning this because it's prejudiced me ever since towards being inspected by anybody. I still don't like it.

Q: An inspector is often known as the son of a bitch from outside.

LEHOVICH: That's a very mild and statesmanlike way of putting it, Stu. I appreciate your gentleness.

Q: What about the problem of corruption from your perspective?

LEHOVICH: I have a couple of reactions about it. One, it was probably just about everywhere. Two, when it was the moderate, normal, expected level and way, it was not terribly noticed. It wasn't terribly shocking, and it didn't bother business. Three, I mentioned earlier that the subsistence wage might have been \$10 a month. For a lieutenant colonel or major in the Army, the wage was much higher. It might have amounted to \$30 or \$40 a month, but not more than that. The families were large and that \$30 to \$40 a month would basically be there for a household of eight, 10, or 12 persons when you counted everybody from wives to children to servants who were part of the household. The lieutenant colonel making, say, \$36 a month who was not trying to augment his income by alternative means was not doing his job as a father, as a family man, or as an intelligent local official. I had no moral compunctions then or later in that kind of a society about the kind of low-level corruption that is built in, that is moderate, is expected, and is actually necessary to survive. On a larger level, when it gets out of control, it gets out of control. It produces some bad effects.

Q: You had this several hundred thousand dollars. You had two million dollars you were playing with.

LEHOVICH: We had minor problems. We never had anything I remember as a terribly big one. Our stuff was popular. It was small. The aid was rationed out for small and rather well-controlled projects. We would frequently find instances where people would, say, build a structure and shortchange the structure on cement or certain other things that we were supplying and we'd complain about it. In one extreme case, a schoolhouse that was shoddily built, we took a hammer and hammered on a concrete floor and broke through it. We asked that it be rebuilt. No, we were not a particular target of corruption. I think the games of corruption were being played in bigger ways, on taxing, for example, entire regions on livestock and rice.

I had a case once when I was driving in town on a Sunday just to pass the time away. It was a beautiful town. I noticed a familiar truck that belonged to my operation. We had two fairly large trucks, army surplus trucks. A familiar truck filled with two and a half tons of goods leaving the warehouse in which we kept various of our food and other commodities, cement and so on. It was driven by two thoroughly familiar people, one of whom worked for the province with our programs and the other was a sergeant in the local military who also worked with our programs from a different vantage. Two very nice guys. I was very fond of both of them. I complained and they were later arrested. In a wonderfully personal way, the sergeant came to me at my little house where I was staying at that time. He said, "Look, they're going to give me a very hard time about this theft. They're going to send me to combat. I can't afford that. I have six children. I'm

going to have to go into combat." I said, "Look, there's nothing I can do for you." "Can you intercede and have it changed? You're my friend." I said, "I can't intercede for you. You've got to believe me. I can't intercede for you at all. I can do nothing more than report what I saw. I'm going to stay out of the rest of this." He was very unhappy. This man cried and he asked me to help him. I said I couldn't help him. Very nice fellow. He went off to combat and, as far as I know, he performed some combat and was none the worse for it. Anyhow, those were personalized levels of corruption.

Q: What about the October '63 events in Saigon? Could you explain how that was reflected on what you were getting?

LEHOVICH: Absolutely fascinating. Let me tell you what happened there. It had become fashionable to talk down the Diem government by the time that-

Q: When you say "fashionable," with whom?

LEHOVICH: It was fashionable among people who are loud mouthed or like to talk.

Q: Are you talking about Americans?

LEHOVICH: We're talking about Vietnamese. It was fashionable to talk down the Diem government by those who liked to talk loudly about politics, not a very big majority in a country like that. When the news came that Diem was overthrown, there was absolute panic, very palpable panic among everyone. This was not a panic of people dependent on that government. It was a panic of people who were terribly concerned that a predictable order was seemingly collapsing. Shortly thereafter, the news came of Diem's death. There was a palpable outbreak of mourning not based on personal friendship or acquaintanceship with this distant, aloof figure of a minority Western religion in an Asian society, but there was wailing and weeping all over the place. Stu, this happens everywhere. It's what happened in Russia when Stalin died in March of 1953. People forgot about that, but there was mourning all over the place. People knew the guy was a son of a bitch - not everybody, but a lot of the people who were crying nonetheless. So, there was that kind of a thing. I actually had told myself from the time that things were getting tense in Vietnam that if and when there was a coup, I was going to go to Saigon to observe it and that's exactly what I did. I hopped on an American "Caribou" airplane which happened to land at the Vinh Long Airfield and went to Saigon and spent the next week up there observing these weird events.

Q: Could you talk about it?

LEHOVICH: I did not observe high politics. I observed what was going on in the streets. There was street fighting. There were some buildings that were shot up in many parts of town that had housed government activities. Some places were, I think, just shot up because people pulled on a trigger, not for any terribly rational reasons. I remember finding two kids playing with a mortar. These were kids who were somewhere between four and six years old. They were playing with a mortar, a beautiful mortar in excellent shape with just a couple of dents where it had landed. I took it away from them. I only later realized that I shouldn't be carrying this thing around myself,

but I took it away from these kids, took it to where I lived. I had a little flat at my disposal in Saigon and showed it to an American Army captain who knew a lot more about ordinance than I did. When I did, he ran right out of the room!

Anyhow, Saigon was a different atmosphere within a couple of days after this coup. Initially, there was great tension and, similarly, an outbreak of concern. But within a couple or three days, it was a festive atmosphere, devil may care atmosphere, I'll be damned but I'm going to do what I want kind of atmosphere.

One of the things that I know personally from a number of young people that I knew at that time in Saigon and in the provinces was that the Diem regime sealed its own fate, in my opinion, by the way it dealt with student youth. This is my own interpretation. Student youth -meaning university or other higher education youth -tends to come from pretty prominent families. There are tens of thousands of pretty prominent families in a county of 15 or 20 million people. An awful lot of them are either senior civil servants or army officers. They're not enlisted men. They're army officers. My own sampling told me that an awful lot of the army officers had brothers or other relatives or, if they were older, children, who had either been arrested or had their best friends arrested. If they were arrested, they were in for some extraordinarily rough treatment, which some of them recounted to me in most unpleasant detail. As a result, because of the huge size of nuclear and extended families over there, you couldn't arrest one kid who was a college student without creating extreme concern in 10, 15, or 20 or more people who were close or extended relatives. There was no question that there came a certain point where the elite in the country had their families arrested. Does that sound absurd? Let's remember in Washington, DC, one eleventh of the entire population works for the city government of the District of Columbia. It is not surprising in a country that had an army of 500,000 Vietnamese, being a small country, that more or less your entire officer corps had somebody who had been arrested and mistreated.

Q: Why were they being arrested?

LEHOVICH: They were being arrested because the government had gotten fairly paranoid at that time about conspiracies or people who were disloyal. It's a pretty typical dictatorship-type of phenomenon.

Q: Was this concern about being disloyal to the ruling party?

LEHOVICH: Most of the time, although the communists were sort of an underpinning for this concern. Most of the time think it was concern about disloyalty to the Pope. Disloyalty to the Pope doesn't mean you have to work for the devil. So, anyhow, the coup of 1963 brought about, as we recall, years and years of changing governments. As far as I'm concerned, with the end of the Diem era there, we were basically heading downhill.

Q: Let's stick to the coup. As you came back, here you were, a province boy back in the big city of Saigon. What was the attitude among the embassy officers, particularly- I assume that you were more in contact with the junior officers who often were out in the field a lot more than the senior officers.

LEHOVICH: Absolutely.

Q: Can you tell me about how they saw this from your perspective?

LEHOVICH: They saw and I sort of associate myself - we saw - the Diem regime as something that, by the very end, basically had to go. We thought it had to go, we thought it would go, and, unfortunately, we thought it should go. We thought that there was no way to continue successfully. In that sense, we were probably a little bit ahead of our elders and betters, but a only by a little bit, maybe a few months or less. That's when the decision was taken at the President's level to get rid of the guy, to get rid of Diem. Interestingly enough, when you say that we're going to change a leader like that -and I don't think President Kennedy or his advisors knew it then - there only one thing that can happen. That means the man will die. I was told that the minute the coup happened by a very wise old American counterinsurgency expert called Colonel Bohannon. He said, "He'll be dead within a week." Of course, he was right. It's inevitable.

I think we were a bit ahead of our elders and betters. My friends among the Americans at that time in Vietnam included not only the folks in the American embassy and folks in AID. These were very, very close friends. They also included the American press - for example, Dave Halberstam was quite a good friend. I saw him fairly often. So were a number of the other reporters - Malcolm Brown, Neil Sheehan, various others who were really excellent correspondents. Vietnam produced a marvelous generation of excellent correspondents at that time including sort of most of today's T.V. anchormen and a lot of other very good folks. These people ranged from being skeptical about the war to panting with eagerness to watch, frankly speaking, the United States and the Diem regime lose. I have to ascribe that kind of a view to someone like Dave Halberstam. I was fond of the fellow, very impressed by him, but I think he wanted the effort that America was involved in to lose in the worst kind of way at that time. To make a long story short, the younger Americans who were out there basically thought the thing had to go.

Q: Was there a countryfolk - cityfolk sort of split with the embassy and working out in the provinces when you would check in either in AID or the embassy?

LEHOVICH: Yes, there was. Frankly, I felt very much at home in both of these communities. I got to know quite a lot of people in Saigon, Vietnamese, as well as Americans and a few French. I still am a member of the Cercle Sportif Saigonais.

Q: Do you still pay your dues?

LEHOVICH: No, I don't pay. They don't send me a bill.

Q: I haven't received a bill in years.

LEHOVICH: I don't pay my dues because I haven't gotten a bill, but I'm still a member as far as I'm concerned. I still have my valid Vietnamese driving licence. It doesn't have an expiration date. Frankly, when I save up a little money, I expect to go out there, rent a car, and take a swim

at the Cercle Sportif. But I got to know a number of people there, younger people, older people, Vietnamese who were sociable folks by nature and would stand me a good meal once in a while.

Q: Did you feel that, at least from the field, you would be giving reports on what you were doing... In no country including the United States, did we have as extensive a reporting program of what was going down at not only the provincial level, but the district level by some very bright people. Did you feel this was getting adequately translated when it got up to where decisions were made? Not just you, but others.

LEHOVICH: I wasn't primarily a reporter at that time; I was later in a second incarnation in Vietnam. I wasn't primarily a reporter. I felt that I shaded my messages a little bit, not terribly much, but a little bit. But I also think that the senior listeners or the senior audience had two ways of listening. One, they would listen and understand very well that there were some terrific problems. Two, almost as a function of leadership, they would say, "Soldier on. It doesn't matter. You're doing the right thing." This was not just with the Diem regime. This was later on. There comes a point where one does the right thing and soldiers on, professing that we will never abandon someone -until we do. Then it happens again, and then it happens again. I certainly give credit to the senior people that I knew well there for listening on two levels at once, for understanding and for continuing nonetheless. It was a situation where, until the end, one continues boldly professing confidence that one is going to do well even when one has long since felt that one is not doing very well.

Q: The military buildup started while you were there, although the Mekong was not a prime area. Were you in the Mekong the whole time?

LEHOVICH: I was in the Mekong Delta for a couple of years. But I also traveled in probably 30 of the 40-odd provinces during that time as well. I took a lot of field trips both before I was assigned to Vinh Long and afterwards.

Q: We moved into one of these rather Americanized reporting programs. Can you sleep in the district capital at night? Is it safe in all sorts of embassies? I don't know if they started on that. But particularly on the military side (This was MacNamara) when you asked the military to report, at a certain point, the reporting becomes very important for a person's career and things get shaded and all that. Did you find there was a two-layer thing, that sort of the civilian not just foreign service, but the other side was reporting one thing and the military were out there sort of reporting another thing?

LEHOVICH: To some degree. Let me give you a couple of examples. Take something like the Strategic Hamlet Program. As I say, my job wasn't primarily reporting, but when I did, I did put down whether I thought something was working well or not. I could put down that we did x amount of work in the last six months of which the effectiveness is pretty limited or pretty good. My military friends who were working with some of the same programs and who were being asked to report on anything in the world at that point, so they were reporting on my programs after a while, they would put down things like "Completed, is a success, everything is working fine. Everything is proceeding according to plan." In fact, the phrase "The program is proceeding successfully according to plan" was a fairly ritual phrase. I saw it an awful lot of times. I didn't

think it meant an awful lot. You can go as far as to say I think it's like a doctor saying "Haven't had a chance to look much at the patient, but I haven't seen an illness." But "Program proceeding well according to plan" is a fairly nondiscriminate type of reporting.
(tape ended)

Q. How were your relations with the US Embassy and AID? What was the contact like?

LEHOVICH: I knew an awful lot of the American embassy at that time. I didn't know the ambassador at that time, but I knew most of the others. I was accepted pretty much. Some of them were with their family. Very friendly. They invited me to social affairs and I spent a lot of time with guys like Bob Miller, for example, who was a political counselor, and Mel Manfull, who was the DCM. He made us feel very welcome. Bob Miller is still my friend. This is 30+ years later. We're good friends. We never worked together in any other way. Other friends included Freeman Matthews, Jr.; Mel Levine. Folks who took the two Foreign Service officers who were with AID at that time very much in as family members. Their houses were open to us in the evenings. There were also good friends we'd known before, from learning Vietnamese or from, basic training, like Tony Lake and Bill Marsh and their wives. I had my own flat, as I say, in Saigon, so whenever I felt like it, I'd drive up there or fly up there and spend a little weekend time socializing.

With AID, we had some marvelous get-togethers. The most exciting were large USOM parties given by Rufus Phillips for all his people, Vietnamese and American, some of the finest parties I can remember anywhere. One event, a business affair, was a catastrophe. That's when the head of AID, a nice but not very successful gentleman called Charlie Mann, decided to gather together all 1,400 American AID employees in Vietnam. I still marvel at the figure of 1,400. He invited all 1,400 of us to Saigon for a meeting because he felt things weren't going right. He was right, of course. They weren't going right for reasons we found out much more about when the meeting started. There were so many of us that we had to rent a big movie theater downtown. I think it was the Rex Theater, one of the really big downtown movie theaters. Big. Most of the 1,400 people showed up for this meeting. Some of us had to fly in; some of us had to hitchhike in by Caribou airplane or something like that, or drive in. It was a real pain in the neck to get to a meeting like that. So, we got there and this man gets up with over 1,000 people staring at him silently. He says, "Before we begin the meeting, I want to ask who has been writing me those letters? Who? Who? Who has been writing me those nasty letters? Tell me! I want to know!" He says this as his opening remarks to 1,000 people in the room. You know what the answer was? From every part of the theater, the answer was "I did," "I did," "I did." Everybody yelled, "I wrote the letters." People had never heard of any letters. You know what happened to the meeting, Stu? The meeting ended! It was a total catastrophe. I've never seen anything like it. I am still awed when I think of it. It was also very funny.

AID was not a well-run organization at that time. Charlie Mann was not a strong leader. He was a very nice man. We had a guy called Jim Killen, who followed him, who was a very strong man but not a very nice man; he was a remarkably obnoxious guy. My own leaders after Rufus Phillips were several. The most gifted of the leaders who followed Rufe was a guy called Samuel Wilson, a very smart guy, a self-made man, Army lieutenant colonel from humble origins in Virginia, a gifted man. He had learned wonderful Russian in Army intelligence training, a

marvelous singer and guitar player, and took over this large operation as a lieutenant colonel in civilian garb, and ran it magnificently, and gave us terrific leadership and later on became head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, a three star general, and all sorts of things like that. Other people who at one time or other ran the Rural Affairs operation were Ogden Williams, Leonard Maynard, and Bert Fraleigh. I still count them as close friends and we correspond very erratically.

But AID was not a well-run organization at that time. It wasn't a very happy organization. The hard part of it -the Rural Affairs part where I worked -- was probably the highest morale. We were viewed by the rest of AID as a bunch of pariahs.

Q: *Why?*

LEHOVICH: Because we were not specialists in hydrology or in medicine or in anything else. Because some of us were downright weird. All of us thought that we were going to go to the provinces and simply do whatever we wanted out there. A lot of us did. That's why inspectors would come out and not even see us and give us bad reports and bills for having repainted our cars. We would return the compliment by complaining about them without ever meeting them and saying, "Get these guys off our backs."

Q: *Why don't we go to the time when you came back. When did you come back to Saigon to be a provincial reporter with the US Embassy?*

LEHOVICH: That would have been in '65 and '66. I left AID in the early summer of 1965, went on leave, and returned soon thereafter for a year at the American Embassy.

Q: *Who was the ambassador then?*

LEHOVICH: The ambassador was Henry Cabot Lodge. I got to know him surprisingly well and there was a reason for it. Cabot Lodge was a very self-confident, quite lazy, selfish, bright, and rather cruel man. He liked young people because he trusted us (No reason not to), and because we liked him, because we laughed at his jokes like hell because he was very funny, and because we appealed to him. If you were 25 years old, your chances of getting along extraordinarily well with Cabot Lodge were very high. If you were 40 years old, your chances of getting along with Cabot Lodge bordered on zero.

Q: *You were courtiers as opposed to being a challenger.*

LEHOVICH: We were not even courtiers. We were just a great audience and to him we were kids. He loved us! We liked him and we were spontaneous. The other ones, who were older, were scared to death of Cabot Lodge and he was very mean with some of them. He was really mean. I mean, very, very, very nasty to some of these folks. I'm not talking about Phil Habib. Phil Habib was in a class by himself because his irreverence and exuberance were so enormous that they filled any room that he walked into. He was a total democrat. It didn't matter whether you were ancient or a kid. Phil liked or disliked people about equally.

Once in a while Lodge did a wonderful thing. Whenever there was a coup, and after a while, there were quite a few, and Lodge was in town, he would make a great show of taking the day off and going and sitting in a bathing suit at the Cercle Sportif the whole day reading newspapers and novels. Whenever anybody asked him what was going on, he'd say, "Oh, nothing much. As far as I'm concerned, everything is fine." His entire modus operandi was to project total nonchalance in these situations and to do it in an outrageous way. It worked perfectly well to the limited audience that really cared about it, but the limited audience included the press and the American military, plus a fair sampling of the Saigon elite.

By then, the embassy was dominated on the one hand by Cabot Lodge, who told us that our job was nation building, wonderful words. And it was dominated by Phil Habib on the other hand.

Q: From your observation, how did those two get along?

LEHOVICH: Spectacularly well.

Q: That's odd, isn't it?

LEHOVICH: No, they trusted each other. Neither feared the other. Cabot Lodge couldn't stand it when people were afraid of him. It was a very cruel thing because it's a no win situation. Supposing you are afraid of the guy? I was in a situation where I am aware of how Cabot Lodge treated one of the three most senior civilian Americans in his mission. He called him in and he said, "I don't like you, George (We'll call this man George.). Do you know why I don't like you?" George said, "No, why?" "I don't like you, George, because you're afraid of me, aren't you, George?" Poor old George was really left without a lot of options at that point and Cabot Lodge told George he was going to get him out of the country, but was going to fix him up with a very good onward assignment, and he did. Poor old George had to leave because Cabot Lodge didn't like George because George was afraid of Cabot Lodge. There was never a problem like that with a guy like Phil Habib.

Q: Let's talk about your view of the situation from the '65 to '66 period. Whither Vietnam when you came in there? I mean, you brought a lot of baggage with you obviously.

LEHOVICH: My job was as a provincial reporter in the embassy's Provincial Reporting Unit. There is no doubt that it the most exciting and most fun of any place in that Embassy. I went around to a lot of provinces and basically tried to see people that other people weren't seeing - monks or priests or labor leaders or doctors. I saw very few officials. I was bored by them and other Americans were seeing them. Also, a lot of businessmen, a lot of businesswomen. Interestingly enough, women run the show when it comes to business.

Q: Oh, absolutely.

LEHOVICH: The best businesses I knew were run by women and it was wonderful to deal with them. You'd sit down, get a cup of coffee, and get straight talk for an hour or two.

Q: All you have to do is go out to the places around here in Arlington and women still run the

businesses.

LEHOVICH: I was very impressed. It was very exciting the first time.

I simply have to say, Stu, it was a very exciting atmosphere. You've got to remember, this is a remarkably beautiful country. It has very nice people who are gifted, who have a good deal of charm, and who very often don't work that hard, so that you don't feel that you have to sit around looking busy all the time. They don't look busy all the time. It's not a very nervous country. A very charming country with shockingly beautiful landscapes and seascapes and rice paddies and mountains and everything else. They have some of the greatest food in the world. They have beautiful women and they have nice men. It is hard not to be absolutely caught up by a place like that. A few of us who stayed there for more than a year or two had gotten caught up in it. All the good reporters, correspondents, were caught up in it, too. A very, very exciting place.

I had an uneasy feeling from the first time I started making trips around the country as a provincial reporter. I had a very uneasy feeling that the American military presence was going to be extremely disruptive socially, destabilizing, unpopular, and in a sense, self-defeating. Self-defeating because I was caught up in the notion that insurgencies had a strong element of popular support or popular hostility to them. I think that can be exaggerated, but some of that is still there.

I was very uneasy about the American military presence. It got bigger and bigger. In a few cases that I was connected with as an observer or somebody who went there and discovered something, that I was closely involved in, it was doing things that were absolutely untenable. Burning rice fields, for example. In a few cases, destroying some villages. Mainly, it was totally dominating what objectively was the anti-communist effort there. It became completely an American effort. I think when we made that thing completely an American effort, we not only pushed it to achieve more measurable successes; we also probably gave the communists a little bit more popularity later on than they would have had.

The communists were not very popular people. A lot of people said they were nationalists, not communists; or bandits, not communists; but they were. The leadership was, the structure was. I think we gave them a kind of lasting legitimacy that they still have. They still call Saigon Ho Chi Minh City. They wouldn't have if there hadn't been a big American buildup.

That was my concern. I viewed this whole saga of growing requests for troops, which I was very well aware of -We were pretty well informed in the American embassy of the big picture at that time -I and others viewed with utter frustration the notion that we were going to go to 200,000; 250,000; 300,000 forces. It became ridiculous.

Q: In your provincial reporting, did you have a particular area to report on?

LEHOVICH: I did the coast, the central highlands, and I could also drift in and out of other places. I was welcome to. That was the scene of some of the big buildups. It was a disturbing buildup.

Q: As a provincial reporter, what would you do and what would you bring back?

LEHOVICH: We were a fairly self-starting group of people, luckily. We weren't given a lot of guidance. We weren't given an awful lot of SOPs on what to do or where to do it or how to do it. We were encouraged to be out of town, to be full of good information and insights when we came back. We did, I thought, some very good reporting sometimes. I did some very good reporting from some of the coastal provinces, on what the actual political climate was. The two political groups that were doing politics there were lawyers and doctors.

The further you got out of the capital, the more it was lawyers and doctors who were doing it. It was also priests and Buddhist monks. It was lawyers, doctors, priests, monks, and a few others. At that time, there was a national assembly that was being started. There was a constituent assembly. There were deputies who would show up in Saigon who had been elected. We knew these guys. There were local provincial councils that were elected. We were watching, in a sense, democracy beginning.

I remember watching democracy begin in one place where I witnessed the local village chief asking the number two man in the province confidentially, and in a genuinely frank and friendly way, who on earth they were supposed to elect in these elections. When the answer was given to him that they should elect the best person, the right person (This wasn't being done for my benefit. I'm convinced it wasn't.), that answer made no sense at all. So, in a sense, some democracy we watched made sense and some democracy we watched made no sense whatsoever and was very rote stuff. But that was one of the things we were doing.

The other thing is, we were generally getting an impression of how the war was going, the counterinsurgency campaign. Pretty soon after I started with that program, we were urged not to be roving inspectors general. In a few cases, we created simply too much trouble. I was involved once in a huge clash between some of the senior U.S. military and the American embassy over something that I came back and said was going on there. They said, "That's just not true." I said, "Of course it's true." Anyhow, that type of thing. We were after a while encouraged not to be, as Phil Habib put it, "Don't be inspectors general" because it was making his situation untenable. So, it was sometimes a bit ambiguous what we were doing out there, but we were the people who were probably the best informed on what was going on in those provinces.

Q: Before we leave it, could you tell me a bit about what was the clash that you precipitated?

LEHOVICH: I precipitated a clash about the burning of a rice crop by an American unit. I was very upset by it. I was disturbed because I thought it was one hell of a way to work and I thought it was inevitably leading to the wrong legacy in that place. I came back and made a case about it in writing and soon learned through some very angry calls to me and some very angry calls to the American embassy from the US military that what I described had never happened. I had to repeat that it had. I was told then that it never happened. Some weeks later, back in the same area of Vietnam, I took time to go to the unhappy major with whom I had discussed this thing in great detail when I was out in the area where it happened and apologize to him because I had put him in an absolutely awful situation. The poor guy. "Of course it happened," in disgusting, great detail. I had to apologize to him for having made his life miserable. That wasn't our job, in a

sense.

May I just add a very interesting story? It wasn't the job of the American press to be inspectors general either, by the interesting rules that had evolved. Let me give you a really grizzly story. Horst Faas was a great war photographer. I don't know if you remember Horst Faas, but he was the finest of the photographers that were there. He was running around chasing everything that was worth photographing. In one case, he was up in the coast in one of the coastal provinces. He witnessed an American unit playing soccer with the cut off head of somebody who had been decapitated, who was a Viet Cong. Worse than that, the company was commanded by General (Inaudible)'s son, Captain (Inaudible). Horst Faas had some of the same rules that I was playing with. He was not an inspector general. He had another job to do, which was to photograph the war. He did photograph this. He went back and gave the photographs to U. Alexis Johnson, who was deputy ambassador and who, at that particular moment, was the acting ambassador, was the ambassador. He came in and he said, "Here are some photographs. Either you stop this and guarantee that you'll stop it or the photographs will get published." He got authoritative guarantees that this type of thing would be stopped, authoritative enough for him to accept them, and he gave the photographs and the negatives away. It's an interesting story. The point there is that he had another job to do in a sense, and I had another job to do in a similar sense. So, when we found things that were truly disturbing, we did things about it. But our job was not to go around and –

Q: When I was there in '69 to '70, I think, by that time the first string of the press had left and what you had (At least my impression and I have to say, it was only an impression. I didn't deal for the most part with them.) was that you had very hungry young amateur reporters who were out really to prove how awful the United States was and to win a Pulitzer Prize, I think by exposing. I think, by that time, that was the atmosphere. I may be wrong.

LEHOVICH: No, I think you're absolutely right. There was always some of that. Sometimes it was a very positive thing. But there is a situation we all come across. If you're the White House press corps traditionally, your job is not to sit around exposing things at the White House that will cut off your access to the White House a week later. At least, that's the way it used to be played.

There were also some correspondents who began as colonial war correspondents and who still are in doing the same thing 1997. For example, Peter Arnett and Jonathan Randal, two guys I knew at the time. I was quite fond of both of them. They were delightful people. They're still doing the same thing. Where they get the energy to be war correspondents for 35 years I don't understand. I don't have that kind of energy. They love it.

Q: How did you feel your reports were received at the embassy by Phil Habib, Alexis Johnson, and the ambassador - yours and the others, but yours particularly?

LEHOVICH: Very carefully read, appreciated. They liked it. Frankly, we worked on making very punchy and readable things. These were not boring reports. It's some of the best writing I've ever done and I think my colleagues would have agreed at that time. I wish I could get the things right now, declassify them, and own them. Some are lost in the massive files of mankind.

Q: This was the time when President Johnson, who really was not somebody who was enthusiastic about this thing, viewed it as screwing up the nation's business. Yet he was caught in this thing and much of it was from the reports that were coming to him, how they were translated, and all that. Did you have any feel that there was a two tier system or two channels?

LEHOVICH: I don't know. I know that, for example, some of the stuff I wrote (I was told it) had been read carefully by MacNamara and carefully by Walt Rostow, who at that time was at the White House. I'm not surprised. These were very good reports that a lot of us were writing. So, what does it do? It doesn't make a big difference. The thing with Johnson, Lyndon Johnson is typical of people who listen on two levels. One, they listen to the bad news and they say, "God dammit, I didn't tell you to be depressed. Go out there and finish the god dammed job." On the other hand, they're listening and they're saying, "It's getting worse and worse all the time. How am I going to get out of there?" He kept this up until the very end. Whether MacNamara really believed in the summer and autumn of 1963 that the thing was finished forever, I'll never know. If he did, he had knowledge of the future that no mortal is supposed to have. That's my view.

Q: We're talking about his memoirs, which for many don't ring very true. They seem sort of self-serving, mea culpa-ish, way after the fact.

LEHOVICH: They're mea culpa-ish and, in some cases, completely in the wrong time frame. Mid 1963, why be mea culpa about it? What had happened then that was so awful, and was going to end so awfully, that he already knew that things were terrible? Maybe he knew; the rest of us didn't at that time. I certainly didn't. I am very skeptical and think he is working out guilt feelings at the expense of historical accuracy.

Q: What about the CIA when you were there? What was your impression of the CIA staff operations and all that you saw?

LEHOVICH: They were on two levels, Stu. The career people, they were the so-called "case officers." That's what they were called in the trade. They were extraordinarily good. I think they were comparable to the crop of Foreign Service officers we'd been sending over there, who were very good.

The other side of CIA personnel, however, was that they in a hurry recruited a bunch of people who were real oafs. I remember a bunch of these guys. I remember, I didn't like the way they walked or talked or spat or burped or drank or screwed around or broke crockery or woke the neighbors at night. They were a bunch of dodos who needed adult supervision. These were quickly recruited people for some of the programs that the CIA was doing, guys they picked up off some project somewhere and recruited indiscriminately. I didn't like these guys at all. I didn't think they were doing a good job.

But the professional clandestine services career people in the CIA were awfully good. I didn't always agree with them and I didn't like it when they pretended that they were doing my job for my organization, but they did it rather well. When I was in the provinces, they had a lot of Rolexes and Polaroids to give out. If they did their job intelligently, the Rolexes and the

Polaroids helped.

Q: *Watches and cameras.*

LEHOVICH: Watches and cameras, that's right. But they weren't Timexes and Kodaks. We're talking about good stuff.

Q: *Top of the line.*

LEHOVICH: Good stuff. They worked well. I think some of the programs they were working with after a while were high risk programs, some of the real physically eliminate the terrorists kind of thing.

Q: *The Phoenix Program.*

LEHOVICH: That type of thing. This is a high risk program. As I know from later on, I have to admit, afterwards, I spent years and years being a serious scholar of counterinsurgency after that whole business. I've written on it; I've thought about it. That kind of stuff happens after a while in an awful lot of these wars. It's very high risk stuff. Sometimes it works.

Q: *When you say "high risk," what do you mean?*

LEHOVICH: First of all, you're dealing with people's lives, which should not be done lightly. Secondly, you're going to make some mistakes. Third, you may make your enemies create more hostility and do yourself more harm than intended. In one case, which was in the minds of the smart Americans at that time, it had worked surprisingly well. That was with the British in Malaya. For the serious planners in America in the Vietnam War, that and the Philippines were the two exciting examples.

Q: *We were bringing in British, Australian advisors.*

LEHOVICH: We were indeed. We were bringing in Australians; we were bringing in some of the very bright folks from the Philippines. One was Colonel Napoleon Veleriano, who ran a contract team of Filipinos, with some of whom I worked pretty closely. We had some of the very bright British from Malaya. I recall Sir Robert Thompson as one of them.

Q: *I remember Colonel Sarong.*

LEHOVICH: Colonel Ted Sarong, yes. I remember these folks, too. A couple of them I met. One of them came down and spent a day with me in Vinh Long province. I thought that he was going to learn from me, but within five minutes, I was learning from him. I learned from him for an entire day. A very gifted man, very experienced. Some of the CIA folks involved in these campaigns were, as I say, doing high risk stuff, but stuff that unfortunately is built in to almost any one of these serious counterinsurgency campaigns. Which is why the serious counterinsurgency campaigns ought to be approached with fear and trembling. Very serious stuff.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover, do you think?

LEHOVICH: In the Vietnam business - Let me just see if there is anything else. I want to cover one other thing because it's anecdotal and it's huge fun. We had a non-stop stream of important visitors out there. When I was at the American embassy for that one year, I was given some of the harder tasks of shepherding these people around, hosting them, being their control officer. The first one was Teddy Kennedy, who came with John Tunney, Congressman Tunney from California. The second one was George Romney. These were absolutely wonderful episodes.

The Kennedy visit happened when I hadn't been there for terribly long in my embassy incarnation. Suddenly, everybody began to move away from me a little bit, saying, "You really got the dirty job, didn't you" meaning I was Teddy Kennedy's control officer. I didn't understand why. First, the Mission Coordinator, a very senior officer and a very nice man called Phil Chadbourne, came up to me. He told me that "Kennedy wants one thing, he wants one thing only. He wants it every night," and my job was to see that he got it. It was so important, I was told by the mission coordinator, Mr. Chadbourne, that I would be expected to dip into my "private stock." I didn't know what he meant by my private stock, but he kept saying, "My boy, dip into your private stock. It's that important. Use your private stock." I didn't have sherry or whiskey or anything like that. I didn't know what the guy meant. I later learned. So, that's the advice about the private stock. This was the day that Kennedy was arriving.

As his arrival time grew closer, I met Cabot Lodge in the corridor, who burst out laughing. He said, "You really got stuck with the dirty job, didn't you, boy?" I laughed, too. I'm a nice guy. He said, "I'm leaving for Thailand so I don't have to meet the guy. I hope you'll survive. Let me tell you something about those Kennedy boys. Those brothers are all the same. They want one thing. They want one thing only. They want it every night. Your job? Make him crawl for it."

Q: We're talking about two people from Massachusetts who hated each other.

LEHOVICH: Absolutely. We're talking about Henry Cabot Lodge, who had been beaten out by Jack Kennedy. That evening, I went to the airport to meet Ted Kennedy. I was immediately mobbed by many senior Americans who got between me and him and covered him with attention. That evening, I went to the hotel to work out his program with him. I came to him and he opened the door. He was on crutches because he had a broken back. He had been in an airplane crash. Of course, all the people who had been telling me "He wants one thing and one thing only" didn't realize that we were talking about a man in intense pain. He opened the door. I introduced myself to him again and he said, "Can you do me a favor? I need something and I need it real bad." I was dreading this question. I knew what was going to happen. I said, "Senator, what do you mean?" He said, "I need some aspirin and some soda water from the downstairs lobby." That's what the senator needed. Very nice man, very nice man.

Q: For the record, particularly Senator Teddy Kennedy and his brother, the President at one point, Jack Kennedy, were known as swordsmen, so usually young ladies were requisite. That's what they were talking about.

LEHOVICH: Yes, and the "private stock" was a rather flattering presumption that I had a stable

of my own lovelies who would come whenever I told them.

Q: You were saying after the Kennedy episode, you had another.

LEHOVICH: After the Kennedy episode, I had another professional challenge which was clearly thrust on me because somebody there didn't like me. I say that jokingly. That was Governor Romney.

Q: He was Governor of Michigan.

LEHOVICH: He was Governor of Michigan and he wanted to be President. That meant that a lot of people thought he was a good guy and a lot of other people thought he was a very bad guy simply because he was after someone's job.

Q: He was a Republican.

LEHOVICH: He was a Republican. Governor Romney came out there. I spent a couple of days with Governor Romney going all over the place, in town, by airplane, to villages, to other places, provinces, and everywhere this guy would gather up as many people as he could and then give a signal to the T.V. crews that had followed us. There were two planes. There was the plane the governor was in with a few other people, including me. There was the second airplane with all these news people. He only wanted the ones who had cameras. He would start his stuff. He would make the little boys squat down and do football locomotive cheers. The football locomotive cheers were when he would yell "Let's hear it for Saigon!" They'd yell. He'd say, "Now yell 'Down with the Communists!'" They'd yell that in whatever Vietnamese words they would have been asked to yell by the interpreter or local official. Then he'd ask them to yell these anti-communist slogans loud enough to hear in Hanoi and they'd yell that stuff so loud, certainly loud enough for the T.V. crew to hear. This was all being filmed and shown in America. It was okay the first time, but this happened two or three times the same day. It became rather weary. Anyhow, Romney was milking this thing for all he could so that he could come back with the strong aura of the anti-communist man, the tough man, the man who could deal with a problem like Vietnam.

Then a year later or whenever else it was, two years later, the guy says he was brainwashed. I was absolutely overwhelmed because I had spent a large amount of time with him. This guy said he was brainwashed. Then suddenly came one of the nastiest phone calls I ever got in the State Department. It was an official call from a guy that I knew reasonably well who at that time was running the whole Vietnam operation in the State Department. He calls up and asks me to write down everything I knew about Mr. Romney's visit for the record. I said, "I'll call you right back," which I didn't do. I called back a few hours later and said, "I'm not going to write down everything I know about Governor Romney's visit for the record. I'll be happy to discuss it with you if you like. But I'm not in the business of writing memoirs about American politicians." So, I didn't write down everything I knew about Governor Romney. I told him all about it. The reason, of course, I was being asked to do all of this was to prove that Governor Romney hadn't been brainwashed. I was perfectly happy to recount in detail how he gave locomotive cheers, but I frankly didn't feel for one minute that I wanted to start writing the Vlad Lehovich memoirs about

Governor-Trying-to-Be-President Romney.

Q: *As a matter of fact, today, if you ask anybody of our generation about Romney- Hadn't he been president of a motor company, too?*

LEHOVICH: He had been president of American Motors.

Q: *American Motors. All that anybody remembers is that brainwash thing, which actually blew him out of the-*

LEHOVICH: Blew him out of the water. Made him look like a complete idiot.

Q: *Yes. Now we can discuss this without having to write the memoir.*

LEHOVICH: Of course. The reason I didn't like writing the memoirs, I knew it that day, it was unmistakable, I was going to be used on that one.

Q: *Yes.*

LEHOVICH: I was going to be put out in the wind on that one.

Q: *Romney out there, was he asking questions?*

LEHOVICH: Oh, yes, he was having a good, highly motivated, very high spirited, fact finding trip, which he was also using with almost no limits, using it to publicize himself. But he was having a very fine, extroverted time fact finding, asking. I don't think he was listening too carefully. I think he was much more interested in photo opportunities, but he was spending several hours a day talking to people who knew a lot, asking them things. But he was running the show. He had some people out there - not advance people, but he had people with him who were working on planning this trip, his people. The brainwashing thing was an afterthought. As you say, Stu, it backfired. It made the guy look like an idiot. But it didn't make him look like an idiot because people thought he hadn't been brainwashed but said he had been. People actually thought he had been brainwashed. That made him look even stupider.

Q: *Of course it did.*

LEHOVICH: How could you believe me when I said I loved you when you know I've been a liar all my life? Who wants a guy like that for President?

Q: *How about with Ted Kennedy? Sort of his back trouble... Did he have an agenda when he came there?*

LEHOVICH: My sense of his agenda and of the whole man was very decent. The agenda was to find out and to learn as much as possible and to see things. I was amazed in retrospect. You had a guy like Kennedy. His brother had been President. He had a much higher sense than some petty sense of a situation like this. I saw nothing petty in the way he behaved in his two or three days

of fact finding in Vietnam. He was with his friend, Congressman Tunney, who was not in the limelight - in fact, he was almost invisible. But those two fellows had a very sensible trip by any standards of political junketing.

Q: What about some of the other junketeers? If we have such a commitment to an area, it's a damn good thing to have people come out from all elements of American society to take a look and see what we're doing. What was your impression of others?

LEHOVICH: I was briefly involved with Henry Kissinger during his trip in the mid-sixties, while he was still on the Harvard faculty and following which he reported to both Rockefeller and Nixon. It is a brief recollection but a useful anecdote because later Kissinger had the reputation of a "swinger" and a social lion. He certainly was not that in the mid sixties. On Kissinger's last night of a rather long visit -two or three weeks -Dick Smyser, a political section colleague who had spent much time with Kissinger, decided it was time for him to have a real night on the town. He asked me, as well as David Engle, to join and enrich the evening with our knowledge of Saigon and of Vietnamese. (David's Vietnamese was superb). We went to a fine dinner in Cho Lon and Henry was silent and introverted. We went somewhere for dessert and he was shy and awkward. Finally, we went to the Arc-en-Ciel, one of the truly fine night clubs in Saigon with elegant setting, excellent music and first-rate food, and magnificent girls. We wanted him to see an expensive and first-rate night club, even though it was one we did not frequent. The girls at the Arc-en-Ciel were not mere bar girls, as elsewhere in town. They were courtesans, very good looking, well educated, poised, sophisticated, and trilingual. Henry was still terribly reserved. We had some drinks and were about to leave. Finally, a girl came up to him. She was perhaps the only one in the place who wasn't a beauty, but rather a rather mangy wreck with lots of makeup and a fiery red dress. She may have been an interloper who came in from the streets. She came up to him and he stood up. She lunged against him in an embrace, flinging one arm around his shoulder and with the other giving him a surprisingly conspicuous and, it seemed, a very probing thrust into his private regions. Henry was reserved no more. He stood back, looked intently at the girl, and said, "Oh, my God, I've been discovered." For a while there was some indecision about whether to continue to leave, or to stay and savor the fruits of having been discovered. Our guest had changed from a retiring violet to an aggressive social animal. We invoked the late hour and the risk of disease to make the case for leaving, and the evening ended safely soon thereafter.

Back to the general subject of visitors. Vietnam was an intensely visited place. The other folks that I came across who were visiting were, first of all, just a lot of friends or family of people out there who would come out for fun. It was a very social thing to do at that time. We also had all sorts of gurus and pundits who used to come out there. I met a whole bunch of folks from the RAND Corporation who became lasting friends. I met the Alsop brothers that way and got to know Joseph Alsop fairly well through that beginning. Various other people would come out who were opinion-making people. What was fascinating was that until the late '60s and even beyond, opinion leaders in America as often as not thought it was a great thing. Some of them, in a very intense way. I mean, the Joseph Alsop treatment or the Roland Evans treatment of Vietnam was very orthodox: wonderful campaign, very difficult, very important, very high stakes, and so on. In a sense, it was very high stakes. I think you're right, Stu. I think people have to go out. People should visit these places. Political junkets can be excessive and ludicrous, but

an awful lot of them are a very good idea and are necessary.

Another note, an uncharitable one, perhaps, but necessary for posterity. It has to do with Daniel Ellsberg, who was with the Lansdale group in Vietnam in the mid sixties, and who later, as a radically anti-Vietnam war activist, leaked the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times. I saw Dan a number of times in Saigon and at least once in the provinces, when I hitched a car ride with John Paul Vann and Ellsberg in the coastal provinces from one province to another. The interesting thing, and the one I want to stress, is how gung-ho Dan was about the war effort, and how hawkish he was. Dan liked to show photos to his friends. Sometimes these photos were of trips, or people, or himself. Dan was an exhibitionist and he occasionally had photos of girls he was seeing or dating and which were indiscreet photos and which his friends did not enjoy seeing because they were embarrassing and Dan was immature. He also had a lot of photos of himself and these, too, were sometimes exhibitionistic. Dan went through a phase in which he liked to wear and pose in marine fatigues while he traveled around the countryside. One photo, which was a shocker to his friends, had Dan in marine fatigues, with rifle in hand, posing with his foot on the chest of a dead Viet Cong. It was like a safari picture of the successful hunter and the game he had bagged. Dan was not involved in military action and had not shot the man, but he posed for such a picture. I saw it, as did a number of others, and it was unpleasant and was part of a pattern of behavior that led Dan's friends to distance themselves from him. I heard that the U.S. military who had been there when Dan posed found the action wrong and distasteful. In any case, Dan was every bit as extreme when he was a booster of the war effort as when he became its enemy. I have no doubt that something within him required these kinds of extreme, exhibitionistic attitudes and that his militancy and pacifism were ways to act out the same needs. I have respected some harsh critics of the Vietnam war, but I don't consider Dan to be a considered or plausible war critic and I do not respect him.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? You left Vietnam when in 1966?

LEHOVICH: Summer of '66.

ERLAND HEGINBOTHAM
Economic Policy Officer, USAID
Saigon (1963-1965)

Vietnam Desk, USAID
Washington, DC (1965-1967)

Erland Heginbotham was born in Salt Lake City in 1931 and educated at Stanford. He entered the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included posts in Seoul, Lagos, Saigon, and Jakarta. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

Q: You left MIT in 1963? What came next?

HEGINBOTHAM: Right. At that point I realized the benevolence of the State Department personnel system because despite that I was still a very junior officer, I was offered a choice of three assignments. But, of course it was possible to be a little bit cynical about those, because the choices were Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos.

Q: You had asked for Asia!

HEGINBOTHAM: I asked for Asia. I guess we took a day or two to think about it, but it wasn't really too hard. I opted for Vietnam, which was a wise choice, because if we had chosen to go to Cambodia, our household effects would have been on their way to Nam Pen and we would have been evacuated the day we arrived.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when?

HEGINBOTHAM: I was there in differing ways from 1963 to 1967.

Q: 1963 was a rather crucial year.

HEGINBOTHAM: We got to San Francisco and discovered that Pan Am had not made the hotel reservations that we thought they would, so we wound up sleeping on benches at the airport that night because there was nothing available within 50 miles of the airport. An over-zealous guard kept coming around and waking us up and waking the baby up, so we would move and then try and find some place where he couldn't find us. We were in miserable shape when we got on board of our plane. When we picked up the newspaper, the headline was that martial law had been declared and that the Saigon airport was closed. We were alerted two and a half hours before we got to Tokyo that the hydraulic system was out and that the crew would have to use a manual breaking process; they gave us lurid description how we should protect ourselves on landing, in view of the likelihood of fire and all those good things. So, when we got to Tokyo we were not in excessively great humor and we had to cool our heels for three days.

Q: This was when?

HEGINBOTHAM: I guess it was June of 1963. I was in Saigon from 1963 to November 1965. In any event, we spent three days cooling our heels in Tokyo that were un-programmed. We finally left on either the same flight or the flight immediately after the ambassador's. It was Cabot Lodge who had just been appointed ambassador. I guess we were on the plane immediately after the one that brought Lodge. Things were not too cozy in Saigon at that time. American personnel was under such suspicion by the Vietnamese that they had been ordered not to associate or have any contacts with their American counterparts.

Q: Why was that?

HEGINBOTHAM: Because of suspicion.

Q: What kind of suspicion?

HEGINBOTHAM: The regime suspected that Americans were up to no good and were plotting against President Nguyen Van Thieu and his wife, Madam Thieu. They were trying to prevent contacts and made whatever contacts existed more visible. So, having arrived in June, we had a couple of months where we had literally no contact with any Vietnamese officials.

Q: What was your job at the Embassy?

HEGINBOTHAM: I was in the AID mission in the program division. I was in the office of economic policy which was responsible for assessing the needs of the Vietnamese economy for supporting assistance - basically military support assistance - which was designed to absorb the spending power - that was generated by the Vietnamese printing presses - with commodities that Vietnam needed to keep its economy going and to support AID projects, much like what I did in Korea.

Q: What were you getting from the people you were working with in AID and elsewhere within the American mission about Vietnam and the Van Thieu regime and his family?

HEGINBOTHAM: Actually it was very much like picking up where I had left off in Korea. As I said, we had virtually no contact with any Vietnamese with the exception of a few locals who worked for AID. So, it was very difficult to find out what the Vietnamese were thinking. But it was quite clear from contacts with a lot of our American colleagues what was going on, because, of course, they had their feelers out in all parts of the country. There was a provincial representatives system at that time which required Americans to be in all of the provinces of Vietnam, so it was relatively easy to get a feel pretty good feel of what was going on in the country. It was a very depressing situation. We arrived shortly after the first monk had emulated himself about a block and a half down the street from where we lived.

Q: We are talking about Buddhist monks?

HEGINBOTHAM: Right. There were a lot of demonstrations and there had been a lot of emulations. A new wave had begun and it wasn't long after we had arrived that President Diem was, in fact, overthrown and killed.

Q: Were you getting a feel about Ambassador Lodge's attitude toward the government?

HEGINBOTHAM: I think the impression was that he had come to talk tough to the Vietnamese in an effort to get them to put their house in order. But I was pretty cut off from the embassy and really didn't get a lot of inside scoop about what was going on. I guess what disturbed me was the sense that the autocratic management of the government seemed to be disappointing a lot of people who normally would supported the government if they had been given a chance to do so. I can't now recall what was wishful thinking and what was suspected with regard to Lodge's job there.

Q: You were part of the program to try and absorb the surplus currency. I came there in 1969 and we were cursing that Vietnam was awash with consumer goods mainly Japanese, like little Honda motor bikes and other thing; it seemed to be a hell of a way to running a war with all

these consumer goods flooding the country. What was the feeling at the time you were there on what was being done; how was it being done; and what was your impression of that?

HEGINBOTHAM: At the time I arrived and for about six months at least, very little was being done; things were chaotic situation. I was trying to learn the whole of the macro- economics of the country and so, I wasn't so involved with the non-project assistance program and what was going on mechanically. Basically we were just trying to do the best we could with the ministry of finance to figure out what was happening in terms of inflationary pressures and what was going to be needed in the countryside to meet the essential needs. We were trying to keep the production processes running as best as could be to avoid having to import still more than we already were. Obviously, in incredibly rich agricultural areas, there was a lot done to focus on the agriculture, but efforts were also being made to try and build up the Vietnamese capacity to produce expendables for the military. So, our focus was really not at all on the consumer economy; it was on the productive element of the economy. The visible consumerism that existed was much more associated in my mind with the PXs and the GIs who started pouring into Saigon after Kennedy's assassination. That was really quite visible.

Q: Where were you and what were you doing when November 1963 when Diem was overthrown and he and his brother killed.

HEGINBOTHAM: I was living not very far from the U.S. AID building and therefore my life consisted basically of going back and forth from home to the office with a lot of alerts in terms of disturbances and things of that sort. We practically backed on one of the Buddhist temples that was the scene of a lot of the politics; there was a great deal of disruption of life. I learned to ride a motorcycle because I figured that was the safest, quickest and best way to commute. Our lives were very unsettled and there were a lot of worries. My wife was teaching out near the airport and there were a lot of concerns about family security. In fact, we had three very close calls with the family in relatively a short period of time. Even once things begin to ease up, unless you had very good reason, I didn't travel outside of Saigon very much. There was no way for me to do what I had done in Korea, which was really to get out and get to know the countryside. It was very clustered, sort of catastrophic existence. When we did venture out, we encountered three rather close calls.

Q: What sort of? How?

HEGINBOTHAM: The first one involved one of the first incidence of a VC kidnapping of an American, a guy who I had come to know, Guy Serts. We had gone out to the edge of Saigon for the idle task of picking up some of the sculptured plants that the Vietnamese were adept at creating .We had gone to a particular block on the edge of town and bought a couple of plants for the stoop and came back; we were enjoying them until we picked up the paper the next day and discovered that Guy Serts had been kidnaped from the very block that we had been shopping in. The exact same location.

Then although we weren't directly involved in the theater, there was a grenade thrown into the theater and a soldier threw himself on the grenade which protected everyone else but killed himself.

A third incidence was when we took some Vietnamese friends - a family with whom I had become close to in my official work - for a Sunday lunch including a ride on the river on an embassy lunch Clueneetee where the French used to water ski. When we got back someone asked if we had been shot at. We said, no. They said, "Well, they were just shooting there." Apparently, the VC were on the far bank and were shooting at the water skiers and the motor boats a little while earlier. So, that seemed to be a dubious past time, too.

Then, I guess it was after the family left, I was literally within three blocks of the embassy when it was blown up. We began to take these things a little bit personally after awhile.

Q: After the assassination of Diem, there began a revolving door in the government. What were you doing? Did things open up more; there wasn't much to see?

HEGINBOTHAM: That is an interesting story, because we used to invite some of the provincial representatives in to our house when they would come into Saigon for weekends. We were sort of a local watering hole for people who came back from the provinces. I very quickly became disenchanted with what I was doing in the office and started talking to my colleagues and we decided that we would undertake a little project assessing how economic development might be conducted under conditions of warfare on military action. We set up a little cross disciplinary group with somebody from the military, and somebody from AID, and somebody from the embassy, a couple of different agencies and we started meeting. My boss didn't like this. He told me that I would have to do this on my own time; the project had nothing to do with what we were supposed to be doing in the office. So I did that. Eventually, I would spend weekends in a province that we selected where we could observe the situation to see what the conditions were and to try to see if we could figure out some answers. We picked Tangin Providence, because it was sort of a transitional province between the north and the south. We used to make frequent trips to look at the province program and work with the AID program to see what was being planned for the province. We very quickly begin to see that it was hard to divorce that from what was being done with the military management. We became quite disillusioned with the way the military operations were being run. So, we began to try to push some new policies even though we were all were junior officers in various agencies. We begin to develop some fairly elaborate plans for the province. The military was very fascinated by this and they invited us to make a presentation.

Q: American military?

HEGINBOTHAM: Yes. At this point my boss saw a way of burnishing his credentials a little bit by letting me spend some of my office time on this project. As I said, we became very frustrated with some of the military operations and started developing some proposals to change some of the way things were being done. We would meet and we would decide which agency was likely to be most receptive to a particular idea and then we would propose our idea to that agency. We would all be alert to position ourselves to respond. We would usually try to cast the proposals in such a way that we were sure it would end up on the action list. We begin to have some interesting success at trying to get some relatively minor things changed from the way things were being done. We became aware of the three wars that were being fought and developed a rather strong partiality to the things that were being done in fighting one of the wars over the way

things were done fighting in the other wars. We became more and more involved with critiquing the military activities in Vietnam and eventually I became totally disillusioned with what was being done with the military forces.

I guess General Harkins was there when I first arrived and he was quite notorious for cooking the numbers, no negative reports and so on. Among the things we became painfully aware of were just how completely misleading the reports that were coming from headquarters. When you got an honest report from a provincial military advisor, it wasn't getting through; that was very disillusioning.

Q: One person I interviewed was saying that he was there when Harkins left and Westmoreland took over. He said that Harkins had the staff draw up a list showing all the successes; when Westmoreland came, he had the staff draw up a list the failures in order to build a benchmark so he could later show how he had improved matters. All the same matters were on both lists, except in reverse. What was the problem, as you saw it as an economist looking at what the military was doing?

HEGINBOTHAM: What we saw happening was that there would be Viet Cong attacks on various hamlets or villages and the ARVIN (army of the Republic of Vietnam) forces would either not bother to show up or often they would be ambushed and severely beaten and retreat before they ever got there. The subsequent evidence and the scuttle-butts was that there were lots of spies inside the ARVIN and therefore the army was extremely vulnerable. Consequently, the result was that the villages, if anything, got a little mortar cover and that was about as much as they could hope for. The other activity that you had going on were the green berets.

Q: They were our special forces?

HEGINBOTHAM: They were special forces. They were working with in small units, independent of any regular forces, basically as guerilla force to counter the guerilla activities of the VC. We also had CIA assisted village and popular forces, provided support under AID auspices. To us, it made sense to support the village and popular forces and to expand the green beret activities so that they could get behind the enemy lines, where such existed. We could combat the enemy with these forces--probably even better than using regular Vietnamese and American ground troops--and at the same time, gather village and hamlet support. As the military assessed their program later they found out that of the officers who graduated from their training courses the top three officers almost invariably defected or disappeared. It was their military operating procedures which friends and foes alike knew. The ARVIN was just so badly infiltrated that it was just hopeless. So, we became increasingly supporters of the war that was being prosecuted by the CIA with the hamlet forces and green berets and wanted that effort enlarged. After Kennedy's death, the green berets lost their luster. They were very much mistrusted and detested by the regular military; so it didn't take long to undercut and undermine the green beret activity, which I thought was a great tragedy. Furthermore, the U.S. forces were coming in over-equipped for the job that they had to do, which meant that the VC were able to arm themselves with weaponry that was much more suited against U.S. forces than it was against them. They picked up 50 caliber machine guns and were able to start shooting down choppers and planes; it was just a nightmare. We quickly became convinced that much, if not most, of

what we were doing with the regular forces was simply building up support for VC by alienating the villagers where the ARVIN had ran over the roughshod thereby disillusioning the locals.

Q: Was it after we studied our troop build up that it was decided that the families had to leave?

HEGINBOTHAM: Yes. The Tonkin Gulf incident precipitated evacuations. That happened about a year and a half after we got there. It was about February 1965 as I recall.

Q: Where did your wife and child go?

HEGINBOTHAM: Since I was expecting to go to a completely location after Vietnam, we decided it made more sense to evacuate them back to the States.

Q: What was your impression of AID operations? Did they change while you were there?

HEGINBOTHAM: They evolved rather radically as the military build-up occurred. I am not quite clear when there was some restructuring of the provincial representatives function. At some point, they changed the whole structure and I don't really have the details of that at my grasp. But the AID process did not change a lot. We were still providing defense support funds and we were still trying to build up plants, more and more of which tended to get cloistered around Saigon as the military areas in the rest of Vietnam became more tenuous. Basically, I was so preoccupied with the general interaction of the military and the AID programs that that was what I focused on just exclusively. As I said, we started with our little group to do everything we could possibly do to promote the village and hamlet popular forces because that it seemed to be the only possible way to achieve our goals. At the village level you could expect that while there might be a some infiltration it was likely to be known. I guess what was most over-whelming was the preoccupation by Washington with statistics body count - the McNamara approach to winning the war with numbers which was just incredibly frustrating.

Q: Does that continue up through when you left in 1965?

HEGINBOTHAM: Yes. I went back to Washington then. I'll have to double check again, because my memory on the dates is a bit fuzzy. I was back in Washington in 1965, but basically I spent most of my time back in Vietnam. One of my principle tasks was recruiting people for the economic and program functions in Vietnam. In the Washington frenzy to win the war; the Johnson years were filled with just crazy proposals. We spent a lot of our time trying to argue against some of the more outlandish ones.

Q: Were these hair-brained ideas or too much or ones that just wouldn't work in that type of environment or what?

HEGINBOTHAM: The mentality that took over was that people in the field weren't using enough imagination. So Washington tried to throw resources at the problems. Washington was trying to come up with ideas - which people wouldn't consider or which wouldn't have been considered in Saigon and in Vietnam.

Q: Were we trying to pump up a horse that was dying? What was the feeling about it?

HEGINBOTHAM: You earlier referred to the revolving door. There was just a constant exchange of leaders and no real conviction that any of them had a strong grip. Big men seemed to be a very imposing type, but they certainly didn't change things just as little men didn't change things. Tal Key, the Air Force general, that didn't do any better, but was at least more colorful about it, but essentially we just seemed to be moving nowhere. The ARVIN were afflicted by their constant susceptibility to being out-flanked and ambushed with their weapons stolen. Basically, they were sort of a supply depot for the VC, it seemed. It was not an encouraging scene. It was just hard to see any way out. The irony of Vietnam was that there were so many people in Vietnam who were sincerely and deeply concerned about the outcome, that it was very hard not to feel terribly committed to try and do whatever one could do. It was like watching the dike gradually giving way and you knew that ultimately you couldn't do anything about it, but you wanted to save as much as you could while you were there. We had a million plus Catholic refugees who had come down from the North; there were whole sects that could and should have been fighting the VC, but who were sometimes fighting against the government forces. There was always that hope that somebody with some sense would come in and allow some local autonomy and regain some support from those sects which were in a powerful position in the areas they controlled. Eventually it became very apparent to me and to many others that the costs of what was being done in the United States - in both political and the economic - terms was just greatly outweighing any possible benefit from our failing efforts in Vietnam.

Q: You broke away from Vietnam in 1967?

HEGINBOTHAM: I was in the Vietnam Bureau in AID and as I say, my principle task was to recruit people to go to Vietnam to serve either as program economists or as program officers. The AID mission had quite a substantial need for program officers at that point, because we were doing so much to support. Incidentally, one of the things that I was doing was trying to see to it that funds got down to the villages, so that they could carry out projects that were of primary interest to them, rather than having all development being pushed from the center downward. We spent a lot of time trying to work with the ministry of finance and through the provincial governments to try to get money out of Saigon; that was very difficult and never very successful.

I felt great frustration doing the core activity to which I was assigned. It was an interesting experience trying to recruit people for Vietnam, because I was told that people were busy fighting a war, so they allowed me a lot of authority. I was told that I would have authority to assign people to Vietnam from anywhere in the AID and if they choose not to go, then they would be terminated - just as easy as that. I told my bosses that I wouldn't work on those terms, but if they would accept my terms, I will be happy to do it. My terms were to give them a third choice.

The third choice was that if they did not accept an assignment to Vietnam for the two year period, they had to accept the assignment to what was then the Vietnam Bureau in Washington, including a requirement to spend at least six months out of the year on TDY in Saigon. I don't recall how many people I sent out - I would guess 20 people - but I did not have to fire anyone, because they mostly settled on my terms. We had an anti-war guy working in the bureau at that time. On weekdays he would work in the AID office and on weekends he would go out and

demonstrate with his friends. We sent him out on a TDY to Vietnam; he had been out there about two weeks when we got a message asking for a full duty assignment there. It was just the result of going out there and seeing how many people who were desperate to try and win the war on the South Vietnamese side. It was just hard to walk away from it. I think that was basically what made the TDY route attractive.

JOSEPH P. O'NEILL
Political Officer, USAID
Hue (1963-1965)

CORDS
Da Nang (1965-1968)

Joseph P. O'Neill was born in New York in 1935. From 1953-1956 he served in the US Army. After joining the Foreign service in 1961 her served positions in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, India, Portugal, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, and Eritrea. Mr. O'Neill was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in May 1998.

Q: That was your first time in Vientiane. In 1963, you went to Vietnam. You went to Hue, in fact, which is halfway up Vietnam.

O'NEILL: Hue was important for a number of reasons. One, it was the family home of the Diem family or the Ngo family (I don't know how you want to call it during this interview). Let's call it "Ngo Diem Nhu's family." His brother was the Archbishop of Hue. Another brother was the governor of Hue. His other brother was his political advisor. Of course, then there was Madame Ngo Diem Nhu, who was probably the only man in the family. So, it was all...

Q: So, they were well-connected in Hue.

O'NEILL: Well-connected. They were a Mandarin family with one terrible cross. That was, they were Catholic. They were always considered outsiders. People forget that the Ngo Diem Nhu family had his older brother killed by the communists previous to his coming to power. Ho Chi Minh had offered both an apology, retribution, or recompense, and a position in his government but Diem would not take it. He had his own idea of who he was. He was a Mandarin. He came from a family. Ho Chi Minh was nothing in his eyes. This was the classic... He was more Mandarin Chinese in mentality than Mao Zedong. He was born, I think, about 300 years too late. I remember, when I asked to go to Hue-

Q: Oh, you asked? I wanted to get into that.

O'NEILL: Yes, I asked George Roberts, who had been the political officer in Vientiane, Laos, and then had returned to the Department to become a personnel officer. He knew me and I wrote him. I said I wanted to go there because I felt that there were going to be an exciting place. Old

George, who later made ambassador, wrote back that I was really going to sort of an isolated, not terribly important post, and it was just going to be very quiet.

Q: We had a consulate there at the time.

O'NEILL: Yes. John Helble was the consul there, who was very, very unhappy with what was going on and who reported back to Washington about how things were. So, when I got there. Jerry Greiner was the chief of station. It was just the three of us. We covered everything from Quang Tri to Quang Ngai and what eventually became ICorps. I spent two years in Hue and then two years with AID working on Da Nang.

Q: You went there for State though?

O'NEILL: I've always been with State. I was given what was considered a tremendous promotion with this assignment. I joined the Foreign Service as a Foreign Service staff 13, (GS-4). I had made GS-5 the same year. I was going to take over a GS-7 position. Man, my career was just starting on an upswing. I went to Hue and became the budget officer, the administrative officer, communicator, and the officer who prepared certain political work, even though I was not an officer. I was still staff. I didn't become an officer until years later.

Q: Was there a military threat there at the time that you arrived?

O'NEILL: There was a MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] mission there. I remember, there was not a great threat there at that time. In fact, all the military officers would hang on and hang on in order to get a combat infantryman's badge. The only way that you can do that is to get involved in a firefight. So, they were always out on patrol. This was '63. In '64, it got a little more heavy. Then, of course, the Marines came in later. What happened was that the period of time, only the Viet Cong were involved there in that area. The NVA, the North Vietnamese Army, did not come down yet. They were not terribly involved.

I have two stories that I'll tell you about this. One, after John Helble left, there were a number of people who came in there. John Negroponete, who had come up from Saigon. He was out of Hue visiting the other provinces and I was left there, and the CIA guy was there, a new fellow. He came charging in. I did their traffic also. He said, "The NVA has come across the border." I said, "No way. Everybody says they're not coming. They're going to stay in Laos. They're going to use the Ho Chi Minh trail." "They're coming in. I got to report it. I'm in a terrible bind here. Negroponete is not here." So, I said, "Okay, I'll send it out. I'll send it out immediately. I'll send it only to Saigon."

Q: Then, Saigon will decide whether they want to send it to Washington?

O'NEILL: Yes. I sent it out and I slugged it from CIA for CIA. It was the first time I had ever done that. I sent it out "NIACT Immediate." By the way, I would code it up and then we had a Vietnamese fellow who sent it out by CW [commercial wire]. The incoming messages would be handled the same way. The cable was "headed" so that all would know what was coming was important. Don't delay processing. So, down it comes. Then the panic sets in. Some types of

phone calls could never get through between Hue and Saigon. This time, all the calls got through. The messages consisted of "What the hell is going on up there?" "I sent a cable. That is all I know." "I can't talk anymore." Mendenhall (chief of the Political Section in Saigon) called; he was upset. I told Negroponte what had happened when he returned from the field. He said, "There goes my career." I said, "Oh, no, I headed the cable from CIA for CIA." He said, "Are you sure?" I opened up the safe and I showed him the outgoing tape. He never forgot it. The report was accurate. The NVA was coming across the border from Laos.

Q: [Negroponte's] career wasn't harmed by that?

O'NEILL: No. He's the only ambassador who has been vice consul, consul general, and ambassador (pro consul) in Honduras and later Manila.

Q: Did you ever get any visits up there from the ambassador or others?

O'NEILL: Yes, we had all the ambassadors up. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and Max Taylor came up. Kissinger came through also.

Q: So no congressmen?

O'NEILL: No congressmen. They never came up. After John Helble left on assignment, he was replaced by Sam Thomsen. Tony Lake, later NSC advisor to President Clinton, was assigned to Hue for some months. He, by the way, was a real political force, as was Halpern when they were in Saigon. People forget that "Rolling Thunder," the big bombing missions into North Vietnam was in part run by Halpern, he of the Pentagon Papers fame. You see the conflicts that later occurred as both Halpern and Lake left the government over Vietnam though they were "hawks" when they were in Vietnam. When we were in Hue, the leader of the opposition was Trich Tri Quang, who was the senior Buddhist monk in the country and who was running the opposition against, first against Ngo Dinh Ngo, and then against us while we were there. Trich Tri Quang used the consulate in Hue as a conduit to the United States government, first through Sam Thomsen and finally Tom Cochran. Tom Cochran was our last consul in Hanoi in the 1950s and later our last consul in Hue. I worked for Cochran again when he brought me back after Tet.

Q: He died about a year or two ago.

O'NEILL: He was our consul general in Da Nang. The problem in that area was the conflict between the Diem family, that was conservative Catholic, a minority family in a majority Buddhist country. Diem had no sensitivity toward the people with whom he had to live and work. The Diem family had a very bad idea of how to rule people. They ruled Vietnam as if they were in the 1600s in China. Other problems included Madam Ngo Dinh Nhu, the sister in law of the president, who was the de facto ruler of the country. She was tough and opinionated. I am reminded of [Russian Queen] Alexandra of Nicholas and Alexandra - narrow minded. The same character - women, which is not going to sound politically correct - who were only interested in protecting their husbands, keeping them in power without regard to the long term interests of the husband or the country.

Q: In her case, her brother-in-law.

O'NEILL: Her brother-in-law. The Buddhists wanted to take back their country and I can understand this. Most of the Catholics in North Vietnam or a significant portion did not come from South Vietnam. They were refugees after '54 from the North. It just did not work. Nobody should also in any way think that Ho Chi Minh was an agrarian reformist. He was a nationalist communist dictator cruel to his own people in the north. One only has to look at what he did for North Vietnam vis a vis what Diem did for South Vietnam. North Vietnam was always, under the French and under the Chinese, the richest part of the country with all the natural wealth. The South had the food. The question later developed of how these two parts of the country could survive economically. I think, until about 1964, the State Department was the body that moved the foreign policy in Vietnam and then came General Westmoreland. Westmoreland was as narrow minded as any general I've ever read about. He makes McClelland, the Civil War general, look like a brilliant, opportunistic Stonewall Jackson. There was a great, great general there at that time by the name of General Walt, a United States Marine Corps general. He had started two programs. One was called "Kit Carson." This was a program whereby a Marine squad or a Marine platoon (but no bigger) was integrated with a Vietnamese squad or platoon. They would each feed a meal to the other every other day. Lunch would either be Vietnamese or American. Then the next day the opposite. They would live in the villages and they would stay there for six to nine months. It was good. It worked for about seven, eight, nine months until NVA finally crossed the DMZ. When the NVA came across, they were too big to handle [by the smaller] units. [Such small unit tactics were] good if they were going to fight guerillas. When the NVA came, Walt said, "Look, we can't defend the whole damned ICorps with what I've got, which is about two and a half Marine divisions. Let's do this. We will protect the DMZ down along Route 1 and from the coast in about 30-40 miles, 50 maximum, all the way down. We will then have a major road, the railroad, the sea, and the major cities, and the most fertile land and at least 75-80% of the population. We will hold this. We will protect this. We will fight in the other parts. We will then build Adrian's wall. When we see them sort of getting up together, we hit them with everything: the planes, the task force, etc." Our friend Westmoreland's idea was that we would have a war of attrition. We would kill them. The Viet Cong/NVA would not be able to take the pain, he thought. As we saw them, we would go out and kill them. They would not be able to run and hide.

I see two things wrong with this. One, we could not afford the casualties. You can see the results of this in the Powell Doctrine today, which is, you arrive on time, you don't cause any trouble, and then you leave on time. If something is accomplished, okay. If nothing is accomplished, so what. That is the result. Now, here you have this long fight. There is no way we could win because Ho Chi Minh and his army were willing to fight to the last Vietnamese in North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

Q: They were not going to fight to the last American.

O'NEILL: We lost this war politically in part. There were many other reasons, when Robert Kennedy ran for the Senate in New York and said, "John would never, never fight in Vietnam the way we are doing now... We should not be there anymore, etc." Again, another misconception. Remember the reason that our friend, President Kennedy, was in Texas was that he had to carry Texas in the coming election. The last political remark he made before he was

shot was, “Lyndon, at least we'll have two states: Massachusetts and Texas.” He was going to be accused in the next election of losing another Catholic country after “losing” Catholic Cuba. It was thus necessary for him not to lose Vietnam. Recall that the Catholic hierarchy never supported Kennedy; they knew the family and his father. He could not have carried the Catholic clergy if he “lost” or abandoned “Catholic” Vietnam, even though Vietnam was not Catholic, but Buddhist.

Q: That would make '64 a very difficult fight for him. When the Marines landed near Da Nang there, did that-

O'NEILL: They landed at Phu Bai just south of Hue.

Q: Did that increase your work or not?

O'NEILL: Believe it or not, Tony Lake was one of the officers who went out to meet the Marines as they came flying in. At Phu Bai at that time we had a big listening station. We were listening to everything the Viet Cong [did]. We also had a big VOA station out there which was broadcasting all over Vietnam. So, the NVA were coming down. The Army people who were there couldn't hold it. We just had the Tonkin Gulf [incident]. Even if we had not gotten involved in the Tonkin Gulf, the Marines would have come in to protect these stations. So, they came in. The only problem we had was local problems with fights between the Army troops and the Marines in the bars in town. We got that settled out by giving them every other night in town. On Sunday, they couldn't go into town and they each had one day to themselves.

Q: Real diplomacy, Joseph!

O'NEILL: Yes. The other thing was, the Marines were very good. I went out to stay with them off and on. Negroponte and Sam Thomsen were busy with other things. There were only three of us. We had to take care of these people out there. I would go out. I speak New Yorkese and the Marines and the Army quite understood that. They never knew what my rank was, thank God. By that time, I think I had made FSS-8 (GS-6).

Q: You were a diplomat to them.

O'NEILL: I was the diplomat. I was the fellow they should pass very politely at the restaurant.

Q: How was morale at the post when you were there?

O'NEILL: We were so busy. By that time, by the way, they had a really excellent USIS [United States Information Service] guy in there, Bill Stubbs, who spoke Cambodian and French. We also had some German doctors up there. They were all killed during Tet. Bill is retired now. There was a police advisor who wasn't terribly good. He felt that the way to stop this whole thing was to give all the police officers shotguns and let them kill every NVA they saw, which didn't last very long. Morale was fine. All of us were bachelors or “temporary bachelors.”

Q: I was going to ask whether or not there were dependents there.

O'NEILL: No dependents. So, not all of them, but I would say a significant majority of the officers had household arrangements. We had a daily telegram. You had the consulate and my house next to it. So, everyone would write their portion of the cable for whoever was the officer in charge, whether it was Sam Thomsen, Negrofonte, or Lake. They would type it out and put it together. They would go over and sit in my house, which was in the consulate compound. I would sit down and would "poke it out." It was on an old fashioned, old, manual typewriter with a "crypto tape" I typed pretty close to 50 words a minute. The rest of it would take about an hour. Then we'd wake up the Vietnamese CW operator, who lived in the compound with his six or eight children (He now has a restaurant here in Arlington.) and was in the French colonial army for a number of years. He would "pound it out." Then we would all get up at eight or nine o'clock the next morning and start all the many things that had to be done. There would be the administrative things or maybe seeing the demonstrations out around town. Some of us would be going out to make trips out to Quang Nai or down to Da Nang or whatever. Remember, we did everything by road. There were no helicopters. There were no short trips. So, you would leave and it would be four days, maybe five, depending on convoys and the rest. We would go to Da Nang through the Hai Van Pass, a long, dangerous, and torturous ride. We would stay in Da Nang and operate from there. It was time consuming and there were many days, weeks, months if I think about the whole two years, when the senior officer in charge of the consulate in Hue was a Foreign Service staff 8 (GS-6).

Q: Did you travel in jeeps?

O'NEILL: Jeeps. No armored jeep, but we carried sidearms. I carried a Swedish K and a 357 Magnum, which I would lay on the seat beside me. Very often we traveled with interpreters. John Helble, one of the great officers in the Foreign Service, would take a driver with him. I generally drove myself. I don't recall taking a driver with me. Sometimes I would go with another American. In fact, I think I was the last American to drive from Hue up to Lao Bao. Lao Bao was right on the border with Laos. That was in '64.

Q: In 1965, you were moved to the CORDS [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support] program at Da Nang. Tell us a little bit about the CORDS program. What was that intended to do?

O'NEILL: There was an Army colonel in charge, Sam Wilson. CORDS was the hope that we would help the Vietnamese administer their government in an efficient and democratic way. From the State side, we got, I think, in general, some excellent officers. [From] AID, we had a mishmash of ex-Army officers, contractors, and I do not know what. We had fishery advisors, education advisors, sanitation advisors on everything and many of the advisors did not know their jobs. Sometime in this period, I got to know the French consul general in Da Nang, Monsieur LeBouef. He said something which I have never forgotten. He said, "You have more administrators in my consular district (which was the equivalent of ICorps) than we had in all of Indochina prior to 1954." He was correct; we would have an American sitting with almost every Vietnamese official above the rank of deputy district officer. It was foolish. I ascribe this primarily to Westmoreland, who had by that time taken over both the military and the political side of the war. He did not understand either the U.S. military on the ground or the Vietnamese.

It was badly done in every way. During this time, 1965-1967, I was the advisor [to] the mayor of Da Nang, but I did other things. It was difficult to control all the advisors who reported to Saigon.

Q: Had you asked for this assignment or was this just-

O'NEILL: I'm not quite sure exactly how that happened. I know that a number of senior officers knew me and they had offered to bring me on to AID as an officer. I said, "No." But then they had started to ask State people to be detailed [to AID]. So, they asked me to stay on detailed to AID. I think there was a mistake made there. I think the AID people thought I was an officer because I was the only staff who ever was an AID advisor. There were refugees coming into Da Nang. I helped with some of this. But again, there was rampant corruption. Some of it, we should just have left alone, but we focused on it. We let a Buddhist group come in. We would give them cement and roofing. We couldn't account for all of it in an audit, but we would see a beautiful pagoda going up. Catholics would come in and they would do the same thing. There would be churches built. There might not be a water well built, but there would be a rectory for the priest, a room for the monk, or there would even be a whorehouse built. We would worry about that stuff, but at the same time at the port, tons of material was disappearing. Somebody said (and I'm sure it's accurate) that if we had used all the cement that had been purchased and sent to Vietnam, we could have paved the whole country. There were ships sitting out there at Da Nang waiting to offload for three or four weeks, some for months. They were short loaded. They were selling cement from off the ship. It was awful.

We did, I think, a couple of things wrong. One, we sent out a conscript army to Vietnam. You cannot fight a guerilla war with a conscript army. Two, most of the Army (There were exceptions, were ticket punchers. They knew exactly to the minute when they arrived and when they were going home. Most of the Army never saw combat, never heard a shot fired in anger, and were very pleased not to. Counter that with units like the Airborne divisions or the Marines. The Marines spent 13 months there. There were terrible casualties among the Marines; they kept most of their people in the field.

Q: That's their tradition.

O'NEILL: That's their tradition.

Q: They're all fighters.

O'NEILL: Even those who were in the back, who were in the rear, always wanted to get some front line time. You have to again note that toward the end of this, many of the Marines were not volunteers. They were drafted. Still, they were able to imbue in them this difference. That war did not have to come out the way it was. Much of the problems, of course, were in the States over Watergate and the rest and politics within the political parties. There were ways to mitigate the sufferings out there. The important thing about this whole Vietnamese war, whether we should have been there or not, people did vote with their feet. Whenever there was a fight coming up, I had never, ever seen people flee away from us to [the Viet Cong] before a fight. I never saw them running the other way from us. We would be coming up (and I spent a lot of

time with the Marines and others) and I never saw them heading out toward Viet Cong country.

Q: That's a good indication of where their sentiments were. Were you there when the Marines' air base was attacked and so forth at Da Nang? There were some very vicious Viet Cong attacks I gather.

O'NEILL: That was the Tet offensive. Is that the one you're talking about?

Q: No, this was in '65 when they shot up a lot of helicopters and destroyed...

O'NEILL: They snuck in, yes. But again, that was overconfidence by the Marines and sloppiness. It happens all the time. It happened in Beirut. They sometimes forget to do the necessary like Roman Centurions. They were all going out to fight some stupid bunch of slaves (Spartacus) and they forget to put up night defenses. They get sloppy. It happens all the time. It's very difficult.

Q: It's human but it happens in the military, too, doesn't it? Was our consulate in Hue attacked while you were there or not?

O'NEILL: No. Again, the USIS building was burned down. I was there when it happened. I remember alerting people by CW what was happening. I think we sent that one in the clear. I can't recall. Bill Stubbs was over at the USIS building getting his people out. The burning was done by university students who wanted the Americans out. Many of them wound up being murdered in the Tet offensive. They saw their saviors coming and didn't know that they were going to wind up in the grave. Anyway, he was over there getting his people out. Tony Lake ran from the consulate about 600 yards up to the USIS building to make sure that Bill Stubbs and his staff got out. Then, finally, they came in one by one to the consulate. We sat there in the consulate listening for this tremendous (by our standards; it was only a few thousand) mob move down to the consulate.

Q: Were there no police, no military?

O'NEILL: The Vietnamese authorities did not interfere at all. So, we sent home our staff, one of them Tuy Cam, a beautiful young lady who later married Jim Bullington (later ambassador), who came after me; Joe Nguyen, one of our great Foreign Service nationals, whom we found out a few years ago was a member of the Vietnamese intelligence organization. We sent them all home. We sat there. The question was, what were we going to do if they came into the building? We had all our weapons sort of sitting around. We hadn't decided what we were going to do.

Q: We had no Marine guards?

O'NEILL: No Marine guards. There was us. That's another thing, I think, that people forget about the Foreign Service, especially at that time. All of us, Frank Wisner, John Negroponte, Tony Lake, John Helble, all of us traveled throughout southern Vietnam without guards. Some of us were captured. All of us were shot at. Steve Ledogar was under mortar attack a number of times. Gil Sheinbaum, who was down in Hoi An, was shot at a number of times. I was shot at.

We were very lucky not to have been killed. I now think about Negroponte, Sheinbaum, Wisner, and Lake. They're all my age or a few years younger. One would not even imagine these guys driving through guerilla held areas. If I had to count up how many times I've driven through areas which were considered hostile, I would need more than my fingers and my toes. But we did. Foreign Service officers did. They did it then. Regrettably, we don't do it as much as we used to.

Q: So, [the mob] never came to the consulate?

O'NEILL: They came and they streamed in front of the consulate. But they did not come in. I still don't know why they didn't come in, but they didn't.

Q: When you were communicating out of Hue, were you able to communicate with Washington or only with Saigon?

O'NEILL: The instructions were that we sent everything to Saigon. Saigon would pass it on. I think, in a way, it was this way so that Saigon would have control over what went out. We had really tremendous officers in Hue. We first had John Helble, who told us in '62 and '63 how deep and difficult going into Vietnam would be. At that time, we were able to go straight into Washington. But at a certain time he was told not to communicate with Washington directly. After that when the other officers came to Hue, we sent everything down to Saigon. I think some of the cables were not passed in whole to Washington. I think they were excised or they were made parts of other cables. At least, I think, the flavor and the passion of the officers' writing was best.

Q: There was fighting in Da Nang in those years between the South Vietnamese and anti-government forces. Could you say a little about that?

O'NEILL: In ICorps, we had a very good general, Nguyen Chanh Thi. He had been a sergeant in the French colonial army and had risen through the ranks. He was not well educated and not from a "good family." Very honest, decent - he made a fine Vietnamese first division, the best in the army. Then he was moved down to Da Nang to take charge of ICorps. Everybody was very, very pleased with this. I think he was moved down to ICorps at our insistence because he was so good. Other generals were fighting for power in Saigon. They were not terribly interested in who won the war. It reminds me of Chiang Kai-shek, "I'd rather kill Mao Zedong than Japanese." This is what was happening. He cut most of the corruption in Da Nang. We had the port at Da Nang, which was always corrupt, but he cut the corruption. He started to become very popular among the people. So, there was a big fight over this. Richard Holbrooke, later assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific and ambassador to Germany, was one of the officers in Saigon at that time. I remember having a conversation with him. In Saigon, the politics was that General Thi had to go because we had bigger fish to fry. We would replace him with a better general. Highly unlikely. Highly unlikely. We did, by the way, replace him with a good general who eventually died in a helicopter. I said, "You know the reason that this general has got to go. One, he's not married. He doesn't have a family. He has no future in this country." Holbrooke said, "You don't understand." Maybe I didn't understand. We were caught by the people who were our allies and did not, as the French or the British would have done, send them away. The

French would have sent them off to some whorehouse in Paris. The British would have sent them off to Asmara or the Seychelles for a pleasant exile. But we did things stupidly. It goes on. We want people to behave in our image. People in the rest of the world act for their own interests. It just doesn't work.

Q: Was any of the fighting between the South Vietnamese based on religious considerations, Christian versus Buddhist, or not?

O'NEILL: Not at that time. I must admit that (again, politically incorrect) many of the more competent officers were Catholic. Was this for a historical reason, i.e. that the French had trained them and then that Diem promoted them? No, it was strictly over power. There were, of course, the tinges of religion, but that was only as a mask for the people. Only power.

GEORGE M. BARBIS
Analyst, Laos, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1963-1966)

Mr. Barbis was born in California and raised there and in Greece. He graduated from the University of California and served in the US Army in WWII. In 1954 he entered the Foreign Service and was posted to Teheran, Iran as Economic Officer. His other overseas assignments included postings in Thailand, Korea, France, Belgium and Greece, primarily in the Political and Economic fields. Mr. Barbis served on the US Delegation to the United Nations (1973-1975). His Washington assignments involved him in Southeast Asia matters and the US military. Mr. Barbis is a graduate of the National War College. Mr. Barbis was interviewed by Mr. Raymond C. Ewing in 1996.

Q: Certainly at the time you were there, you were very aware from your contacts with Mike Forrestal and Cliff Alexander that the government was very interested in what was going on?

BARBIS: Yes. And, this was before Vietnam had become the issue in Southeast Asia and Laos was the focus of all our attention. But, as things were changing in Vietnam, Vietnam started becoming the main issue, and our involvement started to become openly greater than it was in Laos, Laos became peripheral. But, in that initial period I remember we used to say, "Thank God Kennedy is President," because those of us who were working on Lao affairs at the time were deeply committed to the Geneva Accords, which were quite controversial domestically on the political scene. After all, here we were at the height of the Cold War, etc. and the Geneva Accords on Laos provided for a neutralization of the conflict and confrontation there which was indirect, but nonetheless was taking place. We tried, or so I believed at the time, to honestly try to make those agreements work. In the end they fell apart largely because of things the communist side did. The Pathet Lao, supported and directed by Hanoi, did things to which we had to respond and as a result the solution some years later fell apart and Laos is now communist.

Q: Some Foreign Service officers who worked on Vietnam in a little later period did a lot of soul searching and there was a degree of controversy and of not being comfortable at times with US policy. You did not feel any of that in the time you were working on Laos?

BARBIS: No, because I think we were driven by our commitment to try to make the Geneva Accords work and we thought we were doing the right thing. The right thing being as I recall seeing it, isolating Laos from any kind of conflict or power struggle in Southeast Asia. It was a peaceful, innocent country that didn't deserve to be torn apart by a civil war of great brutality. So, we were doing things that later became known as the secret war that some people would be critical of, and dealing with reporters was a problem for me frequently...I remember I had a pretty good relationship with Friedreich Smith, who later became quite an outstanding journalist and still is.

Q: He was with the New York Times?

BARBIS: Yes and still is. He was young, brand new, my age so we could communicate easily and comfortably. Although he would press, he respected my need to protect classified information so I don't think I ever gave any secrets away. It was a little tricky because we were doing things that we didn't want the press to publicize. All of that came out later, but at the time I was doing it without any moral questions or disagreement with what we were doing because I believed my role as OIC Laos was to make sure that I followed our policy which was to try to make the Geneva Accords work.

Later, as we became more and more involved in Vietnam, and as Vietnam began to drive our policy not only with respect to Laos but also with respect to Cambodia, I can remember sitting around with my Cambodian colleague and sort of bemoaning things that were happening that were Vietnam driven that we didn't feel comfortable with. A feeling that what we were doing in Vietnam was not based on an overall strategic plan or vision of what we were trying to do but was more getting dragged into situations because of what happened on the ground to which we had to respond which committed us and got us more and more involved and then before we knew it, we had half a million troops there.

The need to react and the domestic pressures were great. That was the time of the doves and the hawks, with the hawks pressing for more aggressive action to counter the Vietcong. Our feeling was that we had enough to do dealing with Laos in my case and Cambodia in my colleague's case. We didn't know all the ins and outs of Vietnam, although we participated in meetings and in other ways kept up--saw the traffic, etc. But, our impression was that it was sort of an incremental involvement rather than a planned, deliberate, strategic approach.

Q: Going back to Laos again. Did we see the support for the Pathet Lao coming primarily from China or from the Soviet Union or did we not make really a distinction, that it was the communist bloc?

BARBIS: As I can best recall we saw Vietnam... Hanoi... as being the main agent of the communist movement, if you will, in directing things in Laos but with support both from the Chinese and the Soviets. The Soviets certainly were providing a lot of material support, the

Chinese also were playing a role, especially up in the northwest. We had a lot of exaggerated rumors and stories about the Chinese building airfields right up there in that corner where Laos has a common border. Nothing ever came of that, although I guess some people would argue that they did build a road, although I don't know for what purpose. They were able to get supplies and reinforcements and whatever they needed through quite easily without modern transportation.

Q: When you were in Chiang Mai you traveled to the Laotian border, of course, [did you enter Laos]?

BARBIS: Only [viewed it] from across the Mekong [River]. We would go by road to Chiang Rai, which is just north of Chiang Mai, and then by land rover up to the Mekong where there was a little village, [Ban Houei Sai], and looked across into Laos. That was an area of Laos that was fairly sparsely populated. There was not much Pathet Lao activity there during the time I was in Chiang Mai. Most of the Pathet Lao being along the North Vietnamese border in northeastern Laos and, in fact, one province was pretty much under their control for most of the time that I was involved

WILLIAM HARRISON MARSH

**Political Officer
Saigon (1963-1966)**

**Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1966-1968)**

William Harrison March was born in Pennsylvania in 1932. He graduated from Cornell University in 1953 and from Princeton University in 1957 with an MOA after having served in the US Air Force. He entered the Foreign Service in 1960 and served overseas in Saigon, Bangkok, Brussels, Paris, Geneva and Jeddah. Mr. March was interviewed by Lambert (Nick) Heyniger and Vlad Lehovich in 1997.

Q: [interviewer is Nick Heyniger] This was a meeting of junior officers being informed there was a growing and important need for people to go to Southeast Asia? How did that go?

MARSH: There were mixed reactions to it. In the first instance we were told that we had been culled before this pool not solely because of our French language capability and the appropriate rank and level and so forth, but also because we were all unmarried. And immediately, half of the group said, "What do you mean, unmarried? We are married." It developed that the marriages that had taken place in fiscal 1962 had not been recorded and, as a matter of fact, as late as 1966 they still were carrying me as a single officer.

Q: For Heaven's sake!

MARSH: I had a hell of a time to get tickets and a passport for my wife in '63 going to Saigon

and in '66 returning from Bangkok, where she was in safehaven. By that time we had a son. (Some officious person in the Department) when I telephoned from Saigon to the Department to complain that the orders had only covered me and not covered my wife and son, when I told her that she said, "But you're not married." And I said that of course we were, we had a son. Well, this functionary informed me that it was not necessary to be married to have a child. An interesting biology lesson from a total incompetent!

But in any event a number of people, for example, Jim Bishop was one who later was very active in African affairs and ambassador to several countries, said well, on balance, he'd rather not go. The rest acted according to their individual consciences, who were married. I was married but I did talk to some people about the assignment and they said it was a golden opportunity and that it would really be exciting and blah, blah, blah...and a grateful nation...blah, blah, blah...all that sort of thing. In any event I did go into Vietnamese language training.

Q: In the fall of '62?

MARSH: No, the very beginning of '63.

Q: Okay, all right, how long did that last?

MARSH: That was six months back in the basement.

Q: You are at FSI studying Vietnamese.

MARSH: I am. A little earlier I said that the course I had taken under Eleanor Jordan in Japanese, at the embassy in Tokyo in the '50s was very fine, very well done. So I was completely unprepared for the totally disorganized experience in Vietnamese at the FSI.

It was bedlam. We were put under linguists and I think we had seven linguists in six months, something of that sort. They'd change. A very few of them were Vietnamese speakers. So their approach was a wholly mechanical approach to Vietnamese, you know you hold your tongue such and such a way, do this, do that and the other kind of thing and so forth, but as far as any practical facility with Vietnamese, they didn't have it. It was an extremely unsatisfactory course.

Q: I've also had hard language training at FSI. When you say linguist... what I mean by linguist is sort of the supervisor who is supervising five or six language classes being taught by instructors.

MARSH: Precisely.

Q: The instructors are native speakers of Vietnamese but the linguists who are supervising don't really have much familiarity with the language at all.

MARSH: Almost none. They disagreed with one another. There was a great deal of tension and rivalry and all of that sort of thing. My friend Vlad Lehovitch was in the class, as was Dick Holbrooke as well as quite a few other notables.

Q: How was Holbrooke as a language student?

MARSH: Fair. Holbrooke has always been a master politician. His career is his supreme artistic achievement of his life and he has devoted his life to this professional equivalent of Sistine Chapel ceiling here still being worked on. Even in those days he was in great shape because his family lived down the street from Dean Rusk in Westchester so when he arrived he happened to be on very close terms with the Secretary of State, which was nice for him.

Q: Tough. Tough.

MARSH: Right.

Q: So at any rate, six months of struggling with Vietnamese at FSI back in the basement of the Foreign Service Institute, and you emerged into the daylight in '63?

MARSH: In June of '63. Now one thing we haven't talked about, because it didn't exist, was any area training whatsoever. Occasionally those of us in the course would go over to the Department. We were supposed to have some sort of briefing or training session or something of that sort. But there were very few of these, perhaps three or four of these and they were very unsatisfactory. We never had an intensive exposition, let alone a discussion, of the U.S. *desiderata*, the situation, the history of it all and all of that sort of thing. Never.

Q: Why not?

MARSH: What was supposed to have happened was that I was supposed to have been assigned to a consulate to be established at Nha Trang, on the central coast and a very nice place. Unfortunately instead of establishing that post in 1963, it was established a full 10 years later, I believe. We did not have geographic coverage of South Vietnam except from Saigon itself, with the exception of a post at Hue which was very isolated and had very little in the way of resources. It was really to be a watch post to make sure that the North Vietnamese did not cross the DMZ, the demilitarized zone, which of course they did in great numbers, but behind the consulate not in front of it so it was not visible.

Q: So you were assigned to the embassy?

MARSH: Yes. In any event because I was to have had three months of additional Vietnamese training at the embassy, full time. John Burke, who was later deputy assistant secretary and who was ambassador in Guyana at the time of the Jonestown affair, and I were the students in this class.

Now there were two problems by the time we arrived in Vietnam. First of all, the entire situation concerning the Ngo Dinh Diem regime had become very unsettled and very, very troublesome. And the second thing was that we had a change of ambassadors. I was there perhaps two weeks under Fritz Nolting, Frederick Nolting, who was ambassador, and then came Henry Cabot Lodge.

Ambassador Lodge wanted to rethink all sorts of things. He didn't want a vast establishment. There were of course no such limits on the military, so that when I arrived in Vietnam there were, I think, 17,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam. This would be the rough equivalent of, say, 250,000 Vietnamese troops in the United States with many times the money that U.S. people would have had. So not only did we have the 17,000, a considerable number in its own right, but also they were loaded. And also they were taking over housing. For example the Commanding General of the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam had moved into the former residence of the French commanding general - bad imagery.

There was simply no political control. And when I say no political control I mean, of course, no policy control. And when I say no policy control what I really mean is that to a remarkable extent there was no policy. There was a great, overarching glorious thing up in the heavens that South Vietnam shall not fall to Communist North Vietnam, but apart from that there was precious little guidance and precious little leadership. There was endless, endless concentration upon the military effort and upon this vast work it was undertaking. I am sure that to both military and civilians in Vietnam it must have dwarfed all previous enterprises.

Q: Vast work that was undertaken to do what?

MARSH: Well, to build the place, to rebuild the place, to train everybody from university professors through district water commissioners, to build schools, to build roads, to build everything you could think of, to restore the railway going all over the country. And this was in the middle of an enormous war of both a conventional and non-conventional nature. It was an extraordinary thing.

A few years later I was temporarily Consul in Hue. I'll never forget one day, it was one of the most trying days of my life, when we had virtually all of the students of the University of Hue out on strike. There were demonstrations and all of that sort of thing, and the Buddhists themselves in virtually open revolt and so forth. A great Wagnerian lady arrived from the United States to say that she was a higher education advisor and she had come to do work at the University of Hue. I said, "Madam, you have been sent here under misleading instructions, the university has been closed for two weeks and we are not at all sure we'll be able to change that." She looked over her ample bosom at me and said, "Well, open it." And just about that time a vast flotilla of helicopters, Hueys, bound for an air strike against the Vietcong and North Vietnamese passed overhead and I said to myself, "This is absolutely unreal!"

Q: You had two or three months of language training?

MARSH: I got my three months of language training and then was told I would be assigned to the consular section in Saigon and that they had decided that was what I would be doing. I said that that would provide very little opportunity to use the Vietnamese and without rancor of any kind, let's just call this assignment quits. I didn't struggle through a tonal language very badly taught, well, decently taught but under very difficult circumstances, I mean we had a coup d'etat just before we concluded the training. I didn't do that to work in the consular section with visa applicants. That's not what it was about. So I said to just send me home. And then my wife had

had difficulty to get the proper tickets. So, just send me home.

So there was a lot of discussion. The personnel officer was a friend of mine and she was very helpful. Finally it was decided that I should be sort of over-complement in the Political Section helping with the foreign relations of South Vietnam which of course did not involve the Vietnamese army, until they found me something. So after a couple of months they found me a position in what was called the Provincial Reporting Unit. These were about seven officers within the Political Section.

Q: Seven officers, within the Political Section?

MARSH: Well, my friend, we had 25 kosher Foreign Service officers in the Political Section.

Q: "Kosher" means they actually worked for the Foreign Service?

MARSH: Right.

Q: 25?

MARSH: 25.

Q: In the Political Section?

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: Holy mackerel! In 1963?

MARSH: Well, '64.

Q: Wow. So what were you doing?

MARSH: The idea of a provincial reporting officer was to go out to the countryside and to cover developments out there and in effect to make a viability assessment. How are things going, are we winning, all that kind of thing.

Q: Did you wear a flak jacket?

MARSH: No, Sir. This was the heroic period of my life because I was driving jeeps over mined roads; I was in a small provincial town when the Vietcong attacked the military headquarters, which is where I was. They handed me a weapon and I went up on the roof. Fortunately I didn't have to use it, because I wouldn't have known how, having qualified with an M-1 at ROTC training camp only because there was a sergeant who was much too smart to have me in any make-up sessions. So he passed me when all I could have done with the M-1 was to have thrown it at somebody.

At any rate, I was on the roof and saw one of the most incredible sights in my life, namely a

napalm attack on a Vietcong encampment, about a mile away, by our helicopters at night. Incredible colors, explosions, all of that sort of thing. Absolutely magnificent!

Q: Wow. Wow.

MARSH: In any event, I did that work, covering first the provinces up in the central Vietnam region. Later I became chief of that unit, after Jim Rosenthal, later ambassador...

Q: Good for you, because you were still at this point...what...an FSO6 or 5?

MARSH: Well, it's interesting. That's correct. It took me 25 years in the Foreign Service to supervise as many people as I did in the early '60s in Vietnam. 25 years to supervise as many people. I had seven under me.

Q: Your responsibilities were largely sort of covering internal domestic developments?

MARSH: No, no, no...political-military and then some. The idea was how are the efforts to arm and train the Vietnamese going? How are our military training activities proceeding? How are our economic assistance programs functioning or not? What is the mood, what is the attitude of the South Vietnamese?

Q: So you are going out from the embassy frequently, touring around the countryside?

MARSH: Yes. Usually a week out and then a week back in Saigon to write up everything. You had to get the essential military clearances. A major concession was that military clearances were required on our reporting.

Q: Why?

MARSH: That was part of the great effort of the Department of State to get along with everybody.

Q: Is this what Ambassador Lodge wanted?

MARSH: No, it really was Ambassador Taylor because he believed, poor man, God rest his soul, but he believed that FSOs could not understand military affairs. And what Vietnam proved was that war is much too important a matter to be left to military people.

Q: I take your point but I had you in the embassy in Saigon with Ambassador Nolting having been recently replaced with Ambassador Lodge and then Ambassador Taylor replaces Ambassador Lodge?

MARSH: And then Lodge returns and replaces Taylor, for a second tour.

Q: I see.

MARSH: I was there with both.

Q: This is really a significant factor in the embassy's reporting that it has to be cleared with MACV.

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: Wow!

MARSH: That's absolutely correct. It was a great inhibition and I'll give you what I think is the classic case.

Ambassador, now ambassador Richard Teare, one of the finest officers it has ever been my privilege to know, was working for me. He went to a province in the Upper Delta. He came back and wrote a masterly report; very balanced, very objective, very well done that pointed out how precarious the situation was. MACV blew up over this report when it came time for them to clear the final version because they held that adequate training and recruitment of the South Vietnamese militia forces had taken place, and all that sort of thing. So Phil Habib, at that time our political counselor, said, "Well, could Dick go down and take another look?" I said goodbye to Dick in the morning at the embassy, I can remember it very clearly, and I told him I supported him 100 percent but that unfortunately we were up against some power relationships here that were difficult. I wished him good luck and all the best and so forth.

I returned to my work and then towards the end of the morning Dick reappeared. I said, "What happened, that was a short trip." Dick said that his flight couldn't land at the province capital because the Vietcong had overrun it.

Therefore, as a consequence, MACV agreed with Dick's version, right?

Absolutely wrong! They would not change a word of the neutered version that they wanted.

Q: Because the South Vietnamese Army was shortly going to recapture everything and everything would be fine?

MARSH: Who knows, who knows.

Q: That's incredible.

MARSH: So at any rate I'll skip briefly over Vietnam because in another interview I'm going to be talking about it. In any event we had the misfortune to be on home leave in the United States when the wives were directed to leave by President Johnson, the families had to leave. We sought advice of the Department of State but weren't able to obtain any; no one could give us any. We also found out that my wife was expecting our first child.

Well, we had around-the-world tickets to go back to Saigon, so we decided that we would locate Ruth, my wife, in Bangkok. We arrived there. I'm happy to put it on the record that I couldn't

believe how inhospitable and how uncaring the embassy in Bangkok was to the Saigon wives.

Q: And this is an embassy in a similar part of the world with very similar conditions.

MARSH: Precisely.

It so happened that my wife went into labor suddenly. She had a Thai who drove for her with his tiny car and she tried to reach him and she failed. Her contractions were getting faster and faster. She called the embassy. It wasn't just that the embassy turned her down on a ride to the hospital, it wasn't that alone, it was that they gave her a lecture about Saigon wives not supposed to be bothering the embassy.

Q: I can't believe it!

MARSH: She managed to get a taxi and the traffic in Bangkok, as many people know, is horrendous. Even 30 years ago it was horrendous, and our son was coming. As a matter of fact he was starting his final descent as they arrived at the hospital.

Q: Unbelievable and this is the first child.

MARSH: I would like to say to you that the man who turned her down, an American, was completely exceptional, and that he was not the kind of Foreign Service officer that we seek to have, but he did later become an Assistant Secretary for Administration.

Q: I can't believe it.

MARSH: And so what I understood when I heard about that some years later was that I was the exceptional one, in thinking that, as is the case in the military, things had to be "look out for the troops."

Q I can't believe it.

MARSH: But it was a bitter, very bitter and difficult experience.

Q: Assistant Secretary of State?

MARSH: Assistant Secretary of State for Administration.

Q: Wow. Wow.

MARSH: At any rate we were then in 1966. I was desperate to have a sort of normal diplomatic assignment because this had been such an unusual place where, of course, the embassy having been blown up in the middle of my tour, you understand, that it would be nice to see what a place was like under normal circumstances. But of course nothing would do, I had to go back to the Vietnam desk.

Q: Okay. But the normal tour, wasn't it two years?

MARSH: It was extended, without our consent.

Q: You spent an extra year?

MARSH: That is correct, it was extended from two years to three years.

Q: ...in this sort of war zone? Where the military weren't even spending more than two years?

MARSH: I have served, and those of my colleagues have served, far longer in Vietnam than 90% of the military ever did, and without weapons, of course.

Q: We are going to end this part of the interview with your finishing your tour in Saigon and now you are coming back to the Vietnam desk in the Department.

Good afternoon, this is Lambert (Nick) Heyniger and I am interviewing William (Bill) Marsh. Today is Monday, December 8, 1997.

Bill has been talking about his service in Saigon and Hue. The story is up to 1966. So, Bill, you have now been in Vietnam for three years and it is 1966, what happens now?

MARSH: Reassignment happens now. It was a very difficult year in terms of the work that I was doing during the first half of the year in Vietnam. It was a very difficult transfer back to the United States. It was very, very difficult taking up work on the Vietnam working group or Task Force that had been established.

Q: Is that where you were assigned?

MARSH: Yes, it was a disappointment because as I may have mentioned earlier, I wanted to work in a, shall we say, more normal sort of post to see what the standard regular workings of the Foreign Service were like. A good friend of mine, as a matter of fact a Foreign Service colleague and in fact my former roommate at graduate school, some years afterward said to me rather scornfully that I had never been in the Foreign Service. I had been in Vietnam, and that was so extraordinary that it really didn't count as experience in the Foreign Service. He may have had a point.

In any event come spring of 1966, I was dispatched from Saigon to Hue because of the Buddhist uprising and certain rumblings about the Vietnamese military, our allies in that area, and rather they were not plotting against the government. So I found myself in Hue at about the time one would be sending a lot of cables to the Department asking about the next assignment.

Q: Just before we go on, you were sort of assigned to Hue TDY?

MARSH: Yes, I was TDY up there.

Q: And what was your capacity up there?

MARSH: Consul. I was in charge of the state of the Americans there. I feared for it because there seemed to be a very, very strong anti-American sentiment among youth and the citizenry at Hue, particularly in those of the Buddhist persuasion. So I recommended to Saigon that we close the post. Well, that recommendation coming from a junior officer did not carry a great deal of weight so they sent a very senior officer, Tom Corcoran, who had managed over his career to serve in every post in Indochina to Hanoi, as well as the three other countries. Tom came up and took a look around and said yes, I actually had a point and one should close down the post, but that the Buddhists took care of the matter because they burned it down.

Q: Well, for heaven's sake. You weren't in it?

MARSH: Fortunately, once again, I used up another of my cat lives. I've used two or three by this time, haven't I? I still have a few left. But my biggest problem came in trying to persuade the Department of State I was married, had been for three years, and therefore was entitled to travel orders and a passport for my wife, and while we were at it, for my son who had been born in 1965. Some worthy in the Department told me I wasn't married and I pointed out in retort that I had a son and was informed coolly that you don't have to be married to have a child...which really sent me up the wall!

In any event, finally came orders and so forth *so* we decided we would have a little break together, our six month old son, my wife and me, and we sailed from Hong Kong.

Q: Did they think, for example, Bill, that you had established a relationship with a Vietnamese lady?

MARSH: Well, if so, she was the only Vietnamese lady ever to have been born in Ponca City, Oklahoma. I don't know what they thought, but you are making an assumption, Nick, that they thought! I wouldn't necessarily go along with that.

At any rate, just to lighten matters a bit, we sailed on the President Cleveland from Hong Kong. You know we had shore leave in Yokohama so we went up to Tokyo and had a good time with our baby, and so forth. A classmate of mine from undergraduate days was General Manager of the Imperial Hotel, so we were going to take a taxi back down to the ship and he put a hotel car at our disposal, with a driver. Very thoughtful, except that the driver was a country bumpkin who knew nothing of Tokyo and got caught in immense traffic jam. So as we arrived at the pier in Yokohama we saw the President Cleveland sailing off.

Not to worry, they said, and they sent a lighter and we got into the lighter and it took us out into the harbor where the Cleveland dropped her pilot. A huge rope ladder was put down the side of this 25,000-ton ship. I put baby inside my suit coat jacket, tucked him in there, and up we went. And a great pair of hairy arms came out, that's all we could see were the hairy arms out of the side of the ship, and we heard "Give me the baby" so we did and then we continued on up to a

deck where we could get up.

Q: My god! On a rope ladder up the side of this steamer, with your wife?

MARSH: With my wife, and with the baby.

Q: I would have been terrified.

MARSH: This was climbing up about seven stories, I would guess. Well, while this was underway we were more or less stationary, fortunately they stop when they drop the pilot, and they don't just toss him overboard.

At any event we arrived in Washington and hit a maelstrom. The problem essentially was the difficulty in obtaining policy orders, the confusion. The fact that there was tremendous concentration in the presidency of decision-making on Vietnam. You'll recall that President Johnson even had a great hand in designing and approved the embassy that was built after the closure of the old one in 1965. That's how closely everything was worked out.

Q: Let me just take a second here. Okay, now, the Secretary of State is Dean Rusk, the assistant secretary for the Far Eastern Bureau is Bill Bundy, and the deputy assistant secretary is...

MARSH: Len Unger, ambassador previously in Laos and later in Thailand. The office director is Bob Miller, who is later ambassador to Malaysia and to Côte d'Ivoire.

Q: And you're working on the Vietnam desk? What were sort of generally your responsibilities?

MARSH: I was one of the two political officers. You'll recall that at that time McNamara said that he was spending 90 percent of his time as Secretary of Defense on Vietnam. Yet President Johnson, in his memos later, said that his time was perhaps two-thirds, 70 percent devoted to Vietnam at that time. And there we are and the Department of State has named two thirtyish political officers to cover this enormous problem.

Now there were others who were there on special details. At one time, for example, there was a Peace Corps officer, though the Peace Corps never had any representatives in Vietnam. But it was come one, come all, everybody get in the act. At the same time, the essential political work was done either by the two political officers, John Helble and I, or some of the extra people assigned to deal particularly with North Vietnam affairs or with negotiations or what not and so forth. But the regular kind of deskwork that was done was performed by John Helble and by me.

So we arrived and the Buddhist uprising in Central Vietnam had become quite serious indeed. Thus John and I are told that what we need to do is to ensure continuous monitoring and coverage. Therefore we should take turns during the night, in night duty up in the Operations Center. What this meant was that we tended to work 36 hours on and 12 off. We did this for four months.

Q: Holy mackerel!

MARSH: You know, if you want an introduction to exhaustion, this is a very good way to do it.

Q: How come 36 hours on?

MARSH: Well, I think in looking back now the extraordinary thing is we didn't post any objection. We were so deferential and all of us at that time had been in the military, albeit for brief periods of time, not during the Korean War, necessarily, probably not as a matter of fact. But we had had military service to perform after graduating from college and so orders were orders, and "Yes, Sir." We should have said, and I think today's generation would say, to get some more people in.

Q: So it meant both of you worked all day and then one person worked all night.

MARSH: That is correct and this was on a seven day a week basis, and this was for four months.

Q: Before I interrupted you, you said that it was sort of a policy maelstrom with lots of different people telling you what they wanted?

MARSH: Well, it was that. It was pandemonium, really. There were some really quite extraordinary things. For example, in the previous year, that is to say about fifteen months earlier, February of 1965, while on home leave I had been brought into a special little crisis group. This was at the time of the beginning of the air strikes occasioned by the Vietcong actions against U.S. military advisors in South Vietnam. I remember distinctly that one of the things that was made a cardinal principle of it all and I believe originated in State was that in no way were public statements or diplomatic initiatives to indicate that these strikes were retaliatory.

Well, this was just contrary to common sense. I protested feebly about this, trying to say not only that this action of attempting to cast something in a distorted way was against nature, it was actually unhelpful. If we didn't point out that this was retaliation, we couldn't get the advantage in part, at least among the South Vietnamese, for the undertaking in the first place. I lost and was regarded as something of an upstart, as a matter of fact.

This was the period, between 1966 and '68, when I'm afraid I got into trouble several times. For example, there was a Lieutenant Colonel who made a very unfortunate statement in Vietnam in 1968. He said, with respect at the time of the Tet offensive, to the retaking of the town of Ben Thuy, a town in the Delta, that it was quote "necessary to destroy it in order to save it" unquote. I suggested a strong public relations campaign to disown this statement, to dissociate us from it as much as possible.

People thought that this was extreme.

I warned that this was going to become a byword for this effort and that we should get away from it. Others said absolutely not. I think time has shown who maybe had the right diagnosis on that matter. But I got into a little trouble over that one, as a matter of fact. Later still, for example, I said that in 1968 again I had detected a lot of popular upheaval about the war and its

course, even after President Johnson had indicated that he would not run again.

Q: You're talking now about popular upheaval in the United States?

MARSH: Yes, that is right. And others on the staff said no, that the President's self-sacrificial act, if you will, had completely appeased public opinion. I wrote a memo contesting this and saying in particular that I understood from talking to people throughout the country that there was going to be a particular problem at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Others did not find that and so I became considered something of a Cassandra, and something of an alarmist. I paid for that. You'll recall that there were parts of our effectiveness reports in those days that were not shown to us? Later I found that there had been some comment put in about that. It was a very trying time for me because it really was something that tried one's soul.

Q: Let's take a bit more time. In other words, the Office Director is writing your Efficiency Report?

MARSH: Yes, never mind who that is, but in any event...this was before any dissent channel. These didn't exist then. I didn't know this. This was the back part of the report, which wasn't shown to us.

Q: That's not supposed to be part of the game.

MARSH: The part that was shown to me glowed. The part that wasn't shown to me burned, like acid, a little bit, a little bit. But at any rate, it was a very difficult time because first of all, to mix metaphors, it took the Titanic years to sink, but we knew she was going down, those of us who were paying any attention. We knew that our effort was not prevailing and moreover we were seeing the destruction of the consensus, the domestic consensus in the United States on foreign policy.

Q: Let me ask were you briefing people on a fairly regular basis? For example, did you go up and brief Ambassador Unger and Assistant Secretary Bundy and other people on day to day developments in Vietnam?

MARSH: Yes in some ways and some times. It depended. After all they had other sources. But they wanted to hear from the field directly which is one of the reasons that for four months we were supposed to call embassy Saigon every few hours throughout the night and then do a memorandum to the Secretary on the subject.

Q: So you did a daily briefing?

MARSH: I briefed all sorts of people, that was my department. For example, I went over and briefed Senator Robert Kennedy once a month. The reason was that we had a classmate who worked for Kennedy, as you will recall, and he got me in and so forth. I briefed one time the governor of Oklahoma. I was visiting my wife's parents and I had a breakfast arrangement with the governor of Oklahoma, later Senator Henry Bellman, who drove 130 miles from the state capitol to have breakfast with me in Ponca City at 6 o'clock in the morning to hear firsthand

about Vietnam.

Q: Let me probe with you a little more on that and let me ask you, as you discussed the Vietnam situation and briefed some of these senior officers, what was their reaction? Were there sort of different reactions and different sort of feeling they had about the situation and the future?

MARSH: That's a good question. It seems to me that we briefed them about tactical situations and I think that was really beside the point, I think the essential point was what was the end game going to be? On that none of us had any idea what it was because there was a general supposition, from the President on down, perhaps arising from our western logical point of view that ultimately the (end of tape)

Q: [Interviewer is Vlad Lehovich] Bill, in the fall of 1962, what was your image of Vietnam?

MARSH: Let me preface it by saying that I had visited Vietnam with my General, briefly, very briefly, in 1955. Well, even earlier. I had been put on orders while in Tokyo in late 1953 that would have made me, now get this, as an Air Force Second Lieutenant, would have made me port liaison officer in Haiphong.

What was going on? Well, there was to be a major mobilization for service in North Vietnam to assist the French who were in the final days of their agony there, but President Eisenhower vetoed the whole idea. You will recall that Admiral Radford, Vice President Nixon and many others, urged and advocated this, but the President was insistent that we should not become engaged in a land war.

So, it was almost in a way as if I was fated to go there. Now I visited Saigon briefly with my General in 1955, never dreaming that I would be showing up there eight years later. The French were still very much in command and there were some obvious signs that the French had completely alienated the population.

Q: Was this the Bao Dai government at that time? Or already Diem?

MARSH: It's Bao Dai, who had his Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem.

Q: Who had Ngo Dinh Diem as his Prime Minister?

MARSH: That's right. But the French were still in charge.

Q: How long did you stay in 1955?

MARSH: Oh, just a couple of days.

Q: What was your impression?

MARSH: I was horrified.

Q: Why?

MARSH: Well, some things are not suitable for tender ears but that we were shown by the French, such as the prison and certain other things that were very depressing and very wrong. By the way I had met a number of French military up in Tokyo when they came to visit my boss. I liked them very much. I'm a great Francophile, and I liked these people very much. But when they started to talk about the war and about the civilizing mission of France and all that sort of thing, it was clear that they were ninety years out of date.

Q: Was that what you felt was wrong, basically?

MARSH: That and the sheer brutality with which the French had treated much of the population.

Q: How about any impressions about the countryside or the people in Vietnam?

MARSH: Even in those days the countryside, and, again, we were in the South, we were in present day Cochinchina, the extreme south. There were obvious signs of warfare all over the place. I can remember the railroad, following the railroad, down into Saigon. We were coming from the Philippines. I don't know, perhaps for a photo mission we followed the railroad. It had been blasted to pieces in so many parts. You know the Trans Indochina railway had been one of the French great claims of accomplishment in that area. It took them about forty years to build it and they bragged constantly about it and here it was, wrecked. While I didn't see North Vietnam, one wondered what the situation could have been like up there where there had been even more intensive fighting.

Q: So Bill, you are back in the fall of 1962 and you decide that you and your bride will be going off to Vietnam?

MARSH: To put a fine point on it, Vlad, we did not oppose a decision by the Department that that should be the case. So in January I began the study of Vietnamese with your good self.

Q: January of 1963?

MARSH: That's right.

Q: Briefly speaking. In January of 1963, how was it to learn Vietnamese? How long did it last and how much did you learn?

MARSH: Of course, I would be delighted to get your views on this subject, but mine are these. First of all, I come from a musical family and the simplest way to teach tones would have been to note them musically, so I did that. I went to our so-called supervisors there and said, "You know, anybody who can read music, look, I've marked this on the scale for you." They laughed me to derision. This just wasn't the way it was done. Later I helped other people by telling them, "Oh, well, that's a perfect fourth interval" and that sort of thing. In any event the instructors and the

so-called linguists at the program conducted a very, very limited sort of instructional curriculum.

Whereas in Japan there had been regular appearances by Mrs. Jorden, who had told us something of Japanese grammar and syntax and usage and the like. And how these things related to the culture and why therefore there are the three politeness levels in Japanese and that sort of thing, we never had that kind of briefing which in Japan I had found exceedingly useful. But we never had that sort of thing. The linguists instead would concentrate on teaching us how to form certain sounds. This was not very comprehensible, the way they were doing that.

I remember one linguist was trying to explain one particular “o” sound by asking if anybody had ever been to Oklahoma. Since I was married to a native of Oklahoma I could make that sound. He said, “That is very good, will everybody else imitate that?” Well, you know you put intelligent people in a room and try to make parrots out of them. This is not exactly the best way.

Secondly, as far as substantive preparation for an assignment in Vietnam, I don’t know. We were supposed to read the newspaper, I think, and we were supposed to intuit the rest. But there was no well-prepared program of briefings or something of that sort.

Q: I wanted to get to that. Let me just ask, when you finished the course were you able to speak any Vietnamese?

MARSH: Sort of. In the first place in an extremely irregular language I found regional variations very pronounced and very strong. I would say I used French as much or more than I used Vietnamese when I was there. Incidentally, you’ll recall you were supposed to have, well, my partner, John Burke, and I were supposed to have three months in Saigon following the six months we had in Washington.

The tones were never a problem for me. Vocabulary was a problem because vocabulary varied from place to place and I’ll never forget that sometimes people in Vietnam, when I spoke with them, would light up with joy and other times would look completely foggy, like what is this strange person from the United States trying to say? So it was a very irregular sort of thing.

I think the program probably should have been at least one year long.

Q: One year long. A long time.

MARSH: And I would have divided it fifty-fifty between Washington and Saigon. Moreover I would have privatized the program and that would have been complete submergence somewhere. Now you and I both met those who had been to the brief program offered at Monterey by the Army. That was ludicrous, that program.

Q: That was a listening program, for listening to pilots basically, I believe.

Bill, let me skip to something you touched on and that is the substantive preparation for some area studies and briefings. Let me just ask generally, before you left what had you learned about Vietnam, what were your impressions of it, and whom had you met who was active on the

Vietnam scene in Washington at that time?

MARSH: First of all it's necessary to plan. There was a great deal of turmoil about Vietnam policy at that time.

Q: We're speaking here about 1962, 1963.

MARSH: Early '63. Now when I say early '63, I am deliberately marking off the territory before the great Buddhist uprising against Ngo Diem which began in the spring of 1963. There were those at the desk, Paul Kattenburg foremost among them, who took some forthright exception to the emergent Vietnam policy of the U.S.

I learned more about that controversy far later than I did at the time, because at the time there was really no discussion of pros and cons, assets and liabilities, for those of us. We all had Top Secret security clearances, but nobody was saying these are the risks, these are the vulnerabilities, and these are the potential gains and so forth. There was never that sort of thing. Instead much of it was couched in European terms and particularly the Secretary of State brought up Munich 1938 time and time and time again.

Q: This was Dean Rusk?

MARSH: Dean Rusk. And our actions in Indochina became derivative of the global strategic effort.

Q: You mean the Cold War effort?

MARSH: That's so.

Q: Did anybody bring up Korea in that context?

MARSH: Korea was not a very popular subject, as a matter of fact, because Korea, of course, had ended inconclusively. Nobody wanted to make that point.

Q: It had begun in ambiguity.

MARSH: The ambiguity and the pain.

Q: Not our defense perimeter.

MARSH: And the pain of it. Because those who served, the best man in my wedding, for example, had been a Marine on the retreat from the Reservoir and he had lots of things to say about the terrible suffering in that winter weather of 1950. So this was not some glorious expedition, which you would use. Instead what you would point to, you would point to such things as the restoration of the Shah in 1953, and the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954, that sort of thing. Where the United States acted decisively in the interior of a country, in internal affairs, as it were.

Q: Bill, did you have a clear, summarized policy sense of what America was doing in Vietnam as you were about to go over there and work on that program?

MARSH: There was a slogan.

Q: What was the slogan?

MARSH: The slogan was couched negatively. And the slogan was that we were to assist the South Vietnamese to prevent their takeover by the Communist North Vietnamese. So a preventive strategy, a defensive strategy, a limited strategy.

Q: Diem had been in office since 1955.

MARSH: Well, as President since '56.

Q: As President since '56. What was the policy at that time? When you were going over there did we have a sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem policy?

MARSH: Of course that policy emerged much later, once considerable differences of opinion had arisen. But President Truman began the policy of support for the French at the time of the Korean War, in 1950. There had been a continuous policy of provision of materiel and training and political support since 1950. First for the French and then, of course, Geneva came along in 1954.

Q: By the time you were getting ready in early 1963, was there still a sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem policy?

MARSH: Clearly.

Q: Clearly.

MARSH: You'll recall that Vice President Johnson had made a trip to the Far East and had hailed Ngo Diem as the Winston Churchill of Asia. Moreover we had been providing rather considerable support since 1961, fairly early in the Kennedy Administration, that is. Then, 1961, which was a year of setbacks, what with the Berlin Wall and what with the Bay of Pigs, all sorts of things. The Laos situation turning so sour. The focus got narrower and narrower and narrower in Asia until it centered on Vietnam.

Q: It centered on Vietnam.

Bill, when did you go there?

MARSH: I arrived in July of 1963. My welcoming committee at the airport consisted of Dick Holbrooke and Tony Lake!

Q: That's interesting, what were those folks doing?

MARSH: They were....

Q: Were they friends of yours from language training?

MARSH: From language training, that's correct.

Q: So they just came out to meet you.

MARSH: They came out to meet me.

Q: Or were they your official greeters?

MARSH: They came out to meet Ruth, my wife, and me. They took us to a house. It was very dark and there was a curfew because of the Buddhist uprising. The main pagoda was four blocks away and it was surrounded by troops and we had an icebox that was stocked with a bottle of milk, a bottle of gin, and some beer.

Q: This was what they had stocked for you and Ruth?

MARSH: No, the embassy had done that, as a matter of fact.

Q: Bill, correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't that a rather innovative and considerate way to greet a newly arriving couple, some milk, some gin...

MARSH: I supposed so. Incidentally, something that was consistent throughout my three years in Vietnam, I didn't have a phone.

Q: You didn't have a phone?

MARSH: Never had a phone in Vietnam at my residence, no, never had a residential phone.

Q: Let me just back up for a moment. You said that you were met at the airport by Richard Holbrooke and Anthony Lake, who continue to be very interested in government and one of whom was a national security advisor, another one of whom has done all sorts of things with both diplomacy and business. What were those fellows doing at that time?

MARSH: They were on their first tours, really, and they were doing rotational assignments, as I recall. Each of them later on became a sort of *aide-de-camp* to ambassadors and that sort of thing and at the same time traveled around the country. Incidentally, before we get to Vietnam there are a couple of things to signal.

First of all, I was told back in the Department that I was to be consul in Nha Trang on the central coast. That did not come to pass, and then when I was given passport and tickets there was nothing provided for my wife, no orders. The reason was that I wasn't married, they maintained.

And here we go again, this error. Something happened to the Dependency Statements filed in 1962, they never made it. This problem lasted for a decade, trying to get tickets and passports.

Q: Bill, in other words, for a decade after you had gotten married you kept having to prove that you were married to get travel orders?

MARSH: That is correct. One time when I protested that while my wife was in safehaven in Bangkok she had had our first son and how could they say I wasn't married and a supernumerary at the Department told me by phone, "Sir, it isn't necessary to be married to have a child."

Q: Well, that is a wonderful story. I'm glad you took us back there. You just took us to before you had arrived.

MARSH: Before I had arrived. That's right. But I managed to get there somehow or other, maybe just to shut me up they gave me a passport and orders. However when it came time to leave Asia, there were no orders or passport or tickets for my wife, we had to go through that argument all over again.

In any event we arrived in Saigon and there was considerable turmoil, a very unsettled situation for several reasons. First the local political situation with the Buddhists in open revolt and full repression practiced by the Diem government, and secondly because we had a change of ambassadors and clearly a change in policy.

Q: We've arrived in Saigon, it is July of 1963, and you were just saying that there were two things going on which added to the confusion. One was a situation involving Buddhists and another was a change in American ambassadors. Could you share a little bit of the Buddhist situation first of all at that time, as background?

MARSH: The Buddhist situation had been simmering for quite some time but really boiled over in Hue in May, I think it was, of 1963. Now Hue had special resonance because Central Vietnam was the homeland of President Ngo Dinh Diem, and Hue was the see of his brother, the Archbishop, Archbishop Thuc. There was a repression, and it was a bloody repression, of some Buddhist demonstrations and yet another brother of President Diem, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and particularly the latter's wife, Tranh Le Xuan, were hard-liners. We subsequently learned that Ngo Dinh Nhu was double-dealing. But at that time not many of us knew it, if any of us knew that, as a matter of fact because Ngo was extending his lines to the North Vietnamese by the Vietcong, the Vietnamese communists.

So international attention focused on this when there were several immolations by Buddhist bonzes, or priests. The press drawn to Vietnam by the increasing American involvement in the affairs of that country had something sensational to photograph and to report upon that could be very meaningful to the American public as a whole. After all, that you arm so many hamlets or that you prepare the defenses of so many provinces is pretty tame stuff, but martyrs were something quite different. So that was the Buddhist situation.

Now, when we arrived in July of 1963, Ambassador Nolting was already preparing his departure,

in fact did so in mid July, and Ambassador Lodge had been named to the post. For the younger listeners, readers, we should point out that Lodge was, after all, the Vice Presidential candidate opposite Lyndon B. Johnson's vice presidential candidacy only three years previously. So this was quite remarkable.

Q: This was a bi-partisan gesture.

MARSH: It was a bi-partisan gesture.

Q: By a president who hated Mr. Lodge, I suspect.

MARSH: By a President who had seen in Mr. Lodge everything the President's father had had to contend with over many years in the Boston area. So that it was a case of opposites attracting. Yes, indeed, as a matter of fact.

Q: So, Bill, had you had a chance to work with Ambassador Nolting at all before he left?

MARSH: I met him. He was a very approachable man, but again I was in there in the capacity of a student, studying in Vietnamese. But a member of my FSO entering class had been his staff aide and so he took me in to meet the ambassador and we talked and all that sort of thing.

Now there was a policy shift that was imminent. Ambassador Nolting had been identified, rightly or wrongly, probably erroneously, as with Ngo Dinh Diem, sink or swim, up or down. So it was clear that a tougher line was coming in with Ambassador Lodge. Why else would the President name the man he had unseated 11 years previously in order to get to the Senate? Why would he invite him if we were going to continue with the same old thing? From the arrival of Ambassador Lodge in August of 1963 until the *coup d'etat* of November 1, 1963, there was great speculation as to what the Lodge appointment meant and what this mean in particular for President Diem.

Q: Before we get into this period, let me ask a little about the American embassy at that time. When you arrived you went and met a lot of people, can you describe what that embassy was, who was there, who was who at that time?

Who was the deputy chief of mission?

MARSH: The deputy chief of mission was Bill Truehart at that time. Mel Manfull was the political counselor. Richardson was the station chief, CIA, and was a particular target of Madam Nhu.

Q: John Richardson?

MARSH: I think so, yes, I believe so. But that wasn't, frankly Vlad, that wasn't what caught my attention.

Q: What caught your attention?

MARSH: Now the thing I want to describe for you it is necessary to hark back ten years previously when I saw a very large military presence in Japan. I saw bases with tens of thousands of people on them and so forth. But I never saw so many U.S. military relative to the civilian population as in Saigon. They seemed to be everywhere and the Vietnamese, except at rush hours, seemed to be off the street but there were hordes it appeared of military there.

Q: This was in mid 1963?

MARSH: That's so, and there were at that time about 18,000 American military in the country. Now 18,000 would be the equivalent of about 250,000 Vietnamese in the United States, something like that.

Q: Concentrated?

MARSH: Very largely concentrated. They were building an enormous headquarters staff there.

Q: What was that? Was that the MAAG, the Military Assistance Group?

MARSH: The MACV, the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam. That's right.

Q: That was the second of the two? First there was a MAAG, then there was a MACV.

MARSH: That is so. And they were already planning a MACV.

Q: And they couldn't stand each other, as I recall.

MARSH: There were problems but very soon the MAAG was incorporated into the MACV which became a full military Command, it just had hordes of people. For example, where I worked for two and a half years was the Provincial Reporting Unit. There were seven of us provincial reporters and the military set up a unit just to process our reports, nothing else, with 58 people in it.

Q: I was in that unit with you, Bill, and I never knew that until today! You're saying that the military set up a unit to process the reports produced by provincial reporting?

MARSH: That is correct.

Q: Which had a total of...

MARSH: Seven.

Q: A total of seven persons. Amazing. Well, it certainly is attentive. Bill, you were impressed with the military presence at that time in Saigon?

MARSH: I was worried by it.

Q: You were worried by it.

MARSH: I was worried by it, to be perfectly frank with you. Let me again just recall something for the user's benefit here. I had been in local government work, albeit with a Foundation, but there was of necessity a heavy local political component of that work. So I had picked up certain sensitivities of which I really wasn't even fully aware. But what I want to say is, and many people have asked me, when did I first have a suspicion that things were not necessarily going to go according to plan. I would say it was within the first week I arrived. I had literally a physical sensation, a strange feeling in my stomach, and I didn't know what it was but just something seemed wrong, anomalous, and I wasn't quite sure what it was. That feeling didn't decline over the next few years.

Q: You were a student, you said, for the first three months in Vietnam?

MARSH: Yes, although I was pulled off to cover, if you please, for the embassy, that is for the embassy's security section, actions by the government troops at the Xa Loi which was about four blocks from where I was living, as I said.

Q: Was that where the so-called bonze barbecues had taken place?

MARSH: No, they had always taken place in town.

Q: In Saigon.

MARSH: Thus, for example, one took place in front of the Roman Catholic cathedral.

Q: In Saigon?

MARSH: That's right. These were calculated, you know, these immolations, to attract the maximum publicity and attention.

Q: I believe, Bill, there was a list of people who had volunteered to commit suicide in this fashion?

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: And the hierarchy allowed them to at that time.

MARSH: That is so.

Q: By the political Buddhist hierarchy to my understanding.

MARSH: That is so. The thing that was extraordinary is that there we are, outside the Xa Loi Pagoda and we've got representatives of the three Armed Services there, of the intelligence services, of the embassy, and all these American reporters. You almost had as many Americans as you had Vietnamese security forces at these pagodas. It was intrusion.

Q: It was a press event, wasn't it?

MARSH: It was a press event. It was a performance, is what it was, really a performance. There was a lot of shouting back and forth and occasionally there was some wielding of truncheons and that sort of thing, but on the whole I don't think that it was the cruelest thing imaginable, but then I didn't see everything.

At any rate when Ambassador Lodge arrived he decided he was going to reorganize the embassy.

Q: You were pulled out of your language training?

MARSH: No, I managed to take my language training but just before completing the language training they said that I would not be in the Provincial Reporting Unit as I had been told, instead I would be put in the Consular Section. I like music very much and so what I said actually is, "Like Mimi in 'La Bohème,' addio senza rancour... so long, no hard feelings." I said, just give me a ticket and send me back to the United States, I've had this training, we'll just write that off, I'm going to be in the Consular Section where I'll not be using Vietnamese. Let's just forget the whole scene, when can we leave, I'm sure Ruth will be delighted to go.

Incidentally, I did take a trip around Vietnam in October, about two weeks before the coup d'état, with my wife. I took her to Dalat and to Hue and to Nha Trang, so I took her to three very interesting places in Vietnam. One could still travel around by air relatively easily. And so we had seen the country and there we were in Saigon but what worried me to no small extent was that, first of all, everywhere we had to travel by day. At night all bets were off and we were confined whether we traveled or whether we remained in Saigon, to the city.

Q: This was travel outside of town or travel within the town of Saigon?

MARSH: Outside of town, but outside of town was rather severely drawn. For example, suburban areas were off limits. Gia Dinh Province, which was to the northeast of Saigon, no, no, no you didn't do that. We went up to Dalat and that is where we met the head of USOM, the AID mission, and his wife, who were at the same hotel we were. He suggested a place that we would go to dinner called La Savoisiennien, run by two old French women who'd been there for donkeys years and it was a little bit out of town. To my horror, we went through a Vietcong roadblock.

Q: With the AID director?

MARSH: With the AID director.

Q: Who was the AID director?

MARSH: I don't recall, to tell you the truth, I really don't remember. But I'll never forget that. He seemed oblivious to the whole thing but I knew what it was because I did catch a few words, at that time. We are talking October of 1963. But believe me this was not very far from the

center of Dalat at all, but it was at night. But we went and we had a very good dinner and we came back and the roadblock had disappeared. It had moved on someplace else.

Q: Did the roadblock stop you? Did they chat with you a little bit?

MARSH: They sort of waved us through. I think at that time the Vietcong were not particularly interested in having any contretemps with westerners.

Q: At this time you say there were about 18,000 or more American forces, but they are not combat forces?

MARSH: They are not combat forces.

Q: They were an advisory effort?

MARSH: They were strictly training, an advisory effort, plus they were cadre for an eventual massive effort. Thus I remember, for example, meeting a Major whose job it was to go over the Vietnam railway to see if it would handle tanks. I happened to meet him in the officer's club in Nha Trang one time. I said to him that of course it would not handle tanks. In the first place it is full of tunnels and this is a narrow gauge line and very lightweight rail and you would never get through it. He said, "Please, please, don't tell my superiors. This has been a very nice trip."

Q: Fascinating. So we are back after three months of language training punctuated by some work that you have described with security, and other issues, what did you then do?

MARSH: Well, I was put in the external side, external political affairs, but briefly. I was there for about a month or two and then put into the Provincial Reporting program.

Q: Bill, can you describe that program?

MARSH: The notion of the program was that officers trained in the Vietnamese language would circulate throughout the country, spending a week or so in a given provincial capital. Getting down with the U.S. military in those capitols, but working pretty largely with the Vietnamese, the province chief, district chiefs, provincial governments, local notables, Buddhist, Catholics, Cao Dai, what have you. And then spend the next week in Saigon writing up a report on that particular province as to how things were moving.

I think that initially the idea was to try to keep a finger on the pulse of the sects and the Buddhists in Vietnam. Now remember there were a number of dissident sects, Cao Dai, Binh Xuyen, and so forth, as well as the majority Buddhist population. But Buddhists varied greatly, that's a term of art. Those of Hue had little in common with those in the Delta and in the mountains.

Then in addition we were supposed to keep an eye on the various ethnic minorities in the country, the Cham, the Montagnards, etc., and my special assignment, because I had strong French, was to keep an eye on what the French were up to. Everyone was very suspicious at that

time of the de Gaulle government, and in fact the French were considered hostile to us because whether due to their smarting from their wounds and their expulsion from the area and their resistance to the 'Yankification' of Indochina, I don't know. But in any event I remember there was a distinctly hostile air coming out of Washington with respect to the French.

Now incidentally a number of those who had served in the embassy in Saigon, such as Nolting, Truehart, Manfull, and others were old Paris hands. They were regarded as rather Francophile and French sympathizers and they were replaced in later years with those of Asian experience, rather than those with European experience so that they would not be seen as doing service to the old colonial masters.

Q: Bill that is a very interesting point. Let us go back for a minute to folks like Truehart, Manfull and others. Do you think they were there because they knew French and it was at one point or another a French-speaking post? Why do you think they wound up there?

MARSH: I guess probably that was the case. But also because they were people who could appreciate the significance in Asian security of the French-speaking countries of Indochina. You'll recall that SEATO was in operation, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, and the French were members. These were people who could keep an eye on things. Later the sort of favored country became the United Kingdom, namely because of its success, or perceived success, in Malaya. But under very different terms, of course.

If we had in the '50s and early '60s, French advisors and confidential sources among the French, we later tended to have British policemen. Thompson for example, who had been the chief of police in Malaya, and so on, and others who passed through Saigon and went on to Washington. President Nixon, for example, made great use of Sir Robert Thompson from Malaya.

Q: I remember meeting him. Yes.

MARSH: But there is one strong current in our policy that probably bears mention at this time and that is that there was a fascination on the part of the President, President Kennedy, with the guerrilla mystique. This meant that Indo-China, particularly Vietnam, was to be a proving ground for America's capability to conduct anti-guerrilla operations and to counter what was seen as the spreading Chinese evangelism of guerrilla movements.

It seems to me that this was very simplistic and I thought so at the time because the Chinese Revolution was due to an awful lot more things than presumed friendliness between the peasant and the guerrilla soldier.

But this business that the people are the sea in which the fish, the guerrilla swim, all that sort of thing. We had these slogans all of the time. Now the answer to that problem perceived by President Kennedy and his brother, the Attorney General and later Senator from New York, in no small part the answer was to have been U.S. Special Forces. It was assumed that they could serve as Western guerrillas, moving through the countryside, joining forces with the people and so forth. This idea was totally erroneous.

But later on when I was briefing on a fairly regular basis Senator Kennedy, in his office, his first question was always, “How are the Special Forces doing?”

Q: This was some years later?

MARSH: Yes that’s right. But it was an abiding fascination and I think it was kind of a premature Rambo syndrome that we had here, that heroic virtues were the answer to these great revolutionary problems.

Q: Bill, at that time did you find yourself reading any of the classics of counter-insurgency or guerrilla warfare?

MARSH: I already had.

Q: I had, too. Can you elaborate on that because there was quite a cult of those books at that time?

MARSH: Well, first of all, I read “Sun Tsu,” which is what, the 11th or 12th century, something of that sort, on the art of war. I read everything Bernard Fall ever wrote.

Q: This was when you were in Vietnam or before?

MARSH: Before.

Q: So in other words you had, let’s just skip back for a minute, area preparation? While you said it wasn’t very strong, you had basically done a lot of reading?

MARSH: Well, I tried to find out as much about the country as possible because I wasn’t getting anything at the Foreign Service Institute or from the desk. I wanted to know what the place was like. Now as far as American policy was concerned that always remained foggy. As long as I was attached with Vietnam it was a foggy kind of thing and that you were largely supposed to intuit what to do.

Q: That’s very interesting. So you read Bernard Fall, Street Without Joy?

MARSH: Oh, yes.

Q: Various Fall writings? Anyone else?

MARSH: Malraux. Quite a few things. Anything I could put my hands on, because it was fascinating and it was obviously a darkening, gathering storm.

Q: Yes. Yes. Bill, you mentioned that at that time for a lot of people in Washington Vietnam was among other things a proving ground for counter-guerrilla warfare, counter-insurgency. How did that fit in to what you began to do then with the Provincial Reporting Unit?

MARSH: Well, I had some advantages that others of my peers did not have. I had been in the military and had some familiarity with military processes in thinking and approaches and that sort of thing. On the other hand, one of the most impressive things throughout this whole effort was to meet those junior FSOs, Foreign Service officers, and your good name is foremost among them, who had not been in the military. But FSOs who really had tremendous sense and sensitivity to military situations, and to tactical as well as strategic considerations. I was terribly impressed.

For example, Richard Teare, who was a member of the staff, had never served in the military but could go into a Province and then write an absolutely brilliant report on the vulnerabilities of that Province in the military sense. The problem was that our American military colleagues could not accept this. Now I can recall that later, when Ambassador Taylor had arrived - Ambassador Taylor had, of course, an immense prestige, an immense reputation - we really had titans as ambassadors there in Lodge, Taylor, Lodge and Bunker, I think we had the best you could possibly provide - but it was inconceivable for Ambassador Taylor that civilians could analyze military situations. It was just totally inconceivable because he was of a priesthood that could not admit the laity to these mysteries, if you will. How do I know that? He told us so; that he couldn't understand us making military judgments. That seemed completely wrong. What we did was analyze, use our heads, sense and talk to a lot of people at a lot of different ranks, enlisted lower-field grade and senior, both Vietnamese and American.

In any event, one had to be an autodidact, one had to teach oneself here because the preparation for service in Vietnam was not very considerable.

Q: Bill, the Provincial Reporting Unit, who was in charge of that unit at that time? Were you in charge of it?

MARSH: No, later I was. The first chief was James Rosenthal.

Q: James D. Rosenthal.

MARSH: James D. Rosenthal, an extraordinary public servant in my view and a very close friend and a great man and I know you regard him very highly as well.

Q: Who else was with you, Bill, who were your colleagues?

MARSH: We had David Engel, whose efforts, I would like to put on record, whose efforts for many years went unrewarded by the Service, a self-effacing kind of man but whose contributions were colossal. We had John Negroponte, who became Assistant Secretary of State and ambassador to Mexico and the Philippines, and other places, Honduras.

So we had people who did quite well afterwards. We would have had you, but you were out of reach, you were no fool. You didn't put yourself in our clutches. You were with AID.

I want to put this on record, that when anybody disparages the Foreign Service, I don't tolerate it I point out the work that you and your peers did for another agency, in an unfamiliar situation,

with great security problems and so forth, and it was brilliant. Your work was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. For example, Rob Warne, in the Delta, yourself, others, amazing what those young officers, but who were well educated and terribly devoted, accomplished - really, my hat is off to you all.

Q: Bill, in provincial reporting, which provinces did you spend time in?

MARSH: At first I was assigned to those in central Vietnam, and later I took those around the Saigon area. When I became the head of the unit, I was with those around the Saigon area because, after all, rank has its privileges, right? And I wanted to have less traveling. The traveling up to central Vietnam was pretty hairy and the Delta was never an area that interested me very much. Not because it was so infested with communist forces, which was true, but because the dustiness of the place in the dry season made my sneezing so intense that I couldn't talk to people, I was too busy using my handkerchief, so I stayed out of there. I did visit, of course, the Delta to a certain extent and went the length and breadth of the country.

The uplands, the highlands, I also had a dust problem up there. In those days I had considerable sensitivity to that sort of thing so I wanted to stay as close to salt water as I could.

Q: Right. So you were going around central Vietnam?

MARSH: Yes that is right. Remember, we had a consulate in Hue at that time, so the upper three provinces were looked after by our consulate in Hue. I came into the picture a province or two north of Nha Trang and down the coast a couple of provinces, and so forth. A center of considerable conflict between the Catholic and Buddhist populations, the place from which the later President of Vietnam had come.

Q: This was Nguyen Binh Thieu, the later president?

MARSH: Yes that's correct, he was from that area. And, moreover, Nha Trang had considerable strategic significance because of its magnificent harbor.

Q: They were also beautiful places, Bill, aren't they?

MARSH: Well...that was not...I appreciated that very much, but I gave that up in order to move down around the Saigon area.

Q: One personal question at that time, you were married and family still with you? Was Ruth, your wife, still with you?

MARSH: Well, when we arrived in Vietnam... first of all, we were told we would have a two-year tour, and we would never see Vietnam again. And so I would enjoy my two years as consul in Nha Trang and then would have a nice home leave and would never see the place again. Very soon after we arrived there was arbitrary extension of the tour to three years and of course the Nha Trang option was taken away. But for that matter the assignment was going to be completely changed to make a consular officer out of me, rather than a field officer and I didn't

want that. Well, I did get the fieldwork, and we were there for three years with a home leave at 18 months. That home leave came in February of 1965. Ruth was with me. We had planned to go around the world. We were sitting in a restaurant in Oklahoma one day and were told that the President was on television and announced the departure of the families from Vietnam.

Q: So you were okay, right? By then, Bill, you had a son already?

MARSH: No, no, no. On this home leave we had reached Oklahoma, where my wife's parents lived, and we went on to Washington. It was there she learned she was pregnant with our first child. So what we sought from the Department was advice: should we go to safehaven, should we leave her there in the United States, what exactly should we do? And we couldn't get any advice.

Q: Bill, what did you wind up doing? What did Ruth wind up doing?

MARSH: I gave Ruth the option and we continued round the world and we dropped her off in Bangkok.

Q: In March of 1965? Or February of '65?

MARSH: In April of '65.

Q: April of '65. And she was there as a dependent in safehaven?

MARSH: That is correct.

Q: Were there others from Vietnam? From Saigon, who had joined in that program?

MARSH: There were quite a few and far more than the embassy in Bangkok found comfortable.

Q: Did they get housing?

MARSH: No, they had to find it.

Q: They had to find it...they had an allowance?

MARSH: No.

Q: No. Okay. It was a self-help project.

MARSH: Yes, quite.

Q: Was it coming out of your pocket, Bill?

MARSH: That is correct, so was the fare between Saigon and Bangkok. Later on, years later, they instituted a paid fare for people to go back and forth.

Q: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think at that time Emily Lodge, Henry Cabot Lodge's wife, also moved out of Saigon and went to Bangkok.

MARSH: She did and she was wonderful to the Saigon wives, and particularly to mine. They got along very, very well. Ambassador Lodge invited Dick Holbrooke and me and some others to go with him on the jet that was provided for him to go over to Bangkok to see his wife.

Q: Because you and Dick and others had dependents that were there. I imagine quite a lot of folks.

MARSH: That's right. But he was close to us, we were in the embassy, he knew us and that sort of thing. So he was very kind, very, very kind.

Q: That's terrific.

MARSH: But the safehaven arrangements made by the Department were woefully inadequate, more non-existent than actual and Embassy Bangkok was quite unhelpful.

Q: Were they friendly?

MARSH: No.

Q: You weren't terribly welcome, is what you are saying.

MARSH: Well, the thing that I have forgiven but can never forget was that when my wife went into labor she had tried to get in touch with the Thai who drove for her at the hotel where he usually hung out, and she couldn't reach him. She was into frequent contractions and called the embassy and asked if they could send her to get to the hospital in an embassy car. You will recall the notoriety of Bangkok traffic. It is even worse today, but it was horrible then. She didn't get transportation; she got a lecture from the general services officer that Saigon wives were not supposed to bother Embassy Bangkok and were supposed to look after their own matters. So she managed to get a taxi and she arrived at the Bangkok Nursing Home Hospital in Bangkok barely in time, and the gentleman who dealt with her in such an unthinking way later rose to very high rank in the Department.

Q: Bill, on the principle that good deeds shouldn't remain unpunished, who was this gentleman?

MARSH: *De mortuis nil nisi bonam* (of the dead, nothing but good).

Q: Okay, point taken. Shall we go back a little to the provinces?

MARSH: Yes, let's do that.

Q: We're back to the provinces, Bill.

MARSH: This was very interesting work, I must say, extremely interesting work. It was totally

unstructured. We identified what was worthy of reporting or not, whom we would see, we were totally on our own with no supervision out there in the field. Now we had certain general guidelines from the embassy, to be sure, but if we decided we would see X or Y or Z, usually there were no requirement that we call back the embassy for permission. Not everything was ad referendum, we had considerable initiative and got around and it was very interesting. It was also an exposure to danger that I never had in the military.

Q: Fascinating, fascinating.

MARSH: I'm sure you as well as I have driven over mined roads. I'm sure you as well as I had been in a town encircled by Vietcong in a night attack. I'm sure you as well as I had been very, very close to a napalm retaliatory attack by U.S. forces. This was something.

Now, the gods were with me in that I was asked to delay my home leave in 1965 by a couple of weeks because John Negrofonte, who was working for me, wanted to go off on a trip. I was furious because I had everything planned and I had to recast everything. Well, what it meant was that I was away when the embassy was subjected to a terrorist attack.

Q: That was March of 1965.

MARSH: That was March 30th of 1965, and I happened to be in Athens at that time.

Q: It got bombed?

MARSH: And it got bombed, that is correct.

Q: I was out of town, too. I was out of the country.

MARSH: I think you and I, as glasses wearers, were particularly lucky not to be there because a number of people lost their eyesight as a consequence of that explosion. The doctor in the CIA, you'll recall, was blinded. He was looking out to see what all the excitement was about outside.

Q: It was considered lucky at that time, Bill, if you didn't have a window view or if you were facing away from the window.

MARSH: That's right. That is correct.

Q: You would have some shards in the back of your scalp, as did Mel Levine. I remember Mel Levine had to have surgery for the back of his head to have the glass pieces taken out.

MARSH: Yes. And Jim Rosenthal, our leader of the Provincial Reporting Unit, was badly cut in the face. It was very bad. But those people all were given magnificent treatment by the embassy. The embassy gave them one day off. One day off!

Q: Yes. Well, it sounds like a health maintenance organization these days, dealing with someone's delivery of a child.

MARSH: May I comment about that incident?

Q: Oh, of course, Bill. We have about a minute left.

MARSH: There had been a report, an intelligence report, of an impending attack. Someone suggested putting back the concrete barriers that had stood in front of the embassy to prevent traffic from coming and the decision was taken at very high level that this was nonsense, and we were not going to be cowed by this sort of thing.

Q: Amazing.

MARSH: So, the Vietcong drove right into the lobby.

Q: ...drove right into the lobby. At this point, let's take a break and we'll resume this very soon.

This is December 30, 1997. This is a continuation of an interview with Mr. William H. Marsh.

Bill, Happy New Year. Last time we talked we had discussed work in Saigon that you were doing. We discussed provincial reporting. You had quite a lot of interesting stuff in that regard and then we came up to the very dramatic moment of March 30, 1965, when the American embassy was badly bombed. You were luckily out of the country. At that point we stopped.

Bill, what were you doing after that, what is the next sequence of events?

MARSH: First, Happy New Year to you, Vlad. It's good to be with you and is indeed like old times.

Upon returning to the embassy in early April of 1965 from a home leave which itself had been charged with emotion in that while we were in Oklahoma, President Johnson ordered out the families so that we knew that my wife could not return to Saigon. We reached Washington to find out that she was pregnant with our first child, and we had to stop at Bangkok on the way back in order to get her established. I left her pregnant in the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok with two cotton dresses and no place to live. So it's an unsung story of heroism which I think deserves to be mentioned because spouses get very little, very little appreciation from the Foreign Service and from the Department generally.

In any event, to return to the shattered embassy, where my desk was under a pile of rubble and where there were two large boxes on that desk. We had ordered some hurricane lamps from Neiman-Marcus and they had been sent. I was just going to pick them up and toss them out but I didn't hear any tinkle of glass. I opened them and they were in perfect condition. We used them for years. I wrote Stanley Marcus and said he would never believe what a packing department he had. I got back a very nice letter from him saying they get a lot of gripes, but this was the first time they had ever gotten praise like that.

In any event, we got our lives reestablished. It was really like an entirely new tour because it was now a bachelor tour; it was now obviously a wartime tour. The explosion I think had finally dispelled any pretense that we were there to look after civil action or police action, or anything of that sort. Incidentally, the powers that be in the embassy had given all of those who had experienced the explosion a day off. One day off. Which was certainly generous, wasn't it!

At any rate we then set up the work. Jim Rosenthal had been the Head of Provincial Reporting and he left in early summer. So then I became Head of Provincial Reporting and remained Head of Provincial Reporting for the next, oh, nine or 10 months, something of that sort. I had to reorganize. We had an increasingly massive American military presence and the beginnings of American military intervention, if you will, starting in the fall of 1965.

Now there was something that happened then, in the fall, that we did not assess properly, I think. That was that the American desire for a classical battlefield confrontation with the Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces was granted. This in the Ia Drang Valley, and American forces were defeated, in effect, at that time. This had a great influence on the U.S. military, I believe, but we did not have the feeling, the full assessment of that. One of the things was that we really were not accompanying U.S. military forces on military operations. Now right at this point...

Q: Which battle was this?

MARSH: Ia Drang... the Ia Drang Valley. That was a pitched battle and American forces came off second best with heavy losses. Before the military, or military historians, or whoever may be listening to this start reaching for their war-clubs, I should say I am not suggesting a system of political commissars. But I am saying that when you have a war which has mixed civilian and military elements, and in which civilians and diplomats at that are supposed to be doing reporting, providing full coverage of these sorts of things, there should be at least sampling for those civilians on military operations.

Now you, Vlad, and I, both had experience of small scale, small unit stuff out in the Provinces. I'm sure that you had the experience that I had in Ham Nghia Province, just west of Saigon. They handed me a weapon and said I would have to use it as the Vietcong surrounded us. They had called in an air strike but I might have to fight off attackers at this compound. This was in the middle of the night. I'm sure you had experiences of that sort.

But at the level of field grade officers out in the field, we did have that opportunity to observe military situations. At more senior levels, and with larger units, we did not and that's a pity because we did not really get the full measure of what was happening in Vietnam with the American effort. Namely, that the American military power was proving inefficacious there.

So we did our reporting. I may have mentioned the work of Richard Teare, who was one of the fellows on my staff and how he had done a very honest report of the vulnerabilities of a certain province. The military wouldn't clear it. Phil Habib, the political counselor, asked him to go back and do another assessment and see if he had done everything right - and he couldn't land at the provincial capital because the Vietcong had overrun the air field and occupied it! But that

didn't influence the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam at all.

Now one experience of mine, two in fact, seemed to me demonstrate the problems that we had confronting a major general staff operation. The first was, at a time that I was acting consul in Hue, I was called up to the Ben Hai River which was the boundary, you'll recall, between North and South Vietnam. U.S. Navy aircraft bombing had destroyed the bridge over that river. The Canadian members of the International Control Commission had signaled this to me. I got there at once, looked it over. The bridge was in ruins. I got on the phone, called the embassy and said they should please get in touch with MACV because U.S. Navy aircraft had destroyed the famous bridge, which had great, symbolic importance, as you will recall. MACV's response to this when informed was (A) there were no U.S. Navy aircraft anywhere in that vicinity because they had been attacking Vinh, which was something like a hundred miles to the north, and (B) I deserved a reprimand because I shouldn't have been in the demilitarized zone there. I never did understand the latter and, of course, the former point was totally fallacious.

But they insisted that the bridge was intact and that there was absolutely no problem with them.

A second incident was rather interesting, I think. I went to see an old French planter in Phuoc Long Province, which was along the Cambodian border north of Saigon. He gave me a rather full accounting of how the Vietcong were raising considerable funds from the workers on rubber plantations. As the workers came up to draw their wages in cash from the table where he and the other employers sat there was a Vietcong agent who took a percentage off this for the cause's coffers. I wrote this up and got a query, ultimately, from MACV, how did I get there, since there was no military airfield? I said that I drove and MACV responded that was impossible, I could not have driven because the only road between the provincial capital and that plantation was heavily mined. My response was, sorry, I did go and was here to prove that I had made the trip successfully. In which case, once again, MACV said I deserved a reprimand.

Q: Bill, what you are saying, if I understand it, the point of Ben Hai and this second episode, is that when you get a very large command it doesn't know what is happening on the ground. Is that the moral of the story?

MARSH: Let me speak of a time, and there were numerous times, when I happened to participate in briefings of Secretary McNamara. As a matter of fact I accompanied Secretary McNamara, I believe earlier I mentioned how he insisted on using a Vietnamese phrase which he distorted and it became totally counterproductive. At any rate once again I was in a briefing and I happened to be sitting next to a Major Schweitzer, who later became a General and was at the White House. He was a very forthright man of very good but rather blunt reputation in speaking. He was listening at that time because provincial advisors had been brought in to brief McNamara and of course they did very little talking. It was the staff chiefs from MACV who did the talking to the Secretary of [Defense] and all these people were supposed to do was nod in agreement when things were said.

At one point Schweitzer leaned toward me and said, "Did you hear what he just said? He said the Vietcong in Binh Long Province has no mortar capability." Schweitzer said, "I've got a piece of the shell in my leg from a mortar." He went and took this up with MACV and they disallowed

that it was a mortar, he was mistaken. So he didn't even know what had hit him, according to them. An interesting thing to me was that at one time field representatives of MACV were not authorized to receive combat pay, but the Saigon staff of MACV was.

These were distortions. It was difficult for us to know how to deal with them. And as a matter of fact the unprecedented nature of these sorts of problems meant that our superiors, our diplomatic superiors, didn't quite know how to deal with these matters. They found it difficult to give us guidance. Partly because they believed that we should have little guidance because if we were going to go out and report, we should not be biased in any respect by that. But it made it very difficult, frankly, to know what to look for and what was permissible and what was impermissible. Well, we soon learned.

First of all, Ambassador Taylor, Maxwell Taylor, as I mentioned before I believe, did not see a military reporting role for civilians. That was just totally unprofessional as far as he was concerned. Henry Cabot Lodge, on the other hand, who returned in 1965, believed very thoroughly in us and in our work and used and relied on us a great deal. I was there for the second tour of Henry Cabot Lodge.

We saw and learned a great deal, I think, and the difficulty came in transmitting this and then seeing it was useful to policy-makers, decision-makers. I remember, for example, the U.S. Division located west of Saigon, I think this was a little later but at any rate, I asked how many vehicles they had for the troops and was told there was a vehicle for every two. The Lieutenant General shocked me with that statement. I said, "I beg your pardon, there is a vehicle for every two men you have?" And he replied, "Yes, Americans don't walk, they drive." Well, that meant we were going to flood that country with materiel for by this time we had a quarter-million people in the country, you see. But Americans don't walk? Not even soldiers? Not even young men? No, they drive.

There were anomalies of that sort and it was very difficult to know how to put them all together. The confusions were manifest. I think one of the most important confusions that we saw was that in a war which was so inherently political in its compass and in its motivations, the U.S. military weren't quite sure how to provide guidance and to direct their own people. I remember once a conversation with General Westmoreland in which I said the troops had more money than some of them had ever seen in their lives before or were ever likely to see again. Could one not take the system used by the Peace Corps, which rather banks the volunteers' money and then gave it to them when they left? They were able to use that for school or to buy a house or make down payment on a house or an automobile or what have you.

Troops were going out with great enormous batches of money on R&R to Hong Kong and to Bangkok and buying a lot of junk and wasting money in bars and in general driving up prices all over the place. This had an inflationary impact on the economies out there that was not in accord with our war aims for that region. General Westmoreland thought that was a nifty idea and he checked with his people and they told him that it would be too demoralizing, we could not do that. I was struck by the fact that rather sadly he said, "You know, we should, but we can't."

Q: Interesting.

MARSH: Well, work was appreciated by at least one group. There were eight of us Provincial Reporters and MACV set up a Processing Unit. And the Processing Unit simply took our reports, processed them, reproduced them, sent them around the military chain of command and so forth and it was staffed with over fifty people. It had no reportorial, no editorial, functions whatsoever. It was strictly reproduction and distribution. Now that was very flattering to know that that would be done on that basis.

Now we, from '65, noticed that there was a tone of increasing desperation coming in. Foreign Service officers are pretty sophisticated people, or at least they used to be. When people are always talking about success instead of letting the events themselves proclaim the success there must be something wrong. It became a little suspicious. We heard this more and more urgently, about the supposedly growing light at the end of the tunnel, as Phil Habib heard when he went to the conference with President Johnson in Wake Island, I think it was, and so forth and so on. And we had success stories coming in all the time.

But as Henry Cabot Lodge said to some military briefers - and this was a man who had such enormous presence, such an aura about him and so forth, who could really put people in respect of him just by walking or standing nearby or that sort of thing - but at any rate he said in that wonderful Boston Brahmin accent, "General, I'm told there is significant progress made in reducing the Vietcong threat to Saigon, but I noticed that there is even more gunfire every night than there was during my first tour here. How is it then, that there has been such progress." And of course the response was a long, long, series of stutters on the part of the military briefer who could not do that."

Q: Bill, can I just go back, you said there was a tone of desperation that was noticeable by that point, in 1965, can you give some examples of that?

MARSH: The search for negotiations. I'm not sure how we got this, I think maybe we FSOs at the embassy in Saigon got it from osmosis, to tell you the truth. But we knew there was a very active search to undertake a negotiated settlement of matters. We also heard that there was a limitation on the amount of forces. We were going to put in another 50,000, another 100,000, but these would be brief and just as soon as we got things cleaned up out they'd come and that sort of thing. At the same time, oddly enough, the Secretary of State was saying, in effect, we are there for as long as it takes and to do whatever is required. So there is a little contradiction there in that kind of thing. But we had more and more and more visitors and we had an increasing confrontation with the press and you will recall that.

The press could find very little, very little, that was commendable in our effort out there, and a great deal that was condemnatory. I remember when the *New York Daily News* manufactured a story about Doug Ramsey, one of our colleagues, who was taken prisoner there and said that he was privy to the innermost secrets of the Mission Council and all of that kind of thing. We were shocked at the vindictiveness of the story and the sheer viciousness of it. And so we looked to Barry Zorthian of USIA and said, why isn't Joe Freed, the reporter, why isn't he just cut out of the pattern here. None of us would ever talk to him again. And Zorthian pleaded with us, no, no, no we had to try to keep on the good side of the press, we had to inform the public, blah, blah,

blah, blah and we counter-argued that this man was not informing the public but misinforming it. He was harming our own colleagues in the process.

We got nowhere with that sort of thing and we said to ourselves there is desperation here. We were not even showing any real, masculine vigor in what we were doing here; we were kowtowing to everyone. Also we had experts running through Saigon constantly. Dr. Kissinger was there, Sir Robert Thompson came through to give us the benefit of his Malaya experience of the 1950s, although what that had to do with anything we were never quite sure. Then we had Bernard Fall and others who knew the French experience. Come one, come all! There was not a calm sense of assurance; there was a frenzy of trying every possible solution.

I remember the day that McNamara was told about the ramasseurs, these were the middlemen, mainly Chinese, who gathered the rice from individual farmers and then wholesaled it to the major urban markets in Vietnam or, in the old days, it was exported. But the ramasseurs were in a briefing and were suspected of diverting a certain amount of rice to the Vietcong. And McNamara said we would take over rice distribution, and we did! Actually it all fell back into the ramasseurs' hands, its just that you had an American seemingly directing it or distributing it or dealing with that kind of thing.

At any rate we were trying to build nationhood for South Vietnam and at the same time we're taking away one of their principal economic endeavors. I call this desperation. I think we all had this sense of unease at the way things were going, plus the fact that we were eating, sleeping, drinking Vietnam. We talked of nothing else. You will recall, Vlad, how we used to get together for dinner, a dozen of us, something of that sort, we'd go to somebody's house and we'd have drinks and then we'd have dinner. All night long we talked about nothing but Vietnam.

I can remember one time with Dick Holbrooke. I was saying for God's sake couldn't we discuss, you know, what was at the movies, or sex, whatever, anything. He looked at me and I'll never forget Dick's expression. He looked at me, curiously, as if to say "what's wrong with him" and went on with what was probably the fourth or fifth hour of a discussion among colleagues as to what was going on in Vietnam. And here again we were so obsessed that we didn't have "a life," as the kids would put it, today. We lost a life. And everything was like that. This was desperation; this was desperation, because things simply were not going according to plan.

By the way there is a magnificent story about Lord Carrington at Dunkirk in 1940, wading out to an evacuation ship. A man turned to Carrington and said, "Somehow I have the feeling that things are not going quite according to plan." We had that feeling, too.

Q: Bill, what happened next with your own professional activities.

MARSH: In the spring of 1966, Samuel Thomsen had been consul in Hue and had a very junior officer at the time, Jim Bullington, who later became an ambassador in Africa, at the consulate with him. Because of Sam's responsibilities with the Marines there, and because General Walt of the Marine Division really needed a political advisor, I was sent to Hue temporarily.

Now I was rather frantic because I had a matter of a few months before leaving Vietnam and I

was desperately trying to get orders for myself but certainly also for my wife and son, who had been born by this time. The Department had not yet recognized that I was a married man. This stuff had been going on for years; we were now in the fourth year of this. They still couldn't get it straight that I was married. They could accept, however, that I had a son, but they couldn't accept that I was married!

In any event we are up there and the scene is percolating like nobody's business because we have the usual university riots, we have the usual Buddhist demonstrations, and at the same time we have intense activity on the part of the Vietcong and certain North Vietnamese forces. Though we are not broadcasting that fact, that they are present, but we know it full well. At one point I was witnessing, observing I should say, a demonstration of the Buddhists. I was standing out of sight, trying to be an inconspicuous as somebody 6'2" tall and 6'2" wide can be and a great flotilla of U.S. helicopters went overhead and disappeared to the north. Then about an hour later it reappeared with stretchers attached to the struts. You've seen that, I'm sure, Vlad, bringing back the American casualties and so forth. And of course the demonstrators paid absolutely no mind, any attention to this whatsoever.

I said to myself at the time that this was ridiculous. Here are people who are not involved in their own salvation; instead mercenaries are doing their work for them. Mercenaries is the wrong term because they were not even being paid for it, we were paying for it, as a matter of fact, and that sort of thing. Things were very bad and I recommended that the Consulate be closed. Well, I was at that time a relatively junior officer and they weren't going to take my word for it so they sent Tom Corcoran up. Now Tom Corcoran was the number two in the Political Section. He was the deputy to Phil Habib, and had replaced Bob Miller, who had been badly hurt in the embassy explosion. He had been deputy political counselor, a wonderful guy. Tom Corcoran, God rest his soul, he was a marvelous man and had served in every post the U.S. had ever had in Indo-China, as a matter of fact.

Q: He closed most of them down.

MARSH: He closed most of them down, that's right. And he recommended that Hue be closed down. He seconded what I had found. And of course they couldn't act on the thing and so the Buddhists closed it for us, as a matter of fact, by just closing off. Well, it's very difficult from a place like Hue to try to arrange your next assignment and it is also very difficult to try to get your family...

Q: We closed Hue and we closed your job?

MARSH: That's correct, at that time. That's right. But the Buddhists had already burned down the USIS building there, their offices, in Hue.

One story I have to tell you because it exemplifies the disorganization of the American effort. I was at my desk in Hue one day, trying to write the umpteen cables that had to go every day to Saigon to describe a rapidly deteriorating situation. A great Wagnerian lady burst into the room and she said she was from the Higher Education Division of AID, or at least she had been engaged by them to work on the academic programs at the University of Hue. I said, "Madam,

the university is closed.” She peered over an impressive bosom at me and said, “Well, open it.”

Q: Oh, ye of little faith!

MARSH: Now how this woman had ever managed to come from the United States, and to pass through the AID offices in Saigon, and get a plane and come up to Hue I will never understand. But on the other hand, I could never understand encountering at certain battles that I did attend American tourists. And no necessarily adventuresome kids, young people, sometimes rather mature people who decided to go out and see the war themselves. It reminded me a bit of what apparently happened at First Bull Run, you will remember, when all of the people from Washington went down in carriages to have a look.

This was what it was like. It was a terribly, terribly complicated thing. There was a fellow named Ed Grainger, who was an AID officer in Phu Yen Province. His wife was a good friend of my wife in Bangkok, where they were both living in safehaven. Elizabeth Grainger, who was a very soft-spoken, lovely British woman said one time that she was having a hard time of it financially. Ruth, my wife, told me this. The reason was that when the Vietcong had taken Ed, his salary had stopped! So when on my next trip to Bangkok Ruth told me about this on my return to Saigon, I went in to see Charlie Mann, who was the director of AID. I said this was unconscionable. He was outraged and called in his principal comptroller and said that he couldn't understand why the Grainger family had not received any money and the comptroller looked him straight in the eye and said, “Because he hasn't submitted a time card.” With that Charlie blew up. I was glad to see that. He said, “You will pay him. You will pay Mrs. Grainger the money due him, and you will pay it immediately.” The comptroller looked at Charlie Mann again, directly in the eye, and said, “You don't have the authority to tell me to do that, Mr. Director.”

Well, finally, on his personal recognizance, if you will, Charlie Mann did arrange that she got paid. What's my point? My point is that we had the conflict of outworn regulations and practices in contradiction with extraordinary circumstances of a military nature, of an emergency nature. Incidentally, Ed Grainger never did return from his imprisonment by the Vietcong. They killed him.

But in any event, dealing with all that sort of situation, it was quite a complication. Well, the orders finally came and to my great dismay I was ordered to the Vietnam Working Group in Washington.

Q: Were you unhappy about that, Bill?

MARSH: I was unhappy about it because, let's see, I was 35 years of age and had never served at a conventional, traditional, normal Foreign Service Post. Never. In future years people would cast that up to me.

Now one has omens, or they seem to be omens at the time, at least this is my experience. Before taking up a new assignment sometimes there are a succession of minor crises that precede it in one's personal life, and sure enough they foreshadow a very difficult tour and assignment and all. I had to get my wife and son on a plane in Bangkok to Hong Kong to wait for me. This

involved at Bangkok running across Bangkok airport to get my Air Vietnam flight back to Saigon. Almost getting run over by about six jets in the process, returning to Saigon, finding out that the cultural revolution had erupted in Hong Kong, and then the night before my departure from Saigon there was the first time the Vietcong had shelled Saigon airport.

We then took the President Cleveland from Hong Kong to San Francisco but there was one problem on route. At shore leave at Yokohama we missed the boat and had to take a lighter out to the ship and climb up a ladder up about seven storeys up the side of the liner, with a six month old baby boy stuck inside my coat. These were harbingers of some very trying times to come.

Q: Bill, this is fascinating stuff and we have a few minutes more on this side. Should we start with Washington or should we take a little break and have a cup of coffee?

MARSH: Let's take a cup of coffee.

Q: Wonderful idea, I think that's a good idea.

Today is December 30, 1997. Bill, we are back in 1966. You arrived in Washington to be on the Vietnam Desk, which I think was the Vietnam Working Group.

MARSH: That is so.

Q: Could you tell us a bit about that group, Bill? How was it set up and what was it doing right and what was it doing wrong?

MARSH: It was a very ecumenical sort of assembly. As a matter of fact, for a while there was even a Peace Corps representative on it and, of course, the Peace Corps never served in Vietnam. But there were representatives of numerous agencies...

Q: International voluntary services...

MARSH: No, no, no. Not at that time. There were strictly government agency representatives.

Q: It was a very ecumenical group.

MARSH: We had them from all over and gradually there was a decline over the years, less and less and less outside representation, shall we say. It became a State show. Now in '66 there were two developments that were particularly striking.

First of all, we were now in the third year of the search for political stability in South Vietnam and it was as far away as ever. There had been a significant revival of popular dissension and demonstration against the ever-changing governmental authorities of the South. So that search seemed as illusory as ever.

Secondly there was a rapidly rising tide of dissension in the United States and very surprising things indeed were happening there. Great rallies in Washington against the war, the isolation and even confinement of the President of the United States. I remember one time when he planned to go to the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles to give a speech. President Johnson's people told him that within 24 hours of the announcement that he would talk there, California dissidents would arrange that 100,000 people would be present to protest against it, and that that number would probably increase.

You'll remember that at about that time the Secretary of State went in an unmarked vehicle into the basement of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Because in order to appear at the United Nations and to meet with people he would have had great difficulty getting through the lines of protestors outside.

There are two factors of the times as well that I would like to mention, because the younger listeners, if there are some to this, will probably not be familiar with that sort of thing. The first was the Foreign Service had a tradition of noblesse oblige at that time. Moreover many of those in the Foreign Service had been in the military and considered the Foreign Service as a kind of para-military organization, at least as far as Vietnam was concerned.

What this meant was that we were much more accepting of authority than seems to be the case today and that we simply did not question, at that time, or argue, in any event, with decisions that were handed down to us. Thus it was that when the deputy assistant secretary of State for then Far Eastern Affairs, later East Asia and Pacific Affairs, with responsibility for Vietnam among other countries in Southeast Asia, Leonard Unger, decided that he had better have virtually continuous coverage. Thus John Helble and I, who were the political officers on the Vietnam Working Group, had to take turns covering the night duty in the Operations Center. What that meant was that we worked 36 hours on, 12 off. We did this for a number of months. We did this seven days a week. And we did this 30 or 31 days a month, depending on the month. And it didn't really occur to us to say we were exhausted because that wasn't done.

I did question that my superiors made no mention of these marathon reports in my Efficiency Report written in the spring of 1967, and it fell on totally deaf ears. Those involved could not understand what I was talking about when I said that working so many hours constantly was just taking years off my life span, and off John Helble's life span, as well, to be perfectly fair with him.

What I do remember was an example of how ill coordinated the Department was. Whereas I lived in Washington and could take a bus to and from work, John Helble lived out in what was then considered near - West Virginia, that is to say, Falls Church. Which was then about as far from the action as one could be and decidedly frowned upon as not a very classy place to be, way out there six miles away in the countryside. But he used a car. There was no metro in those days, of course. Well, don't you know, in the middle of this, they took his parking permit away and so he was spending an absolute fortune, as you can imagine, for a garage space outside that sometimes would be 36 hours in length. But we tended to work eight to eight and then, if we worked through the night, then we stayed the following day and went home at eight o'clock or some 36 hours after we arrived.

The reason was that we were supposed to call Saigon about every hour or two. Why? Because the percolation throughout South Vietnamese society of that Buddhist uprising in Central Vietnam, that I told you about, in that year, plus the uncertain role of Lieutenant General Thi, who was Corps Commander in Central Vietnam and who looked as if he had separatist ambitions there. Well, there we were.

There were those on the staff who were busily working on preparations for negotiations, which of course came to no fruition during that period of time, and the like. We had a White House constantly in search of progress reports, achievements, something that it could talk about with the public to show that things were going better than indeed they were.

We had one period in which the President had decided that, this was in 1967, in preparation for the following year's Presidential and Congressional elections, somebody had better answer the criticisms that were appearing in great number in the Congressional Record. So the President said that he wanted complete rebuttals sent to the White House the day that the Congressional Record came out. Now what that meant was that one of us had to go to the mailroom of the Department, around seven o'clock in the morning, and go through the mailbags and try to find Congressional Records. Now the Department could not do this for us; they could not put this together for us. So it was amusing because the first day that I did it, I came out of the mailroom so filthy dirty that my dress clothes that I had for the office were hopeless. So I had an old raincoat and I used to wear this old raincoat and then go diving in and go through all these mailbags in order to get them upstairs as soon as possible.

Why did we have to do that? Well, you see, there was a noon deadline on submission on the letters of rebuttal...

Q: You would put on a raincoat?

MARSH: I'd put on this old raincoat and then we proceeded to go through the Congressional Record each day and find the insertions made by members or the remarks put in by members critical of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. Then we proceeded to write rebuttals of that. We had to have all of these fully cleared and upstairs in the Staff Secretariat by noon. Then they would make their way over to the White House and would be signed off by the President that night.

This was a colossal effort because we averaged 50 rebuttals and we had a brand new young lady named Barbara White, whom you may have heard of, I believe she went to Moscow somewhat later. She had just come in from New Mexico, I think it was, and this was really her first job. She was really the most extraordinary worker that you can imagine. Remember she was using a manual typewriter, this was prior to the days of electric typewriters.

Q: Who was Ms. White?

MARSH: She was just a young civil service person, a colleague in the Vietnam working Group. And she just ground out these letters which we just started scribbling as soon as we could. Fortunately a number of them dealt with the same theme and so we were able to crib from one to

the other and we didn't have to write 50 individual letters. But we certainly had to write 10 or 15 and get them cleared throughout the Bureau, through the rest of the Department, and up there by twelve o'clock noon. Well, this was not work, this was frenzy for heaven's sake, and it was an absolutely frenzied operation.

You know the consequence of this was that the Public Correspondence Division of the Department was established. Before that time there had not been one to deal with such matters. But for several months we had to put up with this and it was incredible. The workload was extraordinary.

First of all, there was the old problem of obtaining information. What was going on in Vietnam? How to sift, how to sort in the official reporting, and then in the non-governmental reporting, particularly, of course, the press but also the television, to try to identify what actually informed us and to respond to what was simply a criticism or detraction. This was an enormous effort. I remember one evening I left at eight o'clock and I was the first person to leave the Working Group that night. Somebody made cracks like, oh, what, are you on leave? That sort of thing.

Tony Lake wanted to see a sister whom he had not seen for a number of years. Now Tony at that time was Ambassador Unger's staff aide, and he had arranged to spend a couple of hours with her on a Saturday afternoon, mid-afternoon. Tony, it turned out, could not be spared that day and did not see his sister. This was all that way.

Q: Who was Ambassador Unger, Bill?

MARSH: Ambassador Unger had been ambassador to Laos.

Q: What was his role at that time?

MARSH: Deputy assistant secretary, with responsibility for Vietnam.

There were humorous sides to the Herculean efforts we were putting in. One time Ambassador Unger asked us all to wait and we would go together with him to the Vietnam National Day celebration at its embassy. We were so late when we finally left the Department that we arrived at an absolutely empty South Vietnamese embassy and they had to go find Bui Diem, who was then the ambassador, to come down from upstairs, and say hello to us. There is nothing like going to a party when there is nobody there! So it went.

Q: So this was 1966?

MARSH: 1966 perhaps part of '67. Now 1967, it seems to me, was a year that was extremely misleading. It was misleading because in the first instance there was a considerable abatement of the internal political dissension within South Vietnam. The Central Vietnam crisis faded, waned, and not only that but there seemed to be some institution building because there were elections, Presidential elections, Parliamentary elections, and there was the election of Nguyen Van Thieu as President of Vietnam. So you had the first elected President in four years.

I went to Vietnam for the elections in the company of Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who by this time had returned to the United States, who shepherded a group of prominent Americans to act as sort of unofficial election observers.

The second misleading problem was that there was a decline in military activity. By Christmas of '67 there was the possibility that perhaps we had made substantial headway militarily. The absence of enemy military activity was heartening and perhaps a sign, and it was a sign but we didn't know just exactly what it was a sign of, we learned that in '68 at Tet. The President decided that he would go out and visit the troops in December of 1967 at Cam Ranh Bay. Then go on to visit the Pope, who was a symbol of peace. The President would be able to report on to him that matters were preceding satisfactorily and that we were hoping for negotiations soon on the grounds of the improved situation within the country, as it was then seen.

In the United States, however, the public uproar still rose and the clamor continued very badly. There was not any appeasement of the public dissatisfaction. Much of it we realize now was occasioned by the Draft and in fact once the Draft was done away with, and the university students no longer had to be concerned about that, the anti-war movement declined very rapidly. But it still was in full measure.

I think that many of the FSOs were from Missouri on what the situation was like in South Vietnam, well, let's wait and see what's going on. And there was some reporting that the Vietcong and North Vietnamese were making preparations for intensified fighting and so forth, but again we'd always had reporting that varied 180 degrees. You know, it's hot, it's cold, it's up, and it's down.

Q: Let me just ask a pointed question here. You're saying that as we got to Christmas of 1967 things were quiet politically, things were quiet militarily.

MARSH: Relatively speaking.

Q: Robert McNamara has suggested that three years earlier, if I recall correctly, three years earlier he was able to see that the American effort was not likely to work and he feels a great deal of contrition that he continued to work with it. Does that make sense to you? By the time we were in 1967, what kind of a prediction could one have made? By 1967?

MARSH: The highest level statements in the latter part of '67 were very encouraging. Statements from the senior military were highly encouraging and what they were misreading was a lessening or absence of enemy military activity and taking that as a sign of constructive progress. That we had sufficiently staffed and armed the Vietnamese forces and established hamlet security and undertaken economic and social programs that were taking root and so forth and so that things were getting better. There was that.

Now as far as Secretary McNamara, I've read his book, too. I'm saddened by what I have seen in the book because every experience that I had, and there were quite a few with Secretary McNamara during his visits to Vietnam and in terms of his statements in Washington and elsewhere, every such experience was that he was fulfilling very actively and very eagerly the

role of chief cheerleader for the U.S. effort. At no time was there any suggestion that he had any misgivings or any doubts about the eventual outcome.

Q: Do you think he felt comfortable or sincere in his role of chief cheerleader?

MARSH: You know, the so-called McNamara method applied in Vietnam. That is to say the application of numerous quantifiable measures of incremental approaches in terms of arming, staffing, deploying, and so forth, both the U.S. and the South Vietnamese forces. We certainly had the impression at that time that what he had been so famed for at the Ford Motor Company, was in full application with respect to the Vietnam effort. But in terms of any strategic or shall we say global findings on his part, we had no notion of those whatsoever. And, as a matter of fact, the question arises then why George Ball and others, who had misgivings to say the least about the course of events in Vietnam and of U.S. Policy, why they were so alone. They received no support that I can tell, and I've reviewed the foreign relations of the United States for '64 and '65 and looked at other documents. I have never seen any time in which Secretary McNamara gives the slightest indication that he was having second thoughts.

Q: Bill, let me ask. I think McNamara believes what he is saying in his book, but do you think what he is saying in his book represents what he thought in the early and mid 1960s, or do you think he's reconstructed all that?

MARSH: More the latter. A friend at the time in the '60s was on the staff of Senator Robert Kennedy and I was invited over to brief Senator Kennedy a number of times on the progress of the war, or lack thereof, and so on. I found Senator Kennedy in those times, I'm talking 1966 and 1967, I found him very gung-ho as far as the military effort was concerned. He was particularly interested in what the Special Forces were or were not accomplishing. Thus I was quite surprised when we had the identification of Senator Kennedy with an anti-war position when his candidacy for President came about.

Q: We had Governor Romney, who went out to Vietnam.

MARSH: Who was, quote, brain washed, unquote.

Q: Who at the time he was in Vietnam was extraordinarily gung-ho, and was basically running around cheerleading, then when he came back said he was brain washed, and I think thought he was.

MARSH: Yes. Yes.

Q: Anyhow, I ask this Bill not because you know the answer, but because I think it is a very fair question for students of the period and students of McNamara's book. Anyhow, thank you for the insight.

MARSH: I accompanied him to Hue and elsewhere in Vietnam during his visits and sat in on a number of briefings scheduled for him. Suffice it to say that if he had doubts, he concealed them very effectively.

Q: Bill, let me move to a slightly different direction. You were working in the State Department right now, it was still the Dean Rusk period, Leonard Unger, William Bundy was Assistant Secretary, and at the White House, if I remember correctly, we had Walt Rostow and we had Robert Komer who had moved in.

MARSH: Somewhat later.

Q: Somewhat later. Well, still, back at this period can you describe a little bit what the State Department's role was? Was the State Department making policy or was it just answering congressional correspondence at that time? Who was making policy?

MARSH: Well, very clearly the President was making policy. You'll recall that the President took a direct hand to such an extent that he even designed the then new American embassy in Saigon, and went over the plans and so forth. You'll recall that later he said that he was spending, in his memoirs he said that he was spending during that time, 60 to 80 percent of his time on Vietnam. Secretary McNamara later said that he was spending about 80 percent of his time on Vietnam. So the obsession with this small country, and it was that, but as McNamara knew full well and as Lyndon Johnson said many times before, the United States had never lost a war. Moreover, as leader of the free world and the only super power - now we know it was the only super power but then it was the only super power on the side of liberty in the world - it was the bulwark against Russian and Chinese expansionism in the world. The bulwark against subversion and destruction of friendly regimes everywhere what we had to do was to reverse the stigma of the French defeat in Vietnam.

I don't know, I think that the people who expressed misgivings at that time, such as George Ball and others earlier were very heavily penalized for not being part of the effort.

Q: But Senator Kennedy you felt was a friend of the effort at that time?

MARSH: At that time, but later disassociated himself.

Q: Well, that's very interesting.

Bill, we're now sort of finished with 1967, aren't we?

MARSH: We are, and then we entered the most difficult year.

Q: The most difficult year...

MARSH: Because certainly the military had not prepared us for the Tet Offensive, which was after all a magnificently concealed effort by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese of country-wide mass organization and preparation. You had to admire them. Their timing, the force of their attack, all of that, were extraordinary. Now, I liken sometimes 1968 to roughly, for the United States, to roughly 1958-59 for the French in Algeria when we won militarily as the French did and lost politically and psychologically.

Now in preparation for the coming elections, back to '67 for a moment, the President insisted that persons knowledgeable about Vietnam go out on speaking tours as frequently as possible. So those of us on the Vietnam Working Group were very often out doing that. An example of this was when in '66, on the way to Washington, my wife and I visited her parents in Oklahoma and the Governor, later Senator, Henry Bellman became aware that I was there. He was driven up from Oklahoma City, 135 miles, to have breakfast with me at some ungodly hour like 6:30 or 7:00 in the morning, it was still dark, I remember. There were automobiles with state troopers and everything else, and there I am sitting with the Governor of Oklahoma in a diner, for heaven's sake, having breakfast to brief him on Vietnam.

Q: Bill, what was his motivation to drive 135 miles to see you?

MARSH: Every public official, of course, who had political aspirations, wanted to try to get the facts to find out about Vietnam. Now, fewer and fewer, particularly those of the other party were visiting Vietnam because they didn't want to be associated or tainted with that, which was the difference. Even so, we were in the briefing paper publishing business in the Vietnam Working Group. There was always somebody going away on a trip and we were doing these briefing papers, or going to Europe in connection with the effort to seek negotiations and all that sort of thing.

Of course in those days, prior to the Wang, prior to word processors and all that sort of thing this was all virtually handwritten work that was then typed by the tireless Barbara White on her little typewriter. I cannot express fully my admiration for her. She was just extraordinary and grinding it all out.

It's interesting that we had two political officers on the Vietnam Working Group, something that was such an enormous part of the President's agenda. And at that time you generally had two political officers for other countries of some significance, of course, not for the smallest ones. So we had about the same staffing there for Vietnam as there was for Italy or Belgium.

Q: Wow. Bill, 1968, Tet Offensive.

MARSH: The onslaught.

Q: The onslaught. What was your role in that? Could you describe what you and the Working Group actually did, because the Tet Offensive, the outlines of it are fairly well known?

MARSH: The Tet Offensive tended to pass overhead because we now had the full attention of the principals and the seniors. The embassy was dealing directly with them. The military were dealing directly with the Joint Chiefs who were dealing directly with the White House, that kind of thing. We were at a decidedly lower level at that time. But we were considering the options, as a matter of fact.

We were considering options when we did not know what was going to come. And of course the Public Affairs side of the house was a total disaster. You'll remember General Loan executing

the Vietcong in Cho Lon on television.

Q: General Kau, yes.

MARSH: Loan, Loan. I believe it was General Loan, if I'm not mistaken. Okay, General Kau, if that is who it was.

Q: Whoever it was.

MARSH: I'm not sure, but the chief of security.

Q: We all remember the photograph.

MARSH: And a bound Vietcong.

Q: It was a prize-winning photograph.

MARSH: Yes, etc. The overrunning of the embassy, and poor Hue, where some 3,000 notables of the town were done in by the Vietcong, really an eradication of the anti-communist infrastructure in the place. It was just an unmitigated disaster. Meanwhile, we were running around the country trying to speak on it and this had some very interesting developments.

I tended to take some of the farthest speaking engagements for the simple reason that I was still exhausted from the whole work and wanted to get away from the office, get a decent night's sleep. So I would take Texas and California. My parents at that time lived in California, so it was a chance to see them. I am an only child and it was a good chance and sometimes I would take my two-year-old son with me.

I remember one time at the University of Wyoming where I was speaking and they refused to help me at all. I had this two-year-old and they wouldn't find a babysitter for me to pay, so I spoke and he was on the stage, sitting on the stage behind me. Basic decencies were not observed. It was really outrageous.

Then I went to a small Presbyterian college in North Texas one time, thinking that this was a state with a strong military tradition, here I'll be on friendly ground. I come to find this huge banner on the chapel saying 'Go Home, Marsh, You War Criminal.' It was a time of insurgency in the United States.

Q: When your two-year-old son was sharing the platform with you, did you think your lack of better care from your hosts was politically motivated?

MARSH: Absolutely.

Q: Absolutely.

MARSH: They refused to tell me where I was to speak, they just said it was in something or

other hall. I said, well, where was that, please, and they just said to find out for myself. There was calculated rudeness, nastiness throughout.

Q: Was this before or after the famous episode where McNamara went to the University of California, I believe at Berkeley, and was shouted down and had to leave before he could say anything?

MARSH: I believe it was after. I spoke at Scripps College, which is nearby, and a whole contingent came down from Berkeley to shout me down there.

Q: Bill, when the Tet Offensive happened, shortly afterwards, I remember for example Robert Komer, this is anecdotal information, but I remember that Robert Komer was barely able to speak coherently and indeed was giggling, most of the time, because he was so nervous. He had flown there and he had flown back afterwards, and he was so nervous that he was kept away from the press. My question is, in your observation, how were responsible officials in America, people who were responsible for the policy, how were they taking all this psychologically, the Tet Offensive? Was it a big, palpable downer for everyone?

MARSH: It varied. We had some people who were so much a part of the program that they were just impervious to what the reactions were from outside. I got into a lot of trouble, you know, because I came back and reported in the spring of '68 that people were terribly upset about the war. That there was a great deal of upheaval out there, and that matters were going to be very, very difficult and particularly I had heard that there were plans to disrupt the Democratic Convention in Chicago. I did this in a memo and I got a rebuke and was told that I was exaggerating, that others had said that the self-sacrifice of President Johnson in declining to seek a second term in office had calmed the public.

You'll recall that in the Efficiency Reports in those days there was the part that we did not see and in the part that I did not see there was a pretty strident criticism of me. I was called an alarmist and all that sort of thing and that my reporting was not remarkable for its accuracy and all that sort of thing. Then I was also told verbally to understand that the Democratic Convention in Chicago was in no danger whatsoever and that Mayor Daley of Chicago had all arrangements well in hand.

A few years later, by the way, just to finish the story on that one, an Inspector happened across me in Brussels. He told me about the Secret part of that 1968 report and he took steps to issue a rebuttal and to have that put into the file. I'm very grateful to Ambassador Parsons for that.

Q: Well, I like that. Let me ask another thing. A lot of things happened in 1968. There was a Tet Offensive, there was a My Lai massacre, there was a battle of Khe Sanh, there were U.S. protests, very strong ones, and then at some point that year, if I remember, the Pentagon Papers appeared. Or am I getting ahead of myself?

MARSH: It was afterwards.

Q: It was afterwards. All right, then let's skip over that.

MARSH: The public attitude was such that it was obvious that the post-war consensus on foreign policy had now disintegrated. There was also an attitude in the public of ‘do not bother me with the facts.’ I want to give two examples of that for any scholars who may be listening.

I debated one time Professor Sidney Peck of Western Reserve University. Professor Peck went on and on how in 1967 if the Vietnamese had not voted the government ticket, their rice ration cards would not have been stamped. Therefore they would have been cut out of the food chain, as it were. In rebuttal I said that this was very interesting, but that there was just one problem with it, there weren’t any rice rationing cards in Vietnam. This didn’t stop Professor Peck, he continued on the same story and with the same thing!

Then there was another thing. There was a young man down from Berkeley who spoke at Scripps to me. He was actually rather decent. He said that he appreciated that I had my views and so forth, but on the other hand perhaps my experiences had colored my attitudes. Therefore perhaps people who had never been to Vietnam had a better understanding of what was going on there than those who had been part of it. I said to him that this was an amazing position for a student to take because it seemed to me a total eradication of the scientific method.

Q: Bill, we are in the year 1968, after the Tet Offensive. What were you folks doing at that time? What is next?

MARSH: That was, to borrow a phrase from Queen Elizabeth II, that was the *annus horribilis* for the Vietnam effort, I think.

In the first place, the wounded lion, Lyndon Johnson, was besieged on all sides. The strange thing is he probably would have been re-elected we see now, but in any event he felt he had no choice to do that. Of course he only lived four years after leaving the White House.

The efforts in Vietnam seemed more out of control than ever before. An example was the famous Lieutenant Colonel who in the town in the Delta, Ben Tre, which I believe you know, Vlad, said the immortal words, “It was necessary to destroy it in order to save it.” And back in Washington I groaned when I read that report and said “this fatuity is going to plague us” and I was chewed out. I was condemned on that. I’m not smirking when I say now that that still haunts us. It became a kind of a watchword, a slogan, a model of those critical of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. But I got in trouble. Why? Because there was a desperate attempt to rally all the forces in Washington in support of the President, in support of the military and in support of what came to be called as CORDS, which was the newest name for a pacification effort.

Q: And these were in particular the civilians who were going out in a pacification effort?

MARSH: Yes. It was extraordinary to me because I had had some experience in state and local government working for a foundation for three years, three and a half years, in Pittsburgh. I knew a little something about the mentalities and the capabilities and the problems of local government. But here we were relying for that work on technical expertise and the people who went out seemed to me political virgins who knew nothing at all about what it was to try to win friends and influence people at local and regional levels. But it went on and on and on.

The decision of the President not to stand for re-election, and the criticism that came, and the debate in the 1968 political campaigns... remember that until his unfortunate assassination Senator Kennedy was a very strong critic of the war and he was an insider.

Q: Bill, when did Senator Kennedy switch from being with that particular program to being against that particular program?

MARSH: I tried to look that up and document that and it's difficult, but I would say that it was some time during 1967, with more intense opposition to the war after the Tet Offensive.

Q: Yes.

MARSH: But in any event, Washington, it seemed to me, was in a state of disorganization at that time. The thrust now was really, at least as far as State was concerned, was really on launching negotiations and making something of them and the question of the war was picked up by others. Again, State is having a very difficult time coping with the public uproar within the United States. It does not know how to deal with it.

It's interesting. In those days we had far more invitations to come and speak or debate or something of that sort, with all expenses paid, than we could deal with. Today there are very, very few indeed. But I would say that I was out a hundred times in the territory between Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and California and Nevada in the course of about a year.

Q: That's very impressive.

MARSH: It was interesting because you went to school in Massachusetts and in Worcester one time a woman really accused me of practicing witchcraft, which she intended as a left-handed compliment to my fluidity and verbosity in defense of the war. But I thought I was back in Salem in 1692.

Q: Bill, we are moving ahead in '68. When that year ended where were we?

MARSH: Well, my trials and tribulations were to end in June of 1968 because I had decided on a switch in region. Now my foreign, overseas experience between 1953 and 1968, not continuously of course but on and off had been exclusively in the Far East. And for family and personal reasons and so forth I had decided to shift into a different geographical region. I spoke with the training people and was to undertake a course called Atlantic Affairs Training.

Q: Bill, may I just butt in for a minute? In mid 1968 did you actually leave the Vietnam business forever?

MARSH: I left the Vietnam business for four years.

Q: For four years, until 1972?

MARSH: That's right.

Q: All right. Maybe for the purposes of continuity here perhaps the wisest thing to do would be to just stay with the Vietnam experience.

MARSH: Yes, right.

Q: You left it in 1968 at a period when there was a lot of gloom and disarray and a lot of repercussions within America, a very tense period. And then you went and you basically went to Brussels, as I remember. But that's another tale.

MARSH: That's another tale told elsewhere.

Q: When you left Brussels, did you come right back to Washington and to Vietnam, did you come home?

MARSH: No. But there is one thing I'd like to relate, with your permission, is that this Atlantic Affairs Training, for some ungodly reason, the Department decided that Berkeley was the place I should go to do that. I sent in a couple of applications to the University, and they claimed they never received them. I finally received an anonymous telephone call from somebody saying, "Mr. Marsh don't send any more applications in because we're going to destroy them. We don't want war criminals here at the University of California."

Q: That's an amazing story! That was a call from the University of California?

MARSH: So I of course immediately said, "Ah hah, so we have McCarthyism of the Left, have we?" Yes, the person thought he was being helpful, it was a man, but he never revealed his name. He refused to reveal his name. So I did not go to Berkeley, which I didn't want to do anyway, frankly, I went to Brussels instead. Now Vietnam and Southeast Asia were a great tar baby. I went on leave. Having left at the end of June 1968 from the desk, I went on leave. While on leave I got a call, and you understand I had left the Vietnam Working Group and was really in transient status. I got a call that I should go to Honolulu for the state visit of President Thieu. His state visit to the United States had a rather brief itinerary. It was Honolulu, period. He didn't dare go to the U.S. mainland.

So I went up there and helped out. President Johnson came in and spent about two and a half to three hours with President Thieu and then immediately leaped on his plane. There was no state dinner, there was no anything. I was just supposed to try to keep the Vietnamese happy. But I was called back, as it were, to go out there.

Q: [Interviewer Nick Heyniger] We were talking about different perceptions of the situation and the future in Vietnam within the ranks of the Department of State.

MARSH: Nick, I have never seen this written out, but it is something that I've been thinking about over the years and came up with rather diametrically opposed approaches to policy making. It seems to me that the Foreign Service tends to regard policy making as an inductive process. That is to say, through empirical evidence and experience you put together all the

factors, the assets, the liabilities and so forth and so on and you devise a policy. Whereas it seems to me that our betters and seniors have a deductive approach to it and that this was nowhere better demonstrated than in Vietnam. Apart from the tactical situation, there was really an appalling lack of knowledge and understanding at senior levels about Vietnam.

The only thing that mattered was *Deus le Veult*, as the Pope said in launching the Crusades, “God wills it,” only in this case it wasn’t God, it was the President of the United States, and we were going to win and we would work out later what winning meant. The basic problem that we had was that we could never prove a negative, and therefore we could never know whether we were winning or not. What do I mean by that? Well, the whole idea was that South Vietnam should not fall to Communist domination from the North. Well, how do you prove that? And nobody had the faintest idea and still doesn’t on the thing, or even if it is provable.

Q: I guess the military would have said if warlike activity ceases or declines significantly and in effect South Vietnam has become pacified we would have won.

MARSH: We fell in that trap in 1967, late 1967. There was a long period of quiet, but the mere absence of conflict is certainly not a peace or a victory. The Vietcong and North Vietnamese preparing to launch the Tet Offensive occasioned that quiet in late 1967.

The shock of the Tet Offensive was the contrast between the relative lack of hostilities in late 1967 and the storm, the tempest that broke out, in 1968.

Q: Okay, let’s pursue that for a minute. What would you say was the effect of the Tet Offensive within the halls of the Department of State?

MARSH: Within the halls of the Department of State there was a mixture of chagrin and hopefulness, perhaps. Because the overrunning of the embassy in Saigon, for example, the overrunning of major parts of Saigon and all of the major cities elsewhere in the country was after the enormous sacrifices we had already made. And having more than a half million troops in the country, at that time, and having spent heaven knows how many billions of dollars, the shock was a very great one, but still there was a hopefulness in that. It was not a military success for the enemy side. The Vietcong were decimated and never, as a matter of fact, came back in numbers and in strengths and in the drive that they had prior to Tet.

But of course for the United States it was an unmitigated political disaster.

Q: But what I’m probing for is you and your job and your knowledge of the Department after the Tet Offensive. Where was Hilsman at this time, for example? Were there people who said maybe we ought to rethink this situation?

MARSH: Oh, clearly, yes, and you can see that in the archives of the Foreign Relations of the United States. For example, George Ball was an advocate of a compromise solution. But remember the general optic was that of 1938. Munich was again and again and again mentioned, and particularly by the Secretary of State, as the *raison d’être* for the great effort there. That we had failed to heed the signals and for that we paid dearly and we must not do so again. There was

also the spreading effect, the domino effect, to use President Eisenhower's phrase for it. And there was also a dread on the part of policy makers. They would not be associated with the first time the United States had lost a war.

You know in that sense they probably had some foresight because here, 22 years after the fall of Saigon, Vietnam remains the national trauma. It has a daily influence on what we do and why we do it and more particularly why we don't do a great many things. But in any event in '67 President Johnson decides, with the election coming up, that he wants people out on the hustings as frequently as possible. They are to hold meetings, explain U.S. policy, and try to clear up the rising tide of discontent and dissent and quasi-revolution in the country. So yours truly and others in the group were sent out very frequently.

Now in those days we could pick and choose, because there were so many invitations all expenses paid for groups all over the country for someone to come out and speak on Vietnam. So I looked upon that as a chance to get some sleep, after a terrible year and a third, year and a quarter, whatever it was. I could catch up a bit because I could sleep on a plane, get to bed fairly early the night before you had to speak – provided you went far enough. Now there were some people who went to West Virginia and Massachusetts. They could be back the same day. Yours truly went out to the West Coast because, first of all his parents lived in Los Angeles at that time, and that sort of thing.

But in any event this was really very exciting. Why? Well, I remember going to a small Protestant college in North Texas where I was to speak at the chapel. Here is a big banner all across the front of the chapel when I arrived that said "Go Home, Marsh, you war criminal." Then I went out to Scripps College in California and had a complete contingent of rather Left Wing students come down from Berkeley in order to boo and hiss and harass and everything else as I tried to talk to the ladies of Scripps College. I had all these men from Berkeley down there giving me a hard time. It was quite extraordinary.

Incidentally, one of the things I remember so well. I did speak in Massachusetts. I took my turn at the nearer ones, yes. And in Worcester, Massachusetts, a lady with a wonderfully broad 'A' got up and said, "Mr. Marsh, you said you are not particularly adept in public speaking. I think you are devilishly clever at public speaking. As a matter of fact, I think you are a representative of the devil." I saw the fires of Salem burning there, in my mind's eye.

Q: Why? What was her complaint?

MARSH: Well, I think that some of her ancestors had been at witchcraft trials, to tell you the truth.

Q: You were talking about the situation in Vietnam, as you saw it.

MARSH: After all, I'd had an awful lot of practice. I debated a good many leaders of the anti war movement whose disregard of the facts was so egregious that it actually helped sustain me during a period of great doubt and self-searching and so forth that I experienced at that time. But what I'm saying is that the other side was so unreasonable that it made our side look even better.

Q: So the lady with the broad 'A' from Massachusetts, what she wanted us to do was get out of Vietnam?

MARSH: Oh, yes, and I went to a Quaker meeting in North Carolina and they handed me pieces of an U.S. airplane that had been shot down over Hanoi. It was extreme. It was a very, very tough time. Fortunately I did not go to Chicago. There was no reason that I should. I didn't happen to be at the Chicago Convention but about that time came the culmination of a very interesting thing.

Oh, there is one more anecdote I must share with you. You'll remember that in the latter days of 1967, President Johnson thought the war was being won. We were going to quote "nail that coonskin to the wall" unquote, as he put it so many times. So he decided he was going to visit quote "his" unquote troops in Vietnam in December of 1967. He would then go and call upon the Pope and talk with him about the prospects for world peace and his desire to seek a negotiated solution and then return to the United States. Well, I'm sure that there were political aspects to this whole thing.

But I remember a series of meetings in the Department to plan the trip and an aide from the White House came over, very Texan. An accent you could fry for breakfast. The President wanted to see the Pope in Rome, period, and didn't want to see anybody else. I'm looking around and the people from the Bureau of European Affairs don't have a thing to say. So, you know, I'm half Welsh and the Welsh are famous for their big mouths, and so I say, "Wait a minute, not even our ally, the Prime Minister of Italy?" No, the boss doesn't want to see him. That's very strange. All these other people are very quiet.

I'm in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, for crying out loud, but still foreign policy is a seamless web, as far as I'm concerned. So I said they'd better change that as it would be a bad thing, it would harmful to NATO, it would hurt this and that and the other sort of thing. Well, he talked to LBJ about it. We had another meeting and the fellow came back and said no, the President wants to get off his airplane once he arrives in Italy and he wants to get into a helicopter and he wants to helicopter directly into the Vatican.

At that time the Holy See did not have a helipad and we pointed out that this was the case. That all there was was this big square there. I looked around and the people from European Affairs are keeping their mouths shut. Those from Public Affairs are keeping their mouths shut and all the rest. So little William sticks up his hand again and says, "But, Sir, there is this obelisk, this sort of a monument that stands tall in the middle of St. Peter's Square." He says he'll talk to the boss about that. So we have a meeting the next day and this guy from the White House is back and says, "Well, I talked to the boss and he says to have it taken down."

Q: I can't believe it!

MARSH: I had to suppress a tendency to laugh hysterically at this point. But the better angels of our nature came to my defense and helped me out and I said, "Oh, but Sir, that is an ancient monument and if anything should happen the Catholic population of the United States would be

extremely upset.”

“I’ll tell the boss,” he says. Back he goes and next he says, “Okay, the President will take a limo. But he won’t see the Italians.”

Well, ultimately he did, for a matter of five or 10 minutes in the car, no less.

Q: Did you ask any of your colleagues from the European Bureau, you know, don’t you think it is politic for the President to pay a courtesy call on the head of state of Italy while he’s there? What did they say?

MARSH: Nick, I don’t know. But it wasn’t the first and it wasn’t the last time that my colleagues decided that what was politic was to protect their own careers. I don’t know a lot of instances of overt courage. I know a lot of instances of sort of covert courage.

Q: You’re there to provide advice to the White House.

MARSH: It seems to me if it is to be a dialogue, then it is to be a dialogue of equals. But perhaps I was wrong. In any event, we did not take down Cleopatra’s needle. The President was not impaled on the thing as he attempted to land in the helicopter. He did, and I am not kidding, pull the Italian Prime Minister into his limousine, speed off and dump unceremoniously, the Prime Minister a few moments later. But he did talk with the Italian Prime Minister.

So, there are ways to get things done. You have to compromise a little bit.

Q: I want to take you back to sort of the way the State Department operated at that time. Obviously from what you are saying there was not a lot of discussion within the State Department about policy toward Vietnam. I just wanted to ask, those of us who have been fortunate enough to be desk officers, for example the Bureau of Intelligence and Resource often provides a helpful role in offering a dissenting opinion about future policy, as does the Policy Planning Council. I wonder, while you were on the desk, did that happen? Did INR or the Policy Planning Council get involved in Vietnam policy?

MARSH: Two things. First of all, you may have heard of Paul Kattenburg, who was the Director of Vietnam Affairs in the bureau in 1962-63. He warned that we had a very vulnerable base on which to build a Vietnam policy as far as the country itself was concerned because there was the autocracy of Ngo Dinh Diem, there were the sects, the internal contradictions and a very strong enemy on the other side. And Paul Kattenburg never received the recognition that he deserved and deserves for great courage and farsightedness. Instead he was eased out in a most undignified fashion, out of the Foreign Service, and had to seek a career elsewhere.

So there was this and other examples where people were repaid for their selflessness with very arbitrary ouster. Secondly, when you only know, and that rather minimally, one half of an equation and nothing about the other half, that is to say North Vietnam and what was critical of course was an indication of North Vietnam leaders’ capabilities and intentions. And on that score we had nothing.

Q: Well, I recall that Roger Hilsman was the Assistant Secretary earlier, but after that INR sort of got squelched as far as Vietnam was concerned. I believe that this is the time when the White House, when the President, put Ernest K. Lindley on the Policy Planning Council to see that nobody on the Policy Planning Council voiced strong ideas of rethinking our policy toward Southeast Asia. You didn't find that you were getting that from the Policy Planning Council in any event?

MARSH: No, but what was I? I was an FSO-5 at that time on a scale of eight, and I wasn't privy to lots of things. That's what deputy directors and office directors, even well above that, were undertaking.

Q: Well, okay. So now that's two years in Washington on the Vietnam desk?

MARSH: That's right. Two years that was the equivalent of eight to 10 normal years in the Foreign Service.

Q: Particularly in hours of work served!

MARSH: Well, they are just uncounted. Let me say, for a person who was a close associate and friend, Tony Lake one day asked the deputy assistant secretary if the following Saturday afternoon he could have a couple two, three hours off in order to see his sister, whom he had not seen in some years. And the deputy said that he just couldn't tell and would let him know Saturday morning. So finally Saturday, about lunchtime, the deputy told Tony that he was awfully sorry but he had to stand by, he might need him. Tony did not see his sister as she passed through town.

Now today I think this sort of thing is unthinkable because the response from the young officers in the State Department would be quite unprintable and might even come from their lawyers!

MICHAEL H. NEWLIN
Political-Military Officer, USRO
Brussels (1963-1968)

Ambassador Newlin was born in North Carolina and was raised there and in the Panama canal zone. After graduating from Harvard he joined the Foreign Service in 1952 and was posted to Frankfurt, Oslo, Paris, Kinshasa and Jerusalem, where served as Consul General. During his distinguished career, Ambassador Newlin served in several high level positions dealing with the United Nations and its agencies and NATO. He served as Ambassador to Algeria from 1981 to 1985 and as US representative to the United Nations Agencies in Vienna, 1988-1991. Ambassador Newlin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.

NEWLIN: Of course, I should mention that about midway through in the Johnson

administration, we began to have the looming quagmire of Vietnam. JFK sent the first U.S. military advisors to Vietnam but when LBJ became president the situation had deteriorated to the point where McNamara and the joint chiefs were pressing for combat forces. LBJ, I had the definite impression, had initial reservations about this escalation. If you recall there was a big conference of wise men, Acheson, McCloy, Walt Rostow at the White House and all of them bought into the domino theory, that you cannot let Vietnam fall. So I remember somebody coming back to Paris and telling Cleveland that LBJ was having his doubts about all of this, and he wanted others to participate in his decision on Vietnam whether to go for a massive build up of our military. Cleveland said, "He can't have anybody else. He has got to make the decision himself." Cleveland was all for the Vietnam thing. After we got into Vietnam and after things began to go sour, and it turned out not to be a cake walk by any means.

The NATO ambassadors in addition to meeting in the North Atlantic Council which was a formal thing, they would have a luncheon, a private luncheon with just ambassadors present every so often, I think once a month. Cleveland wanted very much to lobby them, all of his counterparts to really support us on Vietnam. Since I had worked for Cleveland before in the Department, whenever he would go back to Washington on consultation, he would take me along. I would arrange all of his meetings. I remember one in Katzenbach's office. Katzenbach was I think in effect the deputy secretary.

Q: At that point he may...

NEWLIN: Cleveland said, "I want to lash the other NATO members to the American chariot. I want the go ahead to start that." Katzenbach looked at him and said, "I don't think you can do it." I remember Foy Kohler coming out, and this was towards the end of my assignment. We had lunch with Cleveland and a few other people from the mission. Foy Kohler said, "You have to understand that every morning when the president wakes up, his first thought is how do we get out of Vietnam?" Cleveland would come back from his consultations in Washington and say, "Well, we must be doing things all right. I got no complaints whatsoever." The fact of the matter was that everybody was so preoccupied with Vietnam that we were not high on the agenda.

Q: Well during this time, '63 to '68 that you were involved in NATO, how did we view the Soviet threat?

NEWLIN: Well the Soviet threat was a serious matter and that was the glue that held NATO together certainly. Everybody believed the United States would certainly live up to its obligations under the NATO treaty to see to it that the Soviet Union did not encroach into Western Europe. There was that underlying belief.

JOHN R. BURKE
Political Officer
Saigon (1963-1967)

Director, Vietnam Working Group

Washington, DC (1967-1969)

John R. Burke was born in Wisconsin in 1924. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956 and served in Asia, France, Haiti, and was ambassador to Guyana. A Vietnamese language officer, he served in Saigon (1963-1967) and with Vietnamese Affairs in Washington (1967-1969). He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

BURKE: The Bureau of East Asian Affairs, I think, had a reputation as one of the strongest bureaus in the Department over the years. When I was in BNA, obviously, I was working in the Bureau of European Affairs. But quite honestly looking about, I wasn't all that interested in one of the more traditional jobs in one of the larger European embassies, which I might have expected in a BNA assignment. So I was interested in getting back to the Far East and to work within the Bureau of East Asian Affairs -- it was Far East, of course, in those days. The name didn't change until 1968.

So I really jumped at the chance to take Vietnamese, going to Saigon and --

Q: What type of officer would you characterize -- this is the early '60s -- was taking Vietnamese? I mean, was there a characterization would you say?

BURKE: Well, I'm trying to think of some of the people who were in the language program with me: Bill Marsh, who is still in the Service; Dick Holbrooke, who later got out of the Service and came back into the Department as the assistant secretary for the EA; Vladimir Rahovitch, who had a very distinguished career in political military affairs; Jim Rosenthal, who later became ambassador in Guinea and is still in the Service; David Engel, Tony Lake, and Sam Thomsen.

Q: So it was, you might say, a high caliber type of motivated person.

BURKE: I would say so. The group that I was associated with, I would rate them all very highly.

Q: Well, you went to Saigon when, and what were you doing?

BURKE: I went to Saigon in -- I think I arrived in June of 1963. The way the Vietnamese language course was set up, the first six months were Washington at FSI and with three additional months in Saigon. So my first couple of months in Saigon, I was told to bring in the language but doing some odd jobs in the political section in terms of covering things that might not otherwise get covered by the political section, which was fairly -- it was a lean political section at the time.

Q: Well, the later half of '63 can be pointed to as the crucial thing and probably with the finger more pointing towards the month of November, October-November. And so you were there on the scene. Before we get to that, how did you view the situation from your vantage point as a relatively junior officer in the summer of '63 in Vietnam?

BURKE: Well, I should back up just a bit. On my way to Saigon, because of my experience in

BNA, and because I had been the assistant UK desk officer and the Irish desk officer, I was asked to stop off en route in Ireland. And I was there as an advance man during the visit of President Kennedy.

Interestingly enough, Pierre Salinger announced in Dublin that the White House had decided to name Henry Cabot Lodge as the ambassador to Saigon replacing Fritz Nolting. So I continued on to Saigon after the presidential visit. And, of course, Fritz Nolting, whom I called shortly after my arrival, was already packing his bags and getting ready to terminate his mission. And Cabot Lodge did arrive in, I think, around the 23rd of August in 1963. So it was a very interesting time, a very active time in the embassy. A lot of things were going on.

Q: Well, how did the officers view Nolting?

BURKE: I would say that the officers had a regard for Nolting. Many of the officers had served with him in Paris at the NATO headquarters, and he brought several people with him at that time to Saigon when he was named ambassador. You had Mel Manful, who was the political counselor. You had Bill Trueheart, the DCM. And then you had Bob Miller, who was number two, for the political section. So I think all of those people had a high regard for Nolting. He was certainly a very charming individual. And I thought he was a very dedicated professional, really, in his approach to the job of being ambassador.

Q: Well, what was, at that point, the view of the Vietnamese government and all?

BURKE: Toward?

Q: I mean, your view and the view of those around you, the political section and other officers in the embassy, how did you view the situation in the government?

BURKE: Well, the situation, really, in the summer of 1963 in Saigon was somewhat turbulent, because in May you had the beginning of the so-called Buddhist crisis which began at Hue, the incident of May 8 in which a Bonze, Tri Quang, organized a demonstration demanding that Buddhist in conjunction with their observance of Buddha's birthday be permitted to fly the Buddhist flag on some of the pagodas, and also they demanded that their demonstration be broadcast over the local radio station.

An incident developed on the night of May 8th. It's also been looked at and examined and reported oftentimes inaccurately. It was a very confused moment, in any event. Because of the confrontation before the radio station, there were a number of casualties and some Vietnamese demonstrators died. And this triggered a rather turbulent period. The demonstrations by the Buddhists began to spread down into Saigon and picked up by students, the students demonstrating on behalf of the Buddhists and demonstrating against the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. And there were also, of course, many American journalists on the scene, some of whom made their reputations in Saigon in the summer of '63, notably, Malcolm Brown, who was reporting for the Associated Press; Neil Sheehan, who was reporting for the United Press International; and Halberstam --

Q: David Halberstam.

BURKE: Who was reporting for the New York Times. These were young journalists. I think with the exception of one, this was their first post abroad as reporters, as foreign correspondents. And they began to file extensive reports on the developing conflict between the Buddhists and the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. Their reports began to make front pages of the newspapers throughout the U.S., and they brought a certain amount of pressure to bear on the Kennedy Administration and on the government to do something in terms of intervening to somehow help resolve the situation between the Buddhists and the Dinh Diem regime.

We were already committed to supporting the Dinh Diem regime against the Communist insurgency, which had well begun in 1960-61, and we didn't yet, of course, have combat troops in Vietnam. However, we had a growing commitment in terms of military advisors. I think we may have had about 15,000 thereabouts in the country already. And certainly we had begun to supply important resources in the meantime, commodity import program, resources to the government of Vietnam. So it was in our interest, obviously, to try and solve this -- all this regarded by some as a side show -- main problem of insurgency.

Q: Did you get involved in this at all?

BURKE: Well, involved to the extent that we were reporting to the Department, to Washington, what was going on in terms of the demonstrations. Of course, the reports by the journalists were what caught the public attention, and you had that one remarkable photograph taken by, I think it may have been Malcolm Brown. I didn't know he was a photographer, but he took the famous photograph of a Buddhist, Quang Duc, who was really not well known at all. He was a gentleman who one noon sat himself down in a major intersection in Saigon, poured a can of gasoline over himself and set fire to himself. This was such a remarkable photograph; it was just flashed around the world. It was a photograph similar to the famous one during the war in China in 1937 when the baby was set --

Q: It was a baby on railroad tracks, yes. Well, now, did you have any contact with these newspaper reporters? I mean, were they cultivating you? Were you cultivating them?

BURKE: I had limited contact with them and knew them all. I used to chat with them from time to time. But their principal contacts were people like the head of USIS and John -- the name escapes me just now.

Q: You can fill it in.

BURKE: He wrote a book subsequently called Mission in Torment. And he was the principal contact with the correspondents. But they did have social contacts with some of the other members of the embassy staff.

Q: When you got into the political section -- you were there when?

BURKE: I'd say I was getting toward full time in August of '63.

Q: Who was the head of the political section at that time?

BURKE: Well, Mel Manful, as I mentioned was the political counselor and Bob Miller was his deputy. And Mel Manful has retired. He was ambassador to Central African Republic and then Liberia before his retirement. And Bob Miller was ambassador to Malaysia and the Ivory Coast and is still in the Service. But that was the lineup. There were several other officers: Jim Rosenthal was in the embassy at the time; Bill Marsh was in the embassy; Melvin Levine, Charles Flouere, Sam Thomsen.

Q: Well, looking at it, would you say the embassy was sort of one mind? I mean, this was a very "Do we support Diem or do we cut the ground out from under him?" It was certainly a debate in other areas. How did the men of the political section view the Diem regime up to November 1963?

BURKE: Well, I don't think there was any single view. There were shades of opinion across the spectrum. There were probably one or two who felt that Diem had to go, the Diem regime had to go. There were, I think, others on the other side of the spectrum who felt that, "Okay, if Ngo Dinh Diem must go, who will succeed him and how will the succession be arranged, and what will this do to the effort to [unclear] the communist insurgency?"

I'd say there was a great deal of debate back and forth that would go up and down from day to day. As far as Ambassador Nolting is concerned, on the basis of my conversations with him which were limited then during that period because we didn't overlap all that long, but I have spoken with him subsequently and read the article he had before in the Foreign Service Journal and his book that appeared recently, and his position really hasn't deviated. He felt that it would be a mistake to consider a change of administration because the presidency of Ngo Dinh Diem was still valid, that the government was capable of functioning and that the Buddhist affair was a regrettable side show, in fact, distracting people from the real problem.

There were some people in the political section, I think, who probably learned upon review that once you get rid of -- it's clear now from all the documents that have been released, the various books that have been done, that there was an interest particularly in Washington on the part of then Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman, possibly to a lesser extent Averell Harriman and others within the administration who felt that the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem had lost its effectiveness and probably should be replaced by a more effective regime, possibly the more elite.

Q: Do you think, was there a proprietary feeling within the embassy? You know, we're doing this, and we really should rather than sit back and watch events, that we felt we should get more and more, you know, not concerned but really manipulate things within this government.

BURKE: I think there were probably some people who held that view. There were others, of course, who had served abroad and appreciated the fact that regardless of the American stake in a foreign country, the number of things you can do, the amount of influence you can wield is quite limited. I think that it's -- I had been through a coup in Bangkok. The regime of the prime minister when I arrived, was overthrown by a General. And I remember how that unfolded and

what role the U.S. mission was able to play in all of that scenario, and it was an extremely limited role if any role at all.

So I'm afraid that I felt that it's well and good to say, "We have an important stake here, the government must change its way to do certain things to accommodate us in view of our investment." And I think that in most foreign environments where you end up in this would be indigenous. After all, the people of the country, in the final analysis, say to themselves, "This is our country, and this is our government, and we will accept advice up to a point if it's consistent with our view."

Q: Did you have a feel for how the CIA -- its role there? Did you deal with them? I mean, did they have their own policy or own line? How did it work?

BURKE: Well, I was, as I say, a fairly junior officer in those days, and I had little contact with that side of the house.

Q: Again, how did it play out for you personally, and how did you see the November situation of '63?

BURKE: Well, I think it's important to mention Cabot Lodge's arrival and the way he chose to operate.

Q: Yes, if you would talk about his method of operations.

BURKE: Yes. I think that one must bear in mind that Cabot Lodge had been the Republican nominee for vice president in the election of 1960 which John F. Kennedy won.

Q: Narrowly.

BURKE: Narrowly. And I'm sure that Cabot Lodge would be accepted to come to Saigon as ambassador. He brought thought to himself, "Why am I being chosen to come?" He's a very shrewd political animal -- he was -- and he could, I'm sure, put two and two together and probably arrive at the conclusion, although he never stated this to me -- although he's stated several things to me on other subjects -- that possibly his selection was an effort on the part of the Kennedy Administration to make the Vietnam effort more bipartisan and get the Republican involvement.

Lodge arrived on the scene, as I said, on August 23rd -- I believe that's the correct date. He arrived at a particularly crucial moment, because the Ngo Dinh Diem regime had decided to try and surgically eliminate the Buddhist problem, I think on the night of August 21, and they invaded the pagodas in the Saigon area and rounded up several of the activist Buddhist Bonze who were sort of leading the demonstrations. And Lodge arrived at a very tense moment. The American press was out in force to cover his arrival. The obvious question asked was, "What do you intend to do about this terrible thing that the Ngo Dinh Diem regime has done to attempt to liquidate the Buddhist threat?"

He brought with him two advisors or two aides. One was Fred Flott, who had previously worked for CIA. He was more or less a political advisor to Lodge. The other advisor was a colonel who Lodge had met at the Pentagon named Mike Dunn, U.S. Army. And these two people, certainly in the early weeks that Lodge was there, became, in effect, his eyes and ears and conduits to both the U.S. military establishment in Saigon and to the mission itself, the embassy political section.

The economic section was AID. Mike Dunn, who was a friend of mine, has been over the years, I didn't know him all that well at that time of his arrival, but he was a very intelligent officer, got a Ph.D. from Woodrow Wilson School in political science and very active individual, a very effective aide to Lodge and was able to do everything Lodge asked of him. And that is the way the Lodge embassy worked, really, through those two conduits.

I'd say eventually, over a matter of weeks, possibly a couple of months, Dunn became the important member [unclear]. And he was the one that the ambassador depended on most heavily to keep the mission functioning and make sure that he, the ambassador, was being informed about everything that was going on.

Q: There is often a problem when you have put a military man in because of the training, which is, "What does the ambassador want? I'll see that it's done." I mean, we've just recently had a case of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North causing a lot of trouble in the name of our government. But I mean, there is a military mind set, no matter how intelligent. They're trained to see the objective and not often see the repercussions particularly in a political environment. Do you think this might have been a problem here?

BURKE: Well, I don't think it was a problem. Your question is a little more -- I can understand what you're saying. In terms of the personalities involved, Mike Dunn is a very subtle individual as well as being intelligent in the military individual and coming from his background. I do know on the basis of my own experience with him that he was every bit as tough on the U.S. military side even in Saigon as he was in the embassy. In fact, I know from a couple of my military friends, they said more than once, "Wait till we get Dunn back in the Army!" However, he was able to get back into the Army and eventually made major general before he retired.

But in any event, he was out there, and I think he served Lodge faithfully and did everything Lodge wanted done. And the same time, I think he was subtle enough to provide a cushion between Lodge and the mission. Now, I do feel that Lodge arrived, he knew nobody as far as he had never served with any of the members of the staff, the diplomatic members or the Foreign Service members of the embassy staff. I think he was suspicious, one, as to why he had been appointed. Two, he didn't know the members of the staff. Three, he knew he was moving into a very, very dicey situation in terms of the relationship with the Ngo Dinh Diem regime and what he understand Washington to want.

So I think he was very suspicious throughout that entire period in that he did not accept a great deal of advice that might come to him directly from the embassy staff or from any other source within the mission. I think he was extremely cautious, kept his counsel with a very narrow circle almost consisting entirely of Dunn and Flott. And over time, I think he began to appreciate the quality of the people on the staff, but it took a while. And I'd say it wasn't until the overthrow,

the coup of November, 1963, that he had begun to get to the point where he was willing to accept advice from counsel directly.

Q: Again, from your vantage point, how did the November 1963 coup play out as you saw it, and what were the feelings?

BURKE: Well, the rumors were rife in late August that a coup was in the works, something was going to happen in the very near term. Most reporters felt this. I should say this just in passing, but Cabot Lodge made a great effort to butter up the American correspondents on the scene. Almost from the moment of his arrival, he was accessible to them, and I think his press was extremely favorable throughout this period. I think he saw them individually. He gave individual background interviews to some of the more prominent members of the press corps, which was fairly sizeable even then. And I think it played very well back here.

As to the coup, how it played out. Late August the rumors were rife that it was going to happen very soon. And then the rumors began to die down. Elections were held in September for the National Assembly successfully. A new National Assembly was established. The government began to give the impression that they were on top of the situation. And things were very quiet throughout most of October. In fact, many of the journalists said to me they were a little irritated because nothing was going on. And I can't remember precisely what, but there was some sort of a story that was brewing in Djakarta and many of them got orders from their home offices to go down to Djakarta and cover that, possibly find other things to report because things were so superficially quiet in Saigon.

And National Day, which was, I think, October 26, Ngo Dinh Diem came. A parade was held. Diem was out taking salutes of the troops. The crowd was reasonably responsive to him. So things had quieted down, and then, of course, the rumors began to circulate, things would begin at the end of the month. Then the coup erupted. I was not personally aware of the relationship which was later revealed between Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Conein and the coup group headed by General Tran Van Don, "Big Minh," and Kim. But that's been pretty well documented.

So the coup itself, the involvement of the embassy, has been pretty well documented in various books that appeared -- Helen Hammer's book, Death in November, General Tran Van Don's book called Our Endless War. But there are several other books. And there appears to have been a very close contact between Conein, who was an old Indochina hand, who had been in North Vietnam right after World War II and then later on at the time the French were pulling out. He had many friends among the general group that became known as the "Captain's Majors" and whatnot of the past. But from my perspective at the moment -- I was certainly was not privy to any of this -- I rather doubt that the Political Counselor or his deputy were privy to it all.

Q: Well, how did you feel about it? I mean, what was sort of the feeling within the political section when the word came?

BURKE: Well, there was elation on the part of a few people who had argued in favor of doing something to "get this government moving or replace this government." I'm afraid that I was rather cynical about the whole affair because I -- and this was the position I took at the time in

conversations with my colleagues -- I felt that unless you knew precisely what was going to follow, there was not much point in replacing a government that had been, for all of its faults, functioning reasonably well and that had claim to a mandate.

One might argue that Ngo Dinh Diem's election as president of South Vietnam was clouded to a certain extent. Nevertheless, he had been in power for a considerable number of years. He had weathered other crises in that time. And he seemed, certainly on the face of it, a leader who had the best interests of his country at heart, and in point of fact, he was almost incorruptible. After the overthrow, the Military Revolutionary Council, a group of generals who led the coup, made a great attempt to try and document evidence that the Diem regime had squirreled money away abroad in Swiss bank accounts and all the rest, and they were unable to find any.

Q: By this point, had you made any contacts using your Vietnamese in Vietnamese ruling circles even at any level?

BURKE: Certainly not within the ruling circle as such. I had several contacts at the -- oh, let's say, the office director level within administrative foreign affairs, within the state interior, knew a lot of Vietnamese business people, and met socially many Vietnamese who were connected with the government, and many people who had no connection whatever, a couple of doctors and some lawyers, people of that stripe.

Q: How did they view the situation after the coup?

BURKE: After the coup? There was a tendency on the part of almost everybody to say, "It's a wonderful thing!" There were a few people who, in quiet conversation, would express certain misgivings, what they could expect now in terms of their leadership. But generally the reaction was, "This is wonderful! Now we can get ahead and go through the problems and have a government of national union and prosecute the war against the communist insurgence without distractions, this Buddhist crisis."

Q: You were there until '67. And how were things? Was there a change?

BURKE: No. I'd say the bloom went off the rose on January 30, 1964, three months after the coup, when General Khanh mounted his what was been described as his counter-coup, and it locked up the generals who had led the first coup incidents.

I and several others had argued that once you had a coup and you got involved in a coup, the one great risk is you had to beware of is the possibility is that one coup would bring about yet another coup. So over the next two years, roughly -- well, November 1, 1963 to mid-1965 -- you had a succession of probably 11 coups and coup *manqués*, and every one of them brought about a certain change in government.

The real problem here just from a managerial point of view, it seems to me, is that -- let's say that if you were a firm that rates the efficiency of an institution, and you say that the Ngo Dinh Diem regime is 40% efficient, and you look at it two years later, and you find that you've changed province chiefs, maybe, six or eight times in every province, you've replaced directors general in

all the ministries, you replaced ministers in all ministries, and just for arguments sake you've lost 5% efficiency every time you have a change, by mid-1965 in terms of governmental efficiency, they're probably scraping on zero.

Q: Yes. Well, I'm hoping that we will have a series of interviews devoted strictly to Vietnam. So I'm moving ahead rather rapidly. But I would like you to talk about Maxwell Taylor. General Maxwell Taylor came in and was the ambassador for a period of about a year. Lodge only lasted about a year, and then he came back again. As far as the embassy is concerned, what did he tell you before he left?

BURKE: I got to know the ambassador quite well before he left in early '64. I did a lot of note-taking for him in interviews that he had with political leaders. I should say, he was almost four-by-four or five-by-five in French. His French was excellent. He certainly needed no interpretation. But he conducted almost all of his meetings with the Vietnamese in French.

Lodge told me the day that he announced his departure -- we were going off to a meeting, and it was just the two of us in the car. And you may remember that in early 1964 with the coming political conventions to choose a presidential candidate in the United States, Lodge began to develop, without even being present, a certain groundswell of interest in various places. In fact, I think he even won a couple of primaries, political primaries, along the way -- the primary in Oregon and one or two other places -- and ran extremely well.

So the major contender, of course, was Senator Goldwater. And Lodge was, in political terms, diametrically opposed to Goldwater. And he said to me in the car that morning, "John, I'm going back. I feel that I have to stop this man in his effort to gain or make the Republican nomination. I feel it would be a great mistake in the party if he is nominated." And he said, "I really don't expect that I have a chance, but the fact that I have run reasonably well in some of these primaries that I didn't even campaign in, I'm going back to try and see whether I can work the nomination for someone else."

Q: Well, when Taylor came in, was there a change in the atmosphere of the embassy, how you operated?

BURKE: Taylor, of course, brought in a new team. The principal team was, of course, himself; Alex Johnson, with whom I'd served in Bangkok; and William H. Sullivan, who came in as mission coordinator.

Q: Both these were skilled people in the area.

BURKE: That's right.

Q: Lodge came in with people who worked as -- well, they were knowledgeable, but they weren't as knowledgeable in sort of, you might say, embassy terms.

BURKE: They created, of course, the post, I think it's the one and only time in diplomatic practice in the world which you had a deputy ambassador. They created that job for Alex

Johnson. But you had, I'd say, a very smoothly functioning embassy under these three people. Bill Sullivan was there just for six months, and it was understood that he was going to Vientiane as ambassador. He serviced as mission coordinator for the first six months for Taylor.

General Taylor I hadn't known prior to this, but I got to know him extremely well, too, and did a lot of note-taking for him during his mission. I've got the highest respect for him as an individual. He's really a remarkable, disciplined individual in terms of, not military terms, but in terms of the way he conducted himself. He has an extremely good mind, a marvelous thinker. He had Japanese, of course. He had German. He had French. I think he had one or two other languages as well. Curiously enough, he spoke excellent French but he had an American accent, so not as good as one might have hoped. But certainly his vocabulary and knowledge of the language [unclear].

I'd say the embassy functioned extremely well. But he arrived in mid-1964. He had Nguyen Khanh as the prime minister. Khanh had overthrown a coup group in January of that year. Khanh was already running into trouble from Buddhists and northern Catholics, who were at least aware that a sizable group of Vietnamese would come south after the French had withdrawn and were withdrawing and settled in the Saigon area on lands furnished by Ngo Dinh Diem.

Let's see, there's one point I wanted to make in connection with that. Taylor, of course, knew Vietnam because he had worked on the Vietnam problem for a long time in Washington. He had made several trips to Saigon with Robert McNamara. And as he had been Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Special Assistant to the President, so he had very close ties with the Kennedy family, with President Kennedy and his brother, Robert.

Q: Well, at that point, how did you feel in the embassy? Did you feel that you were sort of on a roller coaster of which you had no control? Or were we trying to have some sort of control over events?

BURKE: Well, again, I think given the many changes in government by coup or coup *manqués*, we were at a serious disadvantage in trying to develop contacts. When the first coup group came in, the first military revolutionary council, they put together a group of civilians, and they named it the Conseil des Notables, the council of notables. And the idea was that this appointed group was to function as a legislature of sorts.

Now, there were some very interesting political figures in the Conseil des Notables, you know, people like Shou (phonetic); you had people like Bui Diem (phonetic), who later became ambassador here; just the whole spectrum, both religious -- Buddhist, Catholic. You had people who were members of the Dai Viet Party, the members of the the VNQDD Party. It was a very interesting group, and many of them had been out of the country during the last years of the Diem regime and had just come back, and the embassy didn't know many of them.

So when the Conseil was formed, I said to Mel Manful one day, I said, "Look, why in the world don't we get Cabot Lodge to have a reception, at least?" I said, "We really don't know them well. We have a few contacts with some of them. But we almost are out of touch with this group." So he tried the idea out on Lodge. Lodge agreed to it.

I was pressed into service as protocol officer. I organized the reception. And we had it at Lodge's residence. It went over extremely well. The political section was there en masse with some other officers from the embassy. And after the party, we made a massive effort through MEMCONS, with every conversation and whatnot, and put them all together and really put together the best "book," so called, on political personalities that began to play roles in Saigon.

Unfortunately, the Conseil des Notables went out of business on January 30. But many of these same people began to resurface as political figures in these other mutations and transformations in government that we had later on.

Q: Well, you are pointing to a difficulty that often is overlooked by people who look at the work of a foreign service, and that is, often when a coup takes over, I mean, basically we don't sit back there and have a line on everybody in the country. And when a new group takes over, this often cuts out all the contacts that we have been getting. And particularly when a military coup takes over, I mean, just by its very nature, usually embassies don't have much to do with lieutenant colonels and the like. So that in a fast-moving situation, an embassy can find itself badly crippled as far as gathering intelligence in any country.

BURKE: Yes. And a coup oftentimes wipes out an embassy's entire group of contacts, and you're faced with a whole new set of faces.

Q: Well, again, I'm pressing ahead. I hope we'll come back on another occasion. But you came back in 1967, and you were working both as the director of the Vietnam Working Group and the country director for Vietnam. This is for two years, wasn't this about?

BURKE: No. First of all, I served for 12 months as Bill Bundy's special assistant.

Q: You say you were working for William Bundy. Could you describe his operating style, what you were doing for him, please?

BURKE: Yes. Well, as special assistant, I was the coordinator, if you will, for the East Asian Bureau in terms of keeping the paper moving from the political desks of the various offices within the Bureau up through Bundy to the seventh floor or up to Bundy for his decision or for his action. I worked closely with the country directors at the time, and certainly worked very closely with Bundy on a six- or seven-day-per-week basis, because it was a very critical time, and I'd say Bundy was in the office for 10 to 12 hours a day every day.

I had very little substantive input in terms of paper coming up from the political desks except in the case of Vietnam. And I would participate in substantive discussions on Vietnam with Bundy and with the then country director, Robert Miller, who had been in Saigon with me. Then when Bob left to go to the Imperial Defense College, Bundy asked me if I would take over as director of the Vietnam Working Group, which was the Vietnam directorate at the time.

You asked about Bundy's operating style. Bundy is one of the most brilliant people I've ever worked with. He and his brother, of course, are both --

Q: George Bundy.

BURKE: George Bundy. Both playing key roles at the time, and he's very hard on himself and very hard on the people working for him. He was under extreme pressure, but he certainly asked as much of himself as he asked of others. He did not tolerate sloppy work. He did not tolerate missed deadlines. He was constantly in consultation with Secretary Rusk and with other high officers of the Department in terms, particularly, of the Vietnam problem. But there were many other things going on in East Asian affairs at the time which required his attention as well.

So he, I'd say, set a very high standard for the Bureau and for himself and for the people who worked for him. The people who were not up to the mark he had replaced from time to time. But that goes with the turf, and when you're doing important work, you've got to get the work done as quickly as possible and as effectively as possible.

Q: In that time you were working for him and later when you were the country director of -- what was it? Country director for Vietnamese affairs?

BURKE: Well, the official title in those days was the Vietnam Working Group, and the director of the Vietnam Working Group was, in effect, the director of the Office of Vietnam Affairs. A Vietnam task force had been established back in the Kennedy years, and this evolved into and became the Vietnam Working Group. So it's a rather curious title, but that was the title that was used.

Q: But it boils down to you were the country officer for --

BURKE: For Vietnam.

Q: For Vietnam.

BURKE: Yes.

Q: Well, these are obviously crucial years, '68-'69. What did you as the director for Vietnam do?

BURKE: Well, there was a lot of coordination with other elements of the executive branch that were involved in Vietnam, for example, AID and the aid program, the Pentagon. We were moving to establish the Paris talks and enter into negotiations with Hanoi and looking toward a settlement. We had the Tet offensive that erupted in late January of 1968. So it was the whole panoply of day-to-day sort of crisis management, if you will.

But in the longer term, what we were attempting to do was assist -- well, achieve a series of decisions which would enable our embassy in Saigon to assist the government to become stronger -- well, the Saigon government, the government of South Vietnam -- at the same time, to bring about the commencement of these talks, looking toward some sort of a political settlement with Hanoi and to keep the whole thing together. Obviously, any move on our part in terms of negotiating with Hanoi was bound to put new strains on the government of South

Vietnam. So there was a great deal of balancing that went on.

Bundy, in those days, used to chair a group which was referred to as the "Eleven O'clock Group," and this consisted of myself; George Carver of CIA, who ran the Vietnam office at CIA; Les Kalb, who was over at Defense; Mortimer Halperin, who was also over at Defense; and we would have a military officer sometimes, somebody like Bill De Pree or General George Signias as a member of this "Eleven O'clock Group."

It really was not a decision-making body as such, but it was an effort to keep all the elements of the executive branch informed as to what was going on. It was, in effect, a staff meeting, if you will, under Bundy's chairmanship, but just to make certain that all the agencies and departments with important interests in Vietnam knew what was going on, were informing the others about projects that they might be contemplating or working on, and just generally to review the situation that had happened overnight in Vietnam.

Q: What was your attitude towards this evolving thing? Were you, as with the others, so involved in almost day-to-day affairs that it was hard to haul back and say, "Should we be here? Are we winning? Are we losing?" How did you feel about that?

BURKE: I felt, at the time, that the situation was such that we had a reasonable chance of succeeding in Vietnam in terms of -- by that, I mean, arriving at a situation where the government of South Vietnam would be able to stand on its own feet at a time when U.S. forces were withdrawn, and that some sort of an accommodation with Hanoi could be worked out. I was personally convinced that the accommodation wouldn't work or couldn't be arrived at with Hanoi unless they were convinced that a full-scale win in the South was impossible to them and the cost was too high. But I felt in this time frame, '67, '68, '69, there was still hope that this could be achieved.

Obviously, Tet was a great setback to us psychologically in the United States, although I knew almost immediately from the reports coming in that militarily it had been a terrible defeat for the North, that they had tried to foment this nationwide uprising in the South, and it had failed, that they had lost a lot of their cadre as a result of this gamble on their part. But psychologically in terms of the reporting that was coming out of Saigon by the media, by the U.S. media, and the way it was played back in the United States, particularly the occupation of the embassy compound for a brief period, the occupation of Hue for a longer period, attacks carried out within Saigon itself, it was a psychologically serious blow and probably an almost fatal blow in terms of our effort.

Q: Well, how much did you and those working with you feel the pressures from outside, from Congress, from the press and all? I mean, did this have an effect on your thinking or not?

BURKE: Well, it obviously had an effect on us. It didn't have an effect, I would say, generally, on our thinking and what we felt was possible. But we had to deal with it. We had to deal with the Congress. The main brunt of testifying for the Congress was born by Bundy himself, although on occasion I did testify at the subcommittee level in support of an aid program for Vietnam, that sort of thing.

We were getting, though, constant pressure from individual congressmen and also from the reporters on the scene and also from interest groups within the United States who would come to Washington and wanted to be briefed on Vietnam, many groups which were, in effect, opposed to our continued involvement in Vietnam.

Q: Did you have the feeling -- if you can try and go back to the time that the clock was ticking as far as what we could do -- maybe because, you know, we just couldn't keep up the public support for much longer, did you feel this?

BURKE: Well, there was no question but it appeared that the public support was ebbing. And when President Johnson, in his March 31st speech in 1968, chose to withdraw from the election of 1968 and devote his time, what was left of his term, to try and seek a settlement of the Vietnam War and engage Hanoi in meaningful talks, this was obviously in response to his perception of public opinion and public support.

Also, of course, the constant barrage of reporting of demonstrations, especially at the Chicago convention, the campaign of Robert Kennedy, which was essentially an anti-war campaign that he was waging, the Democratic Convention in Chicago, all of this, it was quite obviously that the "peace group" in the United States was becoming stronger and more vocal. I do and did feel at the time there was still a fairly large residue of support in the United States, if only that element of the populace could be convinced that the situation was winnable or we could achieve our objectives.

Q: There was this talk about, "Well, if we only have 50,000 more troops and then another 50,000 and so on, we could do it." And the number grew to be half a million. How did we view the American military role? Again, I'm speaking from the State Department at the working level.

BURKE: Certainly during my time, I was not conscious of any sharp division between ourselves and the Pentagon. Obviously, the commanders in the field are the ones responsible for the success of operations, and if they felt they needed more troops, then they went out to be given more resources. Certainly, we, the U.S. Government starting with the President and others -- I should mention the Tuesday Lunch. In this period, there was a command body, if you will, at the White House, which was known as the Tuesday Lunch. And this consisted of the President, Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, Walt Rostow and occasionally one or two others.

And in order to get decisions taken at the highest level regarding Vietnam, what you did was get it discussed and decided at the Tuesday lunch, because you had the key players right there. So whenever we had something that we wanted a decision on, it was a very -- actually, it was a very efficient mechanism in many ways, and much more efficient than doing a 40-page memorandum with attachments, which would go up through the machinery of the Department to the sixth and seventh floor, then go over to the White House and eventually be chopped off by, first of all, the NSC advisor and the President. But very quickly, you could get a piece of paper up to the Secretary, and he could introduce the subject at the Tuesday lunch and get a decision on it in a matter of 24 or 48 hours. But this group, of course, looked very carefully at propositions being made by the military regarding bombing, extent of bombing attacks against the North. And

targets were approved at this level.

It didn't make -- and this is a personal view, obviously -- it didn't make a lot of sense to me, a former naval officer who had served in not only World War II but I was recalled for Korea and served three years there. But it seemed that the restrictions that we were placing on the military, especially in terms of actions against the North once we had decided to bomb the North, were much too restrictive. I also personally felt that it was a terrible blunder on our part not to have mined Haiphong harbor. I argued with Bundy in favor of mining early on -- by early on I'm talking '67-'68 -- but for one reason or another, it was concluded that it was too dangerous in terms of risks of damage to Chinese, Russian or third country shipping of one sort or another.

That decision is, just by-the-by, I think it was a mistake, because essentially mining is one of the most humane things you can do. You say, "As of 12:00 tomorrow, shipping goes in or out of that port at its own peril, because the mines are there." So anybody who moves runs the risk of running into a mine. It isn't like bombing. Actually, you can give fair warning, and as long as the shipping does not move, there's no danger to any vessel.

But I do feel that the civilian side did put heavy restrictions on the military and what it was able to do. In retrospect, I think it was pretty obvious that there was a great deal of concern that they got too close to the Chinese border. You ran the risk that we ran into in the Korean War and that the Chinese would enter.

Q: We're always inhibited by the last war.

BURKE: Yes.

Q: I mean, this is a continuing factor in whatever we do.

BURKE: Yes.

Q: It's not looking at the real situation. It's always looking at the last one.

BURKE: That's right. We all operate on the basis of experience, and when you're fighting wars, you just conclude -- it's like kidnaping situations in this age of terrorism as far as diplomacy is concerned. I've been involved in a couple of those, and it's always a mistake to try and handle the next kidnaping in a way that the previous one was handled if you handled it successfully.

JOHN T. BENNETT
Financial Economist
Saigon (1963-1965)

Economic Counselor
Saigon (1973-1975)

and

RUTHERFORD POATS
Bureau Chief, USAID
Washington, DC (1963-1967)

Assistant Administrator, USAID
Washington, DC (1964-1966)

John T. Bennett was born in Wisconsin in 1929 and joined the Foreign Service in 1955. He served in Tunisia, the Dutch East Indies, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, South Korea, and Guatemala.

Rutherford Poats was born in South Carolina in 1922 and joined USAID in 1961. He worked on the Far East from Washington.

Bennett and Poats were jointly interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

Q: I wonder, who went to Vietnam first?

POATS: I was never stationed in Vietnam. I was the assistant administrator of AID in the Far East.

Q: I wonder if you could give me a little background on yourself and then how you got involved with Vietnam.

POATS: Well, Vietnam was the recipient of US military and economic aid from the earliest days of AID programs. At the time of the heightening of the insurgency in South Vietnam in the Eisenhower Administration, there was a sharp acceleration in the concern about Vietnam. During the Kennedy Administration, which took a posture of containment of communism on a global basis, the Viet Cong was seen as a global threat to the United States and the response was in response to that view of it.

The economic aid was increasingly pressed by political authorities and the defense department, to intensify efforts to support the Vietnamese government - then of Ngo Dinh Diem - with the view to strengthening his capacity to win the support of the people or to retain their allegiance against the pressures of the Viet Cong.

Beginning in 1962, there was a major increase in economic aid. My first direct involvement was January 3, 1963 when I went with the Administrator Dave Bell and the Assistant Administrator for the Far East Seymour Janow, to Saigon. We met with the government officials and our representatives there to discuss what would be a useful kind of increase.

Q: Could you let us know how you came into AID and what was your position at that time?

POATS: I came into AID at the request of Seymour Janow in December 1961 at the same time he did. It was just when AID was being created out of several agencies involved in foreign assistance. I agreed to come in for one year and in fact remained.

I had been an economic news reporter and I was bureau chief in Tokyo and traveled extensively. I was initially a special assistant, then program officer and so on and at the time of this trip was the program officer of the bureau.

Q: John, to complete the picture, could you tell us who you are and where you came from and if you would carry on the questioning.

BENNETT: I worked twenty-six years in the foreign service. I went to Saigon in February 1963 as the financial economist in the economic section of the embassy. Saying that, however, doesn't quite convey what was going on.

The economic section of the embassy was in the same building as AID and we worked very closely, not always cooperatively, over the years. I stayed in Vietnam through 1965 and then went back to Washington.

In Washington I was seconded to AID, first in the Far East Bureau and then in the Vietnam Bureau, when it was broken off of the Far East Bureau, until 1969. I went back to Saigon as the Deputy Director of the AID Mission in 1973. I became acting AID Director in February of 1975 and stayed until the last of the helicopters.

Q: Rud, when did you become assistant administrator?

POATS: May of 1964. Janow resigned in November 1963 and about the same time the deputy in that bureau, Jim Fowler, was sent off to language school preparatory to going to Columbia as mission chief. So I moved up from number three to number one in a few days.

I ran the Far East Bureau from then on -- that is from November 1963 until May 1967 when I was sworn in as Deputy Administrator of AID. I kept an eye on Vietnam after that but we split the Vietnam section split off to form a separate bureau at the time I was promoted. Jim Grant came in as the chief of the Vietnam Bureau.

BENNETT: Let's go back to when you arrived in Saigon with Janow.

POATS: At that time the program was pretty conventional for politically motivated AID programs. It had a supporting assistance element -- I don't remember it being very large -- a number of conventional technical assistance institution building activities and a few capital projects. The intention was to provide much quicker impact on the political opinion. We searched for reasonable ways of doing this. We didn't have a lot of experience in these kinds of things. This was rather new to me and to AID. We had somewhat similar concerns at the same time in Laos and Thailand, where insurgencies had begun.

We developed ideas for quick impact AID programs in those three countries in parallel. I went on that same trip to Laos to talk with the people there about how they were responding to this problem.

The roof began to fall in upon the government. The scale of our involvement grew exponentially. AID became involved in support of CIA-led counter insurgency efforts and that was true in Laos. We were in fact financing the air lifts and the food and other non-lethal supplies to the forces opposing the Pathet Lao in the north. Similar programs developed in Vietnam.

BENNETT: I went there in February of 1963. In May we had the beginning of the mess in Hue where the Buddhists got pretty beaten up. Then we had the Buddhists monks burning themselves and the events of that summer.

I was delighted to be going to Vietnam. I was in Curacao at the time. I had very little preparation. My second question was "Where is it?" As soon as I got to Washington, however, I began hearing that this guy Diem hasn't got it. Then I became increasingly aware of the crossfire over those who wanted Diem and those who wanted him out.

How much of that splashed over on your side of things?

POATS: I recall as a newspaper man the efforts to generate press support for aid to Vietnam as early as 1959. So it was a controversial topic even then. But not a national one.

But you are right that we all went into this situation blindly. We had no notion of the depth of the quick sand we were walking into. We had no notion of what social engineering in that kind of culture meant. We were quite naive as to the motivations of the government officials we dealt with, shocked to see that they were not committed to the national cause, weren't even loyal to the people who put them in office. The extent of the corruption was simply staggering. This we discovered quite early on.

Once you plunge into something like this with the kinds of rhetoric that Dean Rusk surrounded it with, it was impossible to do anything else but keep plugging to find a way to make the policy rational. A lot of people spent a lot of time doing just that. We gave it our best and were loyal to the cause.

There were very few who were ready to give it up inside the government. We were somewhat mesmerized by the repeated visit of high officials, like MacNamara, and top State Department people. They were constantly finding the good signs and prospects. I must say that we never saw these signs and were pretty skeptical about these CORP's and rural operations.

BENNETT: I want to go back to that. Were you involved with that when it was first set up? I think Rufus Phillips first set that up.

POATS: He was quite new there and picked by Lansdale. Lansdale was in charge of the counter insurgency effort. A man of towering stature as far as all of us were concerned because he knew something about the country. That put him head and shoulders above everybody else.

Q: Did he really know something about Vietnam or about the Philippines?

POATS: Well yes. He transferred by analogy an awful lot. But we also had the British counter insurgency specialist, Sir Robert Thompson, from Malaysia.

Anyway, these were two people of considerable stature and those of us who were shoveling out the money were not prepared to debate with them.

BENNETT: The first question that was paramount was whether or not we would stay with Diem. The one that was never asked was, "Could we win." There was the assumption that if you changed people, you could. But that was an unexamined assumption.

POATS: The general assumption made at the time of the murder of Diem was that a new cast of characters was bound to be likely to win public support. That he had just simply worn out any chance of winning the hearts and minds of the people.

BENNETT: My feeling at the time was that we sure weren't going to win with what we had. Our mistake was that we continued to try for the next ten years with the next set.

POATS: William Trueheart, the DCM, was one of the few who expressed his skepticism in meetings to the extent that he was just at the point of being tossed out on his ear.

BENNETT: There was enormous skepticism, skepticism was understating it. The atmosphere was very poisonous. I can remember writing a very academic and uninteresting report on agricultural programs and the next thing I knew, I was summoned by Ambassador Frederick Nolting. He wanted to go over it, almost word by word. At the time he said that he had all these people who were shooting at him back in Washington. He didn't want to give them something they could use against his policies. The facts were allowed to stand but a different spin was put into it.

POATS: There are two turning points that I would like to describe, and I may as well get right to them.

One was the set of meetings at a CIA safehouse in Virginia at the time of the initial entry of the US troops. Harkins (the general in charge of MAC/V, the assistance command) General Richard Stilwell and a few others came back to brief the Washington establishment. Present were Alexis Johnson, Len Unger, deputy assistant secretary for the Far East, White House and CIA staff and me, representing AID. It was on what it would take to win, militarily. This was in the summer 1965, I believe.

The MAC/V team presented a plan that entailed putting in about 400,000 troops. That was quite a shocking number to all of us in Washington. Even so, they estimated it would take a four year effort, which was also quite shocking. Doing the arithmetic, it was clear that we were talking about a big expansion of the federal budget. That kind of war effort also entailed a huge increase in military aid to the government of Vietnam. One could easily project a vast amount of

economic aid as well.

The question then was how was this going to be presented to President Johnson for a decision. Those of us who thought this was an excessive amount of lives and money for that cause said that we wanted to be sure that the President was given the facts unvarnished. He could decide the politics of it in consultation with his economic and budget advisors and others. Unger said that Alexis Johnson would present it. I asked Chet Cooper of the White House if he would make sure it was done. Well I heard later that Johnson had presented it, not to the President, but to Rusk. Chet Cooper had not found a way to report to the President for reasons that I never quite understood. There was no indication from the White House economic or political staffs that the President this shocking projection; he only learned of the projected costs gradually. He got used to it in increments. MAC/V came in with a more modest immediate request another 20,000 troops, I recall. But the long term forecast was the thing that would have alerted the President politically to what he was getting into. That was one thing that I observed. I felt later that I was derelict in not having somehow seen to it that the people around Johnson who should have done something about it, did it.

The other turning point, in my view of the war, was the decision that in order to sustain public support of the South Vietnamese government's war effort we had to maintain price stability in the South, and that this should be done by supplying goods on the market in Saigon and the other cities to offset speculative and real shortfalls in supply. Because many areas were interdicted and production was inhibited by the war effort, AID had to pump in everything under the sun including rice.

We largely ignored the damaging medium-term effect of those imports on the economy and on the people. We tried overly ambitiously to preclude price escalations. In much of the developing world, particularly in Latin America it was commonplace to have hyper inflation. But we couldn't tolerate a high take of inflation in Vietnam. We just pumped in more goods.

Now putting in those goods was not just having its impact on production in Vietnam, but also creating a whole class of venal operators who got rich on import whole business. This produced very quickly investigative reports and congressional hearings of which I spent sometimes 10 days out of every month testifying.

Literally one time I was up there I think twelve days in one month. It just went on and on endlessly. Both the Senate and the House operations committees had hearings about corruption in Vietnam, and of course the corruption was the fault of the AID managers, who were supinely accepting the guidance of the political managers about how to fight a war.

BENNETT: That brings up a whole set of management problems. I remember one that always bothered me when I was there. We were carrying on two programs at the same time. One was the conventional AID program and the other was what was called rural operations, a program towards the hearts and minds of the peasants. One story illustrates the point. I think it was Matt Drysdale who was the chief agricultural officer. Any way, he came back from a field trip and said that they had been wandering about the country and came across a program we had started to introduce cocoa production. The farmers were really ticked off because they couldn't sell the

stuff and eventually began to throw cocoa pods at this group.

It struck me that this is where we got ourselves into trouble. There are two parts to this. Many program elements didn't seem relevant, and didn't mesh with the other things we were doing. It was a very diffuse effort. Later on when we did the rice program to introduce high yield rice varieties, that seemed to work quite well.

Q: Let me ask a question. I have just been reading a critique of Vietnam policy. One point mentioned was the concept that "things aren't working here and so we took over." Certainly on the military side we pushed the army to one side which helped ruin whatever moral they had. Moving them to one side while the Americans fought. How about the AID side?

POATS: No, not on the AID side, at least not in conventional AID functions. Even our heavy financial support of the economy was done through the central bank and through the various technical ministries.

The area in which there is some ground for that accusation against AID is in that twilight area between the CIA and AID, the CORDS or rural development schemes. In those operations you had very eager provincial advisors who were appointed and worked for AID but were borrowed from the State Department or the CIA or from the military services.

BENNETT: Like Tony Lake and Diehard Holbrooke -- a whole bunch of them.

POATS: They were all eager to succeed in their provinces. Like the military counterparts, they pressed for more US action. Not all of them but that was a common tendency. At certain stages later in the war when you simply couldn't count on certain province chiefs to deliver, they would bring in US civil affairs troops. Or sometimes they would get the Vietnamese army to do work that really should have been done by the civil government.

Well, that was very hard to distinguish anyway at that point. Because at that point all the province chiefs were military. But I would say the strictly AID technical efforts, producing a better rice, developing rural credit or educational programs, even on a crash basis still had to run through what had to pass for civil government. Isn't that true?

BENNETT: I think so. In some cases when they did it, it was the CORDS's guy kicking their butts to get them moving.

Q: When I was there 1969 to 1970, we had a program dealing with bringing in third country nationals in. We had trouble getting them documented. It ended up in my office, the consular office. We took over the documentation of this. There was tremendous erosion and moving in.

POATS: You mention third country nationals. We had a lot of them, maybe 2,000 Filipino medical workers. They were literally performing medical services as Vietnamese.

BENNETT: I remember Vietnamese that I knew began talking to me in late 1964 about how we were taking over. They argued that every American military guy we brought in, two Vietnamese

would simply quit making any effort. The total effort would go down. I can remember coming back to Washington, in '65, and arguing that by taking over the war we had, had this effect, so that it was going to be very difficult to win. In fact I really felt that we probably wouldn't. But I never really understood how much they were talking about in terms of level of American commitment as early as '64 and '65. We, in Saigon at my level, were thinking of tens of thousands, not hundreds of thousands.

The senior U.S. General, William Westmoreland was a litmus test of this. When he first came in '64, he traveled around a lot, visiting Vietnamese units, and then all of a sudden he just stopped paying any attention to them at all. This was anecdotal, an impression that I got. But it bothered me then and certainly got across to the Vietnamese.

Ken Kugel's (in AID's Vietnam Bureau) response was "Well, we've got so much fire power, we'll blow 'em out of the water, blow 'em out of existence."

POATS: Of course, it was very hard to argue against that at the time. After all, we'd won some wars before. Nobody could understand how that rag tag bunch could resist the might of the US army which was rolling up this little peninsula.

BENNETT: John Arthur who had been a colonel but was working in AID, thought the hamlet program might work. The idea was to create a local hamlet government with a hamlet militia which when attacked could be supported by the army. That second step never happened. We never got that kind of quick reaction force, even when the Americans arrived. We were never able to take something and hold it.

POATS: All of those schemes, strategic hamlet scheme, all created disillusionments, where promises were made that simply could not be fulfilled. Security promises essentially.

Q: Just what you were saying. Did you see a problem where we made promises, that is, we made promises. Is there a problem that when we get involved with something we're not very familiar with, we tend to exaggerate what we can do and we bring people in and there is a lot of movement, but not much gets accomplished.

POATS: External efforts are useful when they support strong local leadership. When you don't have that, you don't have wise leadership or counsel there, nothing makes any sense. We kept building on quicksand. We never had a government composed both of technicians and political leaders in Vietnam that one could count upon to make the right decisions which we could then simply support. We were always pushing our own ideas and they would either grudgingly go along or enthusiastically go along but almost never initiate. That was my impression. I think that was true of almost everything except in the days of Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, who did indeed have some ideas. A very determined man, but he went down with Diem.

BENNETT: I often sensed that we were trying to do too many different things at any given point. Trying to do land reform, promote new crops, like cocoa, etc. There were just so many things going on. Even when I got there as the Deputy Director of the AID mission in 1973, it seemed to me that we were still trying too many darn things ...

POATS: Otto Passman (Congressman) used to say there's not a project invented anywhere in the world that you aren't trying in Vietnam.

BENNETT: How did you feel about that?

POATS: It's true. And this in a country that had very little administrative capacity.

BENNETT: Why didn't we focus it a little more?

POATS: Usually these things are out of some kind of parochial enthusiasm. Everybody was there to try and win the war in his way and everybody thought the universe centered on his thing. We're going to win the war through land reform; we're going to win it with health, you're going to win it with education; win it with political action in the countryside. Everybody had the solution. And who is to say that one of these solutions might not have a certain degree of verisimilitude. So try it out. Money was no object. But what we didn't take into account was the real resource constraint was acute. The main constraint was people.

BENNETT: On the Vietnamese side you mean.

Q: *Until what point were you directly involved?*

POATS: Directly involved until 1967 and then I turned the Vietnam Bureau over to Jim Grant and I became the Deputy Administrator and then quickly got busy with other things.

Q: *Towards the end, were you getting reflections of disillusionment or was hope springing eternal with each new thing up to '75. How about towards the end and the concern of getting our people out of there.*

POATS: Well, I wasn't involved at the end. I can't speak with any confidence about my memory past 1967-1968. I receded from the story. Certainly before that, no doubt about it, hope was springing eternal.

When Nixon came in, there was a thorough reappraisal by Kissinger and the whole crew here. I stayed on for a year after that as Deputy Administrator and Acting Administrator for four months before John Hannah took over. Certainly the tone in the State Department and White House was 'let's find a way to end this thing but not end it in humiliation, not end it in any way that would give encouragement to a repetition elsewhere.' There was not a lot of public pressure on the Nixon Administration the first year to end it quickly, although the American people were certainly tired and illusions were fading by 1969.

BENNETT: That was one of the things that really shook me. With Tet in 1968, the immediate reaction on the American side was really one of despair. Both Westy (General Westmoreland) and Don McDonald (the AID Mission Director), when he came back, were really shaken.

POATS: I was really baffled by the reaction of the press. I couldn't understand it. I think those of

us close to Vietnam didn't understand the strange American response to Tet.

BENNETT: A lot of your problem, as Deputy Administrator, was trying to keep your Congressional support at some level of public acceptance. That had to be a running battle from sometime in 1964 on.

POATS: Yes, for a long time it was possible to use the old reliable of fanatical communist forces seeking to impose dominion over a part of the free world. That began to become tattered as government after government, corruption story after corruption story demonstrated that we weren't making it.

It was difficult to criticize the military and the people who were giving their lives in Vietnam but it wasn't at all difficult to criticize the people throwing away money. I got awfully tired defending that side of the war effort. Secretary Rusk had to take an awful lot of this, of course, and I had to go up with him and slip him notes.

Q: What was your evaluation of Rusk.

POATS: A splendid man who had a single mind on the issue of containment, and who saw, despite his expertise in the Far East (after all he was assistant secretary for the Far East before) the challenge in the jungles exactly as he would see it in Berlin. It was all part of the global contest with the Soviet monolith. He was behind his time in that.

BENNETT: I don't know, I think that was fairly widely shared throughout the U.S. Government.

POATS: He did not provide sensitive leadership in this issue. After all he was in his office eight years. I think that was a mistake. I think had there been a change in leadership in the State Department during that period, Johnson might have been led in a different direction. But Rusk and Mac Bundy were so of a mind on this issue, once Bundy had been out there and gotten bloodied himself. You know he was up at Pleiku when they mortared it.

BENNETT: I remember that. It led to my family and all the other families being taken out, and greatly changed the character of the U.S. involvement -- it became much more military.

POATS: Anyway there was too much of a cohesion of thought there between Rusk and Bundy and of course Walter Rostow who was also an activist. So Johnson was not given many options.

BENNETT: Of course the next one was Bob Komer. At any level, we generally thought he never told Johnson the truth on those issues at all.

POATS: Bob, like McNamara, could always see victory just around the corner.

Q: Mr. Poats has left and I am continuing the interview with John Bennett. Give us once again your periods of time in or dealing with Vietnam.

BENNETT: The first time I was out there was from February '63 to June of '65. In that period I

was an economic officer in the embassy. After Lodge came, they made me economic counselor, which was unusual because I was much too low ranked for that. But I think it was a matter that I got along well with some of Lodge's staff. I stayed in that job until some time in 1965 when Roy Wehrle became the senior economic person and Jim Killen became the new AID Director and reorganized the whole mission.

I left Saigon in June of '65. My family had already gone in January. I went back to Washington and began working in the Asia Bureau, spending half my time worrying about the economic programs in Vietnam and then I switched over to the Vietnam Bureau full time. In those four years, I was actually spending two to three months a year in Vietnam on TDYs doing whatever there had to be done.

One of my discoveries from this period was that communications between Saigon and Washington broke down very quickly. I would go out and get my viewpoints adjusted, so I could see what they were worrying about. Then I'd come back and in a month, it would all get away from me again. It would all be different. We would be fighting about things that we shouldn't have been fighting about. So then one of them would have to come back to Washington, and we would get it squared away again.

We had a series of running issues in this period. The first one obviously was who should succeed Diem, and the kinds of sets of programs that we were going to carry on with them. There were tremendous bureaucratic rivalries.

Q: This is in the embassy?

BENNETT: I should say the U.S. mission. For example you had MAC/V, and the military attachés. Lodge got rid of the attachés because they became a pain in the neck for the military. They began a fight over the evaluation of what was happening. That was proving to be very disruptive.

The military got to be so large in Vietnam, too, that it became overwhelming. I can remember in '64 I was one of several embassy officers that had to go over for a MAC/V meeting. The first thing was the senior general didn't show up for two hours, so we all sat around and waited. The room finally ended up with thirteen generals, six colonels, and a couple of captains to carry the bags for the others, and us civilians. It was a joke.

Q: What was the atmosphere in the mission before Diem was overthrown?

BENNETT: In February when I got there, people were questioning what was happening. Ap Bac had occurred in the fall just before that, and that raised, at least in the press, a serious question about the military effort that the Vietnamese were making and whether our military aid was being effective. And whether all the other programs we had were being effective.

We had provincial representatives all over the country and many of them were reporting that things were going to hell. Others were saying that everything was fine. We ended up fighting ourselves about the correct evaluation and the appropriate set of actions. Pretty soon we had real

dirty rivalry going on. Just take the fact that Nolting felt he was systematically undermined back in Washington. And take General Harkins -- I heard him tell stories that we knew weren't true to the ambassador. I don't know how you handle that. He obviously felt very strongly committed to what ever he was saying.

There were lots of other rivalries. I mentioned the two AID programs -- we had the provincial program and the conventional program, and there was a lot of rivalry there. There was a feeling on the part of the provincial reps that the other guys were not cooperating and providing full support. On the other hand, the agriculturalists felt the provincial reps didn't understand how important their professional standards were. You had real disagreements over that. It became a pretty poisonous atmosphere.

Q: How did you as an economic officer fit into this?

BENNETT: The economic questions became submerged in the larger political and security issues. And I think that was right. Of course you had that running concern throughout -- the question of which objective had priority. And that gave some of the AID people, who were let's say professional agriculturalists, real problems. They didn't want to see it done wrong. That led them into conflict with the other guys, who said "get the goodies out there." Get the Vietnamese to do their thing, to do it right.

Q: What was the reaction to the overthrow of Diem and his assassination?

BENNETT: Leading up to his overthrow, I was asked to look into what things could be stopped which would put pressure on the Vietnamese government, on Diem, to change his behavior. We worked on that. It's not so easy to turn off an aid program. The stuff is in the ships, it becomes expensive, what do you do with it? That sort of thing. In the end it became a strong psychological element that the US had withdrawn its support of Diem.

Now the overthrow. I can go through it day by day but the final day came as a complete surprise to me. I had people in for lunch and suddenly we heard machine guns, small arms firing and bombing outside. We sent everybody home. We hunkered down for a long night of artillery firing. It was pretty scary. I was a warden and I had a radio and was in radio-communication with the embassy and then I was able to talk to my neighbors and tell them what to do. I didn't know that Diem had been killed until sometime in the morning. We all stayed home. We were under house arrest so to speak. It was too dangerous to go out on the street.

The fact that Diem was killed, that came as a shock to many of us. Even though we didn't like him. None of us knew him personally, but we didn't like what was going on. We wanted him out of office. But his death was a shock. Then there was tremendous optimism about what Big Mink was going to be able to do. Then he gets put out in a coup a month later in December. I can remember going with Lodge and some other embassy officers to call on Nguyen Khanh, the next leader. We were going to be his cadre in the president's office. We had one meeting with him and that was the end of it.

This was the beginning of two years of rotating governments and totally ineffective

communications between the Americans and the Vietnamese. This is our reason why we ultimately felt we had to take over the military effort and everything else.

Q: Was this discouraging to you?

BENNETT: Oh, yeah. I felt totally discouraged. '63 was a grim year. After Diem fell, there was a lot of optimism for about a month. Then the military situation became clear, and we had lost a lot of ground in the countryside and then we begin the succession of turnovers in the Vietnamese government. It produced a high level of paralysis.

Q: Were you catching the field reports from people you knew?

BENNETT: The field reporting even before Diem, was quite good. There was plenty of evidence that things were not going well and that the people who were saying everything was all right were wrong. It was anecdotal evidence about a particular province, a particular village and particular district. The point was not that there was one report but that there was an overwhelming amount of information indicating things were not going well.

Q: Did you ever sit in on meetings with Lodge and any of the others? When these things came up, how were they handled?

BENNETT: As a matter of fact, we had weekly meetings, called the mission intelligence support committee or something like that. We had people from the military, from AID, people from the embassy, and I sat in on them. We produced a weekly report. I was astonished always at the frankness with which many of these guys from the military, who publicly were very optimistic, how frank and how pessimistic much of the reporting was.

Q: Isn't it enervating being double-faced. Having to report optimistically on something on which you're getting very pessimistic reports.

BENNETT: You become triple-faced. There is a public face. Government can't afford to lie to the public and I think we were doing it. I didn't have to, but as an institution we were doing it. Then what we sent back to Washington was often couched in terms that would show a particular agency in a good light. The military reporting was much more optimistic than what I was hearing from the intelligence officers themselves. Then there were a bunch of people cast as a critical minority in the system who were trying to get a change in policy. They felt that the classified official reporting back to Washington was much too optimistic and had to be changed.

Q: How about the press?

BENNETT: I think it played two roles in Vietnam. When I first got there, I felt the press was doing a great service as it was reporting what we were hearing from the "subversives" in the mission. It put pressure on Washington to do something. Unfortunately it ended up that we took over the war instead of insisting on a higher level of performance from the Vietnamese. Later on, when I went back in '73, I felt that the press was still carrying on the same war with the U.S. government, essentially arguing that the situation was much worse than it was and that we were

just a bunch of stumblebums. Probably my perception changed in part because I was being criticized, but to some degree it was true. I had the feeling that some of the reporters were really trying to get their Pulitzer by carrying on in the David Halberstam and Malcolm Brown tradition. The fact remains that the U.S. government told stories to itself and to the congress and the public from the very beginning. We should have told it like it was, warts and all.

Q: When you left the first time in '65, what did you feel about what was going to happen.

BENNETT: Just days before I went, another turn over occurred in the government. While I knew the new guy, I wasn't very optimistic. Boy, was I glad to get out of there. I went to Hong Kong and slept for twenty-four hours.

Q: When you got back you were dealing with the economic side of it, weren't you?

BENNETT: Yes.

Q: Was there any concern, I was there in '69 and I was told there was a reason but I never really understood it for all the Hondas, and the fact that the PX was loaded with tape recorders and I saw the Thai troops march in and buy things. I had been a soldier in the Korean War and you were lucky if you got displays of prophylactics. That was about all they sold in the PX. Then to see this display of wealth was disturbing in a time of war.

BENNETT: It was a strange war. The period that I was commuting from Washington, '65 to '69, the PX system had really gotten large. We had convoys going three miles from downtown Saigon to the PX and they would rip-off half of the convoy. The trucks would simply disappear. Stuff got stolen off the docks, stuff got systematically stolen out of the PX itself. They had an inventory system in which they counted what they put onto the shelves. We didn't know what was sold. We were never able to do anything about it. The military somewhere outside of Vietnam ran the PX system. The commander of Vietnam had no control over it.

Q: It was all part of a whole. Was this a good or bad idea.

BENNETT: Well, they thought it was a good idea because you were providing the soldiers with the amenities. What you were really doing was providing amenities to the staffers. You weren't really providing them to the soldiers roaming around the mountains and the woods and being shot at. They had access to them occasionally but not often.

The great harm it did was to create an enormous black-market, which involved a lot of our soldiers, it involved the Koreans, the Thais, the Vietnamese. It was part of the whole process of corruption that went on. You can take some corruption but the level of it there was just gross.

Q: Was this a deliberate policy?

BENNETT: No, some people thought it was irrelevant, the others weren't able to stop it.

Q: I had heard the theory that it was designed to sop up excess currency, to prevent inflation.

BENNETT: That argument was made, but it didn't really sop it up. You paid for your prostitutes, your female companionship, with goods that you bought with dollars. In that sense you were supplying local demand, but ..

Q: *Let's go into when you came back. When was that?*

BENNETT: Summer of '73.

Q: *What was the situation then? How did you feel?*

BENNETT: We'd had the truce. The north had withdrawn some of its troops, and we had withdrawn all of ours except the advisors. Pentagon east still stood, but it was a shell and we were depending much more heavily on the AID program.

I can remember that when I got off of the plane, I went directly to a meeting with the Minister of Finance at his home. They were about to impose a value added tax. Everybody took this very seriously. It was an attempt by the Vietnamese government, with U.S. advice and support, to increase the tax take in order to finance more of the war themselves. To get back some of the vast amount of AID that had been provided all of those years.

I was working hard from then on, right up until the end. It seemed for at least a year things were going reasonably well. Vietnamese seemed to be doing some of the things that had to be done. It was hard but it was working.

But then the North stepped up the military pressure. And it got worse and worse. There is a province up on the Cambodian border, Phuoc Long I think. When that capital there fell, that was the beginning of the end - it was the fall of '74. When some more fell, we knew things were going to hell.

Q: *Who was the ambassador then?*

BENNETT: Graham Martin

Q: *Could you describe him and his method of operation?*

BENNETT: Graham is "something else." In some ways he was one of the most unpleasant people I've ever met. I can remember him taking the skin off the MAC/V commander in a mission council meeting. He seemed to take pleasure in it. I got increasingly angry and unhappy with him. A public display of his ability to be superior. It was totally uncalled for.

On the other hand, he hung on when I think not many people would have done so. He fought very hard to get public support. He really spent a lot of time with congressional visitors. I can remember him handling Bella Abzug beautifully. He was very smooth at it. He didn't change her mind but he also made it harder for her to push her agenda.

We lost public support particularly with the newspapers back in the U.S. We lost it with what he thought was half-hearted support from Kissinger. We lost it really in the Congress.

Would a higher level of aid have made any difference? The answer is probably not. But on the other hand, those of us who were out there felt it was worth making the effort because without extra money, it was certainly not going to work. Like Dickens' Mr. Micawber, we thought something would turn up.

Q: What was your impression of the new Vietnamese government?

BENNETT: Well, it was a new generation. When I first went there, the Vietnamese all spoke French. When I got back they all spoke English. Many of them had had some American training. There was a much higher level of competence, but maybe this was because we were inside more, we knew what was going on. At least I knew better what was going on.

The real problem was morale on the Vietnamese side. They stuck with it. The ones I worked with, ministers and the next level down stuck with it for a long time. It was only around New Year's of '75 that they began to lose hope.

We used to worry about what was happening at the next level of the Vietnamese administration. The working level. I suspect that it had begun to deteriorate badly much earlier. They were still not very effective.

Q: What sort of reports were you getting from the consulates we had put there?

BENNETT: Again, it was a continuation of the old reporting system. I spent a lot of time traveling, talking to the AID people in each of the provinces, making sure that some of the things we were getting criticized for back in Washington like the care of refugees, were working reasonably well. As a matter of fact, my reaction was that they were working reasonably well. But there were some interesting differences in the reporting.

Some of the consulates were much more optimistic than others. I guess that reflected the level of military activity in their particular regions.

I don't think we were under any great illusions but it still seemed that we should give it one more try.

Q: How did the last days play out for you. I'm talking both on your job as far as AID and all that. One is just personal getting out but the other when you saw the effort no longer really made much sense.

BENNETT: After Phuoc Long, Ban Me Thuot, Pleiku, and Kontum fell. Then Hue and Da Nang. We were suddenly faced with an enormous problem of getting food to those refugees, to the military and civilians in great columns coming down the roads. We were flying helicopters up there and dropping bread. Officers came south on ships and were wanting to get off at Vung Tau and walk up to Saigon.

The Vietnamese government didn't want them in the capital for fear of a revolt. So we put them on an island, Phu Quoc off the West Coast. There was nothing there, so we had to fly in pipe, had to drill wells for water, and had to get food and shelter down there. In some cases we had boats, not docked, but sitting in the water for days. They had been taken over by the soldiers on board. The soldiers were refusing to surrender their guns. Some feared court martial for desertion; others had robbed, raped, and killed civilian refugees on the boats. We were literally unable to give them water or food until they handed over their guns.

Q: By the time Da Nang fell, didn't you feel ...

BENNETT: I didn't know about the big picture. I just had a job to do. My job was to see that the refugees were cared for and that unneeded U.S. and Vietnamese employees got out of the country. There was a guy named Cliff Frink who was absolutely vital in continuing to supply Cambodia. We went through a series of shenanigans. We would hire tug captains at high wages to pull barges up the Mekong with rice for Cambodia. The North Vietnamese began shooting at them. So we put other barges loaded with garbage or cotton bales to protect the tug and barges with the rice. That worked for a couple of weeks. Then they found ways to sink the barges and that cut it off. Arranging this was a daily problem for weeks.

Q: So you weren't looking at the big picture at all.

BENNETT: No. There was no point looking at the big picture. We were just playing out the hand. The cards had already been dealt and all we could hope for was a slip by the other side. I was beginning the process of getting my people out of Vietnam, thinning down the ranks, trying to be sure that their effects got shipped. I didn't know how long I was going to stay until noon of the last day. My wife went at about noon that day. But we weren't sure that we were all going to leave. Martin thought that we might make some sort of deal where we could keep a small embassy in Saigon. I didn't want to make a judgment on this. I would probably have stayed if that had happened. That went with my job -- I was the acting AID Director the last three months.

Q: This was not just a holding operation. You didn't know whether the thing would be continuing or else there might be a stand. In retrospect it all seems so clear, but when you are in it... Martin has been faulted so much for hanging on much longer than he should have.

BENNETT: My reaction to that is that if we had pulled out any earlier, we would have had an incredible riot in Saigon -- a total breakdown in authority. As it is, I don't know whether Ambassador Martin foresaw it happening the way it did or not. The North Vietnamese divisions had surrounded the city but weren't in it. They bombed the airport late Monday afternoon. We had been taking out masses of people for weeks. Flying them out to the Philippines or where ever we could deposit them. I had been getting people out. The AID mission even chartered a couple of aircraft to get our people out and anybody else who needed a lift.

Q: How about the Vietnamese staff?

BENNETT: Well, we had been taking them out as well. The problem for the Vietnamese staff

was that many of them had family who couldn't go. I remember one woman who was preparing to go. Her husband just took off and left her. She decided that she had to stay in order to take care of her husband's sick sister. A lot of the people who would have been eligible to go, couldn't.

Q: A decision had been made which had been agreed upon by the ambassador and all that Vietnamese associated with the Americans should get out.

BENNETT: Yes, It wasn't easy though. For example, we took great care that they had enough money, in dollars. We would put them on buses and take them out to Tan Son Nhut, the airport. Then we found the guards at the gate would steal all their money. So we took the money out separately in an American car.

Q: When you're making that decision to do that, that means it's over, doesn't it in a way? Evacuating local employees. The ambassador had gone along with that. It doesn't sound in a way that there was any illusions.

BENNETT: The question is whether or not he should have done it sooner. If we had done it sooner my personal conviction is that we would have gotten fewer out. We certainly would have gotten different people out. Although, I think more people got out the way we did it, because we had martial law we could move around the city. We got all of our Americans out. And a whale of a lot of Vietnamese as well. The USIA director got heavily criticized for not getting his Vietnamese employees out. That's what I had spent weeks doing. Making sure that each days group got out. There wasn't a hell of a lot else to do.

The one thing I didn't do was burn a whole lot of low level classified material in the AID building. We somehow never got told when to do it, until it was too late.

Q: How did you go out?

BENNETT: On Monday afternoon they bombed the airport. I was running a fever and had come home and sat down. I was taking an aspirin and a little libation. The next thing I knew all hell broke loose. Ten minutes of unremitting gunfire. Everybody in the city thought that this was it. My reaction was, hey, there in the city and here we go. It turned out not to be the case. The soldiers panicked and were firing in the air.

What really worried me was my wife who was driving back from the airport when the bombing occurred. She had just put some kids who had been left by the American parent, married to a Vietnamese, with Vietnamese relatives. She'd taken them out and put them on an airplane. She was really concerned that they had been killed, but it didn't happen.

The next thing I knew, I got this phone call to come to a meeting at midnight at the embassy. I said I'm not going, I'm sick. Then I thought better of it and so I called up Martin. I talked to him for an hour about all things that had happened that day. He was in a reflective mood. He'd called the meeting, but he wasn't going to be there himself. But by that time I was fired up, so I went.

We talked about whom we were going to take out the next day. Then I went home to bed. At about 2:30, AM the Vietnamese artillery started shelling the city. You don't sleep when that's going on. The next thing I know, at 5:30 in the morning, I get a call from the embassy. "Meeting in the ambassador's office." So down I go with my wife and I never went back.

I spent that day burning Embassy files, and trying to round up my AID people. At first not all of them had to go, so I had to identify which ones would and get them picked up. Then we learned all of them had to go so then I had to contact the rest by telephone and get them picked up. We had a number of small helicopters destroyed by the artillery of the night before. They were the kind that could land on roofs, so their loss meant we had to move people around the city in cars and buses. We had a ship but we couldn't get to it because North Vietnamese troops were between us and the ship. So that didn't work out. But we put others on a barge and towed it out to sea with a tug.

There was one crisis after another. I can tell you that at one point I was so tired, I didn't think I was going to make it. But we kept soldiering on. At eight PM I was told to go and so I went upstairs to get on the helicopter. The Marine captain who was in charge was standing there cursing and saying, "Where the hell are all these people. We're waiting up here and they're down stairs having a party."

I decided that he might be right and went downstairs. People were milling around, doing nothing. I began telling them to go upstairs and get on the helicopters. Well I was effective enough that by the time I'd made it to the ground floor there was a line running all the way to the roof. I had to get at the end of it. But I got out at midnight.

Q: Did you go out to a carrier?

BENNETT: To a helicopter carrier. My wife was on another ship, the Denver, a landing ship. I was so tired. When we got on we had to stand in line and register and then they searched us for weapons and had us turn in government property -- e.g., some people had brought electric typewriters. I got bunked with a young lieutenant who was on duty at the time. It was right underneath the flight deck. Every time a plane landed, it hit hard -- boy that really wakes you up. A couple of days later I got on a copter and joined my wife.

Q: What was the atmosphere?

BENNETT: A whole lot of backbiting and excuses. Frank Snepp, who wrote Decent Interval, for example was seething with anger and would barely talk. As far as I could tell, because we had left some people we shouldn't have. The confusion, and the lack of direction and clear lines of responsibility, were part of the problem still. I felt I did all right. I got all my people out. That was my responsibility. Nobody was telling me to do it. I just went ahead and did it. I even got four of them over the wall and into the embassy at seven or eight in the evening. By pure fluke. I had been working in Joe Bennett's (the Political counselor) office, at the switchboard and saw the light for his number and took the call. They had been waiting for a bus all day at the AID Headquarters. I told them if they could get to the Embassy in fifteen minutes we could get them in. The Embassy was surrounded by crowds of Vietnamese who wanted to get out on the

helicopters, so we had to figure out a way to identify them. I told them to take the cover off the embassy phone book and wave it. And we got them over. An American on top had to identify them and lean down and pull them up.

Q: Those who didn't get everybody out, what was the problem?

BENNETT: The people in the Korean Embassy stayed there till it was too late and they couldn't move. We could have gotten them out earlier through the American embassy. There were other people who worked for the CIA whose lives were in real danger. They should have been picked up and taken out, but apparently, they all weren't.

Q: You said it was your decision. Was anybody telling you?

BENNETT: The AID Mission was told how many could go out on a particular day. I would simply make sure to fill my quota.

Q: Were you and others jumping the gun?

BENNETT: There is a certain degree of lack of control over this. A lot of Americans had friends whom they helped get out. These were not officials. If you could get them out to the airport, the planes would take them. This did produce trouble. A friend of mine picked up an ex-minister and took him out to Tan Son Nhut, and dumped him on the street. The Vietnamese police picked him up. The next thing I knew Graham Martin was calling. I had to pick up the Vietnamese after he got out of jail. He was really shaking. He was white. We got him out. There was a lot of freelancing. We had a lot of people coming back in. Mission employees who'd been there in past years, came back to get their friends out. Then we had to get those people out again. There was a lack of control over what was happening.

Q: It's sort of a discouraging story.

BENNETT: You win some, you lose some. I wouldn't have missed doing it, but I sure wouldn't want to do it again. There are a lot of lessons to be learned. I wonder if we have.

Q: Let's go into when you came back. When was that?

BENNETT: Summer of '73.

Q: What was the situation then? How did you feel?

BENNETT: We'd had the truce. The north had withdrawn some of its troops, and we had withdrawn all of ours except the advisors. Pentagon east still stood, but it was a shell and we were depending much more heavily on the AID program.

I can remember that when I got off of the plane, I went directly to a meeting with the Minister of Finance at his home. They were about to impose a value added tax. Everybody took this very seriously. It was an attempt by the Vietnamese government, with U.S. advice and support, to increase the tax take in order to finance more of the war themselves. To get back some of the vast amount of AID that had been provided all of those years.

I was working hard from then on, right up until the end. It seemed for at least a year things were going reasonably well. Vietnamese seemed to be doing some of the things that had to be done. It was hard but it was working. But then the North stepped up the military pressure. And it got worse and worse. There is a province up on the Cambodian border, Phuoc Long I think. When that capital there fell, that was the beginning of the end - it was the fall of '74. When some more fell, we knew things were going to hell.

Q: *Who was the ambassador then?*

BENNETT: Graham Martin

Q: *Could you describe him and his method of operation?*

BENNETT: Graham is "something else." In some ways he was one of the most unpleasant people I've ever met. I can remember him taking the skin off the MAC/V commander in a mission council meeting. He seemed to take pleasure in it. I got increasingly angry and unhappy with him. A public display of his ability to be superior. It was totally uncalled for.

On the other hand, he hung on when I think not many people would have done so. He fought very hard to get public support. He really spent a lot of time with congressional visitors. I can remember him handling Bella Abzug beautifully. He was very smooth at it. He didn't change her mind but he also made it harder for her to push her agenda.

We lost public support particularly with the newspapers back in the U.S. We lost it with what he thought was half-hearted support from Kissinger. We lost it really in the Congress.

Would a higher level of aid have made any difference? The answer is probably not. But on the other hand, those of us who were out there felt it was worth making the effort because without extra money, it was certainly not going to work. Like Dickens' Mr. Micawber, we thought something would turn up.

Q: *What was your impression of the new Vietnamese government?*

BENNETT: Well, it was a new generation. When I first went there, the Vietnamese all spoke French. When I got back they all spoke English. Many of them had had some American training. There was a much higher level of competence, but maybe this was because we were inside more, we knew what was going on. At least I knew better what was going on.

The real problem was morale on the Vietnamese side. They stuck with it. The ones I worked with, ministers and the next level down stuck with it for a long time. It was only around New

Year's of '75 that they began to lose hope.

We used to worry about what was happening at the next level of the Vietnamese administration. The working level. I suspect that it had begun to deteriorate badly much earlier. They were still not very effective.

Q: What sort of reports were you getting from the consulates we had put there?

BENNETT: Again, it was a continuation of the old reporting system. I spent a lot of time traveling, talking to the AID people in each of the provinces, making sure that some of the things we were getting criticized for back in Washington like the care of refugees, were working reasonably well. As a matter of fact, my reaction was that they were working reasonably well. But there were some interesting differences in the reporting.

Some of the consulates were much more optimistic than others. I guess that reflected the level of military activity in their particular regions.

I don't think we were under any great illusions but it still seemed that we should give it one more try.

Q: How did the last days play out for you. I'm talking both on your job as far as AID and all that. One is just personal getting out but the other when you saw the effort no longer really made much sense.

BENNETT: After Phuoc Long, Bau Me Thuot, Pleiku, and Kontum fell. Then Hue and Danang. We were suddenly faced with an enormous problem of getting food to those refugees, to the military and civilians in great columns coming down the roads. We were flying helicopters up there and dropping bread. Officers came south on ships and were wanting to get off at Vung Tau and walk up to Saigon.

The Vietnamese government didn't want them in the capital for fear of a revolt. So we put them on an island, Phu Quoc off the West Coast. There was nothing there, so we had to fly in pipe, had to drill wells for water, and had to get food and shelter down there. In some cases we had boats, not docked, but sitting in the water for days. They had been taken over by the soldiers on board. The soldiers were refusing to surrender their guns. Some feared court martial for desertion; others had robbed, raped, and killed civilian refugees on the boats. We were literally unable to give them water or food until they handed over their guns.

Q: By the time Danang fell, didn't you feel ...

BENNETT: I didn't know about the big picture. I just had a job to do. My job was to see that the refugees were cared for and that unneeded U.S. and Vietnamese employees got out of the country. There was a guy named Cliff Frink who was absolutely vital in continuing to supply Cambodia. We went through a series of shenanigans. We would hire tug captains at high wages to pull barges up the Mekong with rice for Cambodia. The North Vietnamese began shooting at them. So we put other barges loaded with garbage or cotton bales to protect the tug and barges

with the rice. That worked for a couple of weeks. Then they found ways to sink the barges and that cut it off. Arranging this was a daily problem for weeks.

Q: So you weren't looking at the big picture at all.

BENNETT: No. There was no point looking at the big picture. We were just playing out the hand. The cards had already been dealt and all we could hope for was a slip by the other side. I was beginning the process of getting my people out of Vietnam, thinning down the ranks, trying to be sure that their effects got shipped. I didn't know how long I was going to stay until noon of the last day. My wife went at about noon that day. But we weren't sure that we were all going to leave. Martin thought that we might make some sort of deal where we could keep a small embassy in Saigon. I didn't want to make a judgment on this. I would probably have stayed if that had happened. That went with my job -- I was the acting AID Director the last three months.

Q: This was not just a holding operation. You didn't know whether the thing would be continuing or else there might be a stand. In retrospect it all seems so clear, but when you are in it... Martin has been faulted so much for hanging on much longer than he should have.

BENNETT: My reaction to that is that if we had pulled out any earlier, we would have had an incredible riot in Saigon -- a total breakdown in authority. As it is, I don't know whether Ambassador Martin foresaw it happening the way it did or not. The North Vietnamese divisions had surrounded the city but weren't in it. They bombed the airport late Monday afternoon. We had been taking out masses of people for weeks. Flying them out to the Philippines or where ever we could deposit them. I had been getting people out. The AID mission even chartered a couple of aircraft to get our people out and anybody else who needed a lift.

Q: How about the Vietnamese staff?

BENNETT: Well, we had been taking them out as well. The problem for the Vietnamese staff was that many of them had family who couldn't go. I remember one woman who was preparing to go. Her husband just took off and left her. She decided that she had to stay in order to take care of her husband's sick sister. A lot of the people who would have been eligible to go, couldn't.

Q: A decision had been made which had been agreed upon by the ambassador and all that Vietnamese associated with the Americans should get out.

BENNETT: Yes, It wasn't easy though. For example, we took great care that they had enough money, in dollars. We would put them on buses and take them out to Tan Son Nhut, the airport. Then we found the guards at the gate would steal all their money. So we took the money out separately in an American car.

Q: When you're making that decision to do that, that means it's over, doesn't it in a way? Evacuating local employees. The ambassador had gone along with that. It doesn't sound in a way that there was any illusions.

BENNETT: The question is whether or not he should have done it sooner. If we had done it sooner my personal conviction is that we would have gotten fewer out. We certainly would have gotten different people out. Although, I think more people got out the way we did it, because we had martial law we could move around the city. We got all of our Americans out. And a whole lot of Vietnamese as well. The USIA director got heavily criticized for not getting his Vietnamese employees out. That's what I had spent weeks doing. Making sure that each day's group got out. There wasn't a hell of a lot else to do.

The one thing I didn't do was burn a whole lot of low level classified material in the AID building. We somehow never got told when to do it, until it was too late.

Q: How did you go out?

BENNETT: On Monday afternoon they bombed the airport. I was running a fever and had come home and sat down. I was taking an aspirin and a little libation. The next thing I knew all hell broke loose. Ten minutes of unremitting gunfire. Everybody in the city thought that this was it. My reaction was, hey, they're in the city and here we go. It turned out not to be the case. The soldiers panicked and were firing in the air.

What really worried me was my wife who was driving back from the airport when the bombing occurred. She had just put some kids who had been left by the American parent, married to a Vietnamese, with Vietnamese relatives. She'd taken them out and put them on an airplane. She was really concerned that they had been killed, but it didn't happen.

The next thing I knew, I got this phone call to come to a meeting at midnight at the embassy. I said I'm not going, I'm sick. Then I thought better of it and so I called up Martin. I talked to him for an hour about all things that had happened that day. He was in a reflective mood. He'd called the meeting, but he wasn't going to be there himself. But by that time I was fired up, so I went.

We talked about whom we were going to take out the next day. Then I went home to bed. At about 2:30, AM the Vietnamese artillery started shelling the city. You don't sleep when that's going on. The next thing I know, at 5:30 in the morning, I get a call from the embassy. "Meeting in the ambassador's office." So down I go with my wife and I never went back.

I spent that day burning Embassy files, and trying to round up my AID people. At first not all of them had to go, so I had to identify which ones would and get them picked up. Then we learned all of them had to go so then I had to contact the rest by telephone and get them picked up. We had a number of small helicopters destroyed by the artillery of the night before. They were the kind that could land on roofs, so their loss meant we had to move people around the city in cars and buses. We had a ship but we couldn't get to it because North Vietnamese troops were between us and the ship. So that didn't work out. But we put others on a barge and towed it out to sea with a tug.

There was one crisis after another. I can tell you that at one point I was so tired, I didn't think I was going to make it. But we kept soldiering on. At eight PM I was told to go and so I went upstairs to get on the helicopter. The Marine captain who was in charge was standing there

cursing and saying, "Where the hell are all these people. We're waiting up here and they're down stairs having a party."

I decided that he might be right and went downstairs. People were milling around, doing nothing. I began telling them to go upstairs and get on the helicopters. Well I was effective enough that by the time I'd made it to the ground floor there was a line running all the way to the roof. I had to get at the end of it. But I got out at midnight.

Q: Did you go out to a carrier?

BENNETT: To a helicopter carrier. My wife was on another ship, the Denver, a landing ship. I was so tired. When we got on we had to stand in line and register and then they searched us for weapons and had us turn in government property -- e.g., some people had brought electric typewriters. I got bunked with a young lieutenant who was on duty at the time. It was right underneath the flight deck. Every time a plane landed, it hit hard -- boy that really wakes you up. A couple of days later I got on a copter and joined my wife.

Q: What was the atmosphere?

BENNETT: A whole lot of backbiting and excuses. Frank Snepp, who wrote Decent Interval, for example was seething with anger and would barely talk. As far as I could tell, because we had left some people we shouldn't have. The confusion, and the lack of direction and clear lines of responsibility, were part of the problem still. I felt I did all right. I got all my people out. That was my responsibility. Nobody was telling me to do it. I just went ahead and did it. I even got four of them over the wall and into the embassy at seven or eight in the evening. By pure fluke. I had been working in Joe Bennett's (the Political counselor) office, at the switchboard and saw the light for his number and took the call. They had been waiting for a bus all day at the AID Headquarters. I told them if they could get to the Embassy in fifteen minutes we could get them in. The Embassy was surrounded by crowds of Vietnamese who wanted to get out on the helicopters, so we had to figure out a way to identify them. I told them to take the cover off the embassy phone book and wave it. And we got them over. An American on top had to identify them and lean down and pull them up.

Q: Those who didn't get everybody out, what was the problem?

BENNETT: The people in the Korean Embassy stayed there till it was too late and they couldn't move. We could have gotten them out earlier through the American embassy. There were other people who worked for the CIA whose lives were in real danger. They should have been picked up and taken out, but apparently, they all weren't.

Q: You said it was your decision. Was anybody telling you?

BENNETT: The AID Mission was told how many could go out on a particular day. I would simply make sure to fill my quota.

Q: Were you and others jumping the gun?

BENNETT: There is a certain degree of lack of control over this. A lot of Americans had friends whom they helped get out. These were not officials. If you could get them out to the airport, the planes would take them. This did produce trouble. A friend of mine picked up an ex-minister and took him out to Tan Son Nhut, and dumped him on the street. The Vietnamese police picked him up. The next thing I knew Graham Martin was calling. I had to pick up the Vietnamese after he got out of jail. He was really shaking. He was white. We got him out. There was a lot of freelancing. We had a lot of people coming back in. Mission employees who'd been there in past years, came back to get their friends out. Then we had to get those people out again. There was a lack of control over what was happening.

Q: *It's sort of a discouraging story.*

BENNETT: You win some, you lose some. I wouldn't have missed doing it, but I sure wouldn't want to do it again. There are a lot of lessons to be learned. I wonder if we have.

Q: *Well, thank you very much John.*

THOMAS L. HUGHES
Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1963-1969)

Mr. Hughes was born and raised in Minnesota and was educated at Carleton College, Oxford University and Yale University. After service with the US Air Force he worked on Capitol Hill and became active in Democratic Party politics. He later joined the Department of State, first as Assistant to Under Secretary Chester Bowles and subsequently as Deputy Director, then as Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, where he served during the event filled period 1961 to 1969. His assignments brought him in close contact with the major political figures of that era. His final government assignment was to Embassy London as Deputy Chief of Mission. Mr. Hughes was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: I had only one slight contact with Roger Hilsman, one time when I was briefing him about events in the Congo. This was when all hell was breaking loose there. He just seemed to swell up and enjoy the talk about columns coming through the Congolese jungle of rebel troops. He started talking about his Burma days. Owen Roberts, our analyst for the Congo, kept saying "These guys may be spotted. They are going to go home and have beer and lay their wives or girl friends and this is not going anywhere." There were big arrows pointed. I would have thought with this OSS (Office of Strategic Services) background that he would have reveled in this sort of thing.

HUGHES: Roger of course had a heroic wartime background in the Burma theater. But I don't think of his reveling too much in covert operations. He reveled in counter-insurgency like

President Kennedy. Concepts like “strategic hamlets” and “ink blots” in Vietnam really absorbed his attention. He was an admirer of British General Thompson of Malaysian guerilla warfare fame. Roger agreed with him that the situation in South Vietnam required new, unconventional notions about how to pacify the countryside. President Kennedy was on that same wavelength

Q: Maybe we should skip now to Vietnam.

HUGHES: (TLH note in 2006: This Vietnam part of my 1999 interview has been amplified and deepened in a major way by subsequent publications. First, substantial material was published in 2004 by the National Security Archive at George Washington University.

(<http://www.gwu.edu/nsarchiv/NSAE/NSAE121/index.htm>) This was the first release of INR’s internal evaluation of its Vietnam estimates from 1961-69, I commissioned this study as INR director in late 1968. It was designed as a miniature Pentagon Papers exercise consisting of a chronological review with reprints of significant texts as well as thematic summaries of INR’s basic output in the Kennedy and Johnson years. Interagency obstruction and bureaucratic inertia had kept the study hidden for decades, despite efforts to have it declassified.

(Second, to accompany the release of the study in 2004, I wrote a retrospective preface which is also available in the internet package above. “The INR analysis on Vietnam” stands out as tenaciously pessimistic from 1963 on, whether the question is the viability of the successive Saigon regimes, the Pentagon’s statistical underestimation of enemy strength, the ultimate ineffectiveness of bombing the North, the persistence of the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, or the danger of Chinese intervention. This 2004 preface includes extensive comments on my personal role on Vietnam under Kennedy and Johnson, as well as INR’s position within the State Department, the intelligence community, and the wider foreign affairs bureaucracy in Washington.

(Finally the transcript of a conference on Vietnam held at St. Simon’s Island, Georgia, on April 8-10, 2005, sponsored by the Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, is now available. This transcript contains considerable additional commentary by me about INR and my personal role on Vietnam. Taken together, the documents listed above amplify in a major way the responses I gave here in this 1999 interview below.)

During my eight years at INR, Vietnam was, of course, THE major issue. It constituted also a prime exhibit of the uneasy relationship between policy and intelligence. The saga began slowly with Laos and Vietnam in a kind of tradeoff early in the Kennedy administration. It was almost as though Kennedy consciously gave Laos, which happened to be militarily indefensible, to the doves in general-- and to Harriman in particular--- to produce some kind of modus vivendi. Vietnam by contrast was entrusted to the hawks to build up and fortify as our chosen protectorate. JFK compartmentalized the South East Asian crisis, letting the negotiators work on the Laos part of it and pointing to Laos when his policy was criticized for being too militarized. At the same time he gambled on a hoped-for success in Vietnam. Kennedy was rather pleasantly surprised that Harriman pulled off his Laos negotiation and came up with some compromises that at least might allow US policy to muddle through.

Q: This is actually where the Soviets were very much involved.

HUGHES: Not only the Soviets, but the international community as well in the form, for example, of the ICC (International Control Commission). In addition there were some storied individuals involved, like the Polish Ambassador in Washington in the late '60's-- a fascinating character named Jerzy Michalowski. Poland was a member of the ICC, and he had early on been deeply involved behind the scenes as Director General of the Polish Foreign Ministry. I remember going more than once to Mikalowski's embassy residence in Washington, and being impressed with his ambidextrous approach. Previously he had been ambassador to the Court of St. James and also ambassador to Hanoi. On his desk he had autographed pictures of both King George VI and Ho Chi Minh.

I said earlier that Kennedy decided to negotiate his way out of Laos and, if necessary, militarize his way out of Vietnam by sending US military advisers for starters. I think it is futile to speculate over what Kennedy would have done about Vietnam if he had lived and won reelection in 1964. Some of his champions are sure that he would have withdrawn. Roger Hilsman thinks so. Others are convinced that the same predicaments that confronted Johnson would ultimately have forced Kennedy to escalate as well.

In terms of domestic politics, hypothetically it would have been somewhat easier for Kennedy to disengage from Vietnam than it was for Johnson because of JFK's Catholicism. The Catholic aspect of the Vietnam war has always been awkward to discuss, but it is there and bears further investigation. I am thinking of Diem's own background at Maryknoll, the dramatic Catholic refugee flow into South Vietnam, the role of luminaries like Cardinal Spellman, and the presence of prominent Catholic generals and politicians in the American Friends of Vietnam. Kennedy and Johnson were located at rather contrasting poles on the political spectrum. Kennedy used to tell his entourage that he was better able to manage the Catholic enthusiasm for Vietnam than anybody else. The opposite was true of Johnson who had to be more conscious of, deferential to, and solicitous of the Catholic vote.

Kennedy (rather diabolically?) had early on sent Johnson out to Vietnam as his personal representative. This was LBJ's first foreign assignment as Vice President. He came back with an autographed photograph of Diem which he proudly displayed in his house in Washington in 1962-3. Johnson had ingratiated himself with Diem and, with his customary extravagance, proclaimed that Diem was "the Churchill of Asia".

By the time I became INR director in the spring of 1963, there were already disputes inside the intelligence community over Vietnam. Views differed about the significance of the Buddhist uprisings, the role that Diem's brother Nhu played in suppressing them, and how seriously Washington should take the growing religious controversy. Kennedy was personally startled by the Buddhist protests, which perhaps for the first time made it clear that he was not dealing with a Catholic country but only with a Catholic regime. According to several accounts, INR's analysis of the serious potential dimensions of the Buddhist crisis certainly reached Kennedy's desk during this period.

Implicit in INR's analysis was a warning about possible consequences. Here was a minority Catholic government in a heavily Buddhist country representing a very strong interest group of

ex-North Vietnamese Catholics who had fled south. Diem's sister-in-law, Madame Nhu, was gratuitously inflaming matters with her references to burning bonzes as "Buddhist barbeques." As a former friend and supporter of the organization, Kennedy took note when the American Friends of Vietnam began to take their distance from Diem and advocate a change in regime. JFK was also impressed with the resignation of the hapless Vietnamese Ambassador in Washington, Tran van Dong, Madame Nhu's father, who publicly denounced his daughter and told people that Vietnam was a looming catastrophe. Thus there were a number of negatives accumulating in the summer of 1963 commanding the attention of policymakers.

Q: I would like to talk about the intelligence side. I can't imagine that INR had a cadre of Buddhist experts. Was this a bunch of hotshot intellectuals making snap judgments or did you feel you were getting some in-depth understanding?

HUGHES: That's a good question. It always seemed to me that we were inadequately staffed in general on Southeast Asia when it came to quantity, but comparatively well staffed when it came to quality. People like Lou Sarris, Dorothy Avery, Dick Smyser, Paul Kreisberg, and Evelyn Colbert had considerable background on Vietnam, many of them with experience on the ground. When he was INR director, Hilsman made repeated trips to Vietnam. We sent Lou Sarris out there more than once as disputes arose with the Pentagon. Later on Bill Trueheart, former DCM in Saigon, also served in INR.

During this period we had to be aware that the press in Saigon was also playing an increasingly important role. David Halberstam so incensed Kennedy with his negative reporting that the President asked the New York Times to get rid of him. Halberstam's retaliation for that was his book The Best and the Brightest, where the best and the brightest don't come out very well.

Roger Hilsman, Mike Forrestal, Averell Harriman, George Ball, and Henry Cabot Lodge were later blamed for the sequence of events that led to the Diem assassination. This is unfair. History is written looking backward, but it evolves looking forward. Ultimately the fact of the Diem assassination colors the retrospective attitudes. At the time, those who signed off on the famous August 1963 telegram were reacting to the precipitously declining situation highlighted by the Buddhist problem with Diem. When Lodge asked for instructions on how to handle Diem, his family, and the Buddhist crisis, Washington was forced to confront a very disagreeable situation. The atmosphere was rather electric when the Hilsman telegram was drafted and approved in various quarters, including quarters that later said they hadn't quite approved, or done so conditionally, like Kennedy, Rusk, and McNamara. The telegram basically told Lodge to invite Diem to separate himself from his brother Nhu. Some, like Fritz Nolting, the outgoing American ambassador to Vietnam, thought this was a cockeyed idea and that there was no way you could separate the two brothers. But Nolting was on his leisurely sea voyage back to America which made him effectively a non-participant. It was unfortunate that the crisis came to a head during a change of ambassadors. Lodge had just arrived when he sent the inquiry to which Washington was responding.

Q: Was INR included in this?

HUGHES: INR was involved to the extent that we had written a sober paper earlier that week

about the Buddhist crisis, a paper which Mac Bundy and Mike Forrestal, insisted that President Kennedy read. Moreover, by coincidence, it happened that for other reasons Forrestal had previously asked me to have lunch with him at the White House the day of the outgoing telegram. I had driven in to the State Department with Roger Hilsman that same Saturday morning, and Roger was clearly primed for an eventful day's work. As I say, I think he has been unfairly singled out for blame. He was part of a group that legitimately considered the Buddhist crisis to be very grave and of another group that worried about Nhu's reported tendencies toward neutralism. He found brother Nhu intolerable for both reasons. I recall that Forrestal at lunch, much to my surprise, said that Harriman "finally" had just come on board. "Finally" at least means that Averell was by no means the instigator of the August 23 telegram. It is true that he played an important part in legitimizing it, as did George Ball in the State Department. Alex Johnson later wrote that he was playing golf with Ball and was asked to stay under a tree and remain uninvolved while Ball considered Roger's draft telegram. That gives you a glimpse into the complicated personal maneuvering that went on that weekend. My impression is that President Kennedy's role remains in dispute. He was clearly deeply involved personally. I think he was more than acquiescent on Saturday, while his acquiescence turned to outrage two days later when the denunciations began.

If Diem had pushed his brother Nhu out of office and sent Madam Nhu off to Switzerland to calm down, things might have been very different. Ultimately the fact of Diem's assassination affects people's recollections retrospectively. Nowhere in the telegram is there anything about assassinating anybody. The question at the time was whether the proposed removal of brother Nhu from office was possible.

Q: It sounds to me like one of these Washington cables - just tell Diem to straighten out his family - and we told them what to do, so if anything happens we are covered. I got one of those, a couple of months later. Madam Nhu was in Belgrade at an international parliamentary union thing lobbying. I got a telegram saying "Try and persuade Madam Nhu not to go to the United States and raise hell." If she comes in for a visa I don't know what I'm supposed to say - the weather was bad? Did anybody think anything was going to happen with this or was this just to cover your ass?

HUGHES: Of course Kennedy himself had originally chosen to send Henry Cabot Lodge to Saigon partly for that reason--political protection. Lodge had been Nixon's running mate for vice president in Kennedy's recent 1960 Presidential campaign. He was also the Senator from Massachusetts whom Jack himself had defeated earlier in 1954. If Vietnam were later to become politically damaging, the blame would at least be shared on a bi-partisan basis with Lodge in Saigon.

Q: What was expected? Were you gathering anything at the time?

HUGHES: There was another element in the intelligence about brother Nhu to the effect that he was not only capable of butchering Buddhists but that he might work out a deal with Hanoi. The two-pronged thrust of the intelligence about Nhu tended to bring together otherwise opposing forces in Washington—those who wanted to find an exit from Vietnam and those who wanted to stay and win. Hilsman and Harriman were both in the latter camp at the time of the August

telegram.

Q: How were you feeling about the intelligence you were getting from Vietnam? How comfortable were you at that time?

HUGHES: We were very uncomfortable about official reporting from Vietnam. We had been critical of Nolting's reporting. We thought it was important to get people out there on the ground to talk widely, not only with the American military and other American officials in Saigon, but also out in the countryside with the troops, with the press, and with foreign observers. There were various INR visits to Vietnam, some of them celebrated. While Hilsman was INR director, President Kennedy sent him and Mike Forrestal on a joint mission to Vietnam. They came back already worried about official reporting. US military reporting became an increasingly difficult problem for INR analysts, culminating in a famous blowup with the JCS in the fall of 1963.

Complicating matters in 1961-3 was the fact that green berets and counter-insurgency had become part of the Kennedy mystique. He and Hilsman shared an enthusiasm for strategic hamlets. A new breed of Americans, right out of Kennedy's inaugural address, was being tested in Vietnam. These were people who didn't take no for an answer, and normally didn't accept skeptical intelligence very comfortably.

Q: I've interviewed a lot of people who served in Vietnam, particularly towards the latter part of the time you were in INR. The military reporting, just by definition, has to be "can do". Also you had a certain discrepancy between a lot of young men who were out in the field as province advisers or out in village hamlets who reported through the embassy's political section. The latter consisted of more senior officers who filtered it out to get away from the supposedly youthful enthusiasm. Thus there was a more rosy picture at the top of the embassy than maybe you were getting from the young people. Did you have lines into that province reporting level?

HUGHES: Yes, and we succeeded to a degree. The people we sent out to Vietnam tried to develop those lines. So did the rather small cadre of academic experts who were not in the government. Unfortunately the number of Vietnam specialists outside the government remained rather stable instead of growing exponentially as the war went on. In fact, this was one of the scandals of the war. The war itself went on and on, but the scholarly community on Vietnam didn't grow along with it. There were various reasons for that phenomenon, including the growing disinclination of the scholarly community to accept government contracts as the war grew more unpopular. In INR we did try to tap into the outside community of experts, such as it was.

Wesley Fishel, for instance, had been out in Vietnam in the late '50s with Wolf Ladejinsky working on land reform. He was a friend and admirer of Diem in the early days, but gave up on him by mid-'63. In late August 1963, I think it was over Labor Day weekend, we called a meeting in Washington at INR to discuss the contingency of a possible successor regime should Diem leave office. Allen Whiting our office director on East Asia, and Lou Sarris, one of our long-time analysts, were joined by Fishel who came in from Michigan for the occasion. Gilbert Jonas from New York also joined us, the one-time secretary of the American Committee on Vietnam. Jonas had had several years' experience as the public relations person for the American

Committee and he knew the Saigon scene very well.

We brought them in one week after the August telegram crisis to brainstorm about what the best follow-on regime of generals might be if Diem were to depart. Their conclusions were passed on to Hilsman and Forrestal. Meanwhile, the generals did not in fact move against Diem for another two months. September and October passed with nothing happening. Some people think that Hilsman's famous telegram went out and Diem was promptly assassinated. The generals delayed for weeks, ample time for Kennedy and his top circle of advisers to have corrected their mistakes if they had serious second thoughts about them.

Q: Look a telegram goes to Ambassador Lodge to go and tell Diem that he has to separate himself from his brother or we don't think he is going to win. But that isn't an action thing. Wasn't more going on behind the scenes with the CIA station chief?

HUGHES: The CIA station chief was very definitely involved all through September and October. He was talking to the generals while Ambassador Lodge was talking to Diem. Near the end a rather desperate Diem asks Lodge "Is the government of the United States still backing me?" and he gets an answer which he had to interpret as negative. That leads to another story that so far has not been convincingly pieced together. Why, during the preceding weeks, were contingency arrangements not made for giving Diem refuge or for flying him out of Vietnam? The impression remains that American officialdom was content to leave Diem and his brother to the post-coup mercies of the plotters.

Within a month Washington became temporarily distracted because of Kennedy's own assassination. What stance would Johnson take toward his complicated Kennedy inheritance? Years earlier, I had watched him day after day in the Senate. I was somewhat surprised when Johnson, I thought uncharacteristically, decided that the Kennedy's team would basically continue in place in the Johnson administration. LBJ decided to keep Rusk, Bundy, McNamara, Rostow, and McCone. Here was a man who under normal circumstances would have fashioned a Johnson administration from the beginning. But because of the assassination and because of Johnson's own real insecurities, he retained the major Kennedy appointees with all their Vietnam baggage. A year later he found himself confronted with a unanimous recommendation from the Kennedy holdovers to expand the war and he expanded it. I have often thought that the chances of de-escalation in Vietnam might have been as good--not better, but as good--if Johnson had allowed most of the Kennedy crowd to leave in early 1964 and had appointed more run-of-the-mill Democratic politicians.

Probably Johnson would have gone the way he did anyway. "They would impeach me, wouldn't they, if I cut and run out of Vietnam?" This was a persistent worry of Johnson's in his telephone tapes in '64. But it might have been a closer call, I think, and the decision to escalate in a big way in 1965 might have been moderated, if not avoided, had Johnson surrounded himself with his own domestic political advisers. Confronted, as he was, with a solid phalanx of major Kennedy holdovers, whatever possibility there might have been for avoiding escalation in 1965 was lost.

Meanwhile there was also the 1964 Presidential election. Once more we saw the ubiquitous

interplay of domestic politics and foreign policy with intelligence inextricably involved. As soon as Johnson became President he had to consider how he was going to get through 1964 without losing the war in Vietnam. The more the unknown generals toppled one another in Saigon, the more desperate this whole thing looked. At home Johnson was going to be confronted by Goldwater who was bound to accuse him of losing Vietnam at every plausible opportunity. Johnson wanted to go through the campaign as the responsible one, in contrast to the irresponsible Goldwater. The whole object was to tinker the Vietnam crisis over for the campaign year and the November election. Johnson was determined to come across as restrained, sensible, and incremental against the rash, nuclear-minded pilot from Arizona.

Johnson had suffered through the “who lost China?” debate in the ‘50s and was completely sensitized to Republican accusations about losing one more country to communism. Almost everything written in ‘64 was written in that context. Those who wrote intelligence papers knew that if the President was reading them he was going to be reading them in that context. Mind you, this was before we had firm evidence of North Vietnamese troop infiltration. Not until early ‘65 did we have real proof that the Ho Chi Minh Trail was being used to infiltrate North Vietnamese regulars.

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1964, because I had worked for Hubert Humphrey in the Senate and because he was about to be chosen as Johnson’s running-mate, Rusk thought it would be a good idea for me to brief Humphrey regularly on Vietnam and other intelligence. So, in addition to my role as Director of Intelligence and Research, I was assigned to brief Humphrey. There was even some discussion about my briefing Goldwater, because he also knew me and I was still a member of his Air Force reserve unit. However he decided not to be briefed by anyone from the Johnson administration outside the Pentagon. I did brief Humphrey, meeting him frequently that summer. In fact I was at the Democratic convention in Atlantic City as his briefing officer. I was officially available to brief Hubert during the day, while I was unofficially helping draft his acceptance speech the night of his nomination as vice-president.

Q: Were you comfortable with this role?

HUGHES: Not entirely. On the other hand I didn’t feel uncomfortable. In those days we thought we could compartmentalize. I tried to be meticulous and careful about which role I was performing. Meanwhile in the days before the Democratic convention that August, Johnson was playing his usual manipulative game--this time with Humphrey and the other Vice Presidential aspirants, including Gene McCarthy-- keeping them guessing where, when, and on whom the VP lightning would strike. Johnson repeatedly made it clear to Humphrey, through his intermediary James Rowe, that being Vice President under Johnson would entail absolute loyalty. This applied to any possible substantive disagreement on Vietnam or on any other major policy matter.

Just before the Democratic Convention we had had the Gulf of Tonkin crisis. Sunday, August 2, occurred on another of those summer weekends when people were out of town. McNamara was climbing mountains in Wyoming. The Bundys were up in Massachusetts. I happened to be here, was awakened early in the morning, and summoned to Rusk’s house for breakfast. There I found myself in the company of Rusk, Ball, Cy Vance (McNamara’s deputy), General Wheeler, the newly appointed chairman of the JCS, and a couple of men from the CIA and the Navy. We were

briefed about an attack on the USS Maddox. The evidence pointed clearly to North Vietnamese PT boats as the culprits. The Navy had sent the Maddox into the Gulf of Tonkin to show the flag and perhaps to be on the scene in case there was any intelligence to be gleaned from radar activity along the shore.

While Virginia Rusk cooked pancakes and served us breakfast, we sat on the floor looking at maps of the Gulf of Tonkin, noting the proximity of islands, speculating about 3-mile versus 10-mile off-shore claims, and guessing where our destroyer might have been. We were also aware that certain covert activities had been approved for this area, the so-called 34A operations. No one knew whether the captain of the Maddox knew about them, or whether the South Vietnamese involved in the 34A ops knew about the Maddox. The Pentagon seemed doubtful about both issues. The scene was reminiscent of the Versailles Peace Conference with Lloyd George and Clemenceau struggling to locate Trieste on their map of the Adriatic. Anyway after we brainstormed this for a couple of hours our small group first went off to our respective offices and then to the White House to brief Johnson.

It was a rollicking encounter, with Johnson at his funniest and most incisive. He asked all the right questions. He speculated correctly that the GVN maritime operations could have stimulated radar activity along the coast, which in turn could have allowed our destroyer to map the coast electronically. He allowed for possible North Vietnamese confusion linking the 34A operations and the presence of the Maddox. He decided that the circumstances were too murky for armed retaliation, and concluded that he would merely warn the North Vietnamese against a repeat performance. (2006 note: subsequent to this interview, TLH discovered contemporaneous notes written later that day about this LBJ briefing. He recounted them at length in session three of the Brown University Conference mentioned above, April 9, 2005.)

The missing leadership was back in town by August 4th in time to handle the so-called second attack at the Gulf of Tonkin. McNamara with his usual decisiveness took charge of verifying the authenticity of the whole event, after doubts had been raised and LBJ briefed about them. Johnson demanded certainty before acting, and the Pentagon rose to the occasion by resolving doubts in favor of certainty. Johnson arranged for McNamara to brief Capital Hill and without further ado, McNamara testified with assuredness about the second attack, misleading the Congress, and propelling more or less everybody into supporting the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. Not that Johnson didn't rather welcome the opportunity. Assistant Secretary Bill Bundy had drafted the resolution and had it on the shelf for just such an occasion. At the time, the resolution's supporters, including Fulbright the floor manager, were chiefly worried about Goldwater who was now the Republican nominee for President and eager to denounce Johnson for inaction.

The conventional wisdom now discounts any second attack. The North Vietnamese at the time and since have denied a second attack. Apparently readers of the intercepts at the Pentagon mixed up the times and dates on the telegrams. Those that they thought were referring to August 4 really referred to August 2. The certainty contained in the McNamara testimony was not corrected after contrary conclusions were reached.

Q: Was this of concern to you, that McNamara was such a take charge person? I would imagine

by this time there would have been some concern about military intelligence.

HUGHES: Yes, I was concerned about both. When it suited his purposes, McNamara himself rose above the confines of military intelligence. He had his own intelligence. By 1965 he was deliberately seeking intelligence outside the military. He ultimately had some intelligence crafted for his own use at CIA without DIA involvement.

Q: Did he ever call INR?

HUGHES: No, but he tried to fire me once in the fall of 1963. INR had questioned MACV's own Vietnamese battle statistics as well as the Pentagon's interpretations of them. (I wrote this incident up at some length last year in a review of McNamara's new book. See Foreign Policy Magazine, Fall 1995, "Experiencing McNamara.") The joint chiefs were furious when INR produced a research memorandum based on the military's own statistics, reaching negative conclusions about the progress in Vietnam which contrasted with the Pentagon's own positive assessment. McNamara protested to Rusk. The latter called me in and told me that INR had made the JCS and McNamara very unhappy. He remarked "After all, they are the experts on this kind of thing." I said, "You have often made it very clear that INR is independent, and that we are to call the shots as we see them." "That's right" he replied, adding, as if to be helpful, "Would you like some military staffers?" I said, "No, I don't think so. We know what they think. We talk to them regularly. But we don't really need colonels over here helping us write." "I can understand that," said Rusk. So he sort of passed it off, concluding, "I'll tell them that any time the State Department gets involved in military analysis, we will of course check with Defense." I said, "We always do check, but we don't clear." "Well, let's just leave it at that," Rusk said.

Q: It doesn't sound like a very take charge person.

HUGHES: No, Rusk was always deferential. He was deferential to McNamara. He was deferential even to me. He made a career out of deference. That was a major characteristic in his rise to power and also a major ingredient in his staying power.

Vietnam also figured in a big way in the famous Johnson versus Bobby Kennedy rivalry. One reason Lyndon stayed in Vietnam and escalated was that he thought that Bobby might otherwise accuse him of jettisoning Jack's legacy on Vietnam. Bobby had been and could have remained a hawk on Vietnam. At one point he volunteered to become the ambassador in Saigon. Lyndon ran from that as fast as he possibly could, knowing that that prospect meant nothing but trouble, no matter how it worked out. It was never clear that Bobby would be a dove until Johnson himself was over-committed on Vietnam and the whole situation went sour domestically. Of course, Johnson had already annoyed Bobby by deliberately bypassing him for the vice presidential selection. Bobby always loomed large in Johnson's universe of possible opponents.

Johnson lucked out. Goldwater was blunted by the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. LBJ looked resolute in responding to an attack on an American ship, but moderate in comparison to Goldwater who hinted that he might have bombed Hanoi in response to the Tonkin engagement. Johnson was able to be moderate, middle of the road, responsible. Goldwater looked like an

extremist. The campaign ad with the little girl and the daisy countdown worked. The responsible Johnson won and the irresponsible Goldwater lost.

Lyndon Johnson also had always liked the other Senator from Minnesota, Humphrey's colleague, Eugene McCarthy. In '64 Johnson tantalized both men over the vice presidential nomination. He did the same with Chester Bowles' old rival from Connecticut, Senator Tom Dodd. In the running up stage, McCarthy finally got tired of being used and withdrew. The night before the nomination, LBJ had both Humphrey and Dodd fly down to Washington so they could twiddle their thumbs outside the oval office waiting for a decision. Humphrey fell asleep waiting for Johnson, but Dodd woke him up exclaiming, "Hubert, how can you sleep at a time like this?"

The Johnson-Humphrey ticket went on to a massive victory in the November election. Fortunately Vietnam hadn't fallen apart in the meantime. Bill Bundy was now producing an options paper about what to do next. Included was a surprise option which most of us were unaware of at the time. In retrospect it suggests that Bill was much more of a dove than anyone who knew him would ever have imagined. This is the paper that included a withdrawal option which so agitated Rusk and McNamara that it was withdrawn from circulation and shredded. There is a good discussion of it in the new book by Kai Bird on the Bundy brothers. Generally speaking, the daily Bill Bundy whom I saw and knew was an unrelenting, though thoughtful, hawk.

After the 1964 election, Humphrey visited LBJ at his Texas ranch. Shortly afterwards, Rusk and Mac Bundy, with Bill Moyers also present, met with LBJ also at the Texas ranch. A few days later I was having lunch with Moyers at the White House. "Did you hear about the discussion about you at the ranch?" Bill asked. I said, "No." "Well, Rusk proposed that you should become the deputy undersecretary of State for political affairs." This is the key job that U. Alexis Johnson had held in the Kennedy administration, with a direct policy pipeline to Rusk, bypassing first Bowles and then Ball, the undersecretaries. "Bundy liked the Hughes idea too, and Johnson said, 'That's fine. Let's do it.' Suddenly, at the end of the morning, Rusk said, "On second thought, I think I'll withdraw that suggestion about Tom Hughes. He is too valuable where he is.'" Moyers asked me, "Can you figure that one out?" I said "No, I can't figure that one out." He shook his head adding "I can't either."

That was a potentially fateful proposition, because, if implemented, it could have had a bearing on Vietnam policy right at the beginning of the Johnson-Humphrey administration. They needed a replacement for Alex Johnson who at that point was in Saigon as deputy ambassador. I would have accepted that post had it been offered. The change could have made some difference in the pre-escalation discussion, because I would have been superior to Bill Bundy in the State Department hierarchy. Had Bill Bundy's secret dovish instincts come to the surface, there would have been a skeptical Ball-Hughes-Bill Bundy lineup at State at a critical time. Instead of this theoretically possible de-escalation signal, the new administration opened with the opposite—with Mac Bundy's own trip to Vietnam in early '65, the Pleiku attack, and Mac's escalation recommendation which Rusk endorsed.

Here was Johnson at the outset of his second term-- determined to accomplish a huge domestic agenda, fearful that Vietnam was going to undermine it; and yet deciding that the domestic

political price for his Great Society was recommitting to Vietnam. The way to keep the military and the Republicans tolerant of his Great Society legislation on Capital Hill was to persevere in Vietnam. He was forced to confront the issue sharply just as 1965 opened, when the Viet Cong attacked an American base at Pleiku while Mac Bundy was personally in Vietnam. Of course Lyndon Johnson thought that CODELS (Congressional delegations) were the most important visitors in the world except perhaps for personal representatives of the President like Bundy. In LBJ's view every foreign government was totally attuned to US official travel. He immediately assumed that Hanoi had attacked Pleiku deliberately because Bundy was there in Vietnam at the time. There was no other possible explanation in the ethnocentric view of the former Senate Majority Leader. In fact there is no evidence that the Pleiku attack was authorized by Hanoi. It may well have been the work of a local commander. Of course it also pleased Mac Bundy to think that his visit was of such significance that the attack must have been timed to coincide with his presence in Vietnam.

Once more there was to be no second guessing. The President received a telegram from Bundy who had visited the hospital and seen wounded American troops. All of Mac's old heroes came back to haunt him. One was the ghost of the family idol, Colonel Henry Stinson, the former secretary of war-- the man who told Roosevelt before Pearl Harbor that the way for America to get into a war was always to make sure that the other side struck first. As Mac put it, you wait for the streetcar and sooner or later one will come along. Here was a Pearl Harbor re-enactment right at Pleiku. So, fatefully at the outset of LBJ's first year as President in his own right, his (and Kennedy's) normally dispassionate national security adviser had become an undisguised hawk. Back in Washington Rolling Thunder became the favorite option, and we were about to embark on the bombing of North Vietnam in retaliation for Pleiku.

Last minute efforts to stave off the proposed escalation were then set in motion. George Ball was alarmed and fully realized that historic decisions were in train. On a weekend in mid-February, he urged me to call the Vice President and share our most recent Vietnam intelligence with him. I checked, and Humphrey was scheduled to be in Georgia for the weekend hunting quail with Minneapolis businessman Ford Bell. At that moment Jean and I happened to have a dinner party at our house in Chevy Chase, and by chance Ben Reed, the State Department's executive secretary and a close friend, was also there. The party was interrupted when Ball called on the White House phone which I had at home at that time. He talked to both Ben and myself. "Jesus. This thing is really bad. Tom, you better go down to Georgia, brief Hubert, and get him back here and involved." Rusk also gave his consent—for such important discussions, the new vice president should certainly be on hand.

By then INR had accumulated a considerable record of skepticism on the war. We had taken dissents in recent NIE's and SNIE's. Sometimes these reflected strange alliances within the intelligence community -- dissents by INR and the army, both skeptical about bombing the North, or dissents by INR and the Air Force, both skeptical about chances on the ground in the South. So I called Humphrey who asked me to get on a plane to Georgia right away. He and I spent the weekend looking over the intelligence reports, discussing the options, and noting where matters seemed to be heading. The Vice President was convinced that he ought to make his own views known to the President, privately but forcefully.

So Humphrey decided to write a confidential memorandum to Johnson. The text of the remarkable document that resulted can be found in Humphrey memoirs, "The Education of a Public Man". Humphrey thought that the most acceptable framework for his memo would be a political one -- American politics and the Vietnam War. He would write it as one politician to a fellow politician. Arguably he and Lyndon were in fact the country's two leading politicians at that point. After all they had just won a landslide national election together. It is a very prescient memo, and makes sad rereading now. Let me find it. (TLH gets Humphrey's book).

Q: I have just read this memo, dated February 15, 1965 from Humphrey to the president. It is contained on pages 320 through 324 in Hubert Humphrey's The Education of a Public Man. As you say, it's as though he sat and wrote it in the 1980's, about what the consequences would be-- the lack of support for the war by the American public and the fact that the Johnson administration was really in a very strong position now having won the election by such an overwhelming number. How much did you take part in putting this together?

HUGHES: I wrote the first draft on a yellow legal pad, six or seven pages, following deep and lengthy discussions with Humphrey that weekend. They were his views that I put on paper. Then on the airplane that Sunday when we flew back to Washington together, he went over that draft word for word and made a few minor changes -- nothing of substance. I still have the original document with his handwritten changes on it. Back in Washington, I put the memo in finished form and had my secretary type up a single copy. This I delivered to Humphrey personally in his office in the Executive Office Building, where I assume he had it retyped on his official stationery.

When the memo reached Johnson, all hell broke loose. Mac Bundy was called into the Oval Office to find an irate Johnson exclaiming "That Vice President of mine promised me his loyalty, and just look at this! Well, Humphrey is to have nothing further to do with Vietnam—no meetings, no visitors, no speeches, nothing. I am appointing you his nursemaid for the foreseeable future on foreign policy." The result was that Humphrey was cut out of all Vietnam meetings for several months. He paid for his return to Johnson's good graces only by becoming an exuberant supporter of the war—ironically in 1966 when the war had already gone so badly that even McNamara was privately defecting.

Q: You mentioned before that you had already been known as a dove. I mean this is pretty strong stuff coming at that time. What had brought you around to feeling that a heavy commitment towards the war would lose political support and that the Americans wouldn't understand?

HUGHES: I had been close to national politics and politicians for many years, and I was now immersed in official intelligence responsibilities. Putting the two together and assessing the probabilities was not very difficult. More important, however, was Humphrey's own similar assessment of the probable political reactions of the American public to the long inconclusive struggle that was implicit in, and predictable from, the intelligence estimates we discussed. INR was basically saying that we were in a no-win situation whether in the north or in the south. We could hold on, we could muddle through here and there with some luck, but ultimately it was not going to work. There weren't enough attractive targets in the North to make a bombing campaign decisive. Pouring US ground troops into the South would inevitably produce casualties that

would become intolerable. Expanding the war to China would be a disaster. These intelligence assessments led to some pretty obvious political conclusions. After long and serious discussions with Humphrey, these were his conclusions and I was pleased to find that mine were similar. But Humphrey was the political expert here, not I. It was his political antennae at work, and the resulting memo represented his views.

Washington newspapers had noted that I had gone to Georgia to meet with Humphrey that weekend. So I was presumably identified with his memo in the minds of its few readers. On the other hand, the whole episode was known only to a very few. The memo itself never leaked. Soon, of course, it was common knowledge that Humphrey had been frozen out of the Vietnam debate inside the administration. There was speculation about the cause. It was hardly the way Hubert had intended to begin his Vice Presidential career.

Another mystery from February, 1965, surrounds Mac Bundy. That same month he served both as Johnson's escalator in Vietnam and Humphrey's nursemaid in Washington. According to Kai Bird's new book on the Bundy brothers, McGeorge Bundy, on February 2, 1965, two days before he went to Vietnam, and pursuant to a request from LBJ, wrote a memorandum to Johnson about his contingent successor as National Security Advisor. Bundy said that he himself had no intention of quitting soon, but of course he would not be staying forever. His memo to LBJ was entitled "A Deputy or Potential Successor in My Office."

Bundy told LBJ that he would like to bring a deputy into his office who could succeed him when he eventually left. Bundy said the man he was looking for had to have an instinctive understanding of the job and had to protect the President's right to hear both sides of hard cases. Ironically this was five days before Pleiku, when Bundy himself strongly argued one side! His memo named three possibilities. Bill Moyers, Abram Chayes, and myself. I had no knowledge of this memo until many years later. Now there was a certain unreality, even otherworldliness, about Bundy informing Johnson of the virtues of Bill Moyers, who was practically LBJ's foster son. Johnson was likely to have his own ideas about Moyers' future. Abe Chayes was my old friend and colleague from the Bowles days, who had served brilliantly as legal counsel for the State Department under Kennedy. But Abe had returned to Harvard, and he would surely have been known to Johnson as a Kennedy veteran and a suspected Bobby supporter. As for me at the beginning of 1965. Johnson would have remembered the discussion that he had just had with Bundy and Rusk at the Texas ranch about my promotion to Alex Johnson's job in the State Department, the proposal that Rusk had made and then withdrawn. Moreover Johnson surely also knew about my Humphrey connection from our days in the Senate.

Perhaps not so coincidentally at about this time in early February, 1965, Rusk at one of our regular morning meetings had casually asked me if I had ever been interested in going over to the White House. He said "You should know that Mac Bundy has his eye on you". I said I had had plenty of experience in working as an assistant to great men, and that, by contrast, I was now very happy running a bureau on my own responsibility at INR. On balance I would rather stay put. Rusk said he was delighted I felt that way, but if the time came when there was an inquiry from Bundy, it would be best for me (rather than Rusk) to tell him that I preferred to remain at State!

Bundy apparently kept a copy of his 1965 memo in his desk drawer, because it reappeared in identical form in a second memo to Johnson when Mac was actually departing, a year later. In February, 1966, Bundy wrote that, as Johnson knew, he was about to leave to take the presidency of the Ford Foundation. Once more he recommended Moyers, Chayes or Hughes, this time not as his deputy, but as his successor. He repeated the same earlier descriptions of the three of us. Walt Rostow, who was actually given the job, was conspicuously not mentioned in the Bundy memo. Years later in the spring of 1991 I participated in a Vietnam roundtable at the LBJ Library in Texas. Two dozen of the foreign affairs alumni from the LBJ administration were there, including Mac Bundy and Rostow. Mac's 1966 succession memo had just been declassified and it was suddenly distributed to the group. It was news to all of us, including Walt. There was a rather dramatic scene. The librarian asked, "Any comments on the memo?" There was a dead silence, finally awkwardly broken by the librarian's suggestion that perhaps this was a good time for lunch. Riding down in the elevator with Mac Bundy, I said, "Well that was a surprise. This is the first time I ever heard about your memo." He replied, "Now you can see how determined I was to have a moderate successor -- and how successful I was!" Incidentally transcripts of that LBJ Library conference have also been published. They omit the Bundy memo incident entirely, but include several interventions by me on Vietnam and life in the Johnson administration generally.

Q: I'd like to stop here. We have come up to 1965 and you have discussed events leading up to that, including this remarkable memo that you and Vice President Humphrey produced describing why we shouldn't escalate. Also about Mac Bundy's recommendation to the President that you might be one of his successors. So we will pick it up there on Vietnam. And I would like to ask you about the bombing, one of the remarkable things the Air Force could do according to the Air Force. Somehow, when in doubt, bombing seems to be an almost antiseptic solution. I was in the Air Force in Korea and was very dubious about what could be done. I think there were a lot of people in the strategic bombing survey who had doubts. So I wonder if you could comment on your thinking at that time. Then we will continue.

Today is the 20th of September 1999. Tom, we are at 1965 and the effectiveness of the start of the air campaign. How was this being portrayed from INR?

HUGHES: I think it is fair to say that, even at the beginning of 1965, there was an attempt to avoid or postpone the big troop decision. The more the Administration wanted to avoid a ground struggle with potentially large American casualties, the more plausible the Air Force sounded in arguing that bombing the North was the way to go. The one thing that the policy makers of 1965 were incapable of accepting was the idea that there was no positive way out. There had to be some road to victory. Almost everybody agreed that the great government of the United States could not be defeated.

Remember too that the men in charge in 1965 were still the heady victors of the Cuba Missile Crisis. They had successfully faced down the mighty Soviet Union. Compared to that, Vietnam was a pipsqueak problem. The question was which military option was most capable of producing positive results with the least cost. The difficult political and military situation on the ground in South Vietnam made people receptive to the air power argument. When the bombing failed to produce the desired results, the decision-makers had to turn back to the army.

So the ground was constantly shifting, with the US military very much divided. This is reflected across the board--in the policy discussions, in the arguments among the joint chiefs of staff, and also in the intelligence estimates. There were a succession of NIEs and SNIEs -- national intelligence estimates from the United States Intelligence Board -- with INR either joining shifting majorities or dissenting. They were published from the middle of '64 through the fall of '65, reflecting the major policy arguments on Vietnam. The public first glimpsed this bureaucratic saga with the release of the Pentagon papers years ago.

In 1968-9, as I mentioned earlier, I also commissioned an internal INR self-study of our Vietnam production over the entire Kennedy-Johnson period. To my chagrin this study is still classified. We've tried to get it released any number of times. Apparently the CIA is still refusing to clear the release. (Note: This study was finally released in 2004, five years after this interview. It is now on the internet. See TLH comments earlier.)

This study covers INR estimates on all the major themes: the possibility of stability in the south as governments were changing; the possibility of pacifying the countryside; the relative determination of the North Vietnamese to withstand bombing and to persist in their infiltration of the south; and the possibility of Chinese intervention. The study shows that INR was consistently pessimistic on the war. In retrospect most of INR's predictions look very prescient. Earlier than the CIA we were pessimistic about the bombing of the north. Earlier than the CIA we were pessimistic about stability in the south. But there was a bureaucratic downside to all this fratricide in the intelligence community. The number of slim and shifting majorities and of repeated dissents in a way discredited the intelligence community's role on Vietnam. By 1966 the policymakers got tired of the intelligence community's split decisions. They wanted analysis and estimates that would be useful in prosecuting the war.

Q: Did you find that in the intelligence community where you stand depends on where you sit?

HUGHES: Actually INR had less of an axe to grind than the others because we had no particular budgets or State Department operations that we had to defend. By contrast military intelligence tended to reflect the roles and missions of the particular military service involved. Likewise the analysts at CIA had to be aware that CIA had an important operational side that had big stakes in big budgets and covert activities. Therefore, it is no surprise that Air Force intelligence estimates tended to reflect their operational interests. Since they were the ones who would be bombing the north, they found that success lay in that direction. By the same token, the army, increasingly involved in South Vietnam, thought it only natural that army intelligence would find it essential to win on the ground in the south. This was a bit transparent. Similarly, during the Cold War, the positions taken by the armed services representatives in the annual national intelligence estimates on Soviet strength regularly looked like mirror images of what the services hoped for in their own budget requests.

Q: During the Kennedy administration, including your former boss Roger Hilsman, there was this infatuation with special forces and green berets-- somehow you have bi-lingual people parachuted into the jungle, and this would turn things around. I probably am overstating. But did you find a diminution of that view as the Johnson people became more involved in the war?

HUGHES: Well, yes, in fact there was a diminution after Roger left the government in early 1964. But it is also fair to say that he wasn't alone in that enthusiasm. Bob Komer picked it up pretty quickly. Bobby Kennedy continued to treasure the concept as one of Jack's legacies. In addition Roger is probably still a better defender of strategic hamlets than I am. He should be interviewed on that subject to see what he thinks in retrospect. . Of course he left INR in March '63 and that was relatively early in the Vietnam saga. As assistant secretary for far eastern affairs, he was able to continue that interest for another year as the operational head of the geographical bureau into the first months of the Johnson administration.

So I don't think there was an abrupt change. Certainly the whole goal of strategic hamlets and pacifying the countryside remained a central objective for those who thought the war had to be won in the south. All that persisted. And then, perversely, the more troops that were dispatched, the more wedded we became to winning the war in the south. As Rolling Thunder and other air force operations failed to produce any dramatically positive results in the North, the policymakers again turned their attention to saving the South. There was a kind of trade-off--attacking the North for a while and when that proved to be unproductive, concentrating again on the South. That was the kind of mental process affecting the policymakers by 1966. There was no question that these contrasting arguments were on the table. The analysis that showed why you were unlikely to succeed here and also why you were unlikely to succeed there confronted the policymakers with a continuing dilemma. Almost all of them, of course, were also proud veterans of World War II. Kennedy supporters were still wearing his PT boat tie clasps left over from the 1960 Kennedy campaign. They weren't about to give up when it came to professional patriotism.

Johnson inherited all of that. He was proud of his own war record, such as it was. There was even a residual secessionist mentality from our own Civil War that identified with South Vietnam. Rusk and Johnson, for example, shared this historical memory in many ways. Both were poor boys with deep Southern backgrounds in rural Georgia and Texas. Both had grandfathers who fought for the Confederacy. In a way the South's revenge for Gettysburg ever since their defeat in 1865, was their subsequent takeover of the US army. Already in the Spanish-American War and the First World War, many US generals were coming out of Dixie. This was in a way the last bugle call for the Confederacy. I remember Harriman coming out of a meeting on Vietnam saying that he felt like the only Northerner in the room.

After World War II the Pentagon had also had a personal impact on the State Department. General Marshall moved in as Secretary of State. Colonel Dean Rusk who served in the Pentagon after the war, came over to State under Marshall. So there was not only a military-industrial complex but a diplomatic-military-industrial complex. Rusk's protégé U. Alexis Johnson at State had a direct pipeline to the Pentagon. A bureau of political-military affairs was established at State to assure constant contact. Folk memories from World War II were still present in many Washington corridors of power in the 1960's.

Dean Rusk idolized General Marshall. The latter's bitter experience with China also had a lasting influence on Rusk. He himself had been traumatized by the Chinese intervention in Korea. You couldn't have found a more sensitized audience than the Secretary of State over the possibility of

Chinese intervention. Speaking of China, there was another curious development in our public diplomacy as the Vietnam war continued into 1967 and 1968. The student protests at home were accelerating and the country was obviously getting more and more deeply divided. The public rationale for the war needed upgrading because saving South Vietnam from communism was no longer quite adequate. There had to be a bigger rationale than that, not only from the public relations point of view, but also to buttress the internal confidence of the policy makers themselves. They had to convince themselves that the stakes were larger than they previously seemed. Suddenly the Chinese threat was magnified. Rusk spoke of a future haunted by a billion Chinese armed with nuclear weapons. McNamara announced that the reason we needed a missile defense was protection against China. Paradoxically, however, the more China became their rationale for the war, the more fixated Rusk, Johnson and others became on the possibility of Chinese intervention.

Rusk had come into office still believing in the Sino-Soviet bloc, and he was one of the last in the administration to accept the fact that there had been a real falling out between the two communist rivals. When INR changed the spelling of Peiping to Peking, from “Peip” to “Pek”, we were pioneers in the State Department, well in advance of the Far East bureau and of the Secretary.

Q: Was it an acceptance of the communists?

HUGHES: Yes, it was a denial of the mythology of Taiwan and an acceptance of the undeniable fact of Communist rule in Peking. But the most significant point was a tactical one. In the mid-‘60’s, Rusk finally accepted the Sino-Soviet split when he realized that it would help let the Russians off the hook on Vietnam. This would enable him to conduct arms control negotiations with the Russians. The more the Johnson administration became embroiled in Vietnam, the more the policymakers became willing to recognize the Soviet-Chinese split. Gradually it became obvious that we were going to conduct a war policy with a China rationale in the morning and a peace policy with a Soviet rationale in the afternoon. By 1966 we have Kosygin and Johnson at their summit meeting at Glassboro. Our debacle in Vietnam had gradually let the Russians off the hook, leaving the Chinese as the main rationale for the war. The US policymakers’ chagrin over the unexpected Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was therefore all the greater.

Q: I want to return to the role of INR and your role. Were you in the State Department responding to this in subtle ways? Were you suggesting how we should look at this split?

HUGHES: As I said, we were convinced of the split long before the secretary of state was willing to admit it. He was briefed about it when he came into office, and details of the deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship were a staple in his normal daily briefings. INR and the intelligence community in general also produced more substantial estimates on the split from time to time. Rusk resisted accepting the seriousness of the split, let alone its implications, for quite some time. I came to think that he had a special problem if China was going to become the major rationale for the Vietnam war. It was the Chinese intervention in Korea that had burned him once before, and it was the possibility of a repeat performance in Vietnam that underlay his incrementalism when it came to escalation.

Setting up China as the major culprit also enhanced Whiting's role in INR as the watcher and warner about every move that the Chinese might be making. So Rusk became ever more attentive to the Chinese threat. His first question at my morning briefings always used to be "Any sign of Chinese movement? Any sign of Chinese reaction?" If Rusk had not been so sensitive about possible Chinese intervention, the rapidity and breadth of our air attack on the north would probably have increased. .

Q: Whiting was your man, but was there any disquiet on your part or on the part of other China watchers? Did they feel he belonged to the old school and there was a new school looking at the cultural revolution?

HUGHES: We were quite happy with Whiting in the 1964-6 time frame when he was still with us. After he departed for Hong Kong, and John Holdridge joined INR, there was some shift in attitude. Arguably the cultural revolution did put a brake on Chinese interventionist impulses, in turn enabling US policy to be more venturesome. How assertive Rusk actually was with Johnson on the China issue remains unclear. Johnson himself was deeply worried about China. Rusk continued with his mysterious posture: "I don't speak out at the cabinet meetings. I reserve my advice for the president." We never knew exactly what that was. He clearly saw nuclear non-proliferation as a place where the U.S. and the Soviet Union had a common interest. He was very enthusiastic about pursuing this and undoubtedly thought it could take some of the curse off the Johnson administration's Vietnam predicament. The worse that predicament became, the more Rusk redoubled his efforts with Moscow. That certainly was true right up to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 which of course necessitated another policy U-turn. Thereafter we were back stopping both Chinese and Russian communism again.

Q: One of the things McNamara said in his book which seems to outrage people from the State Department was that we lacked experts about what was happening in Vietnam and he was misinformed. How would you reply to that, since you were part of the cadre of people supplying the experts.

HUGHES: Well, one can reasonably complain about the continuing small number of experts on Southeast Asia that persisted over the years despite our national concentration on Vietnam. Growing academic disenchantment with the war itself was one explanation. Another was the ham-handedness of McNamara's own Pentagon in embarrassing the scholarly community with fiascos like the Army's Project Camelot in 1965. I'll return to that later when we discuss Latin America.

But as far as the quality of expertise actually available to McNamara is concerned, I am just as outraged as others have been over his statements. For example, Allen Whiting from INR personally briefed him whenever he was asked. We certainly had McNamara on the distribution list for every paper that INR produced on Vietnam. Rusk frequently had meetings in the State Department involving McNamara, where INR and other State Department officers would engage him on a particular issue. (I have summarized my own views on this matter in the article I referred to earlier, "Experiencing McNamara", which appeared in *Foreign Policy Magazine*, Fall 1995) It is indeed noteworthy what a no-growth or slow-growth industry all this was—I am referring to the whole universe of experts inside and outside the government on issues involving

the Vietnam war. But to say that there were no experts, or to say McNamara lacked access to those that were there, is certainly not true. The fact that he didn't act on the implications of their analysis was his fault, not theirs. .

Q: It would seem that moving up towards '68 that the number of experts on Vietnam should have increased. You had all these young people who were on the ground out in the paddy fields of Vietnam.

HUGHES: Yes, but many of the young foreign service officers moved on to careers other than Vietnam. Journalists and other civilians outside the government needed funding if they were to continue in the area. It became a catch-22. The chief dispenser of funds was McNamara's Pentagon, but would-be experts were increasingly reticent to take money from that source. I don't know how hard McNamara tried. To me it remains a mystery. How can you conduct a war for 10 to 15 years and not produce a cadre of serious Vietnamese scholars with committed careers in this area? America didn't produce them. We had a handful of scholars on Vietnam at the beginning of the war and a handful at the end. .

Q: Is there anything else we should cover on Vietnam?

HUGHES: Perhaps another vignette should be put on the record illustrating how Vietnam consumed the relationships at the top of the US Government. As the situation in Vietnam continued to erode, the Johnson-Humphrey relationship remained wary on both sides. After licking his wounds throughout 1965, the Vice President had gradually been readmitted to foreign policy meetings. In the process he had been made to pay penance by being sent off to Australia and New Zealand to rally support there for the Vietnam war. He also went to Europe where he was the target of strident student protests, just as he was at home.

About this time—perhaps it was early 1967-- I went out to meet Humphrey at his house to drive in to work, as we had done so often in past years. We got into his official limousine with the secret service before and behind us. He stopped the procession in Rock Creek Park, got out of his car, and said, "Let's jog down the pathway here." When we were about a block away from the secret service and their walkie-talkies, he said rather off-handedly, "You know, this is the only time during the day that I am not being listened to." (He knew he was being tapped by the president. The new Dallek book on Lyndon Johnson explains how Johnson loved to listen to Humphrey's telephone conversations.) Passing casually over that remark, I said something like "Apart from that, my friend, what else is new?" He said, "Well, as you know, Muriel and I are leaving Chevy Chase to move into our new apartment at Harbor Square in southwest Washington. We had a little house-warming there last night. As our first guests, we asked Lyndon and Lady Bird to come over and join us, and they did."

"Oh" I said, "that must have been quite a family reunion." "Yeah, some family reunion. Lyndon came right in and stretched out on my new sofa. He started scratching himself, and then he said, "Now Hubert, I understand you make the best speech on Vietnam of anyone in the entire country. I mean the President can't leave the White House without storms of student protests, the Secretary of Defense gets stoned at Harvard, but the Vice President, that's another story. Everyone says that you make the best speech on Vietnam. I want to hear it." Getting increasingly

uncomfortable, Humphrey countered with “Oh, I just try to make the usual points.” “No, I don’t want to hear the points, Hubert, I want to hear the speech.” “So I tried again. ‘I just say this and this’.” “No, no, Hubert, I want to hear the speech.” So poor Hubert is about to declaim on demand, standing up in his new living room. Then Johnson gets up to go to the bathroom, saying, “Keep talkin’, Hubert, I’m listnin’.” “Fortunately, the girls had finished in the kitchen, just in time, and the steaks were ready.”

Johnson also enjoyed his role as chief wire-tapper and was fairly transparent about it. He used to call Humphrey to report on the whereabouts of Humphrey’s staff. “I’ll bet I know more about that staff of yours than you do, Hubert. Do you know where that John Reilly is right now? Over at the Soviet Embassy, that’s where, talkin’ to the communists ...”

Q: Did you feel that you were in the Humphrey camp and maybe a target of suspicion on the part of the Johnson loyalists?

HUGHES: Perhaps I was, but I have no evidence of it. Rusk, for example, who was surely one of the chief LBJ loyalists, asked me early in 1968, before Johnson’s withdrawal from the Presidential race, whether I might want to go over to the White House to work actively in the campaign. I told him I wasn’t tempted. Later, with Humphrey en route to the Presidential nomination, Hubert’s own interest in my keeping him up to date on intelligence was redoubled. Vietnam had emerged as a huge crisis for the Democratic party. Bobby had gradually decided that his interests lay in opposing the war, rather than promoting it. Humphrey’s old friend Gene McCarthy, the junior senator from Minnesota, was leading the opposition to Humphrey and Johnson.

I remember briefing Humphrey in his office on Capital Hill the day after the New Hampshire primary, when McCarthy scored so heavily against Johnson. Humphrey had the television on and McCarthy was on glowing over his 40% showing. Always charitable to a fault, and even though McCarthy at this point was obviously a threat to the Johnson administration. Humphrey looked at his fellow Minnesotan on the TV, shook his head, and said, “I still can’t help liking that guy.” Hubert added “I’m going off to Mexico City. Lyndon is speaking tomorrow night. Do you know what he is going to say?” I said, “How would I know what he is going to say if you don’t?” I think Humphrey already had an inkling that Johnson was going to withdraw. Johnson had told him to be sure to listen. This turned out to be Johnson’s public announcement that he wouldn’t run again.

I remember another delicious story from Johnson’s pre-withdrawal days in 1968. After McCarthy’s showing in New Hampshire, Bobby had decided to enter the race and challenge LBJ for the Presidential nomination. He sought and got an appointment at the White House to tell Lyndon he was going to run. Lyndon took him into the room with the tape recorder and surreptitiously turned it on. Led on by Johnson, Bobby said one thing after another that LBJ thought would be hugely embarrassing for Bobby in his forthcoming campaign. The President couldn’t believe his good luck in having it all on tape. As soon as Bobby left, Lyndon eagerly asked for the transcript. His staff assistant came back with a crestfallen look a few minutes later, saying: “Mr. President, I’m sorry. There’s nothing on the tape but a whirling sound.” Bobby had brought a scrambler along and wrecked the precious recording!

After LBJ's withdrawal, everyone's attention shifted to the looming contest at the Democratic convention and the fight over the Vietnam platform plank. Leading the contesting forces were two of my old friends -- Ted Sorenson, who was now spearheading the opposition, and David Ginsberg, who was in charge of shepherding the platform language for Humphrey.

The 1968 platform fight and the subsequent campaign painted the Johnson-Humphrey relationship in a lurid new light. Johnson was still President and naturally preoccupied with his own role in history. Vietnam remained the centerpiece in that endeavor. Johnson obviously decided that one way to keep Humphrey undeviatingly on board on Vietnam was to hint that maybe Nixon might be able to continue his Vietnam policy better than Humphrey. Part of this tactic was to engage in those surreal three-way telephone conversations with Nixon and Humphrey on one end and Johnson on the other telling them about the war.

Meanwhile the Paris negotiations were proceeding. Harriman and Vance, the negotiators, had a considerable interest in what Humphrey might and might not say about Vietnam. They were hoping to pull off a bombing halt in time to be of some help to Humphrey. I must say that some of us had real doubts about Johnson at that point—about whether he actually wanted Humphrey to win. There was no doubt, however, that Harriman and Vance hoped for a Humphrey victory. As usual, Johnson was sufficiently complicated and ambiguous to make life unsettling for everyone. Nixon diagnosed the situation correctly and played up to LBJ on Vietnam. He would tell Johnson that when he, Nixon, became President he would make it a point to give Johnson full credit for all he had done. Nixon was in a position where he could play that game, but Humphrey with his party in shambles over Vietnam could not.

Toward the end of the campaign, another one of Johnson's famous wiretaps disclosed the Anna Chennault –Thieu scandal. This one did upset Johnson. Nixon's devious intervention in foreign policy in this instance may have helped bring Johnson back to being at least a lukewarm Humphrey supporter. Wiretaps on the Vietnamese embassy divulged that the Republican activist and old China hand, Anna Chennault, was hard at work delivering messages from the Nixon camp to Saigon. Thieu was being told by this Nixon emissary not to cooperate with the negotiations in Paris but to drag his feet. Thieu was promised a better deal under a future Nixon administration if he held off.

Here was specific, direct, interference in an official diplomatic negotiation. Johnson was genuinely furious about this one. He correctly saw Nixon behind it, supported by John Mitchell as middleman, and with Henry Kissinger playing a supporting role inside both campaigns at the time. Overruling many of his advisors, including Max Kampelman and myself, Humphrey decided not to disclose the perfidy for security reasons. Publicity would have divulged the fact of the wiretapping. It was a fateful decision, and Humphrey has been praised for his patriotism and self-sacrifice. Disclosure of the Anna Chennault scandal could conceivably have changed the close election result and given Humphrey the Presidency.

Q: You have been personally involved with many of these people in the political arena for a long time. What was your impression about McCarthy and, Kennedy? Were they figuring out what was best politically or was it a matter of belief?

HUGHES: Their roads into opposition were similar. McCarthy's friendship with Johnson waned, of course, after he was passed over for Vice President in 1964. Before that time, they had been very close. His talented wife Abigail also happened to be a close friend of Lady Bird. McCarthy had supported the Gulf of Tonkin resolution like all of his fellow senators but two. Gene's disillusionment with the war coincided with the shift in attitudes in the country in 1965 after the escalation. By 1968 the anti-war leadership-- Al Lowenstein and others-- convinced McCarthy to lead the anti-Vietnam movement, and he did it very successfully. I'm sure Gene has written about his progressive disillusionment on Vietnam. I just haven't read it. I give him credit for longer term opposition and probably more genuine opposition than the rival who upstaged him, Bobby Kennedy.

Until the mid-'60's Bobby supported the war, enthusiastically championing counter-insurgency, and putting himself forward as a possible US ambassador to Saigon under Johnson whom he personally loathed. During his 1964 campaign for the Senate, running with Johnson at the head of the ticket, Bobby continued to support the war. As the unpopularity of the war increased, Bobby's unhappiness with the war, like Gene McCarthy's, increased as well. When political opportunism and a genuine change in conviction happen to coincide, it is probably futile to assess motives. For a Democratic politician, hoping to succeed a vulnerable president who might possibly retire leaving you an open chance for the White House, the Vietnam war was made to order.

Q: Did you find as the opposition to Vietnam grew, particularly in the academic community and with students, that the foreign service and the civil servants were affected? They come from the same class, you might say, of educated people. Did you find this was having any effect on INR and how it was beginning to treat things?

HUGHES: You mean did the disaffection in the academic community affect recruitment?

Q: I was wondering whether, particularly with younger analysts, this was reflecting itself.

HUGHES: I'm not sure what the statistics would show about how many younger people were brought into the State Department at this particular time. I suspect there was a disinclination to join the government on the part of many young people.

Q: I'm really thinking more about serving officers or civil servant analysts, particularly younger ones. Were you seeing them coming up more with dissident opinions?

HUGHES: INR, as I've indicated, was skeptical about most aspects of the war from the beginning. Did that skepticism increase as general unhappiness over the war increased? Probably. For example, in INR we had an office for external research. This office had charge of relations with the academic community, with visiting scholars, with bringing people in on short term assignments. Dissent outside in the academic community may well have complicated some of these relationships. It was also a hard time for "public diplomacy". Some State Department people were sent out to try to man the barricades intellectually. I don't think that they found such assignments very congenial. Some were prevented from speaking on college campuses. Many

got tired of the abuse. Probably some retired, resigned, or otherwise left the government.

Q: Going back to January 1968 how did the Tet offensive hit INR?

HUGHES: Well Tet became an argument. The Pentagon was quick to say that the Tet offensive was in fact a military victory. Walt Rostow enthusiastically agreed. But most of the civilian side of the government concluded that Tet was an intolerable psychological defeat. You couldn't have such a broad attack on American forces after all these years of effort without suffering a major slump in morale. So Tet became an argument. Despite Rostow and Westmoreland, observers outside the government thought that Tet was disastrous. Again INR and the intelligence community were not supposed to be reporting on U.S. domestic reactions. We weren't supposed to be covering student protests in this country. But we read the newspapers like everybody else.

Q: Well did you ratchet up your look at Vietnam to ask "What did this offensive mean internally in Vietnam?"

HUGHES: Oh yes, of course INR persisted in analyzing and estimating the consequences for domestic trends in South Vietnam, and those trends continued to be dismal. Toward the end of the Johnson administration, people were sick of the whole situation. Yet Johnson's deep commitment to his policy seemed unshakeable. Partly for that reason the intelligence community in effect stopped making overall strategic estimates. They settled for producing daily or weekly intelligence reports about developments on the ground. On their part, the policymakers were long since accustomed to taking the bad news tactically, not strategically. If it was bad news today from this quarter, they would place their false hopes somewhere else. In the discussions back and forth between analysts and policymakers, the latter somehow satisfied themselves that the bad news was only tactical and perhaps temporary.

Q: Again, going back a bit but moving off Vietnam onto China. Were you able to get a pretty good fix on China and what was happening? You mentioned there were more China experts than Vietnam experts.

HUGHES: Yes, but they all labored under the cloud of McCarthyism and were scarred by the "who lost China" controversy. There were academic experts within easy reach in Washington, like the distinguished Doak Barnett at Brookings. There were people in the State Department who were more or less exiled from Chinese affairs like Doak's brother Bob Barnett, who worked in State in another capacity on the economics side. Many ranking foreign service officers with China careers had been burned by the McCarthy experience and had left the government or transferred to other geographic areas. But there was a cadre of younger foreign service officers like Charles Cross, incidentally a classmate of mine from Carleton College, who has just written some stimulating new memoirs. They were serving in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or elsewhere on the periphery of China.

Some of the veterans from the 1950s were still around like U. Alexis Johnson. But they had learned to be gun-shy on China. They knew which way the wind was blowing. There wasn't anything very exciting about the China analysis coming from the senior foreign service officers who had escaped controversy for one reason or another. So we are really talking about younger

foreign service officers or academics. The brilliant young James C. Thompson, another political appointee, was a conspicuous exception. He too had emerged from the Chester Bowles stable. He eventually worked either in the State Department or White House for everyone across the spectrum from Bowles to the Bundy brothers to Walt Rostow. Jim never ceased to speak truth to power. He even accompanied Humphrey on his famous trip to Southeast Asia, and along the way he memorably tangled with the Vice President on China (see the Humphrey memoirs).

Thinking back on it, I'm not sure that at the time we appreciated the real depth of the Chinese cultural revolution. The careful incrementalism of the US air strikes on North Vietnam were designed to avoid provoking China. But the Chinese Cultural Revolution may have dampened any Chinese interventionist temptations then as well. This combination of factors may explain the external caution displayed by the Chinese. You could argue that the regime was so concerned about its internal convulsion that it wasn't going to be venturesome outside. But our official and public view was more ominous.

The earlier Sino-Indian war also illustrated the manipulative way Washington utilized its anti-Chinese point of departure both for policy thinking and policy explanation. The war gave the Indian lobby, such as it was, a positive way to exploit the prevailing anti-Chinese atmosphere in Washington. Here was one more proof of Chinese aggression, never mind the facts. (Allen Whiting, for example, argued that China hadn't really triggered the war with India.) Once more you had an overriding political reaction. This time it separated the supporters of India from the specialists on China. Those few who had worked for better relations with India were not going to miss this sudden and welcome opportunity. India could now get serious attention from the U.S. government since it was engaged in a struggle with China. This was enough to produce yet another Harriman mission. And since we were always good at pressing weapons on people, there were rush proposals for US military assistance to India. Naturally pressure for US intelligence collaboration with Delhi quickly followed, especially since Washington was eager for information about Chinese preparations for their nuclear tests at Lop Nor. The Chinese "attack" was of course a calamity for Nehru and non-alignment, and Nehru's carefully cultivated relationship with Chou en Lai lay in tatters. Washington was eager to exploit that development.

Conversely the Sino-Indian war also confronted the American champions of Pakistan with an awkward readjustment. Our U-2 base for the famous over-flights of the USSR was not the only stake we had in Pakistan. For a long time our covert intelligence operators had also used Peshawar as a listening post aimed at Russia. We liked to kid ourselves that the Pakistanis shared our interest in collecting electronic intelligence from the USSR. But as soon as American inspectors would leave for the day, the Paks would switch the antennae from north to east, in order to train them on their favorite Indian targets. We were interested in the USSR, while they were interested in India, and not surprisingly both interests were accommodated.

I spent some time in early 1964 in India and Pakistan, and again debriefed at some length on my return. A contemporary transcript of that debriefing about South Asia is available in the Bowles collection at Yale.

Q: Did you find from the intelligence perspective, having a very vocal public figure like John Kenneth Galbraith sitting in our New Delhi Embassy sort of skewed things at all?

HUGHES: Galbraith of course was only there for a couple of years under Kennedy. He returned to Harvard by the spring of 1963 when Chet Bowles was sent back to Delhi for his second term as ambassador. Ken never confined himself to reporting or advising on India. He felt free to comment on world affairs in general. His cables and letters to JFK always provided much intellectual merriment in the Oval Office. Those of us who worried about Vietnam under Kennedy enjoyed Galbraith's fearless weighing in on what we thought was the sensible side. But Ken was by no means Kennedy's only extra-curricular advisor. Others had no government base at all. Joe Alsop, for instance, was equally close to Kennedy. He kept promoting a gung-ho policy on Vietnam for years, and was located right here in town.

Q: How about looking at the Soviet Union? I would have thought we would have had a very sophisticated INR cadre dealing with that by the '60s.

HUGHES: We did. Throughout the decade, INR had several Kremlinologists with strong credentials, both foreign service officers and civil servants. Our Soviet analysts probably had mixed views about how much could be accomplished with the Russians at that point in the Cold War. Hal Sonnenfeldt, then one of our INR office directors, was a hard liner, if that is the right word. He was a realist, as befits a man who later became known as "Kissinger's Kissinger". There were plenty of warnings about the dangers and limits in US-Soviet collaboration. In 1966-7, however, despite the view of the Soviet Union as a continuing danger, there seemed to be new possible policy opportunities with Moscow. They recurred a few years later with the Nixon-Kissinger decision to turn our anti-China policy upside down and to drive a bigger wedge between the two Communist powers.

Throughout the '60's, INR analysts, like others elsewhere in the government, were busy being Kremlinologists, trying to pick who was in and out of favor. Much time and effort was spent looking at the lineup of Soviet leaders on the May Day reviewing stand and guessing who was next in the pecking order.

Q: Looking on it in retrospect, it was almost peripheral, wasn't it? For a long time there wasn't that much deviation between these Soviet leaders and how their apparatus worked was there?

HUGHES: Especially for those policymakers who hoped for better relations with the Soviet Union, there was always a fascination over how much daylight there might be between this Soviet leader and that Soviet leader. In retrospect it is also easy to say that deterrence was working; and that our cautious, hands off relationship with Moscow was succeeding. Henry Kissinger then and now has always been professionally against "personalism." He believes we must always deal objectively with the government in power. Nevertheless in the 1970s Henry personally enjoyed his rendezvous shooting wild boar with Leonid Brezhnev at his hunting lodge, even though he (Henry) claimed he didn't like blood sports. Hal Sonnenfeldt likewise never denied his pleasure over exchanging pocket watches with the Soviet leader.

ROBERT C. HANEY

**Deputy Chief, Joint U.S. Public Affairs (JUSPAO)
Saigon (1964)**

Robert Haney was born in Iowa in 1921 and educated at the University of Iowa and Georgetown. His career included posts in Paris, Belgrade, Bomako, Saigon, Warsaw and New Delhi. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You were in Saigon from when to when?

HANEY: I got there in the summer of '64. I left in the summer of '65.

Q: What was the political-military situation in the summer of '64?

HANEY: We had a lot to do with the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). In my first few days in Saigon, I learned that MACV was a highly influential player there, but I wasn't sure to whom they were referring when colleagues said, "McVeigh wants this," or "McVeigh rejects that." I confessed to an Army captain attached to JUSPAO that I didn't know who McVeigh was. He set me straight and told me, "Don't worry about it. Anybody here who isn't confused is simply ill informed."

That should establish the framework for an answer to your question about the status of things. They were pretty chaotic. We were counting on the South Vietnamese to pitch in wholeheartedly to save their own country. But their military was not up to it, and their hearts were not in it. Certainly they didn't have the dedication to their cause that distinguished the Viet Cong.

The atmosphere in Saigon was unsettling and unreal. It wasn't safe to venture very far outside the city because the Viet Cong owned the bush, the rice paddies, the tree lines. Several Americans were kidnaped, including one AID officer who one day drove a little too far out of town and was picked up and subsequently killed by the VC. The JUSPAO office was right downtown next to a cinema, and above the cinema were several floors that had been taken over for bachelor officers' quarters. On the top of the building was a flat roof with a low wall around it and a great view of the city. You could see almost as far as Tan Son Nhat, the airport shared by civil and military aircraft.

When you had finished for the day—and the days were long; sometimes it would be 7:00 p.m. or later before you could get away—you'd go up on the roof, where there was a restaurant and bar. Dressed in whites, drink in hand, you would look out over the city as the sun went down. First you'd see the fighter aircraft coming back to land at Tan Son Nhat. Then you'd see the gunships taking off to strike targets near the city. As it grew dark, you would begin to hear the harrump! of howitzers firing at pre-selected targets, like crossroads, where they might catch Charlie. Occasionally you could detect the muzzle flashes when the howitzers fired. Then you'd ask the *garçon* for another dry martini.

Q: This was the Rex, wasn't it?

HANEY: Yes. Named for the cinema, I believe. It was quite a popular place for the military and

some of the embassy people. For us, it was right next door and upstairs. To be in the scene but not really part of it gave you a weird feeling.

Q: What were you doing?

HANEY: As Barry's deputy, I managed the "front office" of JUSPAO, screened the cable traffic, assigned chores to the appropriate sections, e.g., films, press. When Barry was away from the post, I handled what we and the press called the "five o'clock follies," the daily press briefing. That was a difficult chore. You had to be very conscious of security. At the same time, you wanted to be as forthcoming as possible. The press in Vietnam really had more access to what we were doing there than I have ever seen. I was in the Army in Europe in the Second World War. Security then was very tight, and reporters didn't have the access that they eventually got in Vietnam.

The number-two man in the AP Saigon bureau was an aggressive type who drove a convertible around town and wore a scarf that rippled behind him like the signature neck gear of a World War I fighter pilot. He always spoke French when he careered about the city and its immediate environs; he didn't want to be mistaken for an American.

Driving just outside of Saigon one day he came upon a film crew and a small unit of ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops. He stopped, got out of his car and approached the person who appeared to be in charge of this activity, whatever it was. The AP reporter and the person who turned out to be the film director introduced themselves, and the AP reporter asked what was going on. The American director explained that he was making a film for USIA about the war in Vietnam for showing abroad. The scene he was about to shoot was an attack on a tree line on the other side of a rice paddy, a typical engagement in Vietnam. The AP reporter asked enough questions to get a story line going. Then he got back in his convertible and headed down the road.

He soon came to a crossroads café and bar, where he stopped and went in. The only other person in the place, besides the barman, was an unshaven U.S. Army lieutenant in muddy camouflage gear, who, it turned out, had just come in from the field after a week's combat. The AP reporter ordered a beer, introduced himself and asked the lieutenant, "What would you say if I told you that I had just seen a unit of South Vietnamese troops in clean uniforms with new weapons, and they're attacking a tree line, but it's all for a movie?"

The lieutenant exploded. "We can't get the ARVN troops we need in the field, and here they are making a movie!" He gave the AP reporter some really useful quotes. The reporter went back to his office in Saigon, wrote his story and filed it. It turned up on our AP ticker the next morning. We also received a circular cable from USIA calling attention to the AP story and instructing posts worldwide not to use any faked battle footage in their film programs.

I verified with our film unit that the movie crew was indeed filming for USIA. In the AP account as it came back from New York with a Saigon dateline, the reporter described how a bus full of Vietnamese passengers came upon the scene. Hearing small arms fire (which was all blanks), the bus driver slammed on the brakes. All the passengers jumped out of the bus and dove into a ditch

full of muddy water. Then the AP reporter quoted what the American lieutenant had said after he was told that an ARVN unit was being filmed making a fake attack on the Viet Cong. The movie crew said the bus story was a fabrication.

Armed with a version of the story that I could trust, I walked over to the AP bureau. The AP correspondent was at his desk, as was his boss, the bureau chief, talking on the phone. Addressing the number two man, I asked, "Peter, why did you hype your story about the USIA film we're making? You know damn well there was no bus screeching to a halt or frightened Vietnamese leaping into a ditch."

Peter agreed, "There was no bus. I was denied space on a fixed-wing aircraft the other day, and I just wanted to make sure that I would get the kind of transportation I need next time I need it."

That was the first - and happily the last - time I ever had to deal with Peter Arnett, whom I've since seen reporting from rooftops in parts of the world far removed from the 'Nam. Barry was away from the post, so I reported on my investigation to Ambassador Maxwell Taylor. He was philosophical about it, and we were both chagrined that USIA, in its haste to wipe its chin, had - if taken literally - removed from use abroad any movies about the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and classic Hollywood films like "Lost Battalion" and "Wings."

Q: Well, Peter Arnett had the reputation of being sort of anti-U.S. He was Australian. Were you dealing with a press corps that was hostile or, rather than report, trying to develop situations so they could report them? How did you find the press corps?

HANEY: There were some very good reporters in Vietnam. A few have since written books about the experience, and others made their reputations there. But there were a fair number who were there simply because a byline from Saigon or from Bien Hoa would give you a better chance of landing on page one above the fold.

For those who were in television, there was a radical shift in emphasis in Vietnam. In earlier days, the story - a burning building, a protest march, a vote in the Senate - was the image that filled the screen, described by a disembodied voice in tones appropriate to the image. But in TV news from Vietnam, the image that most often appeared center-screen during your favorite news hour was not the story, but the correspondent. Typically he or she would be dressed for the field, hunched over and glancing uneasily from side to side against a visual background of billowing smoke and an audio background of warlike sounds - explosions, rat-tat-tat of machine guns, roar of engines. Anxiously, the correspondent would confide an oral version of the story to a microphone held close to the chest.

Q: Yes. I used to notice, for example, that the anchor back in New York would say, "Now we'll go to our correspondent, George Smith." Then a notice would go up saying, "George Smith reporting." Then the correspondent would say, "This is George Smith." Then he'd tell his story. Then he would say, "And this is George Smith signing off." Finally the anchor back in New York would say, "That was our report from George Smith." The name became very important.

HANEY: Yes. Some media people made their reputations in Vietnam - through first-class

reporting, or simply because it was a great opportunity to get your byline on page one.

Q: What was your feeling about the information that you were giving out? Was this a problem?

HANEY: I was thrown into the breach for the "five o'clock follies" whenever Barry was away. I never had enough time to prepare myself, but it seems to me that there was insufficient coordination among the various elements under Maxwell Taylor's command that led to misunderstandings or sometimes caused us to withhold stuff that you didn't have to withhold. I'm not aware of any written policy spelling out what information could be used and what had to be withheld. We didn't think hard enough about that.

Q: Did you feel you were giving out true information?

HANEY: The information we gave out was as accurate as we could make it, but there were some cases where it wasn't precise enough. For example, there was one occasion where we had used tear gas to try to flush out some Viet Cong from a network of tunnels. The briefing officer had said something about "gas," not specifying what kind. Well, a number of correspondents led their stories with "U.S. forces use gas in Vietnam."

Q: I've got to stop at this point. We'll pick it up next time. We're in Vietnam, '64-'65.

Today is July 30, 2002. How did you find the USIA side of things worked within the embassy in this '64-'65 period?

HANEY: The USIA function had been elevated to something that has never been seen at any other post before or since. As I have mentioned, it wasn't called "United States Information Service" (USIS), but "Joint United States Public Affairs Office" (JUSPAO). Ambassador Maxwell Taylor dealt with his embassy, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), and JUSPAO as he had dealt with the separate entities, U.S. Air Force, Army, Navy, when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The ambassador met regularly with the heads of those elements; their deputies were most often the officers who did the legwork. We deputies logged a lot of chopper time visiting units in the field for briefings. The deputies would travel in one helicopter, escorted by two helicopters for security. Each chopper had GIs riding shotgun - actually .50-caliber machine guns. At first, the sliding doors were left open during flight, but they tended to fall off, so they were simply removed. We flew at an altitude of at least 3,000 feet to avoid small arms fire. The air was hot and sticky on the ground, but at that height with all doors off the chopper, it was breezy and even chilly. I have been a little bit skittish about flying ever since I was in a glider crash in Europe during World War II. I took my vintage Rolleiflex with me on chopper flights and sat belted in on one of the seats facing out an open door, toes on the sill. I snapped photographs to take my mind off where I was and what I was doing. I probably have more pictures of rice paddies than I really need.

We would head out just about every week for a briefing in the field, flying from Tan Son Nhat, the airport that handled both civilian and military traffic. Our "Huey" (as everybody called the HU-1B Army helicopter) would climb rapidly to a breezy 3,000 feet, and off we went across the lush countryside to our destination. The landing pad was generally a soccer field at a local school. To avoid fire from the ground, the pilot would "corkscrew" down for a landing. That meant turning the chopper almost on its side, losing a lot of lift, and dropping down in a spiral, leveling off for a slow landing from a few feet above the soccer field. This maneuver was routine for old-timers, but first-time passengers would sometimes get a surprise. On one flight, a newcomer had put his lunch bag and a thermos bottle under his seat. Unlike a Boeing 747, which gently banks and sweeps majestically to right or left, leaving your cup of coffee unspilled on the tray table, the Huey in a corkscrew maneuver does not generate the same centrifugal force. When the Huey pilot turned us almost on our side to spiral down, the newcomer's lunch and thermos scooted right out the open door.

Q: Barry Zorthian was a major figure there. How did he operate?

HANEY: Barry was very businesslike, very serious, knowing exactly what he wanted, and making sure that you, too, knew exactly what he wanted. He succeeded in increasing JUSPAO staffing to something like 140 people. That was an extraordinary number of slots in that single-country operation compared with the number of Foreign Service officers in the information and cultural function worldwide.

When I turned up in Washington for consultation on my way from Bamako to Saigon, the personnel people said, "This is urgent. We want you out there right away." I had to defer home leave. I did meet the deputy director of USIA, Tom Sorensen, who had sent me my one-page invitation to Saigon. He said to me, "You know Barry, and you're aware he's asked for you. We want you to tighten the reins on Barry. We are giving him what we think he needs, but he keeps asking for more."

At that point, I should have said, "I resign." I should never have accepted that kind of charge. I left for Saigon with people in Washington thinking that I was going to be able to slow Barry down. It didn't work and never could have. I'm surprised I lasted a year.

Q: Often the deputy of a particularly hard-charging person ends up following behind cleaning up the mess, smoothing feathers. How was Zorthian regarded by his fellow officers in other sections of the embassy?

HANEY: He seemed to command a good deal of respect in the other agencies and among his counterparts. I didn't really have much cleaning up to do. When Barry said, "That's it," that was it.

Q: How about the people supporting him? Did they respond to his leadership?

HANEY: Yes. Some of them grumbled a little bit. I got in trouble once after Barry had been away. He traveled rather frequently, came back to Washington, stayed at the White House a

couple of times, made contacts around town. While I was in charge in Barry's absence, one of the guys on the staff came to me and said, "I sure would like to take off on Sunday. I haven't been able to play golf for months." (Most of us worked Saturdays and Sundays when Barry was there.) I said, "Sure, go ahead and play golf." Barry learned of this and chewed the guy out for not showing up on a Sunday and playing golf instead. Barry didn't say anything to me about it, but I heard about it from the fellow who had been reprimanded. The staff more or less fell in line, and that was it.

Barry had a rough way of speaking. If I approached him with a question, he would say, "Yo, Bob." He successfully projected a tough image. One newcomer on the staff quietly asked me one day if it was true that Barry was called "Zorro" by his intimates. I told him, "Don't try it."

Q: Let's talk about the Vietnamese press. Did you have much to do with the indigenous press there?

HANEY: I had nothing to do with that.

Q: What about the foreign press, including the American press? Were they seen as the enemy that they were later?

HANEY: Everyone in the embassy and in all of the agencies became very cautious in dealing with the American media. I had worked as a newspaperman, so I was familiar with the vagaries of the press. But the way the corps of American correspondents operated in Vietnam exceeded anything I had ever seen before. Their demands for access to people, information, transportation were excessive and incessant.

Of course, Vietnam was a continuing major drama for the United States and a story every correspondent wanted to cover. Many media plucked their most experienced and best known people to cover Vietnam. They joined a large group of correspondents less well known but no less eager. One correspondent for the New York *Daily News* and his wife practically lived in the JUSPAO offices. They would eat meals in our snack bar. They may have had a hotel room someplace where they slept, but if I wanted to find the correspondent, I would first look around JUSPAO. He was a faithful presence at the "five o'clock follies." He might try to get some news by saying, "AFP is reporting that MACV has asked for another 2,000 troops for deployment here. Have you got any details on that?" The JUSPAO spokesman would say, "No, Sam, I have nothing on that." Sam would say, "I've got the story, I just need some details." Spokesman: "Sorry, Sam, I just can't help you." Sam: "Can't you give me some details even in general terms?"

Q: These were still the early days. Was the press really seen by the military as hostile at that time?

HANEY: The military tended not to trust the press and to say as little as possible. They were not used to a crowd of media representatives homing in like a swarm of bees.

Q: When you left there, what happened?

HANEY: Barry was absent again, and I was in charge. This was about a year after I had arrived. A cable came in from USIA notifying JUSPAO that the Agency was transferring me to Washington. I never did get any explanation from Barry. I think he was just not happy with me because I would raise questions about the need for staff increases or the best way to deal with South Vietnamese officials, who were prone to say "Yes" under pressure but wouldn't deliver. I was probably doing that because I was stupid enough to heed Sorensen's injunction to try to slow Barry down a bit. That was next to impossible, and it was foolish to try. Since I wasn't playing Barry's game - that he could always get what he wanted - he showed me how the game was played and got somebody else.

Q: You went back to Washington in '64 then.

HANEY: Yes.

Q: What were you doing in Washington?

HANEY: We got some home leave, including the leave we should have had when we were transferred from Bamako. I did odd jobs in the Agency. I worked on foreign press reporting, with the policy people. I was interested in Eastern Europe because I spoke Russian and Serbian and had always wanted to serve in the most important of the Slavic countries. I talked with the area director for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe about an assignment there. A few days later he called me. He said, "We've got a job coming up in Poland. You don't call it 'public affairs officer' in Poland, but it's the same function. You'd be 'head of the Press and Cultural Section.'" Poland at that time was still very much a communist country. I said, "That sounds great." I spent about two or three months in Washington and was then transferred to Poland.

THOMAS F. CONLON
Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1964)

Thomas F. Conlon was born in Illinois in 1924 and received his BS from Georgetown University in 1948. He served overseas in the US Army from 1943-1945. Upon entering the Foreign Service, he was posted in Havana, Surabaya, Singapore, Saigon, Le Havre, Manila, Nice, Canberra, and Bangkok. In 1992 Mr. Conlon was interviewed by Arbor W. Gray.

Q: How did you find the Department of State in 1963?

CONLON: Well, although I had been continuously overseas for over three years, I was able to take only about a week's "home leave" before reporting for duty, as South Vietnam was then in a real crisis situation. Opposition to our involvement in Vietnam had grown substantially for a number of reasons. North Vietnamese propaganda had had a significant impact, particularly in American universities and in the press. Moreover, we were sincerely seen by some Americans as

repeating the French "dirty war" in Indochina, 1946-54. Other Americans were concerned at what they regarded as our "intervention" in what they considered essentially a civil war. (Though they conveniently forgot that our involvement in Korea in the 1950's could have been viewed in the same light.) However, the Buddhist crisis made South Vietnam front page news in 1963, a position which, unfortunately, it never lost till the Communist victory in 1975.

In general, Vietnam, North and South, is a country in the Buddhist tradition. Buddhism is not so much a religion, but rather a discipline or a "way of living." A Buddhist shrine or monastery was to be found in almost every South Vietnamese village and town. The same had been true in North Vietnam before the Communist takeover there in 1954-55, after which most Buddhist shrines were closed or converted to other uses, sometimes for storing grain or other secular purposes. No one knows the exact number, but there were probably 5,000 or so Buddhist shrines and monasteries in South Vietnam by 1963. There also were about 1.5 million Catholics--perhaps 10% of the population--either recent converts or long accustomed to Catholicism. The president of the Republic of Vietnam, as South Vietnam was officially called, was Ngo Dinh Diem, a member of a high-ranking, "mandarin" family from the Hue area of Central Vietnam, which had long been Roman Catholic. Diem himself was a bachelor and a man of simple habits, though he had become accustomed to living in Freedom Palace in Saigon, a palatial building formerly the residence of the French High Commissioner in Cochin-China, and to traveling around South Vietnam in a cavalcade of vehicles and with a truly "imperial" kind of entourage. He was far removed from the ordinary people, although he was personally honest and probably enjoyed considerable respect in the country.

This was not the case with his brothers. One brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, was Catholic Archbishop of Hue. Another brother was Ngo Dinh Canh, more or less the political "boss" of Central Vietnam. Another brother was Ngo Dinh Nhu, a French-type intellectual who was the president's adviser on virtually every issue. Ngo Dinh Nhu's wife became a considerable problem because she was articulate and outspoken and a natural target for journalists, who coaxed her to make unfortunate remarks which considerably damaged the cause of the Republic of Vietnam. Rightly or wrongly, the Ngo family was considered to be generally corrupt.

In May, 1963, an event took place in Hue, the details of which are still a matter of controversy. President Diem had become concerned at the practice of flying Buddhist flags at anti-government rallies throughout the country. Legislation was passed prohibiting the flying of flags other than that of the Republic of Vietnam. In an obvious attempt to defy the government, extremist Buddhist groups flew the Buddhist flag in Hue. Government police, who anticipated trouble, moved in to seize the Buddhist flag. Scuffling broke out and shots were fired which caused a number of dead and injured. This incident was represented by anti-government Buddhists and their supporters in the foreign, and particularly the American press, as anti-Buddhist activity by the "Catholic" government of President Diem. In fact, there were very few Catholics in the Vietnamese Government at the time. A series of more or less continuing, anti-government demonstrations ensued at about 20 of the 5,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries in South Vietnam. Finally, in July, 1963, Vietnamese "Special Forces" controlled by Ngo Dinh Nhu raided the 20 Buddhist centers where virtually continuous anti-government protests were going on. Numbers of Buddhist monks and their supporters were arrested. At about this time a Buddhist monk doused himself with gasoline and set himself afire, dying in the blaze. Several

other such suicides, or "immolations," took place, underlining Buddhist opposition to the Diem Government.

Since Paul Kattenburg, the director of the Vietnam Working Group, was visiting Saigon, which he had not seen for about seven years or so, on the day following the pagoda raids I accompanied Ed Rice, the acting Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, to a special, inter-agency meeting in the White House cabinet room, presided over by President Kennedy. Roger Hilsman, the Assistant Secretary, was out in the San Francisco area, giving a speech. At the meeting Kennedy's charisma filled the room, though he said very little beyond opening the meeting with a question, "What do we have to decide here?" I was appalled at the low quality, emotional discussion of the pagoda raids and their impact on policy, in which some of the most senior officials of the State Dept were involved, including George Ball, then Under Secretary of State, and Averell Harriman, then a "Roving Ambassador" on the staff of Secretary of State Rusk. Only Bill Colby, then Assistant Director of CIA for the Far East, spoke up for the policy of support for President Diem and the Republic of Vietnam which had been approved and continued by five presidents from both Republican and Democratic Parties. The condemnation of the pagoda raids and the Diem Government which emerged from that meeting set the stage for a series of statements virtually calling for the overthrow of that government, then fighting for its life against communist aggression from North Vietnam.

It was not surprising that this relentless pressure on the Diem Government virtually paralyzed it and eventually led a group of South Vietnamese generals to approach our Embassy in Saigon, asking if the U. S. would continue to support the Republic of Vietnam if they overthrew Diem. The reply from Washington, decided on at a high level, was that we would continue to provide such support. Meanwhile, economic aid to the Diem Government had all but stopped, further increasing the pressure. Even so, it took nearly four months from the time of the pagoda raids in late July to the overthrow and murder of Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, on November 2, during which time the communist insurgency made rapid strides in the countryside.

Since it took a fairly long time for the coup against Diem to be mounted, once the subject had been broached, there were numerous figures in Washington, including Secretary of State Rusk, who began to have serious doubts about the wisdom of the policy of pressure against the Diem Government. I was called in to the Department at about 10:00 PM on a Saturday night late in October by Paul Kattenburg. Walt Rostow, one of the senior advisers of President Kennedy, wanted a memo prepared on the assumption that we would attempt to reestablish working relations with President Diem. Kattenburg flatly refused to prepare such a memo, saying that he was totally opposed even to considering such a course. With no advance notice, I prepared a memo outlining the steps we would need to take to resume military and economic aid to the Saigon Government but noting that we should, in any case, insist on maintaining contact with all non- communist elements not in jail. Most unwisely, in my view, we had agreed, at Diem's insistence, on not contacting non-communist figures opposed to Diem, although the British and other embassies in Saigon were in regular contact with them. But it was far too late to consider such action, as events were rapidly unfolding.

The coup began on November 1, but Diem and Nhu escaped from the Palace through a tunnel and were not found until November 2, when they were murdered by some of the coup plotters

who had scores to settle with them. The Vietnam Working Group, where I was still assigned, had an officer on duty all through that night. Jim Montgomery passed the word of Diem and Nhu's death (allegedly by suicide) to the White House Situation Room at about 5:00 AM on November 2 (Washington time). He was told that the information was brought to President Kennedy's attention and that the President was deeply concerned over having approved actions which led to the suicide of two fellow Catholics. I relieved Jim at 7:00 AM at the Operations Center and had the task of informing Assistant Secretary of State Hilsman of what had happened. Hilsman had left word that, under no circumstances, was he to be disturbed before 7:00 AM. I told him of what had happened, that the information had been passed to the President, and that he was deeply upset. Hilsman limited his comment to, "God damn it" and then hung up. It was not long, of course, before it became apparent that the Ngo brothers had been murdered. The suicide story was a deliberate fabrication by the coup plotters which convinced no one.

It was curious to see the reactions of both Hilsman and Paul Kattenburg to the final overthrow of Diem and Nhu. Hilsman had deliberately sought this end, as had Kattenburg. Hilsman wanted to claim credit for this "achievement," if you can call it that, but he knew that President Kennedy was not pleased with the outcome, and so he had to keep quiet and not refer to it. Kattenburg, as I learned only later, had come to the Vietnam Working Group with the intention of working to overthrow the Diem Government and turn the country over to the communists, whom he considered the only legitimate nationalists. He makes this point fairly explicit in his book, The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945-75.

Q: I take it, then, that you didn't think much of either Hilsman or Kattenburg?

CONLON: That's right. Hilsman knew very little about Vietnam, and he was one of the most ambitious, self-centered, and arrogant people I have ever met. During the fall of 1963 he concentrated almost exclusively on Vietnamese developments, to the neglect of his other duties in the Far Eastern area. In mind's eye I can still see Ed Ingraham, then Indonesian desk officer, trying to get a moment of Hilsman's attention to focus on the beginning of Indonesian "confrontation" of Malaysia as one of the endless meetings on Vietnam was about to begin. Hilsman's experience in the Far East was limited to his service during World War II in the OSS in Burma. Kattenburg was an example of a man with his own agenda, the overthrow of the Diem Government and turning the country over to the communists, which he somehow saw as serving the U. S. interest. I was his deputy, but he never exposed this central view to me. I was only able to see it in retrospect.

Q: What happened after that?

CONLON: President Kennedy was assassinated on November 21 or 22, 1963, and Secretary Rusk took advantage of the situation by moving the Vietnam Working Group into the Executive Secretariat, under Joe Mendenhall, my former boss in Saigon. However, oddly enough, I was designated by name, though Rusk didn't know me personally, to remain in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs to handle "routine diplomatic business" involving South Vietnam. Joe Mendenhall said that he thought this was a misunderstanding and that I would eventually join the rest of the Working Group. Hilsman and Kattenburg both left Vietnam affairs, Hilsman returning to private life and Kattenburg going on to another assignment in the Department. I never went

back to the Working Group.

"Routine diplomatic business" eventually came to be interpreted as keeping in contact with the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, then in complete disarray, and helping them with their problems. The Riggs Bank, where the Embassy had a substantial checking account, promptly froze the account after the overthrow of President Diem. I was able to get it unfrozen, as otherwise the diplomats assigned there would have been penniless. I accompanied the very able Pham khac Rau, the Vietnamese chargé d'affaires, on a few calls in the Department, but I had no secretary or other staff, and I marked time for almost three months, with virtually nothing to do.

BROADUS BAILEY, JR.
Provincial Advisor
Dalat, Tuyen Duc (1964-1965)

Broadus Bailey, Jr. was born in South Carolina in 1930. He received his bachelors from Princeton University in 1951 . During his career he held positions in Fontainebleau, Vietnam, at the Pentagon, and in Laos. Colonel Bailey was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in April 2002.

Q: Well, then, after '64 was Vietnam raising its head at all?

BAILEY: Oh, yes, that's where I went, from Newport to Vietnam.

Q: Had you thought about Vietnam before that?

BAILEY: Yes, I had written my paper – the command and staff course had to write a fairly long paper, and I wrote mine on Vietnam and I had a pretty good idea that's where I was going when I left Newport, and sure enough, I did.

Q: So you went to Vietnam from when to when?

BAILEY: From August of '64 to September of '65.

Q: What were you doing there?

BAILEY: I was the sector or provincial advisor in Tuyen Duc sector; the provincial capital is Dalat. And it was a fascinating tour. I was chosen for that job because I spoke French and I think perhaps because I knew some of the people in the headquarters, and they thought it would be a suitable assignment. It was not an awful lot of military duties. My principal duty was really trying to keep track of the generals who were running Vietnam, and they liked to spend time in Dalat.

Q: It's sort of the Switzerland of "A Beautiful Place."

BAILEY: Oh, yes, beautiful – we were back there several years ago, and it's just the same today.

Q: I had heard that it was considered by both sides to be an R&R area, and the Viet Cong wasn't doing much there; was this true, or not?

BAILEY: That's generally true, yes. The Viet Cong were not very far away, they were not infrequently in the morning market, left propaganda messages. They were never more than four or five kilometers out of town, but trying to get the Vietnamese to stir up the VC in the provinces was very difficult. They did not- (end of tape)

Q: Well, was your job sort of to stir it up and try to get them to do something?

BAILEY: Yes, and they did things, they did go out on operations, and I went out with them from time to time. But the province chief's principal duty was to maintain security in the city and around the palaces, so-called palaces, in the town for the VIPs who came, and to ensure the safety of those VIPS, and as I said a moment ago, that didn't include much in the line of military operations.

Q: I've heard at other times there was an effort made to keep American military from going there.

BAILEY: Yes, I think that's true. I think it was more after my time; I think the town was in effect off limits to some of the American units, but the American Army units were just beginning to arrive as I left, so I'm really not sure about that. There were always more military in town than I knew about although they were asked to be sure that my office knew that they were in town. The attack on the Pleiku headquarters, Pleiku compound and airstrip in February of '65, I guess it was; there were six helicopters from Pleiku in town. They had not bothered to let me know that they were there, but Pleiku was on my telephone saying send those choppers back, and I didn't have a clue where they were. I knew where the choppers were, but not the people.

Q: That attack was the one that sort of kicked off the major reinforcements, wasn't it?

BAILEY: Yes, that's right, yes.

Q: It was actually, I guess, the first real attack on American forces, their advisors...

BAILEY: I guess the Rex BOQ in Saigon was bombed about Christmastime of '64, maybe; I'm not sure I've got those dates right, but that was the first real big attack, and I think almost simultaneously, a couple planes were satchel-bombed at Tan Son Nhut airport. A friend of ours from Newport was killed.

Q: Was the province chief a military man?

BAILEY: He was a Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel Phan, a delightful person. He was a protégé of General Thieu, and later was involved in the police force, I believe the national police, but he was a very able guy, young guy, I think he was about my age.

Q: Obviously you're off in the nicest part of Vietnam. Did you get any feel for the situation in Vietnam at the time?

BAILEY: Elsewhere in Vietnam? I realized that the situation elsewhere in Vietnam was much more serious than it was around us, and we were briefed regularly on the activities around Kon Tum and Pleiku, and I had access to the intelligence, and in the delta, and on my trips to Saigon for one reason or another I talked to my contemporaries. I knew that the war was a lot hotter elsewhere than it was where I was spending my time. Most of my time was spent trying to figure out what the generals were doing, and for that purpose I had a direct phone line to General Stillwell, who was the chief of staff of MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam), because MACV would be very concerned about what General was in town, and what were they talking about.

Q: You're talking about Vietnamese generals.

BAILEY: Yes, right. And Colonel Phan, the province chief, was reasonably candid in telling me what they were talking about; I'm sure he was operating under his own rules, and he certainly didn't divulge everything.

Q: Well, this is a time of rotating generals, wasn't it? Rotating governments, before General Thieu more or less settled into the job.

BAILEY: Yes, Nguyen Khan, the general with the little goatee that he wore, he was chief of government, maybe chief of state, I think chief of government, about Christmastime of '64, and I had the not very pleasant duty of telling him that Ambassador Taylor, General Taylor, wanted to see him in Saigon in the Ambassador's office the next morning. This being Christmas Eve, I believe, and the message came by phone from Saigon, and I said to the other end of the phone in Saigon, I think it was General Stillwell, but I'm not sure.

Q: Is this Stillwell with one "l"?

BAILEY: Yes, Dick Stillwell, yes, not related to Vinegar Joe. Whoever was on the phone, I said, "Well, I think I'd better have that in writing," and there was no capability to provide it to me that way, so I wrote it down longhand and took it and put it on a message form and delivered it to palace #1, I think it was, and I got only as far as the gate where the guard properly stopped me, and I said I had a message from the American ambassador to General Khan. And the guard got on the phone and one of General Khan's aides came down to the gate to meet me, and I told him what I was there for, and that I needed to deliver the message and had been told to deliver it only to General Khan. And the captain aide told me that I would not be permitted to do that. And the aide took my written message form to the general and he read it and came back and the message sent back by me to Saigon was that General Khan was not available to see General Taylor in the embassy, but General Khan would be back in Saigon in the next several days and would be glad to receive General Taylor at the JGS compound. So he let Ambassador Taylor know exactly where he stood. But that sort of political military errand was what I really was involved in, and also the hope that I could pick up incidental intelligence on what the generals were up to.

U. ALEXIS JOHNSON
Deputy Chief of Mission/ Deputy Ambassador
Saigon (1964-1965)

U. Alexis Johnson served as Deputy Ambassador to Vietnam and Ambassador to Japan in the Lyndon Johnson Administration. He was interviewed by Paige E. Mulhollan for the LBJ library in 1969.

Q: Did Mr. Johnson, himself, even get closely engaged in the Vietnam problem, say, prior to the election of 1964?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. We used to have meetings on it. I wouldn't say he was deeply engaged. The deterioration in the situation out there and the facing up to the issue came after . . . It came in the latter part of '64 and, of course, the early part of '65. And I was out there at the time.

Q: How did he talk you into going out there? That was, at least in title, I suppose, a demotion. Did he talk to you personally and convince you to go?

JOHNSON: Well, he did talk to me, primarily, through Dean Rusk. I was approached through Dean Rusk, on whether I would go out as Ambassador. And then I said, "Of course, I'll do anything I'm asked to do." And then the thought of Max Taylor going out came up, and I think it was Mr. Johnson's idea to send both of us.

Q: Create a new position?

JOHNSON: Create a new position. And Dean Rusk . . . Let's see. I thought maybe I was going to go. Then Dean Rusk called me, and said he'd just had a call from the President, and would I go along with Max? This thought had never occurred to me, of course, and I said, "Sure, Max and I are old friends." We were language officers together at Japan, 1935. He was the captain, and I was the vice consul, and we'd known each other for years. I wouldn't have readily accepted this kind of what could be a very difficult relationship with anybody else, but he and I had known each other so long, and we thought so much the same about things, that I had no doubt about it. And he [Rusk] was sitting there at his desk; and he had the President on the other end of the line; and I said, "Yes, of course." And then he said, "What would you like to be called?" I had the rank then of a Career Ambassador. And I was, of course, reluctant . . . After all, I didn't want to drop that title. He said, "What about Assistant to the Ambassador, or Deputy to the Ambassador?" And I said, "No, that doesn't . . ." I said, "What about Deputy Ambassador?" And he said to the President, "What about Deputy Ambassador?" "Okay." And so that's the origin of the title of Deputy Ambassador.

Q: Long, thoughtful consideration of that. (Laughter).

JOHNSON: Thoughtful consideration of it, yes. So I went out--that was on a Wednesday, I think it was--and said goodbye to my wife and family and got right on a KC-135 the next day and went

right out, non-stop. And then Max Taylor followed me later.

Q: Was there a fairly clear division between your responsibilities and duties, between you and General Taylor?

JOHNSON: No, no. You know we just worked very closely together. In general, of course, I tended to do more of the running of the Embassy, and maintaining contacts with other missions, and the diplomatic conversations, and that type of thing. But we worked very closely together. There was never any Oh, I should say this was on a Wednesday, and I left on Friday, it was. There's an incident here that I think is interesting.

That night - the night I'd accepted, as I recall it - I know there was a reception. I'm trying to thinkI think it was at the Indonesian Embassy. Can't remember who was here from Indonesia. Well, the Embassy's not important.

Anyway, there was a reception at which the President, President Johnson, was present. This is the kind of a gesture he could do, and I must say, you know, the kind of a thoughtful thing he could do. He spotted my wife over across the room. He didn't know her particularly well, but he knew who she was. He spotted her over there and went over to her, and said he wanted her to know how much he appreciated what I was doing and how much he appreciated her attitude on this. And then he said that--I forget exactly how he put it--but anyway, "I want you to know that you're going to have your ambition." There'd been considerable talk of my going as Ambassador to Japan prior to this. However, it was known that she particularly, my wife particularly wanted to go back to Japan. There were a lot of people standing around, and everybody knew what he was talking about.

Well, from that time on, of course, the story was that I was going to go as an Ambassador to Japan. Then when I came back in '66, the Secretary told me that this was still the plan. And you start getting these newspaper leaks and an occasional newspaper story about my going out to Japan. And in his usual fashion, the President got very furious about these stories. And I recall on one occasion, after there'd been a rumor when I was there; he said something about "these boys over in the State Department blabbing off their mouths." And he, of course, was the origin . . .

Q: Was the source.

JOHNSON: He was the origin, the source of the story from the very beginning. I, obviously, kept very quiet about it, because I well knew his reputation on this. I think that, perhaps, I may be one of the few appointments that was made in the Administration which was not reversed because of newspaper stories.

Q: Maybe he realized he was the leak when he thought about it a little bit.

JOHNSON: He carried through on it. And I must say, I'm very grateful to him for it.

Q: When you were in the mission in Saigon, how much did the mission participate in the tough decision which began almost immediately after you got there?

JOHNSON: Oh, completely so, completely so. One of my first moves, before Max Taylor arrived there, was to set up what we called the Mission Council. That was Commander MACV, who was then General Westmoreland, the agency [CIA] chief, the AID chief, the chief of political section and the two of us [U.A. Johnson and Taylor]. We met regularly and steadily. And all the big decisions were all thoroughly discussed; all our big recommendations, I mean to say, were thoroughly discussed, thrashed out. And we sent back common messages. I would say that, in general, there was no question that Max Taylor was the leader of the whole efforts and Westy and I worked very, very closely together, and when the big recommendations were being made, we worked drafting the messages; and it was a purely coordinated effort. There was no question of anybody running off on one side or another . . .

Q: And Washington did give you adequate time and adequate encouragement to express your views? I'm thinking particularly, for example, on something fast, like the Tonkin episode, that occurred just a month or so after you were there.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. No, no, we had an opportunity to express our views. We didn't have as complete information on the Tonkin Gulf business, it being a Naval matter, which was handled through Naval quarters in Honolulu. Our information on that was not as complete as was the information back here in Washington.

Q: I see.

JOHNSON: And the Tonkin Gulf resolution, of course, was originated entirely back here in Washington. I would say the lead on that was very heavily taken here in Washington, rather than coming from Saigon. But we naturally welcomed it from our standpoint there.

Q: What about the diplomatic channels, the various attempts to initiate discussions with the North? Was that conducted separately from the Saigon mission? Or were you in on, say, the [J. Blair] Seaborne mission in '64, for example? Were you in the . . . ?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. I maintained direct personal contact with Seaborne and those affairs.

Q: He brought, as far as you were concerned, no hopeful signs at all?

JOHNSON: That's right, yes, yes. No, I maintained very close contact with him.

Q: The so-called "peace-seeking group" that was ultimately formed here did not, then operate outside of the normal mission effort?

JOHNSON: No, no, no, no. We were involved in all of that.

Q: When did you find out that the decision for the--what you'd been recommending--the bombing of the North had been made? When it occurred, or did you know before that, that . . . ?

JOHNSON: Oh, no, we knew before that, of course. When the orders . . . We got the . . .

Q: Was there a point at which--before, say, the bombing of Pleiku--at which it became clear that this was going to have to be done and that the decision was forthcoming?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was. Well, more or less so. I'd say our exchanges with Washington indicated to us we were moving in that direction. But the President took the view that he would not undertake the bombing of the North until we'd moved out the dependents. And we, in turn, out there, took the view that moving out our dependents would create such a psychological factor out there that we just couldn't live with it. So we were in somewhat of an impasse. We used to get these telegrams about getting our dependents out. We used to come back arguing on it. And so we were in an impasse. We were unwilling to move out our dependents, and Washington was unwilling to start the bombing until we moved out our dependents. Then the Pleiku incident came along, and we were able to do it simultaneously.

Q: But it was not a difference of opinion as to what should be done?

JOHNSON: No, no, no. No, there wasn't. The Pleiku incident gave us the opportunity to do so. Mac Bundy was out there at the time, also. And this, of course, was a big help in getting the decision. And Mac saw the thing, at the time, the way we saw it, and joined us

Q: You said Mac, not Max.

JOHNSON: Mac Bundy.

Q: Just being clear.

JOHNSON: Mac Bundy, that's right.

Q: You get two names like that .

JOHNSON: McGeorge Bundy, McGeorge Bundy, yes.

Q: When did it become clear that we probably were going to have to put in American combat troops as a logical extension of the policy we were following?

JOHNSON: The way this came about . . . and here I have some conscience. When we started the bombing of the North, we had the problem of protecting the airfield of Danang against possible retaliatory raids. And the Marines wanted, and we agreed, that we needed to put in a Hawk battalion there to protect Danang. And then it turned out that, for these Hawks to be effective, they had to be on the hills around Danang; and to protect the Hawks, you had to bring in Marines to protect the Hawks.

Q: You're talking about Hawk missiles here, not hawk. Some of these things, I add for the benefit of people a long time from now that might not know what Hawks are.

JOHNSON: That's right, Hawk missiles; that's right, Hawk missiles. And then the problem of

protecting Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon came up.

It was agreed, that we'd bring in a ground force. I think it was 173rd--172nd, well, it doesn't make any difference--but [it was] an Army force, ground force, to protect the Bien Hoa area. We, at that time, were not contemplating any massive introduction of American forces. And frankly, this grew somewhat like Topsy. I think it's quite clear from the record. Looking back over Vietnam--I've talked with my colleagues about this--and examining with the wisdom of hindsight, what was done . . . I don't have any . . . I still don't have any real question about what we did. But I do have a conscience that none of us foresaw the extent of the involvement that was going to be required. And the conscience I have is that I don't feel, that at that decision point, we were able to present to the President, in a clear-cut fashion, the alternatives. That is--the situation in which we now find ourselves versus the situation at that time--it was never presented to him in any clear-cut form. The issues have always been presented to him simply in the form--or were at that time--in the form of bringing in a battalion of Marines to protect the Hawks; and then bringing in a battalion of Army troops to protect Bien Hoa; and it sort of grew like Topsy out of that. And in that, I don't think we served the President well. And I don't know; with the wisdom of hindsight, perhaps we should have foreseen the extent of our involvement that might be required. All I can say is, none of us did.

Q: I was going to say, is it perhaps that because nobody disagreed, that this wasn't fleshed out in a more . . . ?

JOHNSON: Well, perhaps that's it. Of course, it involved the intention of the other side, which was always difficult to read.

Q: How about that "other side" business? That's a point the critics have been very adamant on, the degree of regular force DVN infiltration by the time we began bombing the North. Were you all confident in Saigon that there were appreciable numbers of DVN units actually in the South at that time?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, yes. You see, we had the--what was it?--the introduction of the . . .

Q: 323's.

JOHNSON: 325th division--elements of it--in December of 1964. This was . . .

Q: They were in as units, not as in . . .

JOHNSON: As units. Oh, yes, yes. Of course, that was long before we started doing any bombing, or introduced any combat ground forces.

Q: So the critics' case here, as far as the information the mission had was concerned, was just wrong?

JOHNSON: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, yes. Yes, yes.

Q: Even some of Mr. Johnson's admirers, and people who think the involvement in Vietnam has been wise, had been critical of what seems to be the lack of influence that the mission there has been able to have with various South Vietnamese governments. [Take] Mr. [Robert] Shaplen's case, for example, that we should have used our leverage at various times-

JOHNSON: All right. We talked a lot about that. We talked a lot about that. And to a degree, we were somewhat subject to what I call "the tyranny of the weak." This was not due to any lack of trying on our part. In these coup situations, we had some awful rough talking. Max Taylor, as a matter of fact, had such a rough talk with General [Nguyen] Khanh, at one time, that General Khanh refused to have anything to do with him again. And I was appointed a committee of one to work with General Thieu and General Ky--at that time, they were just generals--in bringing about a reconciliation between them . . . (Laughter) . . . General Khanh and Max Taylor.

The one ultimate weapon that we had was the threat of withdrawal and the pulling out of all support. That was not a weapon that was likely to be used. We couldn't bluff about it; the United States can't bluff. If we made the threat, we had to be prepared to carry through with it. And we never found ourselves in such a situation as we felt that we could or should recommend the use of that weapon.

Now, talking about how we should influence things: after General Khanh left, we had the Hung government; and then we had the Phan Huy Quat government. Phan Khac Suu was the Southerner who was the Chief of State; Quat was Prime Minister. The military had, really and truly, turned over the reins of power to the civilian government. In this regard, let me say, I think that we Americans are somewhat enamored of the idea that civilian governments are, by definition, good, and military governments are, by definition, bad. I don't think this follows . . .

Q: Right.

JOHNSON: And this case, I think, well illustrates it. They really had turned over the government to the civilians. Quat had two ministers, in his government, that were of importance to us--one of them, the Minister of Economic Affairs; one of them, the Minister of Interior--that were duds. He knew they were duds; we knew they were duds. But it was a part of the deal--as I said, the political necessities of the time--to take them on.

Well, you talk about influencing governments. We harassed Quat about these two ministers, about getting rid of them, and changing them. And Quat said, you know, "Leave it to me. I'll have to do it in my own time." But as a result of our pushing him on this, Quat acted on this sooner than he otherwise would have. Phan Khac Suu refused to sign the decree changing the ministers. You see, Quat is a Northerner, a Tonkinese; Phan Khac Suu was a Southerner; and Phan Khac Suu was damned if he was going to let Quat get away with this, you see. And we had the impasse. We kept saying to Quat, what could we do to help, and how could we assist? And again, he said, "Leave it to me." And the military kept saying the same thing also to him. They were prepared to support him, and what could they do to help? Oh, ten days or so passed; and Quat was obviously losing ground on this. Max Taylor had taken the trip up to Vientiane, Bangkok, and was away . . . Incidentally, it so worked out that every coup and coup attempt, he was away and I was alone there. (Laughter).

Q: Was there any pre-planning on that?

JOHNSON: There was no pre-planning involved in this, but it worked out that way. And about three o'clock in the morning, I got a telephone call from Quat--would I come right over to his office? And I, of course, went over there; and there was Quat sitting on a chair, here, and Thieu, General Thieu, and General Ky sitting on the couch, just the three of them. And Quat said to me they had been discussing the matter; and they'd come to the conclusion that there was no way of getting rid of Phan Khac Suu as Chief of State and resolving the impasse; except for Quat to resign and the military to take over again. And Thieu was going to be Chief of State, and Ky was going to be Prime Minister. I was, of course, taken somewhat aback by this; and I questioned both Thieu and Ky as to their analysis of the situation, the agreement. And I turned to Quat and said, "Are you fully satisfied on this? There's just no other way out of this?" And he said, "No, there's just no other way out of it." All right. What's an American Ambassador do at three o'clock in the morning in a situation like that? You say that we should, you know, we should have been more vigorous in controlling things. What could you say, except, "God bless you.!"

Q: It was all agreed on their side.

JOHNSON: It was all agreed. There was nothing to do. That's the story of Thieu and Ky coming into power. All I can say is that they've been there since; and you've had more stability there than you've had in many countries that are not at war.

And the balance of power, of course, has shifted from Ky, now, to Thieu under the new constitution. And I'm just enormously impressed with the degree to which Thieu has grown into being a politician, in the real sense of the term. I, of course, knew him well at that time. We'd been through several other coups together one way or the other--Ky and Thieu and I--during the middle of the night, and I knew them exceedingly well.

Last time I saw Thieu was when I went through there in January and had a long, long talk with him, a very intimate talk; and I was just very deeply impressed with the degree to which he has turned from being the military type that I'd known into being what I'd call a real political animal. He has real political sense, looking at things in a political way.

Q: What it boils down to, you're saying, then, is that really they know we're not prepared to make the threat of withdrawal; and therefore, there's really no other threat that . . .

JOHNSON: At that time, that's right. That's right. There was no other threat that was credible. You know, you could tell them all, "You've got to get together. All this haggling and fighting among yourselves." You could preach this to all of them, but how do you make them do it? How do you make them do it?

Thich Tri Quang, the Buddhist. Oh, we spent hours and hours with that fellow. He brought Hung down. Hung was respected. We all liked him. I have enormous respect for him. And Thich Tri Quang brought him down. We'd get Thich Tri Quang in; and lecture him; and pound the table, and all that; but how do you get him to act?

You know, every . . . I often say that, so often, the solutions that people have for foreign policy problems involve having an American ambassador go in and tell a foreign government or a foreign people that they should be something other than what they are. This is not, to me, a very productive course of action. You can influence and guide people within certain parameters, but you've got to recognize the parameters. People are what they are. It doesn't do any good to go in, and pound the table, and tell the Arabs they should love the Israelis, or the Israelis they should love the Arabs, or the Pakistans that they should like the Indians. These are facts of life with which we deal.

In these foreign policy situations, you always have the things over which we have no control; that is, the way people feel about each other, and these things, and the way that people are. People are what they are. Then we have things that we can influence; and of course, this is where diplomacy comes into it. What are the parameters in which we can influence, and what are the weapons and the tools that we can use? And then, we have the things over which we have full control.

Q: That's really only our own activities.

JOHNSON: That's really only our own activities.

Q: Right.

JOHNSON: We don't control the other peoples. Apart from our own people, who think that we should be able to make anybody else do whatever we think that they should do, every foreign country, of course, that has a quarrel with its neighbor, thinks that if the United States only would exercise enough initiative, it could make its neighbors behave. It could make everybody else . . .

Q: Behave meaning agree with what it wants.

JOHNSON: Agree with what it . . . That's right.

Q: That influence, lack of influence, also applies not to changing governments in South Vietnam, but influencing the government in power. That is . . .

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Sure. Well . . .

Q: . . . influencing the military policy of the DVN.

JOHNSON: Yes. Well, there's a part of the job. Again, you can do this within parameters. We have been doing it within the parameters in which we can operate, and I think you can see the results. You can tell the government, "You know, you should do a much better job of administering the provinces than you're doing. You ought to get better people out there." All right, where are they going to find the better people? Just saying these things doesn't do it.

Q: Is that what happened to, say, pacification? There just weren't the people and the effort to make the impact?

JOHNSON: That's a part of the problem. Of course, you've had tens of thousands of . . . Well, you have a government that's started with no training or no base for government during the colonial period. It started with virtually nothing in the way of background or experience. Then you've had ten thousands of the people murdered--government officials, village chiefs--that have been murdered throughout the years. And some of the best ones, obviously, were the ones that were murdered.

Q: Those have been targets.

JOHNSON: Those were the targets, of course. And so, your material with which the government had to work was just extremely limited; and no amount of exhortation is going to overcome that.

Q: That's right. Why, in the summer of 1965, did the Taylor-Johnson mission come back? Was there any specific reason? You felt the job had been done, at that point, that you all could do, or was there some policy . . . ?

JOHNSON: Well, it was agreed when we went out that we would go out for a year.

Q: Oh, I see.

JOHNSON: That was the understanding with which we went out. And we felt that--both of us felt--that we'd done about all that we could do in the situation. And it was accepted back here that we'd gone out for a year; and so we came back.

Q: As a man who had been there and been on the scene, did Mr. Johnson talk to you at length, or frequently, about your experiences there, once you returned?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. We, of course, saw him--saw him privately. Each of us saw him privately. We also saw him at NSC meetings. Oh, yes, there was a lot of discussion.

Q: Did he question you closely as to the very minor details, or specific details, trying to master the situation himself? Or was he just generally getting impressions?

JOHNSON: I would say in general, general questions. General questions, general terms, yes.

**WILLIAM N. TURPIN
Vietnam Aid Program
Saigon (1964-1965)**

William Turpin was born in Georgia in 1923 and educated at Dartmouth College, Mercer and Oxford. He entered the Foreign Service in 1949. His career included

posts in Munich, Belgrade, Moscow, the Hague and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: *You then went to Vietnam. Was this voluntarily?*

TURPIN: No. Killen called me – my ex-boss from Belgrade- Jim Killen who had been meanwhile in Pakistan and Korea, called me up in the middle of the night just after we had taken this new, lovely spunket out for few little sailing bits, I remember over the fourth of July weekend. He said “Bill, I have just been put in charge of the aid mission to Vietnam and I need a special assistant on whose personal integrity and professional ability I can absolutely count, will you come?” I said “yes.” My wife proceeded to give me hell afterwards for not consulting. I said “Audrey, there was no question. We did not join the boy scouts and this is what you do.” Well she was ticked off about that and I don’t blame her. She was quite right. She said “you never liked Jim Killen,” which was perfectly true. It wasn’t a question, do I like him or not? If he thinks he needs me, then I better go. But I told Killen on the phone that I didn’t really know where Vietnam was and I certainly didn’t know anything about it. I wanted to come back to Washington and go around with him on his briefings, to which he agreed.

And the only thing that happened during that period of any particular note was a lunch at the CIA after we’d had a session with Mr. McCowen in the morning. And we had William Colby, he was running the far east at the time, and a guy named, I think, Mansfield from the State Department.

Q: *Manheur?*

TURPIN: Yes. Phillip Manheur. That’s right. You’re right.

Q: *Later a prisoner of the Vietcong for a long seven years.*

TURPIN: I didn’t realize that. Anyway, they were talking busses and trams around the cable and I still didn’t know anything. So when they finally got around to asking me for my positions, low carb low salt as you could get. “Do you have any questions?” I said “yes, I’ve got two. I’m sorry but you got to remember I don’t know doodly about Vietnam. What I would like to know is what’s eating the VC and what are they peddling.” And these hotshots looked at each other and said “well that’s a really very good question.” If I’d had any sense I would have refused to go right then and there. If we didn’t know by this time, there was a hell of a poor chance we would ever do anything sensible.

So anyway, couple of years later, as you may remember, a book came out which I must say I have never read, by some CIA type, about basically what was eating the VC and what were they peddling.

Q: *Yes. It was called Victor Charlie, I think.*

TURPIN: You are probably right.

Q: *Yes. I can’t remember. I think it was a USIA officer.*

TURPIN: It may have been. In any case, I went. And did my best. Killen said he wanted me to learn Vietnamese which I worked at quite hard and quite ineffectually. There wasn't much use, and this really kind of bugged me and still does. I think that the State Department has never had sufficient [language expertise]; they've been okay about languages on the whole. They will give you training and it's good training. But they don't keep anybody around long enough in a country to really master the place. Unlike the treasury people.

Q: Yes. This is always a problem. A language officer should put about five years in a place.

TURPIN: At least. What we need is people that start out about third secretaries and go up to ambassador knowing, I don't mean necessarily Finland, but Scandinavia or something. And what [harm] they do when they send these people off to Africa or Southeast Asia. My last assignment, which I didn't take up, was to Bangkok as economic counselor. And I said, "look, I just don't think I'm man enough in my present tender age of 49 or whatever it was at the time to take on a tonal language." And they said, "oh, you don't have to worry. We've got a kid in the economic section who speaks Thai, and, besides, everybody speaks English. I said, "sorry, I can't play that way." And well, I didn't retire when I got the chance to.

Q: Let's turn back to Vietnam. You go there from 64 to 65. What were you doing?

TURPIN: Well, first I was special assistant to Killen. And I don't exactly know what I was doing. A couple of the counter insurgency people wanted me to come up and take charge of I corps. Killen wasn't aware of that. I don't know what good I would have done. Mostly I just sort of tried to find out what was going on, or what we were doing, to the extent one could. And, I went to Killen's meetings and I wrote a memcon. You know, this was in the days when they were changing their governments faster than you could change your shirts.

Q: Sure. Generals were moving in...

TURPIN: Yes. Everybody moving in, moving out. There was a new finance minister who was a pretty bright cookie, I thought. And Killen said, in the course of the conversation, we must put all of our resources on the table. "We" and "our" are systematically ambiguous in English, unambiguous in Vietnamese. You have to translate it into either "we on this side of the table" or "all of us here in this room." I don't know which was used. I couldn't hear what was being said. But whatever was being said, the Vietnamese had absolutely no intention of putting their money [on the table]. They thought our money was the stuff that was to be dealt with and counted on.

Well, I wrote a memorandum to that effect. Killen got furious. And next thing I knew he'd asked the embassy if they would take me on. Yes, they wanted me to come over and run, so he said, provincial reporting. So from about January on, that's what I did. I was told when I got there, don't bother anybody. It's running perfectly well. Just sit there. I sat there, took Vietnamese and went around as much as I could. And they were perfectly happy to get shut of me the following summer.

Q: What was your impression of the reporting that was coming through the post?

TURPIN: I think the stuff from the provinces was good. It was the cables, which everybody read, that...

Q: *These were cables emanating from the embassy to Washington?*

TURPIN: Sure. Sure. Yes, I asked them one time after I got over there, we were busily engaged in operation “many flags” or something of the sort, trying to get everybody’s little brother down there...

Q: *Get the Philipinos and the...*

TURPIN: The Australians, the Koreans. And I said, “do you think this is an inside job or an outside job?” They said “it’s being run out of Hanoi.” I said, “okay, I can give you that.” But here we are about to intervene with troops when, as far as I know, there is only one North Vietnamese army unit in the country, and that’s the mythical whatever it was, tenth division, which kept getting reported from the mountains. But nobody ever saw it, as far as I could see. And meanwhile the VC were killing us quite happily. Then the troops came in and it really did start.

Q: *You were there when the troops came in?*

TURPIN: Yes. Yes. I was in Hue the day Turner gave whatever the over one was called, the destroyers were allegedly fired upon.

Q: *Yes. The Turner Joy, and another one.*

TURPIN: Joy. That’s right. And something else. Yes. Well, I did not see either... In the first place, I did not think that our aid program was doing a damn thing except dispensing largess. I got to a meeting shortly after I got there. They were talking about transportation and they said, “the Vietnamese were completely irrational. They would rather requisition a new jeep than use their own money to buy a new carburetor.” And I said, “well, you may dislike this, but irrational it is not.” That went over like a lead balloon.

And the medical chief was talking to me before he went in to see Killen about something and he said that they had this big hospital which we had built and he wasn’t about to turn over to the Vietnamese because they wouldn’t use American training methods. They insisted on using French ones and they were not good. I said, “well hell, there’s fifty million Frenchmen around. They ain’t all dead. They must do something right.” “Nope. This would be a waste of the American taxpayer’s money.” “What about having that building sit there empty?”

And the exchange guy came in one day and I said – this is all while they were waiting to get in to see the boss – and I said “what are your ex-exchangers doing when they’re back?” He said, “we’ve never had one come back.”

Q: *You mean...*

TURPIN: People we had sent over on exchanges programs for training. They got off the plane in Paris and stayed there. And I asked the education chief, "what was the political content that we were having printed at considerable extent in Manila?" He said, "oh I don't know. You have to ask Ms. Wynn, or something like that. She's responsible for content." I said, "you mean you don't know whether this is supposed to make these kids loyal to Vietnam." "No. We don't know about that." And the head of the agriculture thing told me after church one day, quite distinctly, "the Viet Cong don't bother us because we are just teaching them how to raise grains. We don't care who gets it." Well, by that time I was pretty sure that, as I'd advised Kinnen in my early days, we should not do something- just stand there. But I never got anywhere either.

Q: *Then you sort of left without much optimism about what was going on?*

TURPIN: None. And my next efficiency rating had to do with "Mr. Turpin did not make the best of a bad assignment."

PETER M. CODY
Vietnam Desk, USAID
Washington, DC (1964-1965)

Peter M. Cody was born in France in 1925, graduated from Yale and after service in the United States Navy joined the State Department in 1954. He served in El Salvador, Cambodia, Laos, Paraguay, Ecuador, the Philippines, and Lebanon, as well as in USAID in Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Melbourne Spector in 1991.

Q: *So you came back to Washington to head up the Office of Vietnam Affairs. You were in that how long?*

CODY: It was strange. I was only in that position about eight months, and the reason I left was as bureaucratic a reason as you can get. I left at my choice. When I went to Cambodia, I was an R4, Foreign Service Reserve, fourth grade, which is lower medium level. Through the efforts of Bill Sheppard, I subsequently was promoted very soon to an R3. I had been an R4 for a long time and then for some reason I hadn't been promoted. But I'd only been an R3 for a year and the panel promoted me to an R2. I could never quite figure that out but I didn't object. Then when I moved into the job of deputy, when I was officially made the deputy director, it carried a temporary grade with it of an R1. So in a period of thirteen months, I went from an R4 to an R1. I was pleased.

When I came back to the Office of Vietnam Affairs, I had to revert to my permanent grade, which by then was an R2, but it meant that I lost, including housing, about \$6,000. So I kept saying to my superiors, "Either give me a promotion, upgrade the official position of this job so I can get paid temporarily extra, or there are several people asking me to go back to take jobs where I could again be given my temporary grade of an R1," one of whom was Charlie Mann

had then become director in Laos. He was asking me to come out as his deputy. So bureaucratically it turned out that it was easier to send me to Laos where I'd get back my grade than it was to do whatever they might have done to give me the grade in Washington. I don't know if they knew it at the time, but very shortly after I left that job, they upgraded my office to a bureau, and they weren't about to make me the head of a bureau at that stage. So maybe that had something to do with it, though at the time I left, I didn't know they were going to do so. I was replaced as Office Director by another man, but he was in the job a very short period of time when they upgraded it. I don't know what happened to him. I imagine he just became one of many in that bureau, which I presume would have happened to me.

Q: While you were in the Office of Vietnam Affairs, what kind of priority did it have within the government?

CODY: It had a high and increasing priority. This was just during the period that President Johnson stepped up the effort in Vietnam. The standard phrase in those days -- and people didn't say no to this question, which they did later -- "Are you against the war?" You could just sort of hold that out as a threat. In fact, in those days we still sent people to Vietnam voluntarily. Later we made it, "Either go or leave the agency." At that point theoretically it was voluntary. I had a letter in my desk from LBJ which said, "Anytime that you have someone that you want to send that you think is important that they go to Vietnam, and they don't want to go, call me and I will personally call them."

Q: The president personally?

CODY: He signed the letter.

Q: He probably would have.

CODY: I was always looking for that occasion and it never arose. It almost arose with Don Finberg once, but it didn't arise. [Laughter]

There was a White House task force on which I represented AID, headed up by Michael Forrestal, the son of James Forrestal, and it had Bill Colby on it representing the CIA, then the head of the Far East Bureau for CIA, and a number of military types whose names I don't remember. I used to be amused how Forrestal, who was quite young (when I saw when he died how old he was, he wasn't as young as I thought he was then), but would sort of push these admirals and generals around. It was refreshing. [Laughter]

So we met once a week. When I first went on that panel, actually, Bill Sullivan was the chairman, who was subsequently my ambassador in Laos and in the Philippines. But he left shortly after I arrived. Then at the end of the time, Forrestal left and went back to private industry, a competent fellow named Len Unger took over. He later became ambassador to Thailand and other places as well.

Q: It's interesting you mention Forrestal and Sullivan, because they were both protégées of Ambassador Averell Harriman. Forrestal had been Averell Harriman's personal assistant when

he was the head of the Marshall Plan in Europe, and then, as you know, Sullivan became his aide and he promoted him when Harriman was involved in some kind of negotiation in Geneva. So that's interesting.

CODY: We built up the Vietnam mission in size to about 2,000 direct-hire employees. It had a built-in multiplier factor because there were forty-eight provinces. There were actually forty-nine, but one was an island where they kept prisoners in cages. We didn't have an AID program there. But there were forty-eight provinces where we worked. If we added another public safety advisor in one, we added one in the other forty-seven. As we kept adding people, they were divided into four regions, and this would eventually bump up the regional staffs.

Q: *So you had a headquarters staff in Saigon, regional staffs, then provincial staffs.*

CODY: Yes, there were people in each province. So you had a multiplier effect. When I was there we reached 2,000 direct-hire employees plus contractors. I don't know how many contractors.

Q: *By far the largest mission in the world.*

CODY: Yes, by far the largest mission that AID has ever had and hopefully ever will. Our back-stopping job in Washington involved a number of things; breaking bottlenecks, recruitment, dealing with other agencies, making sure materials arrived, occasionally dealing with public or congress men. On occasions we were involved with policy issues as well; a big variety of issues. One of the things we put a lot of emphasis on was showing that other nations were contributing to the Vietnam effort, no matter how small. I don't know if it was monthly or biweekly. I think it was biweekly, maybe even weekly. We had a list of what every other country in the world was doing to help the Vietnam effort, to show it wasn't just LBJ flexing his muscles. The Vietnam program obviously had high priority, and it didn't surprise me when they made it into a bureau. I had about thirty people working for me as an office, which at the time I thought was rather excessive, but the bureau reached 200. I think everybody fell all over each other. The trouble is that you get an organization like that and they start writing memos to each other and they start carving out turfs and having arguments about it and so forth. Even my thirty people included a few people who I thought were unproductive, so I put them over in offices and gave them nothing to do. I couldn't get rid of them. It was called the "old goats pen". As I say, I left when I was offered a job in Laos to be Charlie Mann's deputy.

RAY E. JONES
Embassy and Staffing Protocol Officer
Saigon (1964-1965)

Ray E. Jones attended the Lafayette Business College. After a year in Washington working for the Department of Interior, he entered the army. His court reporting work took him overseas in 1945. In 1946, he went to Berlin with the Department of the Army. He has also served in South Korea, Germany, Switzerland, Austria,

Liberia, the Netherlands, Sudan, and China. He was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan on August 23, 1994.

Q: You certainly added to it in subsequent posts. Two years in Vienna and then came another direct change.

JONES: I was due for home leave and at that time, there was a new team getting ready to go to Saigon. The Ambassador was General Maxwell Taylor, and the DCM was Career Ambassador, was U. Alexis Johnson.

Q: And did they ask you to go along with them?

JONES: And General Taylor, out of my files from the State Department chose me to come to Saigon.

Q: I presume you'd not known him in Berlin because he had arrived in Berlin in 1950?

JONES: I knew him vaguely but not well.

Q: Did he regard himself as successful in Saigon, one of the most difficult missions in the world at that time?

JONES: Well, General Taylor is a very astute general, but he could irritate the Vietnamese, I mean lecturing to them and things like that. His assignment there was for one year only. And I must say of all my post, I would say Saigon was one of the most exciting that I had. We went through four or five coups d'etat and it was just work, work, work, almost as events proved all the hard work was for nothing.

Q: And you were there during the beginning of the great American build-up, were you not?

JONES: The great American build-up. We came out to replace General Harkins I think it was with (Westie) General William Westmoreland. I had very close relations with him. A lot of times on Sunday he would call me up and say: "I'm going out on a little field trip. Would you like to go with me?"

Q: Was this General Westmoreland? It was very kind of him.

JONES: Yes, General Westmoreland. Of course, he was a protégé of Maxwell Taylor. When he was at West Point, he was the number one cadet and that impressed General Taylor who at that time was the Commandant at West Point. Westie was kind of his protégé.

Q: What was the atmosphere you found in Saigon among the Vietnamese? Were they delighted we were there? Were they sullen? Were they helpful?

JONES: Not too helpful, Tom. We always thought they didn't pull their weight.

Q: Tell me about the arrangement at the Embassy where you had two seniors such as General Taylor and Ambassador Johnson. Did Taylor leave the running of the Embassy to Johnson? Did they get into each other's way?

JONES: No. I believe he and Johnson attended maybe Chinese training together, so they were great friends, and Taylor was the one to help Johnson to come to Vietnam. He chose him as his DCM.

Q: Was the Embassy in agreement with ... Policy in Washington was promulgated in Washington or were there differences?

JONES: No. I don't believe so. There were no differences.

Q: We saw the situation. Both ends were about the same. Why did General Taylor leave there after a year?

JONES: It was agreed between him and President Johnson that he would take the assignment for one year only.

Q: I see. Did you feel yourself in any personal danger out there?

JONES: No. Not whatsoever.

Q: Not even on your trips with General Westmoreland?

JONES: No, although one night during my period there we had several bombs. The Embassy was bombed but I was back in the States on a trip with General Taylor when the Embassy was blown up and there were quite a few casualties.

DAVID G. NES
Deputy Chief of Mission
Saigon (1964-1965)

David G. Nes was born in York, Pennsylvania in 1917. He graduated from Princeton University with an A.B. degree in History in 1939. Mr. Nes was appointed as a Foreign Service Officer in 1946. His overseas career included posts in France, Scotland, Libya, Morocco, Vietnam, and Egypt. He retired with a Superior Honor Award in 1968. Mr. Nes was interviewed by Dayton Mak in 1992.

Q: From then on, you were plunged into Saigon where you were DCM with the personal rank of Minister. You had a few other assignments as well. Particularly with reference to Saigon and what came later, what was the situation in Saigon when you were there and who was your Ambassador?

NES: Perhaps I could begin by regaling you with how I was assigned to Saigon in the first place. I was just finishing up in December the IDC course in London when I got a telephone call to report back to Washington immediately. I explained that the course wasn't over and that I was in the middle of preparing a British defense budget, but that didn't seem to cut any ice. So I got on a plane the next morning and flew back.

I was called up to the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs for an appointment with Roger Hilsman, the Assistant Secretary. Roger said, "What would you think about going out to Saigon as Cabot Lodge's deputy?" I expressed some surprise and said, "How has this come about?" He said, "Well, you may recall that when you were in Libya, Cabot Lodge came over there as our UN Ambassador for a visit and you offered him a choice between coming to the Embassy for all sorts of activities, ceremonies, cocktail parties, etc., or taking the Ambassador's car and going out to the Rome ruins at Sabratha and watching the sun set. [I recommended the latter, which Ambassador Lodge accepted.] When the problem of replacement of our current DCM in Saigon arose, we asked the Ambassador if he had any preference. We offered him three names and he apparently selected Nes because of his Libyan experience."

Q: What was the status of our involvement at that point in Saigon? What was the situation on the ground with regard to both the French and the US and the Vietnamese?

NES: By the time I arrived, we had some 25,000 so-called advisers on the ground out to battalion level in the Vietnamese army for training and advisory functions. The activities of the communist forces in the South, known as Viet Cong, were obviously increasing day by day, both in taking over villages, particularly in the Delta, but also in a tremendous propaganda effort. It was very clear that the control and supply of these Viet Cong forces came directly from Hanoi. We were able to intercept the radio and ground communications to a certain extent. The heart and mind of the whole operation in South Vietnam centered in Hanoi which meant that it was very hard to get at.

Shortly after my arrival, General Westmoreland arrived to take over command. We got along very well. I traveled with him by helicopter and light plane into every provincial capital in South Vietnam which gave me a pretty good bird's eye view of the situation. It seemed very clear to most of us that the tentacles of the communist effort in the South extended so far into the villages in the countryside that it would be very difficult, if not virtually impossible, to rout them out without going into the heart and brains of the operation in Hanoi, which, of course, would have meant the occupation of North Vietnam as we had occupied Germany and Japan and which was politically unthinkable back home in the United States, or in fact in the Western world.

General Westmoreland, I think, was still hopeful that the effort we were engaged in in the South could prevail, but I am not sure he was that optimistic. He told me at one point, if he had the number of troops that were bogged down in the South and could use them for the occupation of the North, we would suffer far fewer casualties than we are suffering now.

During my brief tenure, we did begin to build up forces. First of all providing direct air support to the Vietnamese, secondly, naval support off the coast. But by the time of my departure we hadn't yet introduced any active combat units. These were to come very briefly thereafter in

tremendous numbers as we all know. But I would say that at the end of my short time there was not too much optimism that we could achieve our objective, which was very simply preserving a non- communist South Vietnam. We could not achieve that objective without in effect going after the North directly. My departure from Saigon was sudden and unexpected. With no warning. Ambassador Lodge departed to run in the 1964 Presidential elections. General Taylor was appointed as Ambassador and chose career Ambassador Johnson as his deputy, and so I was "trumped" out of a job.

RICHARD J. DOLS
Intelligence Analyst, Vietnamese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1964-1966)

Richard J. Dols was born in Minnesota in 1932. He joined the Foreign Service in 1961 and served in France, Canada, Swaziland, New Zealand, and Washington, DC. He was in the Intelligence and Research Bureau (1964-1966) dealing with Vietnam. He was interviewed in 1992 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Then you moved to INR from 1964-66. What were you doing there?

DOLS: Two things there. I did Soviet-Vietnamese relations during the Vietnam War.

Q: That was a very interesting period, wasn't it?

DOLS: It was indeed.

Q: That was when we were really beginning to get engaged.

DOLS: It was. We were, for example, busy watching the building of the SA3 (surface to air missile) site in the Hanoi area. We knew who was involved in building them. The problem was that one of the unwritten rules of the Cold War was that Americans and Soviets don't kill each other. You only kill surrogates. What do you do? Do you hit those sites now before they are operational or do you wait? If you wait or even if you hit them now you are going to kill Soviets. What do you do? The intelligence community and other military planners were in a quandary. How far do we go? We were very hesitant after being burned in Korea with the Chinese intervention. We didn't want to push anything too hard, too far.

Well, one Saturday in the summer I recall getting a call to come in. There had been a shootdown. Two F-4s were flying over the valley and the pilot had seen a flashing pole of light come up and hit the wing. Of course it was an SA3. That was the first time the North Vietnamese and their friends fired. So now it was a real question of what we should do. We pondered about 24 hours and then came to a very common sensible solution. We just pretend we don't know there are any Soviets there. We just say we are hitting the North Vietnamese positions in retaliation for the strike on our aircraft. And that was what we did. Thereafter, of course, things escalated considerably.

Q: What was the feeling that you got at that time about our involvement in Vietnam?

DOLS: My own personal feeling?

Q: Yes, but at the time.

DOLS: At the time, our rhetoric on the subject was basically that we were stemming the tide of aggression, etc. The other side can call it a civil war, but we had the right to intervene even if it was. We, of course, had our own strategic interests in that part of the world which would be adversely affected if the South fell. So, at least in the early days it seemed a very worthy cause. I think upon reflection we very quickly realized that the cost of it was not going to be commensurate with the rewards of any kind of happy outcome. In fact, the military which earlier had argued before the Johnson decision to intervene and go beyond the 15,000 Kennedy advisers, had staunchly held to the old axiom that you can't win a war on the Asian mainland.

They were right. They were especially right in this situation where the enemy had a protected line of supply practically down to the south part of South Vietnam. It was an unwinnable war and the military was right, but once they got gung-hoed in they went the other way.

We had a lot of problems with the gung-hoiness because they then got carried away in the other direction. For instance, for the Christmas peace negotiations, about '65 or '66, we put on a big campaign to get some peace negotiations going. We had delegations going all over the world to various capitals. What does the military PR apparatus do but announce on the 24th of December some horrible atrocities by the VCs. We said, "Guys you knew those things happened a long time back, but you held them until December 24 in the midst of our attempts to get talks going, can't you be a little more helpful than that?"

So we had a swing first seeing it in our strategic national interest and then having the internal problems that goes from "you can't win there, stay out" to "let's go all the way." We were moderators in the process.

Q: There wasn't any strong dissident group within...just the people like yourselves thinking this was a controllable problem...

DOLS: It wasn't until about two years later and then, you remember, we had the demonstrations about the time of the Cambodian bombing by a number of FSOs outside the Department. One from my class, in fact.

Q: This would be around '70 or something like that.

DOLS: Well, I think it was '68 when we started Cambodia. It was after my time at INR.

There were no dissents really among the officers working on it. Our only problems were excessive gung-hoiness by the military or whatever.

JAMES F. LEONARD
Intelligence Analyst, Far East Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1964-1966)

James F. Leonard was born in Pennsylvania in 1920. He graduated from Princeton University with a bachelor of science degree. He was in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946. He entered the Foreign Service in 1948 and served in Taiwan, France, Russia, Syria. Mr. Leonard was interviewed by Warren Unna in 1993.

LEONARD: My first assignment was on the China desk, or whatever it was of INR. Then during the time I was in INR, I guess three years, '64 to '66, almost three years, two and a half anyway, I moved from China, to focus pretty much on Vietnam. During that period we were engaging in the escalation in Vietnam and we had a whole series of intelligence estimates on what would be the consequences of various US actions. I was often, not always but often, the State Department representative in those meetings over in CIA where these intelligence estimates would be turned out saying: "Suppose we bomb, suppose we do this, suppose we do that? What will be the consequences?"

Q: Well now, there has been great dispute about the US was informed by its professionals and how much of that information was ignored. So you had a chance to see it coming in and ...

LEONARD: By professionals you mean people in the field?

Q: Coming in and the CIA, and the State Department intelligence people. I guess what I'm driving at is you saw the hard memos. Did they reflect what actually we now know was happening there or not?

LEONARD: I think so. There was from the Tonkin Gulf onward, a tone, an outlook in the State Department, from Mr. Rusk, not including of course George Ball, but then very much including most of the other seventh floor principals as they were called, and Bill Bundy who was the Assistant Secretary for East Asia, a feeling that the war could be won if we just plugged away at it and kept doing what we were doing but did it better. The estimates that we in INR were doing, were ambiguous on that. It was hardly a cheering section for our policy, but it was not anything like a bugle call to lay off, to cut it off. The only bugle calls like that that I am aware of were issued by Bill Trueheart when he was the number two in Saigon and became convinced that there was no hope ... You know the sad story of the Trueheart/Nolting relationship?

Q: I saw both of them out there, but ...

LEONARD: Well, Nolting was the Ambassador and Trueheart was his deputy. They had been together at NATO where Nolting had been the number two. Trueheart had been his deputy and they went together to Vietnam. They were very close friends. Then they had a basic difference. This was in the period of (Ngo Dinh Diem). The difference was over whether Diem could make it. Nolting went away at one period on home leave and Trueheart sent in a famous cable which

said basically: "Diem has got to go." "We cannot possibly win; the whole thing will go down the tube if he doesn't go, and probably will go down the tube anyway." Nolting found out about this and rushed back to Washington to try to change things, but by that time that Kennedy and others had begun to think that some reexamination of our policy there was very important. This led , just how directly is a very complex matter which I'm not an expert on, to the overthrow of Diem. Both Nolting and Trueheart eventually left and we got a new team in.

Q: Was the US informed that there was going to be a coup against Diem and looked the other way, because some people said that the US was very much immediately involved in it, in the overthrow of Diem ...?

LEONARD: I don't think that anybody said to the plotters: "Go get him, get rid of him, and we'll be behind you." What it seemed to me may have happened is that there was a failure to say: "At all costs, protect him." But I have read some other memoirs on this period which are much more detailed, specific, and knowledgeable than anything that's in my head. I just think my own thoughts on that ... I was in Taiwan when it happened. I'm simply not a good source for what really took place at the time of the overthrow. What was more important in a way was that after that you got a series of Ambassadors. Alexis Johnson and General Taylor, etc., who basically were in support of the policy, what you could call the McNamara/Rostow policy, and I have to say it looked as if it had Kennedy's support as well, although people swear that if he had lived he would have changed it. It certainly had Johnson's support to see the thing through and not buckle under the pressure. It was at that time that I came into the Department and saw what was I think an uncritical acceptance of our Vietnam policies, except in INR. In INR, attitudes were more skeptical, though not bluntly hostile.

Q: I want to ask you now ... You mentioned the gulf of Tonkin earlier. The gulf of Tonkin resolution. You in INR would be getting the cables on what we assume had happened there.

LEONARD: We would, although I was not in Washington quite yet. I came between the first gulf of Tonkin and the second gulf of Tonkin incidents. There were two of them. The one in August, I had not arrived. I think I may have mentioned this to you earlier, when I arrived I was curious about it, because it to me had seemed like such an extraordinarily inexplicable and stupid action on the part of the North Vietnamese to have attacked our ships and brought down this escalation on themselves. So I went back and looked at the classified material, and my conclusion from that was that you couldn't say that it hadn't happened, but also you sure could not and should not have said that it really did happen. Maybe there was other information that I never saw, but in fact I don't think there was, and it's all been researched and written up very thoroughly.

Q: So you raised your scepticism on that?

LEONARD: Yes, I indicated I was rather skeptical about this and I was told by my boss: "Well, keep your scepticism to yourself."

Q: This is the boss in INR?

LEONARD: This is past history, yes.

Q: *I see. Now then, you were there for the second ...?*

LEONARD: I was there for the second, and we had, in effect, what looked to me like a replay of it. This time I was in a position to say: "I think we ought to have some reservations in anything we write about just what it is that happened here, because it is a very unclear sequence of events." And in fact, INR did write it up that way, and as far as I know, the second gulf of Tonkin incident, although the right wing used it, you know the hawks, used it for their purposes, I don't think it served quite the same way as the first did.

PHILIP R. MAYHEW
Advisor, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
Saigon (1964-1966)

Philip R. Mayhew was born in California in 1934. He graduated from Princeton University in 1956 and served in the Marine Corps from 1957 to 1959. He entered the Foreign Service in 1961 and his overseas posts included Laos, Congo, Vietnam, Thailand, and Jordan. In addition, he served in various positions at the State Department in Washington, DC. He was interviewed on May 26, 1995 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: *Did you go back to the Department for a while from Stanleyville?*

MAYHEW: No. It was a direct transfer. I was still on loan to USIS having done only 7 months of my 2-year tour. In Vietnam USIS started something called, at that time, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), later changed to other names.

At any rate, in looking back at the African experience, you can see that we had too many people there trying to do things which were really totally irrelevant to a largely tribal situation. I suppose, in the longer run, you could say that US policy there was more or less successful since the Congo never went, even ostensibly, Marxist. But the actual government that the Congolese had was about on a par with Congo-Brazzaville across the river which was Marxist. Both of them were dictatorships and almost without any redeeming economic benefits for the population.

Q: *When you arrived, you got to Saigon again, it's still '64, what was your job?*

MAYHEW: I became part of JUSPAO as an advisor to the Vietnamese civilian government's information service and to Vietnamese Army S-5 Psychological War efforts. They had representatives of this office at Corps level, it was now decided to break that down to division level.

Q: *The IV Corps, I Corps.*

MAYHEW: One for each Corps. Now there was going to be 8 or 9, I think, and I was going to have the IXth division area.

Q: *Which is where?*

MAYHEW: Which is down in the Delta, it included 6 provinces in the central delta.

Q: *S-5s being the...?*

MAYHEW: S-5s being the military psychological warfare branch. Each province had a set of US military province advisors. So we worked with a US military officer advising the Vietnamese S-5s. Each province also had a Vietnamese civilian information officer which we also advised. Our job was to carry on information and psychological warfare.

I had funds with which I could support various activities. We worked with Vietnamese information service and with military S-5s, Vietnamese and American on almost any kind of project that was thought useful. For instance, in Khien Phong province, a good deal of which is watery and practically every village is on a canal, I funded a showboat. It was a boat which was run by the Vietnamese Information Service with a team on it of actors, actresses, singers, and so on which did psychological warfare kinds of entertainment. I think it was probably the only showboat in Vietnam.

It was an idea thought up by one of the American military S-5 advisers who was a dedicated, hardworking, very creative guy. He thought up the idea and got the Vietnamese Information Service to go for it, and I funded a lot of it. We funded posters for poster campaigns, we funded leaflets to be dropped over VC areas, loudspeaker programs, information sheets of all kinds, even some newspaper-like publications. Anything having to do with the media, we could fund if it seemed like a good idea.

We created a Returnee Program, for VC the government was trying to get back. We funded a little booklet with pictures and very little writing -- showing how to come back, how you were reeducated if you'd come back, allowed to go back to your family and all that. At the end of the book it said, come back with this book and you won't have any problems. We had people come in with the book. Whether it warranted its investment, however, is difficult to say.

Q: *In the first place, what was the situation -- military, politically, and all in the area you were in?*

MAYHEW: In the area I was, there were a few districts that were almost totally VC controlled and you really could not go in except to outposts by helicopter. You probably wouldn't choose to spend overnight, if you didn't have to. I think every place that I dealt with, all the district capitals of all of these provinces, you could drop in on by helicopter safely enough. But at night many of these places were just outposts that the government was hanging on to.

On the other hand, Angiang province, which was controlled by the Hoa Hao religious sect, was virtually free of communists. It was almost totally safe. The rest of them varied from Khien

Phong, which was bad, to Vien Leng and Sa Dec, which were not bad at all, except in the remoter places.

There were a number of roads which were considered unsafe in the daytime and generally untraveled at night. Vinh Binh, which was one of my provinces, which faced the South China Sea, was rather bad from a security point of view. The only real road was the highway that went from Vinh Leng, where I lived, to the province capital. It was normally safe in the daytime, but David Engel, who was one of the provincial reporters for the embassy, was using my vehicle and a huge mine was set off in front of it. He and his driver ended up with all the glass from the windshield in their face, but they managed to control the car and go around the hole, which was about 10 feet across and 2-3 feet deep. They could have been killed.

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

MAYHEW: I consider the Vietnamese difficult to deal with in the best of times. As personalities, it seems to me, they are clever and sensitive but xenophobic, back-biting, rather unpleasant people to deal with. I did not have a great deal of difficulty working with them because, after all, I was handing out money, substantial amounts of money. I was helping them do their jobs, but at the same time pushing them to do things I thought advisable and it can't have been easy for them to have me intervening. They tended to have the long Mandarin fingernail, clearly did not move out of their office very much, clearly were accustomed to giving orders and waiting for them. They were not accustomed to what we think of as public relations. One might think they could look good if they and we put some kind of program together that gave them something to tell their bosses they were doing. However, this was too alien to their bureaucratic culture.

Q: What about JUSPAO? Who was running it at that time?

MAYHEW: Barry Zorthian.

Q: I assume you would go up there from time to time.

MAYHEW: Yes, and Zorthian came down to see me from time to time.

Q: What was the spirit of the time?

MAYHEW: USIS was a very big place when it had JUSPAO. The field reps were different from what everybody else was doing. Probably different than most things USIS people have done in the past. We didn't have a lot in common with people in Saigon. But I recall that we thought we were doing important work, that the war was to a large extent psychological. Perhaps everyone in the field thought the war was being managed wrongly.

It seems to me that the Phoenix program had begun when I was there. There was a local CIA guy that we'd see a lot of. But that was out of my purview, and they were not about to tell me anything about it. I had varying relationships with the US military province senior advisors. Some were very shrewd fellows, some were not, some were easy to work with, some weren't so

easy. But the ones who weren't so easy sometimes had S-5 advisors who were fairly good. In that case I could just deal with these S-5 advisors.

The S-5 advisors were usually infantry or artillery and trained to fight wars; doing psychological warfare was something of a change for them. But they figured that was their job and they'd go along with the program. One or two were aware of French experience in Indochina and Algeria and were really very interested in the subject and dedicated.

Q: When you left there in '66, what was your feeling about whither Vietnam?

MAYHEW: I think most of us, who were at that time quite junior, felt that this thing could be won, but we weren't doing it the right way. For instance, Mr. McNamara felt that he never got the information that he should have. Well, if he had asked the questions of most people in the field, including his own military, candidly, he would have gotten some candid answers.

There certainly were plenty of people in the field who doubted that we could win the way we were going. In retrospect, whether the South Vietnamese could have won it any way, is hard to say. But trying not to use hindsight, I think certainly many of us felt, I felt anyway, that the war could be won. But you had to do a lot of things differently than they were then doing them. There had to be much more concentration on local development, much better Vietnamese military efforts, much more local autonomy. You had to have people who were dedicated to winning the war.

I'm certain I would have subscribed, for instance, to John Paul Vann's ideas.

Q: You left there in 1966.

MAYHEW: Yes. I spent the last few months in Saigon, working for a general who was deputy to Barry Zorthian for field operations. That was only three months, then I went back to Washington.

Q: Those three months that you were in, sort of Zorthian's thing, how did that appear? Was it sort of a never-never land?

MAYHEW: I was never involved with press relations and what we told the press, which seemed to be the controversial area. I think a lot of people were knocking themselves out, trying to do the right thing. But a lot of it was, in retrospect, punching the air. By that time I think the American establishment had become so huge, and so many enterprises of all kinds were going on, that coordination probably was extremely difficult. I'm sure it must have been in USIS, in JUSPAO. They had made a decision to go even further toward increasing the size of JUSPAO. In fact, I think toward the end, they even divided my territory. But eventually, of course, they got one of these JUSPAO kind of advisors under whatever organ it was, CORDS by then perhaps, in every province.

CLAYTON E. MCMANAWAY, JR.

**Program Officer, USAID
Saigon (1964-1965)**

**Vietnam Program
Washington, DC (1965)**

**Pacification Program Officer, USAID
Saigon (1965-196?)**

**Defense Department, MACV
Saigon (196?-1970)**

Clayton E. McManaway, Jr. was born in North Carolina. He graduated from the University of South Carolina and served in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps. He served in Phnom Penh and Saigon, and as Ambassador to Haiti.

Q: When you left Cambodia did you go to Saigon?

McMANAWAY: Yes, for a while..

Q: This was shortly after the death of Diem in October 1963 and you had the October coup and the beginning of the revolving governments and military groups. Were you getting any feel for how the people felt about the situation.

McMANAWAY: We were very isolated there. We were tucked away in one corner of the AID mission and AID missions are pretty well isolated from what is going on at the embassy. So we were even further away from that and pretty much stuck to ourselves. We could sense that there was a good deal of frustration about what was going on and a lot of impatience with these repeated coups and demi-coups.

Q: You were there for how long?

McMANAWAY: I don't remember whether we were there for six months. We had what was then called the commodity import program going on in Cambodia when we shut it down. The commodity import program was easy to run but very complicated to shut down because you had orders all over the place and you had goods and things [in ships] on the high seas and didn't know where they were. There was no system for tracking those things. We were trying to turn ships around and it took a long time to shut the thing down and finally close out the books. I made several trips back over to Phnom Penh. I was there when the embassy was stoned which was another interesting experience.

Q: What happened at the embassy?

McMANAWAY: It was an organized demonstration which turned violent. No one was hurt, everybody was inside. I just barely made it inside before everything erupted. Some cars were turned over and burned, they threw stones through windows and things like that. There was one

rickety old elevator in the embassy which was the old French kind being open except for an accordion type metal door. I had gone up to the top floor so that I could see better what was going on. Then word came for everybody to congregate on the second floor. I got in this elevator and you couldn't stop it. It came down [to the main floor] and right in front of the elevator was a window. Well, I hid there. There were three or four Cambodian fellows outside tearing up a car and they saw me and started throwing things in an attempt to hit me. They didn't succeed but did get things into the elevator. They finally got in on the first floor but the Marines blocked up entrances and they couldn't get any further. It was over after a few hours.

Q: Then you went back to Washington?

McMANAWAY: Yes, and was assigned to the Vietnam Desk.

Q: When you say the Vietnam Desk was this State Department or AID?

McMANAWAY: It was AID.

Q: What was your impression of AID's Vietnam program looking at it from its headquarters?

McMANAWAY: My impression was that it was largely a logistics operation, moving things out to Vietnam. And it was obviously growing by leaps and bounds.

Q: This was just before we started to really get involved.

McMANAWAY: Yes. The fellow who was just above the Desk Officer, whose name was Stoneman, I think, was a good logistician, but that basically was all he understood. So I couldn't see much coherence in what we were doing. Later on, once I went out to Vietnam, I was one of the leaders that finally got us away from this awful business of winning the hearts and minds of...of this terribly naive notion that you can build a school or hospital and win the hearts and...I hate that phrase to this day because it really kept us from really realizing what was at stake there for quite a long time and I think really lost the war for us.

We finally developed the pacification program, which I became involved in, both from within AID and then later when we went through the two reorganizations when Komer came out and got the civilians organized so we could put it into the military organization. It took us a long time to turn around from this thinking and realize that what we had to do was to provide people with a stake in the society and economy and local community that they wanted to protect. A stake that was important to them, not winning their hearts and minds which was nonsense.

Q: When you say winning hearts and minds, how does one win hearts and minds in the mind-set of the 1960s when you were back in Washington?

McMANAWAY: The theory was that you gave them better seeds for their plantings, better schools, better medical services, etc. This would, without regard to what was threatening them, somehow gain you their allegiance. Instead of starting with the notion that what you have to do is develop first of all local security and then they need to have a stake politically in their local

government. And they need to have an economic stake. You do that by connecting them up with markets and with roads, etc. So, it took us a long time, but we finally got it turned around. Actually, one of the things you will find out later is that I think we won the war and that is why the [Viet Cong] ultimately faded away.

Q: The mainline armies...

McMANAWAY: Turned over everything they had. But we won the guerilla war finally. It took us a lot longer because we didn't understand it. West Point never understood it, Abrams did.

Q: That was also helped by the Tet offensive which knocked the hell out of the Viet Cong.

McMANAWAY: Yes, decimated it.

Q: Did you volunteer to go back to CORDS [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support]?

McMANAWAY: Well, CORDS didn't exist when I went back. I was asked by a fellow who I had a lot of respect for, Roy Wehrle, who was a real star in AID at the time. He was a young man rising...

Q: Is he still around?

McMANAWAY: No, he years ago went back to academia out in Illinois. Everything was inflated in Vietnam in terms of titles. The mission was huge by this time. He was the assistant director for plans and something or other. He was number three in the mission. He was back on consultation and asked me to come out and join his program office and deal with local finance and currency matters, classification, etc. And I did.

Q: This was 1965?

McMANAWAY: Yes.

Q: Were you in Saigon?

McMANAWAY: Yes.

Q: What were the main things you were working on at that time?

McMANAWAY: I was working on pacification. We were torn with a lot of different ideas about how to bring security to the countryside and how to win the hearts and minds. One of the things we were looking at was how could you bypass the province chiefs and get straight to the village chief with money for self-help projects, that is what we called them then.

I set up a special fund which was jointly administered. It was financed from counterpart funds and required sign-off by the U.S. ambassador and the [South Vietnamese] Prime Minister. I

designed this thing and worked it all the way through the bureaucracy and sent the letter over to the embassy to go to the ambassador. Peter Tarnoff was the ambassador's special assistant. I got a call from Peter and he said, "Did you write this?" And I said, "Yes." It was about a three page letter, I was still learning how to write. He said, "The Ambassador wanted to meet whoever wrote this and you are not to tell anybody. Don't tell Charles Mann." The ambassador was Lodge and he couldn't stand Charles Mann, who was the director. Charles Mann was an Austrian who had worked his way up from being a clerk in Paris after the war in the original aid program.

Q: That was before the original Marshall Plan, ICA [International Cooperation Agency] or something like that.

McMANAWAY: He had worked his all the way up to be a mission director. But Lodge couldn't understand him and wasn't about to acknowledge to Mann that he couldn't understand this letter. I was pretty scared. Here I was still a junior officer going over to meet the ambassador alone without telling the director. So I went over there and it was a fascinating experience. I sat in front of Lodge's desk and he said, "Who wrote this awful thing?" I said, "I did." He said, "Well, tell me what you are trying to say." And I told him. He said, "All right, you let me know if I say this wrong." He reached behind him and got his dictaphone and dictated a one page letter which was just beautiful. He said everything I had tried to say. I learned an awful lot from that few minutes. Lodge had a lot of faults but not being able to write was not one of them. Anyway, it went off.

Q: Were you getting any input from the field about your attempts to get down to the village chief?

McMANAWAY: Yes, we got some. We would have meetings with people from the field. But at that time, and one of the reasons we finally had to reorganize, we had too many people in the field, too many agencies had people in the field. Later on when we were looking at how we should reorganize, I drew up an overhead slide thing which showed all these lines going out from Saigon to the field and it was a nightmare. That was when initially the Office of Civil Operations was set up, which got all the civilian agencies together under one chain of command. And then Komer moved it into MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] and that is when it became CORDS.

Q: You were at the AID office as a fairly junior officer, what was their impression of Lodge and his direction?

McMANAWAY: There again, we were pretty well occupied with what we were doing. We thought Lodge was sort of a lazy guy, not very energetic. One had this sense of sort of a caretaker approach to things. Not a lot of initiative coming from him. But I was beginning to rise up by then. I was promoted fairly rapidly in Vietnam because they had temporary promotions which was one of the incentives to get people there. Increasingly I was asked to take on more and more responsibility and I negotiated my way up. I said, "Well, if you are going to give me all this responsibility..." I reached the FS-01 pay grade, which in those days was as high as you could go when I was 35 or 36. I was negotiating with the Vietnamese budget office on how the local currency was to be used, the entire budget. Later, when I moved over to CORDS we succeeded in taking all that money away from AID. That was one of the reasons I was no longer very popular in AID. We took all the local currency away from AID and put it into the pacification program.

Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese bureaucracy at this time?

McMANAWAY: You really had to push them to be responsive to the people of the countryside. You basically had Saigon and the rest of Vietnam, which is not uncommon. In terms of their competence, the Vietnamese are very competent people and very bright. I always thought they were too bright for their own good. They were complicated people. My counterpart, who wasn't really my counterpart, I was dealing over my head with this fellow at the budget office, was highly capable and knowledgeable, but had been there too long. He had been doing the same job for much too long and was quite rigid and you really had to fight with him to get any change. In fact I think he opposed this submission that I finally got through.

Q: Was part of the reason for the initiative that the feeling was that if you didn't have a proscribed procedure to get funds down to the village chief they would be sidetracked by the district and province people?

McMANAWAY: Yes, they would never get there.

Q: Did you have any feel for the role in the CIA there?

McMANAWAY: I was probably was pretty naive about it at that point in my career. I didn't know much about it. It was a huge mission and a big joke because they all drove Toyotas. Some procurement officer went out and got the low bid and bought all the same car.

Q: And they all had Hmong guards in front of their place, who were a distinctive racial type so if you saw these guards in front of a house you knew it was CIA.

McMANAWAY: I didn't know very much about what they were doing. We were working extremely long hours and didn't have time to sit around and ponder what other people were doing.

Q: What was the Office of Civil Operations?

McMANAWAY: This developed out of a meeting that took place, I believe in Hawaii, [President] Johnson had with Westmoreland. Komer had been coming out on visits and I had met him. It was decided to send Komer to Saigon. He was a very forceful man.

Q: He was known as the blowtorch or something like that.

McMANAWAY: Johnson had decided to send him out there to get the pacification program going and told Komer that he and Westmoreland was to work it out. So Komer, I think very wisely, realized that he first had to get the civilians organized, which became the Office of Civil Operations and very shortly after that it was moved in as an integral part of MACV and Komer became a deputy to Westmoreland. We worked right through the military organization. Our head was assistant chief of staff for CORDS.

Q: How did AID take this?

McMANAWAY: Badly.

Q: Were sizeable chunks of the AID organization being taken out and put into CORDS?

McMANAWAY: In Saigon they were being taken out and the chain of command was shifted so that the AID people in the field were reporting back not to the AID mission in Saigon but the Office of Civil Operation. Komer asked me to come over with it and I headed up the plans and program office. No one else wanted to do it. A lot of AID people were afraid to do this. They saw this as something...which I think in the end they were right...a lot of people in AID suffered for having served in Vietnam, which was an outrage later on, several years later. I would have, too, but I left. I think I definitely would have because all they were going to offer me was to run the Vietnamese Desk when I got back. I wasn't about to do that. I got an offer from the Defense Department and left AID.

I went over and convinced some people who had been working with me to come with me. Others didn't. Some refused, it was not a requirement. It was not a large office at the beginning, but it was the beginning of this shift of command of all these people in the field. Ultimately we had people down to the district level. When we moved into MACV we integrated everything.

Q: MACV stood for Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

McMANAWAY: We moved right in and became an integral part. The interesting thing about that was once we got inside the elephant we never lost another policy fight. We couldn't win one on the outside. We argued, for example, over how many popular forces there should be, how many regional forces there should be.

Q: These were basically small militia groups at the lower levels.

McMANAWAY: In theory and principle the popular forces were to be under the village chief's command and the regional forces under the district chief's command or in some cases province chief. These are not the full army units. And we couldn't get any attention to this from the U.S. military. The U.S. military, of course, were the ones who were negotiating with the Vietnamese on force levels and that sort of thing. So we couldn't get an increase. Once we got in, of course Tet had an influence on this, too, a lot of things happened that year of a very positive nature. They mobilized, for one thing. I think the first time the Vietnamese mobilized was after the Tet offensive. They didn't have a government which had the political strength to do it before that.

Q: Tet was in January, 1968?

McMANAWAY: There were three offensives. There was one in February, one in May and one in August. Each one of descending violence. But once we became a part of MACV and were able to put our points forward in their system, I don't think we ever lost another policy decision.

Q: How was the coordination with the military?

McMANAWAY: Well, CORDS was a combined civil/military organization.

Q: Did you have military officers assigned to CORDS?

McMANAWAY: Yes, I had a colonel for a deputy.

Q: How did this work? Were there differences in viewpoint?

McMANAWAY: There were differences but it worked quite well. I was in charge of plans and programs and evaluations. I had a colonel under me. Our top guy who reported technically through the chief of staff to Komer was a civilian and his deputy was a brigadier general. We sort of layered it that way throughout the organization and it worked quite well.

Q: What was your impression of the reports you were getting from the field? Let's say pre-Tet. Was this part of your responsibility to get reports and get an idea of how things were happening?

McMANAWAY: It was not my responsibility but I used them, of course. We had an evaluation unit that went out. Craig Johnstone headed it up. Our impression was that there were a lot more Viet Cong out there than the military was reporting and that Westmoreland wanted to believe. But we were just as surprised by Tet as anyone else. We were not unaware of the weaknesses of the reporting system and that is why we had this evaluation unit to travel all over the country. And I traveled all over the country. And traveled even more after Tet. Before Tet we didn't have a counterpart organization on the Vietnamese side. It was only after Tet that we got them set up as a counterpart organization. Before Tet we would send out instructions to our province advisor and he would go over to the province chief who hadn't heard anything from Saigon, so it was like going up against a brick wall. After Tet when we got the counterpart organization set up, we would parallel these instructions working them out in Saigon first and then the instructions went out so that everybody got the same instructions. Then after Tet we got the first pacification annual plan which grew out of an accelerated pacification campaign that we launched in late summer or early fall that year. John Vann was very much opposed to that plan. It was one of the few times that John and I had a big argument.

Q: What was your impression of John Vann, he being one of the major figures in our efforts in Vietnam?

McMANAWAY: John was extremely capable, a tremendous leader. His private life was somewhat spectacular also. But I was never a moral moralist, that was his business and not mine. He was driven.

Q: How was he viewed within CORDS?

McMANAWAY: He was one of the heavies. He was never in Saigon, he was always out in the field.

Q: How did Tet hit you personally? Do you have any Tet stories?

McMANAWAY: Well, I was here on leave and was called back. One story...I was getting ready to go back and I got a cable from Komer calling me back. I was sitting in home of some friends of mine in New York watching television and the news came on and there was my good friend George Jacobson leaning out the window of the embassy. Someone is trying to throw him a pistol.

Q: I recall that.

McMANAWAY: I came right out of my chair.

I jumped on a plane and flew back and got to the airport which had taken a direct hit on the building. There was no one there. It was just empty. There was no one there to unload the bags. We finally found somebody to open up the cargo area so we could get our luggage. We carried our own bags. Luckily MACV was right across the street so I was able to get over there. I was walking down the road with my bag and along comes my deputy in my car. It turned out my driver had disappeared and never showed up again. That was my entry back. It was still going on.

Q: You are back and the offensive is still active in various places, how is this affecting the CORDS program?

McMANAWAY: I think there were about 35 cities in the country which were hit or overrun. Initially we pulled in our horns but in Saigon I ended up with three jobs. We set up a recovery organization which I headed for Komer, working directly with the prime minister's office. The guy who headed that up was Colonel Que and he, after a few months, became mayor of Saigon. In fact, we made him mayor of Saigon.

Q: Was this because you felt here is somebody who can do the job?

McMANAWAY: He was a very capable guy, strong and forceful. Saigon was desperate for leadership. He asked for me as his advisor. So I was doing the pacification planning programming job, the recovery job, and was the advisor to the mayor of Saigon.

Q: Recovery was recovery from the Tet?

McMANAWAY: Yes. One day Bob Komer called me and Bob Montesque, General Montesque, into his office and said, "There is nobody out there. The Viet Cong are not out there. What we need is a pacification offensive." "What the hell is a pacification offensive?" "Go figure it out." Pacification is defensive by its very concept. After three or four days we came up with an accelerated pacification campaign. And it worked. We targeted where we wanted to send forces in every province. It was all mapped out. John Vann objected, he thought we were overextending ourselves.

Q: Were you having more Americans go out in the field?

McMANAWAY: Well, that got them out. What we needed was something to kick both the

Americans and the Vietnamese in the backside and get them moving out of the provincial capitals.

Q: I would think this would always be a problem because it was more comfortable in the capital, it was more dangerous in the countryside and there was always the paperwork which ties you down. Was this a problem trying to get people out without tying them down to bureaucratic burdens?

McMANAWAY: The bureaucratic functions weren't really that much of a concern. It was getting both Americans and Vietnamese out of the bunkers and back out into the countryside and in the process convincing them that in fact there was no one out there, and there wasn't. It was a big success and we built on that and used that as the model for the annual pacification plan which came the next year.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? I want to put something on the tape so we will know where to start next time. I would like to ask you about the Phoenix program; your impression of Westmoreland, Abrams, Bunker and how the embassy worked; also were you getting at this point any reflections of the operation of the CIA in their work; talking about the post-Tet period.

McMANAWAY: Fine.

Q: Today is September 14, 1993. You mentioned last time that you wanted to talk about the RD [Rural Development] Cadre program. What was that?

McMANAWAY: That was a program run originally by the CIA. It was a concept which ultimately proved ineffective. The concept was that you would take trained Vietnamese, teams trained in various specific projects and disciplines...health, education, security, etc... and send them into VC [Viet Cong] controlled areas, into the hamlets where they would dispose of the VC and provide a form of government and then move on. The fallacy in the concept was that they did move on, didn't stay. Of course once they left the VC came back and anybody who had cooperated with them in the meantime was singled out by the VC for abuse. This was part of our learning process in Vietnam. I can recall and still work myself up into a bit of a lather over this phrase "winning the minds and hearts" of the people, which was a stupid idea. It took a long time to get away from that concept. A lot of it came out of AID and their notion of nation building.

Q: Wasn't this also a reflection of the Kennedy Peace Corps and very American?

McMANAWAY: It is very American. But the idea that you can go in and build a health clinic which then doesn't get stocked with supplies on a continuous basis is nonsense. It took us a long time to get away from that. It took us until 1967-68 to start getting away from that idea and getting into the idea that what we needed to do was to build a political, economic, and social structure in which the local people had a stake and wanted to protect. After Tet we were able to persuade first the U.S. military and then the South Vietnamese military, that local forces were important. We got a huge increase in the local forces which were called popular forces which

were at least theoretically under the control of the local chief. So you had permanent security in these areas, not transitory. That made a big difference and was one of the major turning points. It was also a reflection of our beginning to understand the war.

Q: You were there during the period when people were beginning to understand this. Was it first sort of a theoretical thing, with people saying this sounds good and then trying it out, or were there hard minded people as opposed to people who were sort of warm and loving and thought this would do it? How did this work out?

McMANAWAY: You had several things going on at the same time. At the highest level you had President Johnson appointing Bob Komer as his man on pacification...we never did come up with a better name for it than that. At a meeting with Westmoreland, I think in Hawaii in 1966 or 1967, he assigned Komer to Vietnam and told Bob and Westmoreland to work out the relationship. Komer was to be in charge of pacification as a deputy to Westmoreland. Komer was a brilliant bureaucrat, in the best sense of that word. He saw right away [what to do]. What had happened prior to that is that we had a proliferation of civilian agencies in Vietnam, each with its own line of command out to people in the provinces where their people were stationed. I once drew up a briefing chart which showed all the lines out going out to the provinces from Saigon which was a nightmare. There was no coordination. The civilians were not working together. So Bob decided first to get the civilians organized and he established the Office of Civil Operations. He pulled segments out of AID, USIA [United States Information Agency] and other civilian agencies that were there, and put them all together in this outfit which we pronounced OCO. Once he had accomplished that he moved it into MACV, into the military structure, which was his goal all along. The civilians were no match for the military in terms of staffing and bureaucratic struggles for winning any policy issues until we got into MACV. One of the most miraculous things to me was that once we got into MACV we never lost a policy fight. We were inside the elephant and able to do quite a number of revolutionary things. One of them was to get this terrific increase in popular forces. We got across various aspects like permanent security and redoing village structure through elections, etc.

Then Tet came along which was a tremendous defeat for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, although obviously not perceived that way. But it was. There were three Tet offensives, one in February, one in May and one later on, I think, in August.

We were getting away from the RD Cadre at that point and moving towards using the regional forces and restructuring the village and using the more sophisticated concept of what pacification needs to be about. Now the accelerated pacification campaign was a big success. Komer was right, the Viet Cong were not out there. We and the Vietnamese were all hunkered down and there was nobody out there. We brought security to about 3 million people in about 3 months. That led then to the first national pacification plan where we brought all of the programs together, got it written up and translated into Vietnamese, sent out and got them organized.

When I went to Harvard after Vietnam, 1971, I was going to write a book about the year of the monkey, 1968, the year of Tet, because so many firsts happened that year. The South Vietnamese were mobilized for the first time, which meant we could get more forces. We got them to organize themselves in a way that we could relate to them both in Saigon and at the CORDS

level, the province level, the district level, which is as far as we went, we didn't go down to the village level in our position, so that we were no longer sending out orders to our people that were not be paralleled by the Vietnamese. We had quite good success. As I may have told you in the last interview, I am one of those who believe we won the guerilla war.

Q: What was your impression of Westmoreland and Abrams?

McMANAWAY: Westmoreland, in my view, never understood the war. We used to call him instant image, with that granite jaw appearance. He is a fine man but he never understood this war and I don't think he understands it today. Abrams understood it. If we could have had Abrams there from the beginning, the war would have turned out differently. It was fascinating watching Abrams bring his co-commanders around to support pacification. We actually got into the military plan the objective and strategy for supporting pacification under Abrams. He understood it, Westmoreland did not. I don't think Westmoreland read anything. If you didn't brief him he didn't know. Westmoreland was a logistician of some genius, I suppose, but he didn't understand the guerilla war.

Q: How about Ellsworth Bunker, our ambassador, did you have a chance to see how he operated?

McMANAWAY: He was a master, one of the finest men I have ever known. I did not have the honor of working closely daily with him. I saw him only a few times at country team meetings that I would attend for some specific purpose. He understood the war and what was going on. I have nothing but admiration for Bunker.

Q: What was your impression of the embassy which was very large? How did you feel it did in reporting the situation and dealing with the host government, two of the important things an embassy does?

McMANAWAY: Well, we were almost a separate operation. We were so big and had so much money, so many forces, and so many people in the organization...there must have been 6000 people in the CORDS section...that we didn't pay much attention to the embassy. When I first got there Arch Calhoun was political counselor and then Phil Habib came along. We would hear from Phil occasionally - he would come and brief us on what was going on. We were interested in those things but we were totally absorbed in our work in the field. Even our contacts with the Vietnamese government were separate [from the embassy]. Now Komer, of course, attended country team meetings, and Colby after him...and he worked much more closely with Bunker. The rest of us in the CORDS organization were totally absorbed in what we were doing.

Q: It seems to me that one of the major reasons for the eventual defeat of the South Vietnamese was essentially the corruption and the narrowness of its ruling group. How were you dealing with this?

McMANAWAY: We had special reporting on province chiefs. We didn't get much involved in the national politics. Komer might have, but the rest of us didn't, although we had periodic meetings with President Thieu. He established a council which we attended. But, again, we

talked there about the pacification program, about the war, not about national politics. But we had reporting on corrupt province chiefs and we got them changed. We had a very aggressive stance with the Vietnamese. We were right in there all the time. Komer used to call me up and tell me to go tell the prime minister who he wanted fired. We would go over with lists of province chiefs that we wanted changed and they would be changed.

Q: I have been interviewing Terry McNamara who was up in Da Nang and he talked about the I Corp commander of the Vietnamese who had quite a reputation for his involvement in all sorts of nefarious things. Would that have been too high to get at?

McMANAWAY: Yes, probably too high to deal with. Although we did have a very aggressive posture with corruption. I was not one of those who believe that is the reason they lost the war. I think they lost the war because the North Vietnamese had a better army in the end and the South Vietnamese didn't have our support any more. The first invasion came in 1972 and we provided air support which enabled them to fend it off. Between 1972-75 we began cutting back funds for the South Vietnamese army. By this time I was in the Defense Department and was following it for the Secretary of Defense, Mel Laird. I was on his little group of Vietnamization program. I was seeing reports and doing analysis. The South Vietnamese army no longer had enough ammunition to train. Funds had been cut back so deeply that they were not able to allocate ammunition for training purposes. When the invasion came by the entire North Vietnamese army, they didn't have our air support.

Q: How about the CIA? You must have been up against them quite a bit since they had their own programs going.

McMANAWAY: Basically what happened was that they pulled out of the RD Cadre program. This was somewhere around 1968-69. It was after Komer left because I remember I was in the office with Bill Colby who had taken over from Komer, when he got the call from Ted Shackley, who was the station chief, informing Bill that they were withdrawing the funding support for the RD Cadre program. They provided intelligence. They worked with South Vietnamese intelligence. But except for that one occasion, we really didn't bump into each other that often that I was aware of. They worked more with the South Vietnamese and strictly intelligence groups and we didn't have that much trouble or involvement with them.

Q: Was the Phoenix program going at that time?

McMANAWAY: The Phoenix was one of the eight or nine programs within pacification.

Q: This is the one that got a lot of publicity and all. My understanding was, and this is really from hearsay, that it was designed to root out the Viet Cong cadre and all.

McMANAWAY: It was designed to go after the Viet Cong leadership and there were several mistakes made with it in how it was described. I remember Bill Komer was called back to appear before Fulbright for a week of hearings and we brought back a whole team. I came with him and did most of the preparation for the hearings in terms of preparing the testimony, the backup and the questions and answers, etc. I sat through the whole thing but didn't say very much. At one

point I realized what we were doing. We were getting a lot of tough questions about the Phoenix program and we had described the program as designed to root out the political leadership of the Viet Cong. I remember passing Bill a note saying that we had made a terrible mistake because we were sitting talking to politicians and they probably thought we were talking about legitimate politicians. We weren't, of course, we were talking about the secret command that controlled the organization of the Viet Cong.

In our terms we were very successful in those hearings because, as Bill put it, we stayed back with the trust ads, Fulbright didn't get the headlines that he wanted. However, there was one night that on national television Walter Cronkite, and I have never had any respect for him since, picked up a very sharp exchange that occurred between Senator Gore and Bill about the Phoenix program. Gore had said, "Now you are telling me that it is not an assassination program?" And Bill said, "It is not." Well, that little clip was shown on TV that night followed by a clip of some rather brutal treatment of some elderly Vietnamese gentleman...he was being given the water treatment by Vietnamese soldiers and this was described as being the Phoenix by Walter Cronkite. The analyst who looked at the film clip for us said that it was made up of about ten different incidents that they had pieced together to make up this story for Cronkite to use.

It was not an assassination program, which was the misconception of it. The only mistake we made was that we gave people quotas. That was really a mistake. I remember George Jacobson being very much opposed to that. He perceived rightly how it would seem when it got out. It was intended as a management goal, a way to measure progress. I never thought the Phoenix program worked very well. It was not designed as an assassination program. It was designed to identify, track down and get at the tax collector and the local secret command in control of the network of the Viet Cong. Not necessarily to kill them but to arrest them, to get them out of the picture. What usually happened was that you would get intelligence...this was also supposed to bring together a lot of the different intelligence...about a tax collector or a local commander who was going to be traveling from this village to that village and you would use those popular forces to lay an ambush. More often than not, and I looked at the statistics at how the people who were part of the Viet Cong cadre, the leaders, were actually killed. They were killed in combat not as a result of assassination teams or a deliberate operation aimed at them. So by the time I left in 1970, I thought we had put so many popular forces out into the countryside that we had pretty well suffocated the Viet Cong structure and the Phoenix program was no longer needed. One of my last recommendations before I left was to disband it.

Q: Then you left in 1970. When in 1970?

McMANAWAY: August.

WALTER A. LUNDY
Political Officer
Saigon (1964-1966)

Principal Officer

Hue (1966)

Walter A. Lundy, Jr. was born in Georgia in 1933. After receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia in 1954 and serving in the US Air Force from 1954-1958, he received his master's degree from Georgetown University in 1961. His career has included positions in Colombo, Saigon, Hue, New Delhi, Teheran, and Seoul. Mr. Lundy was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in September 2005.

Q: So you went to Saigon in 1964...

LUNDY: Before the completion of language training.

Q: So about how much language training did you have?

LUNDY: Oh I only missed about the last six weeks, but I would have had to have gone out a month or two earlier had my wife not been pregnant. This was because in those days there was a push to expand our embassy in Saigon as we became more and more involved in the worsening situation.

Q: So she was able to go with you?

LUNDY: Yes. Our son was born in Saigon in November.

Q: Oh, that is why you went...I see, a little bit early so she could have the baby...

LUNDY: No, a little bit late. In those days, doctors thought that until women were past the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, something like that, it was better that they not fly because of the danger of miscarriage. I don't know whether that precaution still is recommended by gynecologists.

Q: I think it's a little bit the opposite now, that you can't fly after a certain point but anyway...

LUNDY: There was a window in there during which there were no restrictions on her flying, and that was when we went out.

Q: Was that your first child? Born in Saigon?

LUNDY: We had our first in Colombo. Our older daughter was three years old when we went to Saigon.

Q: Saigon in 1964. Would you like to describe what it was like and also what your job was there.

LUNDY: I was assigned to the political section in Saigon as one of several provincial reporters. The approach to reporting was completely different in Vietnam from what it had been in Colombo. I loved my job in Vietnam. Obviously, the situation was not healthy. However, when we arrived in Saigon in 1964 the city still was relatively peaceful. We settled in nicely and put

our daughter in a French kindergarten. Things were going well for us personally, but the security situation was continuing to deteriorate. Our son was born in November; my wife and children were evacuated in early February, 1965 along with all the other American dependents. That evacuation surely was one of the most efficient things the U.S. government ever did.

Q: To where were they evacuated?

LUNDY: They came back home. The evacuation was announced on Monday, and my family was out of there by Thursday. This was roughly in the middle of the exodus. Within a week all the dependents were gone. The impending evacuation was kept secret from Embassy staff. Only the ambassador and a very few high-ranking people in our mission in Vietnam had any idea it was about to happen. Ironically, some dependents who were evacuated had not arrived in Saigon until the Monday morning the evacuation was announced. This was because the people who were responsible for the assignments process and travel arrangements did not know about the impending evacuation. There were no leaks; the secret apparently was kept.

Q: The reason for the evacuation--I guess this was early February, 1965?

LUNDY: Yes, 1965. This was not the famous evacuation which occurred 10 years later; this was the first evacuation, the one most people have forgotten about.

Q: What occasion, what was the reason for it at the time?

LUNDY: The security of dependents in Saigon had grown to be a matter of increasing concern. However, the immediate impetus probably was the decision to widen the American role in the war. Allowing dependents to remain in a war zone was untenable. I do not recall when our intention to send combat troops into Vietnam was announced, but I am sure the decision already had been made by the time of the evacuation. Three weeks later, in the first week of March, the first Marines waded ashore at Danang in central Vietnam. That was the beginning of the real Vietnam war, which lasted for more than ten years.

Q: Was the threat at the time seen as Viet Cong or other elements?

LUNDY: Viet Cong.

Q: Primarily.

LUNDY: Viet Cong who not surprisingly had infiltrated Saigon thoroughly. We never felt personally insecure, and up until the time my family left dependents still were not being cautioned about areas they should avoid in the city, but the U.S. government rightly was becoming very nervous. There had been some frightening incidents. And less than two months after the evacuation the embassy in Saigon was bombed.

Q: And you were there?

LUNDY: No, I was not there. I was in Grady County, Georgia, by a quirk of fate. Ambassador

Taylor had been called home for consultations. (Before he would agree to go to Saigon as ambassador, he had gotten a commitment from the White House that the flow of official visitors to Vietnam would be drastically reduced. Instead, he would come home periodically for consultations). A number of us within the mission were offered seats on the plane, a Boeing 707 from the VIP squadron at Andrews AFB. As one of the more junior Embassy officers, I obviously could be spared for a week. And they felt sorry for me because of our family situation with the two small children. I was home the week the embassy was bombed.

Q: That was the plane that brought Ambassador Taylor back?

LUNDY: Yes the plane that went out to pick him up. The same or a similar aircraft took him back a week later.

Q: And you went back when he returned?

LUNDY: Yes. When they were evacuated, my wife and children went first to her parents' home in Alexandria, VA, but a few weeks later they had gone to Georgia to visit my parents. I joined them there. Of course, that part of the trip we paid for. We came back to the Washington area together, and I returned to Saigon on the plane taking the Ambassador back. It was a lucky break.

Q: Did she and your children ever go back to Saigon?

LUNDY: No, that was out. It was several years later before a limited number of dependents were allowed to return to Vietnam, and I'm not sure that they ever let children go back. As I understand it, there was never a clearly defined policy on the presence of American dependents in Vietnam in later years, but I do recall hearing some adult dependents, particularly those who had jobs somewhere in the mission, were allowed to accompany their spouses. The first evacuation incredibly even took the working spouses out. Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson--he was deputy ambassador in a strange bureaucratic arrangement, but Ambassadors' Johnson and Taylor were both superb professionals who seemed to have no problem at all working together--lost his secretary even though her husband was an AID officer in Vietnam. If he stayed, she could not, meaning Ambassador Johnson gave up his secretary in the evacuation.

Q: So your wife and daughter, and then your newborn, were there for about six months?

LUNDY: A little more than seven.

Q: Well, let's talk a little bit more about your job there in the political section. You were provincial reporting for a particular area/province?

LUNDY: Yes and no. Provincial reporters, as we were called, were assigned a group of provinces. The country was split into four regions, one or I corps, two, three, and four corps, they were called. But we moved around, eventually I worked in all the areas except II-Corps. I worked in the most southern provinces in the Mekong River Delta, which comprised IV-Corps, and the provinces around Saigon, which were III-Corps. I covered most of the country at one time or another excepting II-Corps.

*Q: When you say you covered all of that at one time or another that meant travel?
A lot of travel?*

LUNDY: We did go to the grass roots. To be candid, we spent most of our time talking to the powers that be, or more accurately that were. First, of course, we had to check in with the Americans. We spent a fair amount of time with the U.S. Government civilians and our military in the provinces, but we also talked a great deal to local officials and in many cases to the Catholic and Buddhist clergy. However, the powers that be were mostly those who at least ostensibly supported the government of South Vietnam. At times, we talked to representatives of opposition political parties or religious or cultural leaders who were not enthusiastic supporters of the central government but who presented no serious threat to those in power.

Q: How was your means of travel around to the provinces, usually military helicopter?

LUNDY: It varied quite a bit depending upon their geographic location and the security situation in individual provinces. Sometimes we could take Air Vietnam, the civilian airline. It became well known the Central Intelligence Agency operated a small airline called Air America in South Vietnam. We often used their flights; within the provinces we sometimes went by military helicopter, sometimes by jeep. Some of the provinces close to Saigon we could drive to, and the embassy provided us a jeep.

Q: The kind of reporting that you did on these various provinces, was for internal use within the embassy, or did you do a lot of reporting to Washington, or was much of it edited pieces that were compiled covering several different reporters, or all of the above?

LUNDY: All of the above. Contrary to my first post which would rather not send something into Washington that was not considered letter perfect, in Vietnam the idea was to report virtually everything to Washington. While I was in Saigon, provincial reporters had a great deal of editorial freedom. We had a first class supervisor in Jim Rosenthal, who worked directly for Bob Miller, the number two under the political counselor, Mel Manfull. They were a superb team. Jim, Bob, and Mel all later became ambassadors. At the time, Saigon had the largest American embassy political section worldwide.

However, I think in retrospect we may have been inundating Washington with our reporting. President Johnson made it clear there was no higher priority in U.S. foreign relations than Vietnam. We did comprehensive reports on each province which were supposed to be updated every three to four months. We would spend four or five days in a province, return home, and spend the next two or three days writing up our memcons (memoranda of conversation) and drafting an analysis of the situation in each province. These were called mission province reports. Although I never felt really comfortable in the language, I spoke Vietnamese extensively and also some French, which had rusted out a bit in Colombo. For a junior political officer, in Vietnam I had as good a job as was available anywhere in the world.

Q: Looking back now, what forty years or so later, do you think your and the other political officers view of the situation was too rosy, too optimistic, too incomplete, or pretty accurate?

LUNDY: I guess I would lean toward pretty accurate. The analysts in Washington were not optimistic. I would recommend to anybody David Halberstam's The Best and the Brightest about that period. There was a very insightful analyst named Lou Sarris in a fairly senior position in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) who comes to mind. From the beginning Lou was pessimistic. I think he and his colleagues were basing a great deal of their analysis on the embassy's reporting. Halberstam points out in his book how Lou Sarris harmed his own career by assessing the war in Vietnam as he saw it rather than saying progress was being made, which was what the establishment at the time wanted to hear. Clearly by mid-1965, when we had a change in political counselors at the Embassy, the word from the top was "let's try to be more positive."

Q: Beginning in mid-'65?

LUNDY: Yes, from about that time, I began to see some of our editorial freedom being taken away.

Q: Do you think that was simply a matter of a change of personality or was it...?

LUNDY: I think it came from the top. The new political counselors was that thoroughly admirable Foreign Service Officer, Phil Habib--a brilliant diplomat, and a survivor, if there ever was one. However, I was disappointed in his leadership my last few months in Vietnam. I don't know this, and I can't prove it, but I think he was probably told "let's try to put a more positive spin on things". In later incarnations, I developed a deep respect for Phil. He was a man of considerable intellectual integrity and certainly one of the most successful FSOs of all time.

Q: Now you are in a situation where there is tremendous, very high level concern and interest in Washington, a very political situation, really all the time that you were there and even more so probably after you left.

LUNDY: Oh yes, I'm now in the group that is considered to have served there early on. When I left in January, 1966 there were only about a couple of hundred thousand American troops in the country. The number of civilian staff at the Embassy and in other USG agencies increased substantially. At the peak, U.S. military personnel in Vietnam totaled somewhere between six and seven hundred thousand, I think.

Q: At least that, yeah.

LUNDY: I should talk about the last four months, which were the most rewarding of my time in Vietnam. I was shipped off to the consulate at Hue where I was acting principal officer. There was an unfortunate bureaucratic situation in Hue. The incumbent was moved down to Danang as political advisor to the Marine commander, General Walt. I took over the consulate, which was staffed by only two officers and one secretary/communicator. I-Corps comprised the four most northern provinces. I remain proud of the reporting we sent to Saigon. Direct communications to Washington were not possible from Hue; all of our substantive reporting went through the political section in Saigon. We did very little in the way of consular or economic/commercial

work. The war was the pervasive, all consuming issue. There was a considerable amount of dissent in Hue. The families of both Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem (the former president of South Vietnam who was over thrown in a coup d'etat in late 1963) had deep roots in the area. The city also was the old royal capital and the seat of a very influential university. It was an area where politics was taken very seriously, and the reporting we were sending out from Hue was of great interest both in Saigon and Washington. And I began to see more evidence of censorship.

Q: In Saigon?

LUNDY: In Saigon, yes. Let me cite the mission province report I did assessing the situation in Quang Nam province which was where the Marines had landed near Danang and where we probably had committed more resources, both military and civilian, than to any other province in the country. Certainly in I-Corps it was where we were making our strongest push, but the whole situation was bogged down. We had all these troops there, but there was hardly any progress toward pacification of the province. When I reported this to Saigon they sent the airgram on to the Department with only a few of the more damning sentences deleted. The airgram received, I was told later, very wide distribution throughout Washington, and at CINCPAC (Commander in Chief, Pacific) in Hawaii. I think the message that we were not getting anywhere did indeed get through. That may have been my most important piece of reporting in my entire Foreign Service career. Did it really change anything? No, of course not, but I do believe it inspired some thinking about just how difficult our task in Vietnam was going to be. Later, another mission province report assessing our efforts in Quang Ngai was gutted of all mention of the drastically deteriorating military situation. The VC (Viet Cong) virtually controlled the province, but only a small part of the report describing activities of the political parties in Quang Ngai was sent on to Washington.

Q: To what extent was your reporting, particularly from Hue, shared with the U.S. military locally?

LUNDY: In Hue we had no secrets; the local U.S. Army advisors and other representatives saw any of our reporting which interested them. We had a real team effort at Hue, working closely with the military and representatives of other USG agencies. Most of the American military and civilian employees there at the time knew all too well we were working in a backwater, and that we could not expect much attention from either Saigon or Washington. No USG personnel, civilian or military, had anything higher than province level advisor status. As a very junior FSO political officer, sadly I probably had as much or more clout than any American in the province of Thua Thien. Hue was a backwater vis-a-vis the government in Saigon as well, a fact which the local Vietnamese deeply resented.

Q: Deeply resented it...

LUNDY: I mean local government officials, civilian and military, deeply resented the lack of attention they were receiving from Saigon.

Q: So you were there about four months in Hue?

LUNDY: Four months, and then my 18-month tour was over.

Q: In Vietnam?

LUNDY: In Vietnam, and then I went home.

Q: I wanted to ask a little bit more about the dynamics in the embassy. Were Maxwell Taylor as ambassador and U. Alexis Johnson as deputy ambassador there throughout the period?

LUNDY: No. Ambassador Taylor left in late summer of 1965. I think it now is pretty clear that he was fired, unjustly so in my opinion. Henry Cabot Lodge went back to Vietnam, which may have been another reason our editorial freedom was reduced.

Q: Of course this was still the Democratic, the Johnson administration?

LUNDY: Yes, it was LBJ who appointed Ambassador Lodge.

Q: A Republican but also partly with the idea of trying to get a broader support for the war and what was going on.

LUNDY: As I recall, Ambassador Johnson left at about the same time Ambassador Taylor departed. I don't even remember who became Ambassador Lodge's DCM. I'm not sure there was one; perhaps they called the number two man mission coordinator or something like that. I was at Hue most of the time after the changeover.

Q: U. Alexis Johnson had served as ambassador two or three times before going to Saigon as the deputy.

LUNDY: I know he had been in Prague...

Q: And Thailand.

LUNDY: Yes, that's right, and later he was ambassador to Japan.

Q: Yes, that was later. Did he function as a DCM, or was he really in effect a chief of mission, the second chief of mission?

LUNDY: He was more like a second chief of mission, as I recall. He had more contact with the staff than Ambassador Taylor did, although Ambassador Taylor was certainly quite open and did interact with the staff. Ambassador Johnson reached out somewhat more I think, but then that was probably just how they had decided to divide the work. I didn't have a lot of contact with either Ambassador Taylor or Ambassador Johnson. However, they would let it be known when they appreciated something that the junior people had done. There was much respect for their leadership throughout the mission.

Q: I would think though to ask you to go up, even if it were for only four months, to Hue showed

quite a bit of confidence in you and what you had done in the embassy or was it that there wasn't anybody else to...?

LUNDY: I don't really know, if I can be a little bit self-congratulatory, perhaps a combination of the two. I was both willing and available. John Negroponte, with whom I came into the Foreign Service, was also a junior officer in Vietnam, and had been sent to Hue that summer to replace the incumbent who was on home leave. I had gone up for a visit while John was there, and I think he recommended me. Bill Marsh who by then had replaced Jim Rosenthal as head of the provincial reporters in the political section had something to do with it as well.

Q: Was Negroponte principal officer in Hue?

LUNDY: He was acting principal officer, as I was, for a couple months.

Q: Before you went.

LUNDY: Before I went.

Q: OK, after your wife and children left did they consolidate you into some kind of bachelor officer quarters in Saigon, or did you remain in your house?

LUNDY: I stayed in the house; they made us double up, however. A good friend in the consular section, Tom Wilson, moved in with me. He had a larger family and had been living in a bigger house, which he knew he would have to share with more than one other person. By moving in with me to a smaller house we kept it down to two people, which probably was his main motivation for making the change. We got along just fine, and he was able to keep the house by himself while I was at Hue, where I was only supposed to be on TDY (temporary duty). Technically, I suppose I was assigned to Saigon but on detail to Hue.

Q: When you finished at Hue you didn't go back to Saigon and start working there again? That was the end of your 18-month tour?

LUNDY: That was the end of my 18-month tour. Originally, I was sent to Vietnam for three years, but after the families were evacuated, all tours of duty were reduced to 18 months. I was only in Saigon for two or three days before leaving the country.

Q: Was the security situation a lot worse during the last six months, eight months of your time in Vietnam, or did it not really change that much for Americans?

LUNDY: At the time, I didn't think it really had changed that much, but it's obvious history has confirmed that the VC (Viet Cong) infrastructure was both growing and thriving.

Q: You said you didn't really have much contact with opposition elements either in Saigon or Hue other than those that were respectable...?

LUNDY: Acceptable.

Q: Acceptable to the government. Was that pretty much the case throughout the whole time you were there and do you think that...?

LUNDY: Much of the opposition in the functioning, but not threatening, political parties and many of those active in the South Vietnamese government had fought for the liberation of Vietnam from the French. You could not, of course, make contact with the real opposition, the Viet Cong, with whom we were at war.

Q: I guess I'm still trying to grope whether we perhaps during the time you were there or otherwise perhaps should have had more contact with Buddhist elements or...?

LUNDY: We talked to the Buddhist leadership all the time. They were not a political party, but they did oppose the government, and Hue was their most important rallying ground. The Buddhist leadership was not united, but those who opposed the South Vietnamese government were the most active. The Catholic leadership in Hue tended to support the government. The most senior Catholic official in Hue was a relative of the Diem family, but he was a much more liberal, more pro-democracy person than most of the other Diems had been.

Q: In Hue did you share housing with the other officer who was there?

LUNDY: Yes, there was one house for the principal officer, and we shared it.

Q: OK, anything else about your time in Vietnam, in Saigon and Hue?

LUNDY: No, I think we have about covered it.

FRANK G. WISNER
Staff Aide, USAID
Saigon (1964-1967)

Program Officer
Dinh Tuong Province (1967-1968)

Senior Advisor
Tuyen Duc Province (1968-1969)

Ambassador Frank G. Wisner was born in New York in 1938. He graduated from Princeton University in 1961. He was stationed in Saigon, Dinh Tuong Province, Tuyen Duc Province, Tunis, Algiers, and Dacca. He later served as Ambassador to Zambia, Egypt, the Philippines, and India. Ambassador Wisner was interviewed by Richard L. Jackson on March 22, 1998.

Q: You went from there to Vietnam and stayed for most of the rest of that decade. That was a

time when many Foreign Service Officers were trying to go to Vietnam where the action was and many were trying to avoid it. Did you steer yourself there? Or how did that process work?

WISNER: I certainly didn't steer myself there. I thought at the time -- in Algiers the Moroccan-Algerian War was over (I was covering that) -- I was having the time of my life when all of a sudden a telegram arrived from Washington, signed as one called it in those days by "highest levels". "Highest Levels", that is the President, directed that I be called back to Washington. We were looking for French-speaking bachelors to strengthen our presence in Vietnam, and I was called back to Washington to be one of those French-speaking bachelors. I was first taken aback when later reminded by the personnel officer for the assignment, Alan Wendt, (later ambassador to Slovenia) that when I wrote my original A-100 request for an assignment my second choice, after Algiers, was Saigon, so I was getting it. Just exactly what I asked for. Bill Porter, who also saw me as a future Arabist, asked that the assignment be waived and that I be allowed to stay in Algiers and go on with a career as an Arabist, and his appeal was overruled. So I came back to Washington in the summer of 1964 and was assigned. There were two groups who were called back, those who were sent immediately to Vietnam and those who were brought back and put into Vietnamese language training, area and cultural studies to be prepared. I was in the latter group. We were all told that we really had a choice, either to take this assignment or leave the service. Later on we discovered there was a second choice and that is either you were to do well in our studies of the Vietnamese language -- a tonal language is very difficult for the western ear -- either that or we were to be sent to what was in those days called a fever post, fever spot, and suffer in our careers. In fact one of our officers was taken out of the course for seeming insufficiently diligent in the learning of the Vietnamese language and not reassigned quickly, and we protested that and our protest was upheld and he was reinstated with honor. Fred Spots went on to have some interesting assignments. He was a European specialist, a German expert. As for the rest of us, many went on to great things: Steve Ledogar was our disarmament ambassador, Dave Lambertson ended up as our ambassador in Thailand, Desaix Anderson is our chargé in Vietnam, Paul London didn't stay with the service, but has had a terrific career, he was with me at that time, Dicky Burnham went on to a career in the IFC. We were a very good lot and we had a lot of fun together.

Q: Were there also others like Dick Holbrooke?

WISNER: Well, we were already in Vietnam or about, in Dick Holbrooke's case, to leave Vietnam and come back to the United States. They had been recruited and sent directly without benefit of Vietnamese language training. Peter Tarnoff was working for Cabot Lodge in the front office. Lodge's second tour as the ambassador. Though our group was all foreign service officers -- like Dick Teare, people who were going to learn Vietnamese with the majority to be assigned to the provincial reporting end of the political section of the American embassy -- I was however to be assigned on a secondment to AID, to the pacification program. After going through language training and area studies and a brief stint at Fort Bragg with the United States Special Forces, acquainting myself with some of the weaponry that we were giving the Vietnamese in those days, mainly ex-World War II, Korean-vintage weapons, I was sent out and assigned -- this was really the very end of Maxwell Taylor's period as ambassador to a province in the delta. The province was a sensitive one, it was the Dinh Tuong. It was the headquarters of the 7th ARVN (Army of Vietnam) Division. That division had played a very important role in coup-making. We

were at this point trying to stabilize, find a political formula of some stability. The 7th division area was very important. Dinh Tuong was well known as well because, just outside the provincial capital, the battle of Ap Bac had been fought where John Vann and others earned their names. Neil Sheehan cut his teeth as a journalist. The Vietnamese army was really defeated by the Viet Cong insurgents, and this was one of the real wake-up calls when General Harkins realized that our way of doing war side-by-side with the South Vietnamese was not working. It was selected as one of three provinces by the ambassador of the day, Maxwell Taylor, to begin to organize a consolidated pacification program.

Heretofore, American agencies had been represented separately in the field -- AID had its people, USIA had its people, the CIA had its people, the military had their people and each of these American agencies competed for the ear of the province chief and his bureaucracy and of his provincial and village defense forces. Maxwell Taylor decided that we needed an integrated American presence with a team chief. Dinh Tuong was selected as the military command, and a Lieutenant Colonel Mc Fall was given charge of the several agencies. I was assigned to the AID office, provincial operations caring for refugees, building up agriculture, village self-help, village improvement, education support, these sorts of things, with a budget that flowed down through the Vietnamese side with some resource availabilities directly under our control, notably food and some amount of money. The man who I worked for, Mr. Letts by name, was a professor of agronomy from Texas, and he was a flinty old character. He came down, and he felt his instructions were very clearly not to cooperate with the Lieutenant Colonel who Maxwell Taylor had put in charge of the provincial effort, and he and the Lieutenant Colonel could barely speak to one another. It was very disruptive. I found it much easier to work with the military than did my boss, to his considerable unhappiness. Eventually Mr. Letts was able to go back and be an agricultural advisor where his skills were better served. I ended my time in about six months in the delta.

Q: It was a risky place to be?

WISNER: Oh, it was a bit risky. I was not awfully cautious and I traveled the length and breadth of the province to all the reasonably pacified areas. Took a lot of American visitors around. Joe Alsop used to come.

Q: You took some motorcycle trips?

WISNER: No, that was later. That came later. I did actually acquire my first motorcycle then, and I was on a road to Saigon one day when I saw a jeep blown up with a remote control mine a little bit in front of me, but my motorcycle days were in the future. But I was called to Saigon to be the staff aide of the new, then-deputy ambassador. First and, I think, last time in the world we ever named a deputy ambassador. Bill Porter had been brought out to give Cabot Lodge some strength, so that Cabot could focus on Washington, the politics, the diplomacy with the top rungs of the new Vietnamese government of Nguyen Cao Ky and leave the management of the mission in Bill Porter's hands. The idea was, through the title, to give Bill Porter the strength that, in fact, he didn't need because his personality and judgment was really sufficient. I was brought up as Bill Porter's staff assistant. It was also the time I lost my father, and I went home at that moment to attend the funeral, see to my mother and the family and then return to Vietnam. I then started

to work in the second phase of my life in Vietnam which was increasingly with the pacification program.

Q: So that meant you traveled a good deal outside Saigon?

WISNER: Well Porter, as I noted, was responsible for the management of the mission. But increasingly, as Washington became more and more anxious about the conduct of the war and our ability to achieve our goals of peace there, Porter was given the job of working together with the great civilian agencies -- USIA, USAID, CIA, the police program of USAID which was a very important adjunct of our pacification effort -- and to create a sort of coordinating mechanism for the pacification program. As his staff assistant, not only this interested me, but it was where he needed someone to pull the effort together, and I really became the working secretary of a mission liaison group that brought these agencies together, set the priorities, assigned the tasks. As the matter progressed through 1966, late '65-'66, Washington became increasingly assertive in the desire to see a more coordinated effort and this evolved into the creation of a formal organization called the Office of Civil Operations. I really wrote the charter for that, picked a lot of the people for it, helped write its rules, and then Bill Porter put me at the disposal of the new organization, which was run by the then-Deputy Director of USAID, USOM it was called. Wade Latham, who had been our DCM in Turkey, was an AID officer, and economist. I went over as Wade's special assistant to help him make this organization run, make it function. The next step didn't have very long. McNamara came out, urged an intensification of our abilities in the pacification field and a closer integration of the military and civilians sides and, without too much more ado, Lyndon Johnson forged a unified pacification effort putting the civilian operation in charge of pacification but under Westmoreland, in comusmacv's direct command. So you had Westmoreland at the top, the Chief of Staff; obviously General Cheysson; then you had a deputy for pacification -- in this case Porter had left and Bob Komer came in when Bunker arrived. Komer was a fiery, determined, and ambitious fellow and had been back-stopping the effort from the White House. "Blowtorch Bob" as he was known. I liked him a lot, but many didn't. A vigorous, demanding individual with a lot of imagination, tremendous drive. He had a military subordinate, General Knowlton who went on to become Commandant of West Point. And I worked for Komer and for General Knowlton and Wade Latham at the end of his tour of duty in headquarters at MACV near the airport at Tan Son Nhut. Again, bringing the military and civilian teams together, writing the mission orders, picking who would be top in one province and top in another, military or civilian, recruiting new foreign service officers for the job, analyzing the pacification programs, working out ways of working better with the Vietnamese, trying to build links with them, I was at the center of our pacification thinking and planning right up to early 1968 when I was given my own province and put in charge of a highland Province.

Q: Frank, before that, pressure was growing on President Johnson and a lot of that pressure focused on the success of the pacification program and you were front and center in that. You came back here probably a few times, you were struck by the growing resistance movement within the States. What were you thinking? Were you a true believer, did you have doubts? What was in your mind?

WISNER: Well, in retrospect of course, this was clearly the first great political crisis of my

career. The decision surrounding pacification in a narrow sense, but in a much broader sense the United States' role in Vietnam. I went to Vietnam believing very deeply that we had undertaken a national commitment to preserve the independence of South Vietnam and that we could win if we were skillful and determined. We had to; it wasn't whether we could, we had to. We could not suffer a defeat; it was virtually unthinkable and our cause had to triumph. Now I was not unmindful of the odds: the determination of the North Vietnamese, the consistency of their backing from Beijing -- Peking in those days -- and Moscow. And I was not unmindful of the strength of Vietnamese nationalism and how complicated it was to take even arguable Vietnamese nationalists, of which there were many in the south, and mix them with an outside power like the United States and actually make them a strong and politically credible alternative in this sort of environment. I felt that we had little choice but to do that, and I maintained that view with consistency and determination, focusing rather my efforts on how to improve the practice of the American war effort: how to make pacification more effective, more sensitive to local demands, to decrease the amount of bureaucratization, resist the encroachment of conventional military operations. Pacification was a political, social, and economic issue, not just purely a military one to be conducted by military officers. So my mind was there. Yes, of course I could hear the drumbeat at home of protests against the war rising. They added to a sense of urgency that we had to be able to make a difference in Vietnam, in my mind. The day I came home in 1967, I found even my own family split; my little brother and sister alienated from my next older brother. My younger brother, Ellis, had come out to join me in Vietnam, he was as much part of this. It was almost that the family had split down the pre-WWII, post war fault line. My brother and I had a sense of America going to war we couldn't lose, and I did not question deeply enough the very logic of our engagement. It took me some time to understand that it really was a cause that we could not possibly triumph in. The domestic base wasn't there, but I don't blame it on the failure of the domestic base. We had picked an impossible objective, and that was to pacify Vietnam. To force a political conclusion, the weight of the argument would rest with the most evident nationalist and best organized party, and that was the government of Hanoi.

Q: As you managed the pacification program, was this a debate among you and the other officers there? Was there a division or did you all see it more or less as you then did?

WISNER: If you were in Vietnam in those days, the debate began early in the morning and ended late at night and it was every day, there were no Saturdays, there were no Sundays. The debate was over how to conduct the war not, whether there should be a war. The debate was over whether there were more skillful, politically savvy ways to associate ourselves with the Vietnamese to energize them and to help them overcome the inconsistencies in their own political, military and administrative behavior, as well as to face the problems of their war-wrecked economy. Those were the issues we debated. We debated amongst ourselves. What we saw was the very heavy, stultifying bureaucratic hand of the American military. There were terrific military officers of course but the whole machine was a very heavy operation. We, as young civilians in particular, found that hard to associate with. We were trying to introduce flexibility. In fact the Komer reforms introduced a lot, and Westmoreland, once he was fully in charge, and Abrams after the pacification effort allowed a lot more flexibility of the pacification response inside the military organization than had been the habit heretofore.

Q: One remembers Cabot Lodge and his white linen suits in Saigon, what was your picture of him and his effect?

WISNER: That was really more the first Cabot Lodge when he was associated with the government of Ngo Dinh Diem, before the war reached the fever pitch that it acquired in 1965. In 1965, we were talking about the country being cut in half. 1965 is the introduction of American troops. America takes full responsibility for the conduct of this war. It becomes a really make-or-break national decision for ourselves. Cabot Lodge comes back, obviously picked by Lyndon Johnson with very strong political reasons behind it, and he settles down. Cabot Lodge is an intriguing figure and is, first of all, utterly likable. Our families had an association. He was always very nice to me personally. He wasn't a man for details of bureaucratic management. He left that to the people who worked under him. He loved younger officers.

With the exception of Leverett Saltonstall, he was one of the last of the Boston Brahmin politicians. Cabot Lodge was the choice of two presidents for this assignment, both of them with political motives in mind, maintaining some balance with the Republicans and keeping them more or less on our side as we prosecuted the war in Vietnam, Cabot having been the vice presidential candidate in Nixon's first run for the presidency. I would go on to add that Cabot Lodge was not a deep man, but he had the right political instinct in Vietnam. He was deeply committed to public service and to nation over party. We had to get over this protracted period that began with the death of Ngo Dinh Diem and find stable government. As Cabot returned for his second tour as ambassador, his objective was to take this cockamammy combination of Thieu and Ky as president and as prime minister and turn them into an effective government. Putting American backing behind them, sorting out the natural differences between the two and building a relationship between them and the United States, both in the public eye and private eye, and trying to help them get themselves organized to have a public persona in Vietnam itself and be credible partners in the conduct of the war -- and that really was the right priority, given the assignment that Cabot had.

Q: Which was quite a patriotic assignment for him to take, given his age and family considerations.

WISNER: Oh, absolutely, one had to accept the admirable nature of his sense of service. He was not a man who liked controversy, and he really didn't like all the hair-pulling inside the American mission. He found distasteful the shoulders and elbows that get pushed around in bureaucratic warfare either in Saigon or between Saigon and Washington. People like Ed Lansdale had a very romantic appeal to Cabot, but he couldn't fathom why it produced nothing but bureaucratic confusion. Disorganization rather than forward motion resulted inside the effort in Vietnam from the loose cannon nature of Ed Lansdale and his almost mystical views of how one related to the Vietnamese and prosecuted a war. The Ambassador turned to Bill Porter to run these things for him, to take these demons away from him. When controversy broke out in the country team between Westmoreland and the civilians, virtually he would hold his head in his hands -- this was not Cabot's either forte or pleasure -- he wanted more to focus on the political aspects, both American and Vietnamese. And there I think he did his very, very best against quite overwhelming odds. He no longer had the same proconsular status that he had in the first time as ambassador, for now you had this huge, approaching-half-million American men in the

field. Westmoreland was certainly of commanding stature in the American presence in Vietnam. The nature of the operation had changed. Politics and the war, the roles of the two had switched, in our eyes, though really not in fact which was a basic flaw in our way of going about the presence in Vietnam. And so I think this second tour as ambassador -- he was separated from Emily Lodge, no wives were allowed to go to Vietnam -- was a hard period for him.

Q: He and Westmoreland had a reasonable dialogue?

WISNER: They certainly did. Westmoreland was respectful. Cabot Lodge went to pains not to interfere in Westmoreland's military life, nor question Westmoreland's judgments. He made it pretty clear to Bill Porter that he wouldn't countenance a lot of second guessing of Westmoreland's manner and priorities and decisions. And Westmoreland was a fine honorable soldier, but he was a written-by-the-book soldier, and adapting to the complexities of a war like Vietnam with the counterinsurgency and its main force aspects was complex for Westmoreland. His responses were heavy -- more men, more equipment, more bombs. I don't think he was ever fully at ease. He traveled a lot, saw a lot, but I don't think he was ever fully at ease with the more political aspects of the counterinsurgency struggle.

Q: Well, inevitably the mission was also fighting the battle at home, as doubts grew. There certainly have been all kinds of charges of inflated success stories about pacification and what was going on. The McNamara missions were an exercise in spin, as they are reconstructed in history. How did that seem from the perspective of being there? This is perhaps truer of military than of Embassy reporting.

WISNER: No, it's unfortunate. I think it all goes of a piece. The urgency of getting on with things, of showing that we were making success forced us to look for signs of what we could demonstrate was working. We were not only our own program former -- we not only designed our own programs -- we were the judges of their success. Now, while I would tell you right up front that there were no harsher critics of the battlefield statistics than people on the civilian embassy pacification side. And our constant efforts to show that progress was being made -- we were sharp critics of that, sharp critics, much more inclined to try to call -- to see things our own way. But we too were missing a critically important point. And that is that this effort was fundamentally flawed. I operated with the hope that we could make it a success, if we did the right things we could make it a success, if we could get the right Vietnamese in place, the right province chiefs, the right military commanders, the right psychological warfare programs, the right pacification strategy, the right nighttime warfare, the right intelligence coordination. If you could get things right you could make this work, and we were focused on the wrongness of our operations. But we accepted the fundamental logic of the operations themselves. And so we were, too, part of the distorted perspective in which the war was seen. When journalists came out from the United States, from the Rolly Evans and the Stew Alsops and Charles Collingwood and the many times Joe Kraft came out to look at this war, they would see us, and they would find these voices of dissent. Not dissent with the war, but dissent with the conduct of it. We had a bit of the hubris borne of having seen "the truth". I think in reality as well we overlooked some very important internal dynamics. We overlooked the increasing weight of conventional warfare capability of the North Vietnamese. In believing that Westmoreland and his senior officers overdid the military side -- the great sweeps, the heavy use of artillery and air power, the major

operations -- in being critical of that, in believing that insufficient resources were being expended to provide local security, we overlooked the fact that what would finally kill the Vietnamese regime would be a military victory, and in the end that is what killed it. It was an overwhelming conventional defeat of the Vietnamese army, overextended. It wasn't that the Vietnamese army was under equipped or badly officered by most normal circumstances. Its political logic was deeply insufficient, but what broke it in the end was not the political insufficiency, it was main force warfare starting in Pleiku and then rolling up the entire front.

Q: It was about this time you went to a province. When did you go? Where did you go? Where did you stay?

WISNER: It was an interesting period. I was asked by Bob Komer to be one of the new integrated military-civilian province senior advisors.

Q: An immensely responsible job for somebody of your then age.

WISNER: I was 29 years old. I was a Foreign Service officer, class 6 in those days, became a five a bit later. I was sent up to take command of about 160 American military and civilians including AID, USIA and CIA employees. Millions of dollars in a provincial program. The province I was sent to was the province of Tuyen Duc in the Vietnamese highlands and the autonomous city of Dalat, the old vacation city, the educational center. There were a couple of universities and the Vietnamese military academy in that city. I was sent up at the beginning of 1968. I had as a deputy a Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army, who really took badly to the thought that a 29-year-old civilian was coming up to set up as head. He had been military attaché, of all places in Malawi. He, I think, saw the final blow to his military career and while I was home on a very brief period of leave -- I went home with Paul Hare, we traveled home via Morocco, had a terrific trip all through Morocco, and Paul was going to the neighboring province of Ninh Tuan as senior advisor -- while I was away, the provincial intelligence picked up the movement of Viet Cong and this was a province that had had considerable peace throughout most of the conflict, probably why Westmoreland and Komer felt they could assign me there. The dangers weren't too great. Very unwisely, without assessing what kind of threat was occurring in the province, the Lt. Col. Lloyd Michel was able to obtain a couple of helicopters and, taking the provincial province chief's reconnaissance force and a couple of his officers, went and landed in the middle of a North Vietnamese battalion. Now in retrospect, this was one of the battalions moving into position for the Tet offensive, and he brought those helicopters down right into the midst of this battalion in a remote area of the province and he paid for his decision with his life. By the time I got to Dalat in January of 1968, a new officer had been assigned, a lovely man, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Deverill, who had taught a lot in the military system, was a nuclear affairs officer, eventually was to go back to West Point to teach mathematics there, a man of a very gentle and thoughtful nature and disposition, a man utterly determined to support me, a fine, fine man, a man of the greatest integrity. I was in Dalat for a couple of weeks when the Tet Offensive started and we went through hell.

The town was almost overrun in the first days. We had no effective forces there. I ended up fighting for my own house at one point, staying up nights, patrolling the perimeter of my house and then trying to work during the day, answering calls from Saigon, from Westmoreland

personally on one occasion about the fate of Dalat's nuclear reactor -- we had a nuclear reactor among other things -- looking for forces, finding them assigned to the province then pulled off for higher priority missions. The actual military threat to the city I was in, intense military threat, did not abate for five months. It was a very complicated period. I was visited by many people. Nick Platt (our future ambassador to Zambia, the Philippines, and Pakistan, and now President of the Asia Society) came out and visited me, and I was sending him home when he was pinned down at the airport with machine-gun fire. It was a very tough, tough period, and yet I had my first experience with command of a complex, interagency operation in intensely stressful circumstances -- intelligence, political assessment, economic action, military training, logistical support, political and economic and military advice to the local commanders, the top military officers in the city and the top province officials in the province. These were mature, senior Vietnamese officers, with the town's political leaders, with the Catholic Archbishop, the religious hierarchies on the Buddhist side, the Montagnard tribal chieftains. It was a diplomatic assignment in a wartime setting with vast resources at my disposal, with few embassies in the United States overseas presence that were as large in even numbers of employees and certainly not in budgets as I had at age 29 in Dala. I turned 30 there.

Q: So you were there for a total of?

WISNER: A year. The basic mission of course was to pacify Dalat and Tuyen Duc, to go out to the population centers, build their self-defenses, improve their economic circumstances, help build political support for the government, and strengthen the administration. It was innovative, lots of good ideas, moving and caring for refugees where that was necessary, expanding employment and prosperity where that was also possible.

Q: Well your stay in Vietnam was certainly longer than average. At each stage they wanted you to go on to further things and you agreed?

WISNER: Absolutely, it was part of my sense of commitment. I remember when President Johnson announced he wouldn't run, I remember that vividly. I was in the province chief's office and he felt very strongly. I had to assure them that this did not mean the United States was backing away. I noticed the skepticism that creased the Vietnamese brows at that point. But it was a sense of real foreboding. I came home to -- at this point in 1968 -- a radically transformed United States. One that I quickly found myself personally out of sympathy with. I had a sense of loyalty to the mission I had carried out in Vietnam, that was only part of it. I was hostile to the breakdown of what I thought was public discourse. I was hostile to the breakdown of public institutions, the anarchy in our university system. I noticed it in the life of my youngest brother, and I consider 1968 in its many aspects, even in racial harmony, one of the worst years in American history. It was hardly, as it was called in those days, the greening of America from what I saw, I saw it as a very, very unpleasant passage. Yet I felt a sense of mission and obligation to what I had done in Vietnam, and that wasn't the end of my Vietnamese experience for later as my career advanced -- I went on to work on things North African again, first in the Department and then in our Embassy in Tunis -- I was called back to Saigon as a Foreign Service inspector in the early 1970s to evaluate the widespread presence of Foreign Service Officers, not only in the embassy but in the field throughout, in my case, the southern part of Vietnam. I was then called back, pulled out of the embassy in Tunis at the time of the cease-fire, made Deputy

Consul General in My Tho under Tom Barnes in Can Tho, with responsibilities reaching throughout the southern part of the country, the Delta. For the first six months of the post-Paris peace conference period I then, when Saigon fell, became one of the organizers of the evacuation effort and ended up as Deputy Director of the President's task force for Indochina refugees. I then went on in my regular government career and was called back again by Mr. Vance in 1979 to join then-former Senator Dick Clark in plucking boat people out of the South China Sea and reorganizing the refugee effort for Vietnam. So my career in Vietnam frankly began in 1964 and it wasn't over until 1979.

Q: Thinking about that, going back to organize the evacuation, was this the most intense experience probably of your foreign service career? The most marking?

WISNER: I can't say it was the most. It was certainly very intense. It came about in the following way. Very few people know this story. Would you like me to tell it to you?

Q: Be delighted.

WISNER: Well, as the last year of our presence in Vietnam moved along and the certainty that the United States was going to not return to the fray and that the final round was building up, the disagreements between our embassy and our Ambassador, Graham Martin, in Saigon and Washington grew more and more sharp. Graham Martin was in constant disagreement with Henry Kissinger and with Assistant Secretary Phil Habib, probably the greatest Foreign Service Officer of my time. But I was assigned at that point to the office of the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Carol Laise, wife of Ellsworth Bunker. Her own sense of anguish over the course of events in Vietnam was very, very deep. She was a superb, decent, committed woman, and public servant. Ellsworth Bunker stayed in a more detached way intimately concerned, but no less anguished himself. So Carol had no quarrel with my sense of obligation to what we could see as the approaching end game. But there was a view that Graham Martin advanced from Saigon that any attempt to organize the United States Government for an evacuation from Saigon would have the political effect of signaling our lack of confidence in Thieu's ability to keep the place together. And we would in effect be kicking the struts out and bring the whole house down on our heads. So here we were faced with the implacable opposition of the ambassador and the agreement of the Secretary and the Administration to back him on this point and the ever increasingly obvious fact that an offensive was beginning and the end was approaching. The final days of the military war were approaching us. Cambodia was falling also on the other side at a rate much more rapid than any of us could have anticipated. Like many others, I felt a profound debt of obligation to those Vietnamese who had placed their faith in us, worked in a mission, or served side by side with Americans.

Q: Were we at a life-or-death decision?

WISNER: So what happened was absolutely fascinating. Lionel Rosenblatt, bless his soul, now in charge of Refugees International, who was working for the Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Irwin, called a group of us who had known each other in Vietnam to the Deputy Secretary's conference room and there, in approaching disregard for legal authority, we met to plot the evacuation effort. And we met every day to think through what needed to be done and how to go

about it. As the end game really began to approach and the Vietnamese army began to collapse under the hammer blows of the North Vietnamese offensive, Henry Kissinger -- largely at Phil Habib's prodding -- gave instructions that a special task force be created. We had a team and a plan. Now that task force was headed initially by Dean Brown. Early on, it was obvious that people were starting to flee Vietnam. How were we going to organize this? What were we going to do with them once they got out? Who were going to come to the United States? Who would take care of them when they came? What were you going to do with your embassy? How were you going to get it out of the country? How were you going to coordinate the full weight of the United States Government and coordinate this internationally, because boats would be leaving, planes would be flying, they'd be landing anywhere from Bangkok to Singapore to Manila to Guam? And what were you going to do with what was shortly to be 200,000 Vietnamese refugees pouring out of the country? Not to mention tens of thousands of others stranded around the world as their country's existence came to an end. It was awesome. We began to organize ourselves inside the United States Government. Officers like Paul Hare, who came back and put his job down; Clay McManaway in AID; Ray Dubois out of the Pentagon; Julia Taft out of HEW in those days, HHS today; the strong and wonderful presence of General Chapman at the Immigration and Naturalization Service; Sol Green, his deputy. We formed a real interagency effort and a very strong connection to the American voluntary service community -- the Lutherans, the Catholics, the Church World Services, HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), the International Rescue Committee, Jules Kline -- these people all came together to help receive and care for these thousands of Vietnamese.

In the first stage, the issue was getting out of Vietnam, and then we were managed and run by Dean Brown, former ambassador to Jordan, former Under Secretary. I worked with Dean, did a lot of the leg work; we were working 16, 18 hours a day. It was hell on me personally. I had lost my wife at that point to cancer and was trying to cope with a family, a baby daughter without a mother and it was emotionally very complicated for me personally. But I was working -- maybe it was, say 16, 17, 18 hours a day -- trying to make this whole system function.

After the fall of Saigon, the weight of the operation shifted to how do you bring these people into the United States? Where do you get, what camps do you put them? Where do you resettle them? How do you get budgets from the Congress? We had already done that. In fact we'd gotten 500 million dollars for the cost of the effort. Organizing Congressional testimony, liaison with the Congress, another major responsibility. I became the deputy director of the task force working for Julia Taft, a terrific lady who is now our Assistant Secretary for Refugee Affairs. And that really was opening these camps that we had at Pendleton, at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, at Eglin Air Force Base in northern Florida, Indian Town Gap in Pennsylvania, the last one we opened, and then getting the people settled from there and on into American communities all over the country. We succeeded. Within virtually a year from the fall of Saigon, nearly a quarter of a million Vietnamese had been brought into this country and found homes and most of them who could work had something approaching a job. It was an enormous accomplishment and brought the whole government together in a manner that was unprecedented. The model of course served us very well when Dick Clark came on to deal with the boat people. And over the years we've brought nearly a million Americans of Indochinese origin to this country, but largely as a result of the bit of work that was done at the time. An intriguing story of the foreign and domestic aspects of American public life coming together.

Q: Still, in terms of the time, the image of the helicopters lifting off from the roof of the embassy.

WISNER: Absolutely, it was with some emotion a couple of weeks ago I went back to Saigon for the first time, Ho Chi Minh City now, and stood outside that old embassy, and here it is with its streaked cement. The embassy is back in our hands now, but I mean I could practically hear the chopper blades. I remembered walking through the door and going up to the ambassador's office, sitting in there with Ellsworth Bunker.

Q: Do you feel that the friendships that you forged in all those years on Vietnam and the crew that worked on it formed, in a way, a core of the service and facilitated then your subsequent...

WISNER: Well, I'm not sure I could say there...

Q: The Tony Lakes and Dick Holbrookes and you yourself and many others.

WISNER: Well that's thoughtful of you to put it that way. I'm not sure it was the core of the service. In most cases, all of those you mention, they left. Others a result of disagreements over policy or, in Peter Tarnoff's case, the change of Administration between Carter - Vance and Reagan - Haig. So that in a physical sense these people moved out of the Foreign Service to come back later on in very significant positions. Some were never in the foreign service. Les Aspin, Congressman Aspin, who I worked with in Saigon in those days -- we were in the same office together -- became close and dear friends. Some stayed in the service; Paul Hare and I did. We were the exception in this group rather than the rule. Johnny Negroponte stayed in. Dick Teare stayed in. David Lambertson stayed in. But I think of others who were in this same circle of friends, people like Les Gelb. Some ceased to be friends -- Dan Ellsberg, with whom I considered I had a bemused friendship during my time in Saigon, but when the Pentagon Papers story broke ---. But other friendship circles remain very strong. I remain deeply fond of Neil Sheehan all these years, so the friendships extended into the press. It was really a set of fibers linking a generation, this Vietnam experience. People who were deeply interested in public policy. People like Tony Lake, Dick Holbrooke, Peter Tarnoff with uncommon intelligence, a capacity to take risks for public purpose, a sense of spirit of public engagement that is in some ways lacking today. The sense of drive, the sense of something really being at stake. This was a terrific lot of guys to have known and been associated with, most of them much brighter than me, but a wonderful, wonderful gang.

GILBERT H. SHEINBAUM
Political Officer, USAID
Hue, Hoi An, and Saigon (1964-1968)

Gilbert H. Sheinbaum graduated from New York University with a degree in history and political science. He also attended New School for Social Research, where he studied international relations. He was convinced by one of his brother's friends, Jim Green, to enter the Foreign Service. He also served in

Laos, France, Denmark, Madagascar, Malawi, the Philippines, Switzerland, and Sri Lanka. He was interviewed by Tom Dunnigan on September 6, 1995.

Q: And there were three ambassadors, Maxwell Taylor, Cabot Lodge and Ellsworth Bunker, while you were there. What was it like when you arrived in Saigon in '64?

SHEINBAUM: Well, I have a very close friend, Gerry Hickey, an anthropologist who had spent a couple of years in Saigon in the late '50s. He still studies and writes about the Montagnards in Vietnam. In November 1963 he was on his way back to Vietnam and stayed with me for what was to have been just a few days. He wound up spending three months with me, but after the Diem assassination, they put a hold on visitors, so I had learned a lot more about Vietnam from Gerry and it sounded like I was going to a real hell-hole. I was prepared for the worst. However, when I arrived in Saigon in September 1964, it couldn't have seemed more peaceful. Five days after I got there, there was a coup, but you wouldn't have known it if you'd gone out on the streets. I'd gone over to the AID office on a Sunday to do some work, and when I came back to the hotel (the famous Continental with the lovely veranda looking out on a major square) I was told, "How come you went out? We're all restricted." Well, it didn't look like it from the traffic I saw on the streets -- well, the traffic was indeed a bit lighter, but I was new to Saigon and it was a Sunday and I didn't find things to be uptight. There was a lot of military activity as time passed and a lot of government instability which bothered everyone. My first assignment was up in Hue, the old royal capital in central Vietnam, for seven months. There was a fear of Viet Cong behind every bush. I was warned that I couldn't trust any of the local people; even if they were government people, were they really working for the Viet Cong? And so on. And yet I had some very good relationships in those days. So I had an interesting although somewhat frustrating period in Hue. I was the AID rep for the city of Hue, while the provincial AID officer was an Army Lieutenant Colonel, who I think had a different agenda than just AID work, and he was a total loss as far as the rest of us were concerned. He was also a nasty guy. Then I was assigned down to Hoi An, a very old, historic town (formerly known as Fai-Fo) noted for its small port and now capital of the province of Quang Nam. They assigned me there as the provincial rep and I . . .

Q: But still with AID?

SHEINBAUM: With AID. I stayed there only six months because they brought in a senior officer over me, one of many who were two-three grades higher assigned - despite absence of knowledge about Asia - to buttress our civilian presence throughout the country. This guy was a poor administrator, offensive to the Vietnamese, and a pain, so they then assigned me to the 3rd Marine Amphibious Force as the civic action advisor. I spent the last six months in Central Vietnam with the Marines, an unusual and revealing experience. The Marines treated me very well.

Q: Now, when you first arrived, we were not actually in a fighting situation, were we?

SHEINBAUM: That's correct. When the Marines came ashore in early 1965, they were the first U.S. combat troops in Vietnam, and they came ashore in my province, Quang Nam. I was not informed of this beforehand, although the senior AID officers in Da Nang were in on it. It didn't

have any great impact on my AID program in the province at first as the Marines took a defensive posture during all that period. They were setting up bases in Da Nang and Chu Lai; they built a new airstrip in Chu Lai, 50 kms. south of Da Nang. And they were establishing reasonably good relations with the local people. But, of course, they were very distrustful of everything and, as we found out, they had good reason to be. For example, the Marines were perplexed to discover one morning that a Vietnamese they had killed the night before during an attack on Chu Lai was the spiker on the local volleyball team the Marines played regularly. But in general the situation was very quiet at that time. The Marines didn't go into an offensive posture until 1966, about the time I was leaving Central Vietnam.

Q: While you were with AID, did you have any connection with the embassy at all? The people in the embassy?

SHEINBAUM: Oh, yes. John Burke, one of my oldest friends in the Foreign Service, asked me if I would consider joining the political section after my AID tour, but I had planned on economic training at Princeton. You see, in '64 when I got squeezed out of that economic training at Princeton, they said, "Well, don't worry, we'll take care of you after your stint with AID in Vietnam." At that time, Jack Reinstein, who had been my Economic Minister when I was in Paris, was head of economic training at FSI. I wrote him that I'd like to get back into Princeton. And the response was, "Well, we have a new program, a six-month economic studies program at FSI." I said, "Fine, I'd love to go into that and then follow it with Princeton." "Oh, no, no, that's not our policy." The policy was that after you go through the six-month course, you get a tour of duty as an economic officer and then you can do economic training at a university. I said, "Yes, but by that time, I'll be over forty." And forty was the cut-off for university training. So I said, "I've just finished my tour in Vietnam and I think that the Department is welshing on its earlier commitment to me." That's the term I used with Jack and he said, "I don't think that's correct, that the Department's welshing on its original commitment to you." I said, "I'm sorry, Jack, they are welshing on it because that was the commitment and I'm not getting it." So I turned down the six-month course and joined Embassy Saigon's political section.

Q: All right, could you have left after two years in Vietnam? You could have gone to the six-month economic course if you wanted to take it? But rather than that, you went into the political section in the embassy.

SHEINBAUM: Right.

Q: Which put you there in some of the hottest days we've ever had in Vietnam, leading up to the . . . Were the Vietnamese you met and dealt with, were they optimistic, fatalistic, or how could you characterize their outlook and their prospects that they saw?

SHEINBAUM: Some were guardedly optimistic. Others were just going about doing their thing. I suppose, guardedly optimistic was the way I would characterize almost everybody there that I dealt with. I was assigned to deal with -- not with the government's party -- but with all the miscellaneous parties. I did that only for a year because I got scooped up by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to be his first staff assistant. Well, actually his first staff aide was Bill Shepard who was the holdover from Ambassador Lodge.

Q: *Oh, yes. who ran for governor of Maryland, right?*

SHEINBAUM: Right. But the Ambassador wanted somebody else and he focused on me. I turned him down at first. I said, "It's not the kind of job I'd like to do. I'm doing substantive work; I'd like to continue in that." And then Tom Recknagel, Deputy Political Counselor, came back to me and said, "Look, the Ambassador's looked around at everybody else - and you're it." And that was nice; I mean I worked with not only Ellsworth but also with Eva Kim who was the secretary. Eva and I were back-to-back in the office and she was great to work with.

Q: *Were you often in physical danger, did you feel, in Vietnam?*

SHEINBAUM: There were a couple of incidents involving military aircraft or Air America when we were in physical danger, not from hostile fire but from aircraft problems. I was never under fire but, of course, I was there during the Tet Offensive when we didn't know what was going to happen next.

Q: *I wanted to ask you about that. You dealt with the non-governmental political groups -- parties. What about the Buddhists? How do you assess the Buddhist factor?*

SHEINBAUM: Somebody else dealt with the Buddhist movement, if you want to put it that way, because I didn't speak Vietnamese very well. The Buddhist factor was rather strong because, you know, the Buddhist clergy had become rather activist. There was lingering Buddhist resentment against Ngo Dinh Diem and the Catholic control of the government. In 1967 Nguyen van Thieu was President and, because he was Catholic, the Buddhists felt that they were still getting short shrift since few other leaders of the government -- the major players -- were not strong Buddhist followers. I gained insight through numerous friends who were Buddhist. The Buddhists were resentful, but they were not a cause for major problems at that time.

Q: *And they were not supporting the Viet Cong?*

SHEINBAUM: No, as best as I can recollect as a group they were not overall supporting the Viet Cong. There were individuals and maybe some small components of the Buddhist community who were, but, generally speaking, I don't think they were supportive of the Viet Cong because they knew that things would be very tough afterwards - as they were.

Q: *Well, as you know, there was growing frustration and uncertainty in this country as to our Vietnam policy from '65 on. Was that reflected in Saigon -- the riots, the student demonstrations here, the protest marches?*

SHEINBAUM: Reflected in what way, do you mean, Tom?

Q: *Among our staff out there?*

SHEINBAUM: We were very conscious of it, I would say. We were very conscious of it. Phil Habib was our political counselor the first eight or nine months I was in Saigon and then it was

Arch Calhoun, and I think they felt the pressure building up in the United States. But we all felt that we still had to do our jobs the best way we knew how. We had to present the situation as it actually was. I think we were, generally speaking, pretty honest in our reporting. I saw much when I was working for Bunker. There was so much paperwork on my desk that I didn't have a chance to read anything but the most important documents. Yet, I was certain that the staff was pretty honest, at least for the State Department guys, especially those who were dealing with the reporting from the provinces. The five-person provincial reporting unit - Dick Teare was the head of it when I was there - laid things out on paper in a very realistic way.

Q: Punches were not pulled then?

SHEINBAUM: That's right.

Q: What was the effect of the withdrawal of our dependents from Vietnam?

SHEINBAUM: I wasn't in Saigon at that time (February or March 1965). I was up north. And of course, I didn't have any dependents. And after the bombing of the embassy in February, I think that there must have been a morale factor involved. I also think that it was an indication that things were not going well. And therefore, there was some foreboding about the future.

Q: Now, there were peace feelers being put out from Harold Wilson and other people all through the mid-'60', Did they have any effect on our people out there?

SHEINBAUM: Not that I recall.

Q: People were not saying, "We should have grabbed this, or we should take advantage of this." Because they all came, of course, with various hooks in them as far as we're concerned.

SHEINBAUM: Yeah, sure.

Q: Now let's talk a little bit about the Tet Offensive. Were you personally affected by that?

SHEINBAUM: Well, I had just returned two days earlier from my father's funeral in New York. Dave Carpenter, my housemate, and I and a few friends had gone to Cholon (the Chinese part of Saigon - Tet is also a Chinese holiday) for dinner and to watch the colorful festivities. When the shelling began at 3 a.m. January 30, I had to be woken up by Dave. and we immediately got on two phone lines in Arch Calhoun's house next door one to the embassy and one to Washington. The connection with Washington was important because, after a while, our duty officer at the embassy, Allan Wendt, was too busy handling the wounded and giving directions to the Marines and others in the building.

It was chaos in the embassy. And snipers were firing at it from across the street. Allan, our communicator, Jim Griffin, and the Agency people were very active. They were trying to report as much as possible. Allan had to give up; he just left the phone off the hook in the embassy, except for us and so we fed information back to Washington whenever Allan told us what was going on. I had to stay at Arch's house until about nine or so in the morning to keep on the only

line between the embassy and Washington, but I left when I learned the Ambassador had already come to the Embassy after all the Viet Cong inside the compound -- nineteen or twenty-one -- had been killed. But they didn't get inside the Embassy, fortunately. The Marine who had been outside the building but inside the compound had been very alert, and as soon as shooting began at the embassy gates, he pulled those heavy, huge, wooden doors shut and bolted them as he came running in. Thank God for that because otherwise the V.C. would have gotten inside the building, having gotten through the fence after killing the four U.S. Army personnel at the two gates, and the V.C. were running rampant around the property. So I came to the embassy after Bunker had done his walk-through of the property, and things were chaotic. Some staff had slept through the racket going on throughout the city. I remember driving to the embassy and seeing a few bodies lying around -- one hanging out of a car. I think we sent everybody home at three o'clock. There was probably a curfew. I left between five and six and I was the last one in the entire embassy to go. The Ambassador had gone, Eva had gone, and so I went outside and began to drive my Austin Healey -- a white Austin Healey with the top down. It was the only car on the street all the way home, about 1 ½ miles, and I was surely conspicuous all the way.

Q: A rather eerie feeling, I guess.

SHEINBAUM: It was. I got to the first corner, and as I was making a right turn I heard somebody pull the bolt back on his rifle. I slowed down, and I heard bolts being pulled back at a couple of other corners, but nobody hampered me and I got home. So that was that. Then a couple of times in the next few days, I had to run messages up to the palace to Thieu or to his aides. There were a couple of blocks en route where there were still some Viet Cong snipers, and the Marines that drove me in some wreck of a sedan had M-16s on the floor. They were holding them as we drove up to the palace and we kept our heads down. That was one of the last V.C. hold-out areas in Saigon, virtually across the street from the palace, but that the only way we could get into the palace was through that one gate. So I had to do that a couple of times. So that was perhaps the one time I really felt I was under fire, but nobody fired at us.

Q: Yes, you were in grave danger there.

SHEINBAUM: As you can see, I survived.

Q: Did the results of Tet change your viewpoint at all or those of the people with whom you worked in the embassy?

SHEINBAUM: We were trying to make things as plain as possible to Ellsworth Bunker -- what the situation was. He was getting a very limited point of view from the military and perhaps to a certain extent from the Agency. The Agency was trying to be honest in many ways but unfortunately they were under pressure from their powers-that-be back in Washington. I forget who was Agency Director at the time. George Jacobson, the mission coordinator and a retired Army colonel, and I would bring in some people to talk with the Ambassador. We gave them false names for the Ambassador's calendar or maybe didn't even put them on the calendar. Some of these were military officers like John Paul Vann who would come in under an assumed name because General Westmoreland would have hit the roof if he knew that Vann was talking privately with the Ambassador. And the Ambassador was appreciative of that. George brought in

his military contacts, and I brought in some of our provincial people. I think it helped to leaven the situation for the Ambassador. We were all beginning to become very pessimistic as to how things were going to come out. Then there was the second Tet Offensive a few months later which made us more apprehensive as it lasted longer and created more devastation around the outskirts of Saigon. I remember flying around in a helicopter a couple of times -- Westmoreland's helicopter while he was in the Mission Council meeting -- and seeing how bad things were. Of course, we didn't have television at the time (no CNN) and we, ourselves, didn't see anything unless you drove or helicoptered through those areas. And in April of '68, Lyndon Johnson was supposed to have met us -- Bunker and Westmoreland -- in Hawaii, but then Martin Luther King was assassinated, so a presidential plane was sent for us and we went to Washington instead.

Q: So you were back here during the Martin Luther King riots?

SHEINBAUM: Well, the riots had ended. It was during the phony peace.

Q: I see. And was Ambassador Bunker kept aware of all the talks that were going on in Paris at this time with Harriman and others?

SHEINBAUM: Yes.

Q: So you were fully in on the picture there. Well, you left in July of '68 . What were your thoughts, leaving Vietnam. Were you depressed or . . . ?

SHEINBAUM: Happy to be out of there because I didn't think we were going to succeed. I guess I'd become somewhat pessimistic even though we generally felt that the Viet Cong had been substantially weakened by their two offensives, and the North Vietnamese were for a while not able to sustain any further offensives as things stood at that time. Westmoreland asked for a lot more troops, 150-200,000, according to reports. I don't know whether he actually asked, I've never seen that defined or whether that was one of several options he put forth.

Q: Which was turned down?

SHEINBAUM: Which was turn down -- wisely.

Q: Well, following those exciting years, you were transferred to Denmark.

SHEINBAUM: I lived through Vietnam again in Denmark because having just come from Vietnam and the Embassy had many requests for a speaker, particularly on Vietnam, I went to many parts of Denmark talking about U.S. foreign policy and particularly Vietnam.

Q: Did you find any sympathy for our policy in Vietnam?

SHEINBAUM: Not much sympathy. But I found less antipathy than I expected.

BARRY ZORTHIAN
Chief, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
Saigon (1964-1968)

Barry Zorthian, a graduate of Yale, served in the Marine Corps during World War I out in the Pacific. At the end of his service, he became a journalist with the New Haven Register. At a Yale Alumni cocktail party, he ran into an old college friend, Lowell Clucas, who was a senior editor at the Voice of America. Clucas invited Zorthian to come to work at VOA. It was while working stories that centered around the United Nations that he became interested in Foreign Affairs. In 1953, he earned his law degree at night, while still at VOA. He also served abroad in Germany and India. He was interviewed by Cliff Groce on October 20 and 26, 1988.

ZORTHIAN: There was certainly an operation going there -- people like Dave Sheppard and Ev Bumgardner and Doug Pike and quite a few others. The mission was a troubled mission, for all kinds of reasons. My predecessor, John Mecklin -- who was a lateral entry PAO from Time Magazine and wanted to get in a hitch of public service, was a very fine journalist and a very good guy; I got to know him much better later -- had been transferred by Ed Murrow as part of a whole housecleaning of the U.S. mission, which was in all kinds of difficulty with the press, with the Diem overthrow, the aftermath of that. So virtually every chief of agency was transferred, John among them. The AID chief was transferred. Paul Harkins remained as commander but Westy (General Westmoreland) was brought in clearly to replace him in a few months. The CIA people were transferred. We got a whole new country team there very quickly, all within the space of -- Westmoreland, for instance, arrived two weeks before I did, left Vietnam four years later, one month before I did. Phil Habib came in fairly shortly to replace Mel Manfull as political counselor. Pierre da Silva came in for CIA. Jim Killen came in for AID, to replace Joe Brent. The whole thing turned over. Washington's decision was -- the situation there was deteriorating after Diem -- they'd bring in a whole new team and turn them loose on them.

Our USIS role in Vietnam was fairly confused. AID had its own communication program going, providing hardware and equipment and training. MACV (Military Advisory Command, Vietnam) had a political directorate operation going, modeled somewhat after the Kuomintang political operation in Taiwan. We had advisers from the British -- Bob Thompson and his team, including a fellow named Dennis Duncan, who was a specialist in "propaganda," working out of their Malaysian experience. There was all this talk about how to handle an insurgency, the combined political-military approach that was necessary.

This was still a "low-intensity" war at that period. Well, that first year in Vietnam was awfully rough. When I was assigned -- I still have the letter sent by Ed Murrow, it must be one of the last letters he sent before he left the Agency and subsequently died -- he said in so many words, "When I proposed you to Henry Cabot Lodge," who was then ambassador, "he was a little concerned about your lack of French," which I did not have; I had kitchen French but nothing fluent, but said he could live with that. "However," Murrow said, "you have to understand this clearly, that you will have nothing to do with the press. You will be director of USIS, he will

handle the press himself, be his own press officer." And those were the ground rules under which I went in. "Zorthian, go do your USIA thing and keep your nose out of the press."

Well, our press relations at that point were horrible. Washington was quite concerned about that, and the new team was quite concerned about that. And despite the ground rules he set up, Lodge kept turning to me on press issues. And obviously I ended up communicating with journalists. By June, when we had a big conference in Honolulu, chaired by McNamara and Rusk, Westmoreland and Lodge jointly recommended that I be named "Czar of Media Relations," of information in Vietnam. Their recommendation was accepted. Remember, this was all in a low-intensity, a counter-insurgency situation. We had less than 20,000 Americans in country then, and those were largely logistical and support and advisory troops.

Q: Who originated that idea of giving you overall control -- the Ambassador?

ZORTHIAN: Well, I'm not sure. I guess the Ambassador did. I certainly didn't because I was in no position to do so. And Westmoreland did, to a certain extent. He had a military information guy, but the need for coordination was very clear. I guess the ultimate recommendation for that may well have come out of Washington. Bob Manning was Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs when I first got there. Bob is an old friend of mine. That decision in Hawaii was eventually endorsed, or adopted, or whatever the right word is, made statutory, by the NSC. As far as I know it's the one and only time the NSC put out a directive, naming me by name, saying I would be the chief public affairs adviser to the ambassador and COMUS MACV, and have the following responsibilities. It gave me the guidance of maximum candor with minimum security, laid out ground rules. Now, I pretty well know Bob Manning wrote that because he moved from the State Department over to the White House as the coordinator of the whole media effort there. To some extent unfortunately, Bob got the offer of being editor of Atlantic magazine shortly thereafter and left, and he was never really replaced. So in the media relations hat, I ended up literally with five bosses, because I was authorized and responsible to five agencies. I'd get White House message, I'd get State Department, I'd get Defense Department, I'd get USIA, and even AID, all of whom had ideas, uncoordinated frequently.

Ultimately -- I guess it was almost a year later -- I finally got transferred, because there were complaints about a USIA man dealing with the American press -- Leonard Marks, I've never forgotten, went up before Fulbright, and when he was asked about the law that prohibited USIA from propagandizing the American people: "Were those people in Vietnam dealing with the American press?" He said, "no, absolutely not, USIA does not." Well, I was seconded to the State Department shortly after that, with the Agency reimbursing State for salary. But those were very intense days. Vietnam was collapsing. Militarily the South Vietnamese were losing as much as a battalion a week. The country was in danger of being split in two by the VC. Governments were coming and going. We had demonstrations in Saigon. We even had raids on some of the USIS libraries. It was a very difficult, intense period, where we were close to anarchy much of the time. And in the middle of all this, we were trying to set up the press operation and to coordinate it and make it effective and be honest.

Q: You were addressing a multitude of audiences simultaneously.

ZORTHIAN: Oh, absolutely. And I kept my hat as director of USIS while also being in charge of this press operation. I had fairly quickly a deputy for press as well as a deputy for USIS. Harold Kaplan came out initially, spent about a year. He was followed by Jack Stuart, I guess. John McGowan came in. On that side eventually, Gene Rosenfeld. On the USIA side I ended up with, in my years, five different deputies. Dave Sheppard first, Bob Haney, then Harry Casler came in, Sandy Marlowe came in, and finally Keith Adamson were all deputies at USIS. And as the thing went along we had enormous numbers of Agency people come in.

I've never forgotten the start of the Five O'Clock Follies. Flying back that June from Honolulu to Saigon, I sat next to Frank McCullough, who was an old friend, "Time" bureau chief out there -- actually living in Hong Kong but spending most of his time down there. I said, "Frank, how am I going to tackle this damn thing? What do we do?" The relations were bad. MACV had very little credibility. We didn't have that much, but I'd started being honest with these guys. He said, "There are a lot of things you can do. One is being honest." But he also said, "Have one time of day when you can be reached. One of the headaches here is that people can't get authentic sources, official sources, when they need them." So I looked around for the best time, and I finally announced to the media, "I will be in my office every day at 5 o'clock. If you try to reach me at any other time I may not be here, but remember, I will be in my office every day at 5 o'clock and available to answer any questions you have." And that literally is what happened. The first day maybe five guys showed up, and then it went down, and then it went up. About a month or so later, the MACV press officer changed. A guy named Lee Baker, Air Force, had been transferred, and they got a lieutenant colonel named Lou Breaux, who died recently. He came in, and I called over there and said, "Why don't you come on down?" MACV put out a daily release -- just put it out, never answered questions on it, unless someone took the initiative. "Bring that press release down with you, that press statement, and sit down on the couch next to me and be ready to answer if anything comes up on the military." Which he did. And this thing built up, and that eventually became the Five O'Clock Follies. Downstairs, when we redid USIS after one of these attacks and sacking of the building, we built an auditorium down there, and it got very formalized, institutionalized.

Q: What was the size of the group in those Follies?

ZORTHIAN: Initially, three or four. As it started to grow, then, some days 15, if there was a big crowd. The day the Brinks blew, on Christmas Eve, or Christmas week, of 1964, when the windows in our office blew out and blew glass all over us, there may have been ten, 15 in there. Eventually it grew out of my office, and I had enough other burdens so Harold Kaplan started taking it, and we moved into another office. Kappy started taking that on, and that became part of the deputy's job, the counselor for press affairs. It finally grew out of that temporary space, and we finally moved downstairs in due course.

Then, as far as my own role goes, I shifted in this a year or so later to where, every Wednesday after lunch -- 2 o'clock if I remember it was -- I'd sit in my office and go on a background briefing with any journalist who wanted to be with me, and we'd get into all kinds of things. I'd go through the files, the cables, give them our evaluation. I did that, and the other thing I used to do, again growing out of that conversation with Frank, is have background briefings at my house, over a drink, inviting a certain number of journalists. It was not a wide open thing, it was by

invitation. And I'd try to get the legitimate journalists. One of the problems in Vietnam was that we had a lot of what I called non-journalists, people who'd obtained a letter from their local editor -- I'm going to Vietnam, if I write anything I'll send it to you -- and the editor had given them a letter that forced us to give them credentials. Some of them were there only because they wanted PX privileges. So you had a lot of legitimate, good, first-rate journalists. You had a lot of bad journalists. You had a lot of non-journalists. You had a lot of tourists posing as journalists. There were all kinds there. And you had the visiting firemen, who would be a burden.

Q: Name some of the people you considered the good journalists.

ZORTHIAN: Oh, Frank McCullough certainly was a very good one. Bob Shaplen was an excellent journalist. Of the younger day-to-day journalists, Neil Sheehan was a good journalist. David Halberstam only visited there while I was there. There was a period there when the older hands, World War Two vets, came in: Keyes Beech and Bob Hewitt. You know, as we'd go along, some of the younger journalists who came in winning their spurs there -- Morley Safer I always thought was a first-rate journalist. He was very heavily criticized, I know, for that Cam Ne thing, and if you look at that, his commentary is really not as bad as it was cracked up to be. Dan Rather was out there. There was a group of TV people who were sort of the field dogs. They'd go out with the cameras and look for the boom-boom. There were those who sat back and were much more thoughtful. Peter Grose of the New York Times, in his first years, was a good journalist there. And an awful lot of name journalists came out. The handling, care and feeding of visiting firemen was a major part of our job. As I go along, more names will come to mind. But there were also a lot of just half-baked, superficial and almost irresponsible journalists.

But that first year [1965] was quite frantic. Then, in February -- and I once did a piece commemorating this, I couldn't get it printed -- the first American officially- sanctioned, or admitted, combat involvement came, when we had the air strike in North Vietnam. Shortly thereafter the first American troops came in -- March -- the Marine outfit that came in to Chu Lai, the base up there. By April or May, the 72nd Airborne came in. In June -- this is all 1965 -- there was another very significant Honolulu conference, and this much more secret, much more closely held, where the basic decision to bring in a big American presence was made. I remember Max Taylor giving a press conference, and questions were being raised, and he said something to the effect -- I've forgotten the exact words -- "We're recommending 100,000 men," or something like that, and he said, "We hear there's a figure of 300,000 -- absolutely not! There's no way we can ever justify or need 300,000 troops there." Well, as you know, we finally hit 550,00.

But through the spring of 1965, the other side of the house, the USIS, communications, propaganda side -- and I use propaganda here hopefully in the better sense of the word -- was still disjointed, still uncoordinated. The respective heads of the operations -- Ralph Boyce of AID communications and a guy named Bob Bowen, lieutenant colonel in the military, headed up the MACV thing, and I began to meet periodically under the umbrella of the Mission Council, which was trying to pull the mission together. There had been competition, separatism and everything. Lodge, if you remember, left in June 1964, and Maxwell Taylor came in as ambassador. One of the tasks Maxwell Taylor had was to try to coordinate this mission. We evolved -- because the whole communications was disoriented, uncoordinated and sometimes contradictory -- we

evolved the concept, by mutual agreement, that this all ought to be pulled together. I kept pressing: we've got to have coordination. We had a so-called Psychological Operations Committee, which I headed up. When I first got there I found them voting on policy. My first statement was, "There'll be no more voting. I'll make a decision, and if it's wrong it's wrong and I'll check with the powers that be. But this isn't a democracy we're operating here." Well, we evolved this concept of cohesion, of pulling together the whole thing, and that led to the concept of a joint U.S. public affairs office, a completely coordinated operation.

About that time, in March, Carl Rowan came out with Army chief of staff Harold Johnson, who was very receptive and very sensitive to this communications side of the business - the only chief of staff or top military man who came out on one of those visits and asked for a briefing on what USIS was doing -- and he came over and we briefed him. Carl, with Johnson's agreement, picked up on this idea of a joint operation, brought it back to Washington. The NSC approved it. And so we got another directive, organizing the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, with contributions from all five agencies: State, AID, the military -- MACV, USIS, and even CIA. We had a couple of CIA guys, divorced from their CIA duties, as their contribution to JUSPAO. The operation started informally, by Embassy announcement, in April, I believe, of '65. Formal institutional approval by Washington, with paperwork authorizing and all of that, started July first, '65.

Q: I'm confused, Barry, because I thought when you went back from Hawaii in June of --

ZORTHIAN: That was the press side only. This was the USIS side, the communications side. And for the first time, all communication in Vietnam, from media relations to USIS activities to psychological operations -- anything dealing with communications -- came under one direction. I had two deputies. On one side was the press deputy; on the other side we had a JUSPAO deputy. Both those deputies, incidentally, were counselor level in rank terms. The great tragedy is that the JUSPAO concept, which grew out of the counter-insurgency, was overtaken by events almost before it started, because in came the conventional war units. MACV grew and grew and grew, and the tail started wagging the dog. Even on the civilian side, reorganization started almost that soon. By fall we had CORDS, or whatever they called it then. At this time, you see, we had three representatives in each province; we had a JUSPAO rep, and AID rep and a MACV rep, military rep, advising province chiefs -- this, in addition to the military units -- the civilian side of the operation, if you will, the people side of the operation. Eventually, that was all taken over by CORDS and JUSPAO lost direct control of its province reps, of its field reps, and got instead a support role and a role of substantive direction, much the way the Joint Chiefs command the theater commands and the Army, Navy and Air Force all provide support and manpower and service policy direction.

Within a year or so USIA became tired of the mission because it was drawing down people, it was drawing down money. They wanted out. They said so. There were a lot of elements in the Agency that said, "This is not our job, wartime propaganda." At any rate, JUSPAO got almost dated -- the concept. You know, we kept talking about this coordinated, political and military, counter-insurgency war, and coordinated communications support effort, and it got almost dated by the time it got going. Although I will say over the years I think JUSPAO made some real contributions. I think there were many flaws in the operation, and certainly many people have criticized it. The tragedy to me is that the whole experience, if you will, has been forgotten and

put aside. The Agency, when it did a 35th anniversary book, barely mentioned JUSPAO. There was one picture of Sam Dieli, and it simply said under it, "A member of JUSPAO" -- no recognition that this was something that was a very significant part of the Agency record and experience, that took a lot of its manpower, took a lot of its money, and had implications for its role generally.

But you had this pattern. As I say, I got there in early 1964. By June the press chore, on a coordinated basis, had been turned over to me. That first year was a frantic, hectic, chaotic year -- political, substantively -- in Vietnam. The spring of '65 came the concept of JUSPAO. That was accepted. It was put into operation during '65. By December there was some loosening of it. By December '66 the Agency was tired of the thing, wanted out. I've got a copy of a memo from Leonard Marks to the White House saying that in so many terms -- Dan Oleksiw being his point man on weakening it or cutting it down. Then going along for six or seven years, until I think it was officially dissolved in 1972, if I remember. Bob Lincoln would know that, I think. Bob was there. Or Alan Carter -- one of them -- I guess Bob sort of officially ended it and converted back to USIS.

There were a lot of problems, many, many gaps, shortcomings. But I'd also say -- and I don't think it's too self-serving a statement -- a lot of major contributions and lessons were learned.

Q: Name some of your problems.

ZORTHIAN: Acceptance by all hands, who were used to traditional, institutionalized, Washington-based agencies -- to accepting a coordinated concept. Remember there was never this kind of coordination back in Washington, so that we were getting direction -- now I'm talking just about press -- from five different agencies with different interests. There was never that coordinated operation back here. Even though USIA was supposedly the executive agent, it did not pull together very much back here. So acceptance was difficult.

The problem -- and it's an eternal one -- between headquarters and giving direction to a field. The collateral responsibility problem. We had representatives out in the provinces that nominally and in fact were under CORDS but also turning to us for help.

Resources. The Agency and others made a lot of things available, and did put a lot of money into it, but there were times when even those were inadequate for the task in front of us. Now at the same time, I say, probably too much dependence on our part on product, to the mechanical approach, to counting effectiveness in the millions of leaflets we dropped rather than the substance -- the difficulty of affecting substance and actual programs. You and I have been in this business too long to think that you can engage in communication, engage in propaganda, if you want, in a vacuum. If the substance isn't there, the rest is going to be very inadequate.

Q: How did you try to measure the effectiveness of the operation in the provinces?

ZORTHIAN: Very difficult. One measurement was the return of Chieu Hoi's -- the people who returned from the VC. That obviously could be intensified by focusing all your effort on that, and there were times when we did. The ultimate test in the provinces was security at the hamlet level,

the resistance of hamlet dwellers to VC influence. That was a very difficult thing. You could almost tell the whole story of the Vietnam war on that. That's what Bob Komer with his hamlet indexes, and so on, tried to do. All you could do was contribute to the overall effort, just as the economic program would contribute and military security would contribute. The ultimate test was: were those hamlets resisting VC influence? Were they secure enough? Did they support the government side? And that was a very difficult thing to measure, and to say it was one way or the other was very hard to judge. So you ended up -- this was like the war. It was so difficult to explain and measure the progress in this kind of a fluid war you ended up looking for statistics that you could quantify. So we got into body count issues, and also we got into, how many leaflets did you drop, how many movies did you put out, how many showings did you put on? Well, those obviously are just statistics and don't tell you what people are thinking.

Q: It also affected VOA. We went up to 18 hours a day of broadcasting in Vietnamese, and had no idea of what good it was doing.

ZORTHIAN: A most difficult thing, and I'm not sure ever resolved; a constant problem for the Agency generally.

Another problem was people, training of people. People came out there for 18 months, they got a quick smattering of Vietnamese -- in the early days they didn't even get that. Were they adaptable? Did they have aptitude for that kind of work? Would they want to be there? Was there some enthusiasm, commitment? Now a lot of them had it. Some had it who weren't qualified. Some who were qualified didn't have it. But this was not, if you will, an elite corps trained for this purpose. A background in the Agency came closest of all the agencies, but still wasn't designed for this kind of a situation. The group of province reps I had at first were a great team, but then inevitably, in that kind of thing, as numbers grow you get dilution. But Fred Quinn and Rex Baer and Sam Dieli and John Scanlan -- that first group who came in were just first-rate officers. They helped set the thing up, they got it established, they functioned well. But they also were in a counter-insurgency situation, those early ones, more counter-insurgency than later when the conventional forces moved in. Part of our answer to problems was always: more, more; and I'm not sure that is the answer. Just as part of our answer to the war was: more, more. I'm not sure Americans are skilled enough, sophisticated enough in that kind of a situation to do it with an epee instead of a saber. We've got to go in and clump down five million tons of cement and bombs and PXs and the God-damnedest logistic tail you've ever seen, and try to just win it by weight. And that never worked -- never worked well.

Plus, you know, the ultimate problem was your relations and the performance of your allies, the Vietnamese. Who again weren't trained particularly for this kind of a war -- not the people we were dealing with, who tended to be by and large the urban Vietnamese, a lot of them northern Vietnamese, not very skilled particularly at communication with the hamlet. Obviously, some were, but an awful lot weren't. The competence of the government, the leadership presented, the issues of corruption, and so on -- all that diluted the effort. It would take a long, long analysis and evaluation to come up with final answers, but I think such evaluation is needed.

Still today, 20 years after I left, the U.S. government has not worked out standard operating procedures for low-intensity wars and how it would handle them. If we got into another such

situation, is the Agency going to be the prime agency again? Will it take it on? If so, is it ready to? Has it given any thought to training and preparation? If it's not going to be, who is? Who ever it is, are they ready? Is the military still, in their training for psychological operations, emphasizing largely equipment -- mobile printing presses, mobile radio transmitters, all the rest of the equipment, the goodies? But how much of substance? How developed are our overall plans? Some of it's going on but not very much. We are not prepared, and the Agency isn't. I don't think the Agency has distilled a thing out of Vietnam -- which is a disappointment. Now, the military has tried some; they've done a certain amount of lessons out of Vietnam, they've done a certain amount of postmortems on it. But I don't think the Agency has, and I think the Agency essentially want to turn its back on it.

Well, perhaps so. All I say is, the last time we went into it, the only one that came close was the Agency, and so we were tapped. What's going to happen next time? And it's no good to tell me there ain't going to be a next time, because there sure as hell may be. You know, we came close to it in the Gulf in some ways, and Central America is an area where we've done something. Now the CIA ended up doing the consultation down there, but the Agency has had some involvement in it. As a matter of fact, as far as that goes, I would even note that the Agency hasn't trained for media relations. There's no training for handling the press in our Agency except trial and error, on the spot in the middle of a situation. There's no preparation for it. And as far as I know, none of the training deals with the question of media relations.

Q: They have instituted media relations courses now, in which they're trying to teach people to deal with the press, the media in lively situations. That started recently. They bring in people to really throw zinging questions at them.

ZORTHIAN: Well, God bless, if they are. That has to be recent then. It sure didn't for a long time. It was like throwing the dice. A guy might be good at it or might not.

Well, JUSPAO obviously is close to my heart. I spent four of the good years of my life there, and I get a lot of thoughts on it and somehow I keep saying to myself, I'll write it all out, but I suspect that's not going to happen. On the personal side, I went till June of 1964 without the family. Then my family came to Saigon, after school ended in New Delhi, for a month. Then they took off on home leave, as did I a week or so later and met them in New York. And I wasn't here a week before I got a message from Maxwell Taylor saying, "Come back, you're required." So I went back to Vietnam. Margaret and the boys came out alone in time for the school year in September. They were there about five or six months, obviously not the healthiest situation. The kids used to go to school in a Navy bus with people riding shotgun up on the roof of it. And all civilians were evacuated in 1965 after the initial air strike. Families had a choice of where to go, and my family went to Baguio in the Philippines because of what was then regarded as the best American in Asia, the Brent School, and stayed there three and a half years. I used to get over there about once every other month, sometimes once every three months, a quick visit.

Q: This was high school age?

ZORTHIAN: No -- grammar school age. Actually, when they started high school, Greg came back a year before us to enter prep school here, at high school level. Steve never got to high

school while we were overseas. He started that here. Well, then, finally, after Tet, which was a -- shock may not be the right word, but which was a sort of watershed event in Vietnam.

Q: It was certainly a shock in the United States.

ZORTHIAN: You know, it was clear my war was over, and we were entering a whole new phase and it was time for me to change. I stayed on for quite a while because Bunker wanted me to. Ed Nickel came in to take over the USIS part of JUSPAO; he came in as director of JUSPAO. I became special assistant to the ambassador for press relations, with Gene Rosenfeld as my deputy. But that was a temporary setup, and there was no doubt that one of those days I should have left. I was phasing out. At one point I was assigned to Japan. Alex Johnson, who had been deputy chief of mission in Vietnam, accepted me there as PAO, obviously without language. Then that backed off because Bunker asked me to stay on, and the Agency assigned me to Tufts for a year. I was supposed to go to Tufts for a year's residence.

While I was in Vietnam Jim Linen, president of Time, Inc., had come through. Margaret was over there on one of these big visits, because Vice President Humphrey was in town. They called over the wives; I was doing some official things. Jim Linen had always thought he had dinner with me. He hadn't; he had dinner with Margaret. But based on that, when he got back to New York he asked me if I were interested in a job with Time, Inc., and spelled out a prospect for me. I got back, and they confirmed the prospect. I didn't know where the hell to go. At one point, LBJ told Dean Rusk to give me an Embassy. He had asked me in Guam to stay on a year; I was supposed to be out of there. Well, when the President asks you, you don't say no. Subsequently, Westmoreland had offered me the IV Corps - the top civilian job there with the military under me -- a job John Vann finally got, incidentally. I didn't want to extend again. Margaret was getting restless; four years was enough, et cetera, and I was getting tired. Things had changed, and after Tet, as I say, my war was over. But there was nowhere to go. I didn't want to be a PAO for 20 more years. I was relatively young. In 1968 I was 48 years old. Time came in with a very good offer, so I decided to resign. Dick Schmidt said, "Well, stay on till we get the career legislation through, and retire as a career foreign service officer rather than a reserve or civil servant." So I stayed on a couple of months. I became special assistant to the director for those two months. It was a nominal job. I was cleaning up, doing reports, briefing, and so on. The legislation went through, and I was sworn in as FSIO-1, whatever the title, and then resigned the next week and left the Agency in October 1968. So it's been 20 years.

Q: Did you find your military experience, your reserve status in the Marine Corps helpful in that military situation?

ZORTHIAN: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Q: How so?

ZORTHIAN: Simply that I had been in the military and in the Marine Corps reserve -- I was promoted to colonel while I was in Vietnam, and Westmoreland pinned the colonel's eagles on me.

Q: I thought you were a colonel when you were at VOA.

ZORTHIAN: No, I was a lieutenant colonel then. This was chicken colonel. And he pinned it on, and the word was around. And, as I say, I understood the military, and with that knowledge that I'd been in service, there was a little more acceptance of it; I don't want to overstate it. Margaret lived on a military post -- or right off it -- in Baguio, right near the John Hay base. I'd go in through Clark. But just understanding their structure, understanding their approach to things, helped. I even did two weeks -- it didn't stretch to two week because it was cut short, but nevertheless I took two weeks active duty training in Vietnam, up in Da Nang. Taylor let me go up there. It lasted about a week, a week and a half, before he called me back, but when Lou Walt commanded the Marines up there -- and particularly with the Marines, you know the old wheeze about "Once a Marine, always a Marine" -- they sort of accept you in the family. No, that was helpful. The military people I dealt with were essentially at the colonel level -- the head of information for MACV, the head of information for Vietnam Air, U.S. Air in Vietnam, for the Navy, for the Army. Eventually it became a one-star thing, Sy Sidle became head of information there. Incidentally, those last years, the military, simply because of its weight, kept getting further and further from direction of USIA and of me. By the time I left, that authority was never really restored. And as I understand, the subsequent people really just ran the civilian side of the press operation.

Q: Well, how much of this decision by the Agency to reduce its involvement in the whole picture in Vietnam was affected by the natural course of events on the ground in Vietnam, or how much of it was a philosophical or substantive position taken here in Washington without regard to what was going on?

ZORTHIAN: Remember, the Agency reached that reluctance -- and I don't mean it was an abrupt cut-off but it was a gradual thing -- in December of '66 while the war was still building up and while U.S. forces were growing there. So the situation in Vietnam in '66, comparatively, was in better shape than subsequently. So the Agency's reluctance didn't grow out of the progress there. It may have grown to some extent out of the growth of the military, the fact that it became more of a conventional war, and the weight of the military, but I think most of it, my reading of it -- and Leonard Marks or Dan Oleksiw may have a different reading -- my reading of it was that the Agency got tired of the burden of the budget and manpower demands JUSPAO was making on it, and the extent it had to constrict operations elsewhere. And also faced internally a certain amount of pressure, saying, This is not our business. The cultural purists, if you will.

Q: When Shakespeare was in charge, Kent Crane was area director for the Far East, it seems to me that the Agency involvement in Vietnam was intense.

ZORTHIAN: Well, that may be, but that's later. I'm talking about a memo from Leonard Marks to the White House, saying, I want out! I don't mean they wanted completely out, but they certainly wanted to reduce it. Don't ever let them deny that, because I have it in writing, the memo to the White House. Now, whether after I left there were some new directives -- remember, what the heck, Frank came in in the beginning of 1969. Whether he restored that I don't know, but the fact on the ground is, JUSPAO was dismantled by '72 and it went back to USIS. And I don't know that the Agency at that time, at the end, had even the franchise for

policy guidance in Vietnam. You see, among the other things we did, we had a policy unit that issued guidance in psychological operations to all elements. At one time it was headed by a military man, quite a bit, but Bill Stearman, for instance, did the guidance for and direction of the North Vietnamese effort. My feeling was, as I say, that the core of the opposition came from -- well, there was this feeling, that the nature of the effort had changed, almost before JUSPAO was created. But the core of the effort came from the demands JUSPAO was placing on the Agency -- money, people, and the image of the Agency, as a propaganda outfit as against a cultural, information outfit. And in that there was a good deal of reluctance, including many career officers.

Q: Well, some of us in VOA objected to the fact that we started putting on this program designed to reach North Vietnam, in which we would read the names of prisoners from North Vietnam. This was not a program. This was certainly not in the VOA pattern as a news and information source. But this was enthusiastically supported by the Agency uptown.

ZORTHIAN: Well, it began -- you know, LBJ was a very demanding guy. He'd say, Goddammit, get out there and ... But again I'd say, sure, I can see legitimate questions about that. But here's a situation where you need a tactical radio operation. Who's going to provide it the next time around? There's no preparation for that. And so they'll turn to VOA again.

Q: We turned that portable transmitter at Hue over to, I thought, the military, or to you people for whatever broadcasts you were making into the north, but that had nothing to do with VOA except for the title to the transmitter.

ZORTHIAN: Well, that was after my time. But if the military took it over I question the military's capability at that time of training to handle that kind of assignment. There just was not any readiness.

Q: You think we didn't learn anything from that experience.

ZORTHIAN: Oh, I think we learned a lot, but I'm not sure the Agency has ever distilled it and made it part of doctrine or adopted it or even looked at it. You were in the agency. Now, did you hear of any lessons being learned by the Agency, institutionally? No.

Q: What are some of the memories you have of that experience in JUSPAO, on the personal side -- except for the family situation?

ZORTHIAN: Oh, enormous. Once the families left... You know, someone say, "What price did you pay in Vietnam?" Obviously, the big price -- and it was a very real one -- was separation from family, with two sons in important, formative years -- the months and time you lost with them. Professionally, the job obviously was a very demanding and exciting one, a very intense one. You served in Vietnam seven days a week, 12 hours a day, if that's what the thing called for. And a lot of people did that kind of time. So the intensity is something; you were always absorbed in the job. There were very few breaks unless you got away over to Manila or somewhere else on a trip. And you know, those relationships, in that kind of an atmosphere, become very, very intense, very, very solid. Many, many of those journalists I regard as friends,

see many of them today in Washington. A lot of them have grown up to become managing editors or editors. My relations with them were very close. Professionally, some of the jobs I've had since then sort of threw me in touch with them. But that's also true about Agency people, some of whom are gone -- John McGowan is gone, Sandy Marlowe's gone, Harry Casler's gone. A number of others who served out there I see every so often. Now, there's also frustration at what happened, at our inadequacies in implementing policy, in carrying it out. Our shortcomings in that regard, the flaws we had, the flaws our allies had. I was a believer then. I haven't changed my mind about the propriety or need for our actions. I think we carried it out very badly. We could have done much better with much fewer.

Q: You're talking about the total effort, not just JUSPAO.

ZORTHIAN: The total effort. At the same time, I recognize the price paid. But remember, sitting in Saigon, you're not quite as conscious of that. I don't think I was fully conscious of the price being paid until April of 1968, after Tet -- when, by the way, I'd gone on record to Phil Habib, Bill Depew and George Carver, who came out as an inspection team, saying, "We've got to get the hell out of here. We go to the Vietnamese and say, 'Shape up or we're shipping out,' and if they don't do it, let's get out." That's not hindsight, because the failure of the Vietnamese was very visible then. But as I came out here, I left Saigon under curfew, darkened at night, car dark and so on, driving from the residence out to Tan Son Nhut airport, flew in one of those darkened planes, the things that McNamara set up, one of the KC tanker jobs that had been converted with bunks and so on. Flew dark, and we stopped in Honolulu so there was some daylight then, landed in Washington in the dark. And there was a curfew on here. It didn't look any different from Saigon. That was the Martin Luther King period. That obviously comes as quite a setback.

Then I went up to New England to visit Greg, who had just started in Andover. I took two or three days off, and stopped off in Boston and saw Ken Galbraith. He invited me to dinner that night, and there were a number of people there -- Dave Halberstam, among others. I guess I didn't realize till that dinner how deep the criticism and opposition in the U.S. was. You know, you read some about it in the clippings you'd get from the States, but the intensity of that opposition was just enormous. And the price that was being paid! Here was my son, fresh back, already demonstrating against it, as whatever he was, a freshman in high school. So the price we paid was enormous and therefore I began to feel that what we were trying to do in Vietnam probably wasn't worth the cost at home. But I'm also very disappointed that we didn't do it better in Vietnam. And I don't know that, again, our structure, our approach to these problems is any more sophisticated or skilled today than it was then. Maybe. I think we lost whatever accumulated backlog of knowledge and skills we had. And what have we done with it? Twenty years now, we have very few people in this government who know counter-insurgency, are ready to deal with it, or have any real thoughts about it. Sure, there's some skill left. Now, you can't stay prepared for that forever, but you can spend some time dusting off the lessons, keeping them up to date, keeping them alive. And we haven't.

Of course, one of the sharp memories is the people looking over your shoulder. I see Hubert Humphrey in that picture on my wall and remember his visit. Well, brushing against people like that, seeing them for a day or two under intense conditions, is a very good experience -- at least, impressive, in what you see. People don't realize how much of this country came through

Vietnam. We had 7,000 official visitors one year. A lot of them were military, but nevertheless many, many civilians came in.

Q: How did you get your regular work done?

ZORTHIAN: You did it only because you worked 12 to 18 hours a day. There was no other way. It was good that the families were out of the way, because we couldn't have done any work. Put aside the personal danger; you couldn't have spent any time with the family. There were some first-rate people involved there who devoted an awful lot to it, put an awful lot into it. The frustration of feeling -- you know, all this crap about "the press lost the war" -- bunk. We lost the war in Vietnam, not the press.

Now, you can make an argument that in a backhanded sort of way we won, that the 55,000 lives did not all go in vain. Because we bought ten years, if you will, for South Asia. And those ten years were important ones in getting the surrounding governments to get their roots in and then to establish themselves. In South Asia, in many ways -- with the exception of Vietnam, where you had all the boat people coming out, and Cambodia, Indochina -- but Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and so on -- not the Philippines recently -- in many ways is one of the more peaceful areas of the world. We've had fewer problems there, with the exception of the Philippines. So there are arguments to be made, but overall, I guess, there's some -- pride may be the wrong word, but some satisfaction in having done a job, feeling you contributed, playing a role in what was a critical event in our lifetime, our generation, being very much part of it. And at the same time, a sort of frustration and very real disappointment -- in not having it be successful. So you get ambivalent about it.

Q: You have expressed regret over the fact that there is not an organized memory, as it were, of that experience, to learn from it. Would you recommend to the U.S. Information Agency, or to the U.S. government as a whole, today, that some kind of institutionalized look at that period be undertaken?

ZORTHIAN: I'd certainly recommend that the U.S. government do some contingency planning for low-intensity conflicts. The military is doing something, but I'm talking about overall, including civilian agencies. And in the field of communications, if the decision is that USIA is the prospective principal agency in that field, then that USIA undertake such a study, yes. Some agency of government should do it. I just get the feeling, as I say, that most often the civilian agencies have just sort of brushed it under the rug, and if it happened tomorrow would be caught again short in capability, resources and knowledge. They'd reinvent the wheel.

Q: Is there anything we haven't covered that you want to get on the record?

ZORTHIAN: I don't know, Cliff. Off the top of my head, no. You know, you can keep talking about all kinds of things. There are some great people in our agency of that period. That kind of situation, what became a conventional war, brings out principal qualities in some people. Some of them were cowboys, there's no doubt. A lot of them weren't particularly happy to be there but did one hell of a job, just determined to do it. Many of them went back to more conventional assignments, and I'm not sure came out that well. It's hard to follow that act, professionally.

Some have done it, I guess, but many of them have put in their time and retired since without, I think, ever reaching that degree of intensity in their professional lives.

Q: Is that why you decided to go ahead and retire?

ZORTHIAN: To some extent, yeah. What do you do, afterwards?

Q: You said you didn't want to be a PAO for 20 years.

ZORTHIAN: You go to Japan, a perfectly important post and so on. But you sit there for three years as PAO in a fairly conventional operation, and you say, "Geez, what the hell am I doing here?" So you end up leaving, and try to find a new career that's satisfying. Well, there are all kinds of reasons. One was that I had two kids to educate. You didn't educate kids in college -- even in those days, let alone today at \$20,000 a year -- at private schools on a government salary. Not easily, at least. So all kinds of things entered into it.

I was going to tell you about the ambassadorship. LBJ told Rusk to make me an ambassador, with Leonard Marks there. Rusk was not one of my greater fans. I'm not sure I had too many fans in this press relations job. He was reported to have said at a staff meeting at the State Department about that time when my name came up, "That's one of those sons of bitches who thinks the public has a right to know." That sort of puts the wrong twist on my efforts. The military didn't particularly like the way I was open with the press; I'm not sure they didn't think I was just creating headaches for them out there. AID and CIA may not have been in the loop. So there were very few guys back here cheering me on. Nevertheless, LBJ wanted me, the ambassadors for whom I worked were supporters. My relations with them always were good. Anyway, LBJ told Rusk to give me an embassy.

Finally one day Leonard Marks called and said, "I've got an embassy for you, Barry." This was over the overseas phone, which we weren't quite used to, so you'd shout to make sure you were heard. I said, "Where, Leonard?" and he said, "Niger," and I said, "Oh, Jesus." I said, "You mean Nigeria, don't you?" Which was not all that attractive either. He said, "No, no, Niger." I said, "Wait a minute, Leonard." And I raced upstairs and pulled out an atlas and looked, and there was a big place that said "Niger" but I noticed it also said "desert" in most of it. And then I noticed that little strip of green. I said, "Leonard, I've got to check with Margaret. I'll call you back," I check it out. It has a little sliver of green along the river, the Niger River, three million people, virtually all starving. But it was Rusk's ultimate revenge, because it was one of the few countries in the world without a single daily newspaper. I told Margaret, "You don't want to go to Niger, do you?" and she said, "Not after India and Saigon." So I called Leonard and said, "Margaret won't do it" -- I must admit, I cowardly put it on her and said, "Margaret won't take it." But that was Rusk's thing. And with the State Department attitude in those days, reflecting what they thought about that post, the guy who got the job finally was an R-3 from AID who was black. This, in State Department eyes, is really the bottom of the ladder. If I'd had a reasonable post I might have stayed in. That was a disappointment, and it was obvious I wasn't going anywhere in State. So we gave up on that one, and did decide pretty much to get out.

I have no regrets. You know, you pay a price, jumping around, but no real regrets. I had not

intense, close relations with LBJ but came close to him, saw him closely in action many times, a few times directly, and some of the exchanges with him certainly stay in my mind. One of them Bob Donovan reports in the book he did on Truman and Johnson. And there are various memories that come back. I've stayed in reasonably close touch with a guy like Westmoreland, Bunker I've stayed in touch with. I was very lucky in the Foreign Service, with five literally great ambassadors, each in his own way. I served with John Kenneth Galbraith, with Chester Bowles, with Henry Cabot Lodge, with Ellsworth Bunker, and with Max Taylor. That's quite a roster. None of them career; even Bunker wasn't. Then as career people we had Alex Johnson and Sam Berger, who were top-flight, and Bill Porter, who died not long ago. So it was a very impressive group of people to serve with, and I think in many ways the best the country has to offer. So there is satisfaction in that kind of experience. I've often thought about writing a book, and never got around to it. When I first came back I had a couple of five-figure offers, a \$20,000 advance, and so on. Frank Stanton at CBS was working on that. But the book they wanted was not the one I wanted to write. They wanted a kiss-and-tell book, "How I Lied to the Press in Vietnam" type of book, and there was no sense in doing that. If I'd gone to Tufts I'd probably have done the book. Instead I went to "Time" and just got involved there very quickly.

JOHN J. MCCLOY
Ambassador
Vietnam (1964-1968)

John McCloy was appointed in 1964 as Ambassador to Vietnam. He was interviewed by Paige Mulhollan for the LBJ Library in 1969.

McCLOY: Then I can recall being called down to Washington by Mr. Johnson on various occasions when he sought outside advice. I remember very vividly one time when he tried to induce me to go to Vietnam. That was when Senator Lodge first resigned from his position there. He wanted me to take Senator Lodge's place.

Q: *As ambassador to Vietnam.*

McCLOY: Yes, to take his job in Vietnam. That was early on. That was quite a long way back.

Q: *That was the summer of '64, yes.*

McCLOY: I objected to such an appointment. I said I didn't know anything about that part of the world; that I didn't think that it was my dish of tea; that at my age at that time, I felt that it would take two or three years out from my practice after I had spent so many years in government and I wished to return to the practice of the law, I didn't want to break into my practice again. I sought some continuity and I felt I had responsibilities to my firm. So I resisted his importunities in that regard. But I must say that I had a very strong impression of the man's force when he pressed me to take the job.

Q: *He tried to exercise the treatment at this time.*

McCLOY: Talk about twisting your arm! He probably has forgotten about this, but I will never forget it. It was not in the big Oval Room, but in that little room at the side there. And he was quite insistent - he's a pretty tall man, and he leaned over me, and he said: "We're organizing for victory there, McCloy, and I want you to go out there and help in the organization." He rang all the changes. He went from appealing to my patriotism and shaming me with my lack of it, or lack of willingness to take on a tough job. And I'll never forget, he told me -- to give you an idea of how heavy the pressure was -- he said to me: "I want you to go out there, McCloy, because you're the finest or the greatest or something, I forget what the adjective was but the indication was that I was a pretty successful proconsul, having in mind my German experience. And he said -- these may not have been his exact words but they were close to it -- but "You're the greatest proconsul the Republic has had." I saw myself with a Roman toga with a laurel wreath around my head. I must say, he almost got me at that point. I thought to myself, "I can understand how Mr. Johnson gets people to do things for him, because from tremendous pressure and tremendous flattery, I felt that he had rung all the changes and I came out of there rather limp and feeling a little bit ashamed of myself because I hadn't agreed to do it. But it just seemed to be so contrary to my scheme of life at that time, having spent so much of my active adult life in service in the government through the wars, the World Bank and Germany and so forth. But I got a very definite impression of the President's will, and his strength.

Q: Did he continue to ask outsiders such as yourself in for various crisis periods?

McCLOY: Yes. Bob Lovett and I were down there off and on for quite awhile. He talked to me a couple of times in regard to Vietnam. President Kennedy had also asked me for some advice in regard to Vietnam early on. There's no use going into that at this stage. Having seen the commitment which Mr. Kennedy had made of American troops and the American flag into the Vietnam war, which when I was consulted about it, I was very reluctant to approve an American intervention there. But, having made the commitment, then I felt that we ought to do what we could to win the war.

I remember one occasion when there was a question of whether we should bomb lines of communication to break up the infiltration and the movement of the troops from the North into South Vietnam. I spoke in favor of such action. I remember very vividly that Clark Clifford was called upon by the President to carry the brief in favor of bombing in that connection. There have been some other reports and alleged comments that I made at a later meeting on Vietnam when some major decisions were up, but those reports are wrong. I didn't attend that later meeting.

HAROLD KAPLAN
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Saigon (1964-1967)

Public Relations Officer, Vietnamese Affairs, The White House
Washington, DC (1967)

**Press Officer, Negotiations with North Vietnamese
Paris, France (1968-1969)**

Harold Kaplan was born in 1918 in New Jersey. He worked in various government agencies including the OWI, UNESCO, the Marshall Plan and joining USIA in 1952. He served in Germany, France, and Washington, DC. He was in Vietnam and in Washington worked on Vietnamese affairs. He was interviewed by Lewis Schmidt in 1990.

KAPLAN: That's right. I had an extremely interesting time there and I wasn't at all enthralled, because the Kennedy Round was really getting into its stride -- this was 1964, when I had a call from Washington. "Sorry, old fellow, but we need you in Vietnam."

I said, "I don't even know where Vietnam is. All my training has really led up to this job. The ambassador loves me. Both ambassadors love me." There was an ambassador in charge of the Kennedy Round, too.

Q: *In Berne, too.*

KAPLAN: There was one in Berne, but I didn't work with him. My two ambassadors loved me. George Ball was here and loved me. I said, "I'm really feeling useful for once in my life. Why in the hell are you sending me off to this Southeast Asian place that I know nothing about?" Of course, I read the newspapers. I knew that things had heated up there considerably and the Diem assassination thing had happened, and it was getting to be a big headache. But at the end of 1964, we didn't quite foresee what happened later; at least I didn't.

Q: *I don't think anybody really did. When Lyndon Johnson went in, I think he felt that this was going to be a six-month proposition and we would take care of it and get out of it.*

KAPLAN: Exactly. I thought I was once again being cheated out of my Vienna, except I was in my Vienna already, Geneva, doing something very interesting, fascinated by something new to me, which was the old GATT and trade issue, and working with a guy who was fascinating. I thought it was very interesting.

In addition, I had other problems which gave me a sprinkling of the whole U.N. system, and I was quite happy there, but you're in the Army now, you know. I was a professional by then. They said, "Go," and I went. I went to Vietnam, and I don't regret that either, although I have to regret it as an American, regret the whole experience. It was an awful, awful business for us all.

Q: *Were you ever in charge of the so-called Five O'clock Follies?*

KAPLAN: Yes. I set them up and created them. Of course, the meat and substance of the briefing was military, so I just presided over it. It was in order to assert the primacy that we tried desperately to keep going at the beginning. It was under my auspices and I set it up. The fact is, however, that the military took over Vietnam very shortly. All through 1965, a great deal of traffic went through Saigon and Washington on this issue. I was Cabot Lodge's counselor of

embassy. I wanted to be in the embassy. I wanted to be part of that. I felt this was in our national interest. I wanted everybody to understand that Vietnam was a country and we were accredited to it. But the more they piled troops in there, the more Lyndon Johnson sent these people, the more this became impossible. Although I won on paper, I had a big fight about this with Barry Zorthian, and he finally said, "All right. You win."

Q: *Let me get this straight. When you first went there, was Barry there already?*

KAPLAN: Yes.

Q: *Had they set up JUSPAO at that time?*

KAPLAN: No, they were in the process of setting it up. I was drafted into JUSPAO, and all the while kicking and screaming. With the support of Cabot Lodge, I said, "I am Cabot Lodge's counselor. I think we ought to have our setup." After Maxwell Taylor left, and with the consent of Cabot Lodge, who went both ways on this, there was created a thing called the Mission Council. The Mission Council set up a joint U.S. Public Affairs Office under Barry, and although I was recognized by Washington as independent and Cabot's man, in fact, Barry controlled my budget, my office, my secretary, everything. I was working for Barry. I ended by just saying I had to accept it.

Q: *That's a point I wanted to establish, because this has come up on several other occasions in which it was indicated that the press activity, in effect, the spokesman for the non-military side of the picture was supposedly completely outside of JUSPAO and was independent of them. I think later even their budget became independent.*

KAPLAN: I established the principle of that. I got them, on paper, to send a telegram saying this is the way it was. I put it under Barry's nose. He's a very tough guy to deal with! [Laughter] With a little smile, he said, "Okay, Kappy. You win." But, of course, he knew very well that I didn't win. [Laughter]

So we had the principle, but it didn't work. People totally forgot the embassy existed after a while. The war took the whole thing over, and you couldn't do anything about it; it was just too big. When the Big Red One came over, the Air Mobile Division, the whole thing, pretty soon the country was sagging under the weight of our armor and our men. This little embassy, with its few remaining political people, people just brushed it aside; it didn't mean a thing. This was one of the many great political mistakes we made, because it enhanced the sense we gave to the entire world that South Vietnam did not exist except as sort of a sort of --

Q: *A military fief.*

KAPLAN: That's right. I have written on this subject, and I won't go any further on this. I wrote "Farewell to Vietnam," our way of negotiating our way out of that. I'll give you a copy if you want to put it in the archives. That was published in *Commentary*. Before that, I had written a number of little pieces on the whole press setup there when I was out of government by then. I swore, when I left the government, that I would not dump on it and write about how wrong we

were about everything, and I didn't. I did write one piece for a French magazine after I retired from the delegation on the theme that the South Vietnamese, unencumbered by us, rid of us at least after the agreement was signed in 1973, would give a better account than the whole world expected and might even be able to survive. I published this in a magazine in France called *Preuve*. I believe that, and still believe it.

Q: *I believe that it could have happened if Nixon hadn't been so besieged.*

KAPLAN: That's right.

Q: *And with Congress going the other way, cut off virtually all aid to them.*

KAPLAN: Absolutely.

Q: *That killed the morale.*

KAPLAN: They proved it could be done in the offensive of 1972, after we were gone.

Q: *They withstood the first attempt.*

KAPLAN: The Easter Offensive was a tremendous success. Half of the North Vietnamese attacking force was destroyed. They took a terrific beating in that. The South Vietnamese lost a great deal, too. Don't forget there was not a single American ground soldier involved in that. It was a terrific thing. But what we did give them was the air support to compensate for the fact that the first time the North Vietnamese were bringing tanks and things like that down. That was an extremely interesting operation.

After that, the U.S. and Vietnam concluded the thing they'd been negotiating about, and by that time all our troops were out. The North Vietnamese simply waited until the Watergate situation got deeper and deeper, and it became clear that we would not lift one finger, not even for the air. Then they did the whole thing. I have described that very graphically in a piece called "Farewell to Vietnam," which I must give you, in *Commentary* magazine, which started out as a review of a book called *The Palace Revolution* by a Vietnamese, a very interesting book. It was a tragic business. The South Vietnamese would have had a much harder time without any American troops than the South Koreans had, because we'd get those divisions. But they would have, I believe, a fighting chance of surviving if we had kept the Air Force, which was, after all, there.

Q: *Also the materiel and economic support.*

KAPLAN: That's right. When the collapse came, nobody would lift a finger. One of the most poignant and awful things in the *Commentary* article about this book, *The Palace Revolution*, is the story of these people coming back to Washington, where everything is falling apart, and buttonholing people in Congress, pleading with them just to allow a plane to take off from Thailand and hit these people, just to send in another shipment of ammunition. It was tragic, tragic.

Q: Somebody else whom I've interviewed had talked to somebody over there and subsequently also talked to some of the North Vietnamese, who said, "If you had come back in and laid down another carpet of bombing on North Vietnam at that time, the whole thing probably would have collapsed." These were North Vietnamese saying this!

KAPLAN: Lew, you had a situation like the Egyptian Army suffered in the Sinai. You know how very few highways the North Vietnamese had going from north to south. They had the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but you couldn't take tanks over that. So you had twenty-four divisions strung out from North Vietnam to Saigon on an open highway. It was exactly the situation that the Israeli Air Force had against the Egyptian Army. The Israelis just filled the desert with the carcasses of those tanks and trucks. It was a tragic thing. That was the one time the North Vietnamese were not able to move. There were a few planes in the sky. At the beginning, there were a few South Vietnamese planes, too. But they never had a bombing force or a fighter force.

This just left me wrung out and dead. I was, of course, long gone and out of there. I had served in the negotiating group in Paris. I was out of government by then. But I watched all this with a sinking heart and thought of all the people I knew. It was just the most painful thing I've ever lived through.

Q: It was apparently very painful for [Secretary of State Henry] Kissinger, too, because in another interview the officer being interviewed said he was in a meeting at the State Department at the time that Vietnam was coming apart, and the U.S. was refusing to send any further help. Kissinger just stopped and said, "I wonder sometimes just what kind of a country we are." Then left the room.

KAPLAN: When you think of the promises we made to those people, the speeches we made, the endless things, you couldn't have this attitude in Congress just because they so hated Nixon, or whatever, this cowardly, miserable -- these people refused even to talk to the people who were pleading with them. They said, "Go away." It's something that just kills you. You say, "What kind of a country are we?" The political thing meant to these people that promises made, even in our name, solemnly, by people who were elected by the American people -- solemnly -- didn't count for them, because they were just another country. No country can operate that way. It was just disgraceful. The Vietnam experience led straight back to Europe. My wife was in Hong Kong while I was in Saigon. I went back to Europe on a lecture tour that the Agency had asked me to do.

Q: When they were trying to get some of the PAOs and other people in Europe educated to what was really going on in Vietnam, sending people like you around to say, "This is the way it really is."

But before I left, Walt Rostow asked me to come to the White House for a while -- two weeks, he said -- because the President was getting so neurotic about the atmosphere in the country about Vietnam. He wanted to set up a special office to handle his Vietnam public relations problem there. I said, "But it's being handled in a dozen different places. The President, himself,

with all the television sets in his office, and everything else, he's his own PAO on Vietnam. What in the world can we do?"

"No, no." The President has decided, according to Walt, that somebody had to do this.

I went over to the White House and they gave me a little office. I created a little facility. I can't remember it very clearly. It was under Walt Rostow's general purview, attached to the National Security Council, and supposed to disengage from the mass of stuff that we got out of Vietnam things that needed to be disseminated by the President's press operation, everybody else in government, etc. I tried to think what we could usefully do in that respect and set up some things.

A few weeks went by, and I wrote a couple of speeches. When you're in that job, you have to do whatever they ask you to do. I began going to see Rostow and saying, "When can I go to Europe? Harlan Cleveland is expecting me there as his counselor. And my wife is there and my youngest child." The other two were at school. "I think I've set up this office. I think I know what you mean. It's working. We've got young Sven What's-his-name here, who will carry on." Rostow had a lot of people. Again, he himself was constantly talking to the press about these various things.

I got a call from Washington. I think it was from Phil Habib. It might have been Bill Jordan, saying, "Harriman's going to organize a delegation in Paris, and we've decided you're on it."

I said, "Phil, the ambassador will tear me limb from limb. He waited and took very good care of my wife, and he's a very sweet person. We're finally functioning here. You can't do this to me." That sort of thing.

Phil Habib says, "Kappy, don't argue with me. Governor Harriman has more clout than Harlan Cleveland, and that's that."

Sure enough, they put me on that damn delegation. I went down to Paris to prepare for the arrival of the governor, who arrived on May 12 or 13, as I recall. I was there a few days before. I went to the offices, saw Sargent Shriver. I was supposed to be the press officer in the delegation, but I was helping out with some of the administrative stuff. The governor arrived, and we were off and running. We were doing the Vietnam thing. Bill Jordan was the main press man at first, but he was very senior, and the President was going to send him off after a while.

The President put that delegation together in a very odd way, because he only half-trusted Harriman, as I began to understand, in the sense that Harriman was anxious to get rid of the Vietnam thing in almost any way, and he was ready to be much more forthcoming to the North Vietnamese than the President was about to be at the beginning. So he sort of surrounded Harriman with other people, of whom Bill Jordan was one of the toughest. Bill had worked very closely with Walt in the National Security Council. Of course, we had Cy Vance, too, who was a good soldier and also very devilish, but, nevertheless, without the independent crowd that the President feared Harriman would use from time to time and pushing him a little further than he

wanted. I won't go into all the politics of that delegation. All I know is that it was fascinating.

At first it was an interesting job, but my heart was broken and my wife was still in Brussels, and I had been separated from my wife for a long time. During the Vietnam period, she was in Hong Kong, but I think I made it up there about three times in the whole time I was there, for a day at a time. We worked night and day in Saigon. And now we were separated again, and she was there in Brussels. The ambassador was mad, she was mad, everybody was mad. It was a very miserable situation.

But at least the Vietnam talks were fascinating. Every newsman in the world came to them, as if we were really going to settle that Vietnam situation. Of course, they didn't understand the terms of reference that we were really just setting up what was to be the negotiation later, so they all came. I think we accredited 1,800 newsmen from the United States alone in the first weeks. It was just an incredible number. Of course, Bill Jordan and I were taking care of these people. It was really something. Then we had the rest of the world there, and it was a circus.

When it became clear that the governor wouldn't let me go and it wasn't going to settle down, Harlan Cleveland said, "I need a counselor and I'm going to get somebody else." My wife came down and joined me. So I spent all of 1968, through the election, and then into 1969, when Kissinger took over, and we were still holding the meetings with the North Vietnamese, including some secret meetings. It was a fascinating thing in many ways. The real negotiation became, finally, the business of Henry [Kissinger], and, if you read that piece of mine, you will get some account of what he did and how he started all that. He was a brilliant negotiator, as always, but this was one that he did all wrong, for reasons that were not entirely his fault. The result was, as all the world knows, a total collapse of the whole thing.

Q: How long were you there?

KAPLAN: I stayed there until the autumn of 1969, kicking and screaming more and more as time went on, because we were literally being used as a decoy. We would go to the Hotel Majestic, which the French called the Centre des Conférences Internationales, the old Hotel Majestic, which, curiously enough, in my experience, went all the way back to that first conference of UNESCO in 1946, which was held there. That's where the UNESCO headquarters were before they built their offices. So I knew that place very well.

Now I was attending these meetings there, but as a pure decoy. We'd go out, a newsman would come around, I'd make some sort of statement. I was on French television all the time. That was my one moment of celebrity, because television has that effect on things. So everywhere I'd go in the streets, people would recognize me. They'd say, "Ah! You're the American spokesman!" But it was very humiliating, in a way, because we weren't able to say anything and nothing was happening. It was a purely phony thing while Henry was doing the real negotiating in secret.

So I began going back to our benighted colleagues at 1776 and said, "I love Paris. It's my old hometown. My children were brought up here. I'm having a great vacation, but there's such a thing as vacations that last too long. I think you ought to give me a real job."

They kept saying, "Wait, wait, wait."

I finally said, "All right, I'm going to take my retirement." So that's the story of my USIA career.

Q: *You retired in 1969?*

KAPLAN: I retired on November 1, 1969.

H. FREEMAN MATTHEWS, JR.
Political Officer
Saigon (1964-1966)

Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1966-1970)

H. Freeman Matthews, Jr. was born in Bogota, Colombia in 1927. His father, a Foreign Service officer, was stationed there. Growing up, his family also lived in Cuba, France, and Spain. He enrolled at Princeton, but his graduation date was pushed back because of his service in the Korean War. After graduation, he and his wife went to work for the State Department in 1952. He served abroad in Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Vietnam, Mexico, and Egypt. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 20, 1993.

MATTHEWS: From a job standpoint, I was pretty low on the totem pole. In that sense, I think -- We'd been there just about a year when I got a telegram saying: off to Saigon.

Q: *This was not 'we'd like a volunteer' or something?*

MATTHEWS: No, there was no volunteering. Well it turned out that 2 old friends, Bob Miller and Mel Manfield. Anyway, they were in Saigon and they were trying to collect old friends to go. I was very disappointed with what was happening, even though the family could go on, this was September 1964. It'd been less than a year that Diem was assassinated.

So despite the fact that the family could have gone, they stayed on in Korea. So that's what happened, they stayed 2 years, while I was in Saigon, they stayed in Korea. Which I think turned out to be a wise decision. They had good house, good school, servants. What happened to her of course, it became a very different situation. At the beginning she would write me about some problems with the kids, and even though I'd answer right away, by the time it got back, the problem had disappeared. So it forced a new independence on her, it was difficult at the time but she stepped right in and did a wonderful job with the kids.

Anyway, I was in Saigon for 2 years and when I got home for one Christmas, and Summer of '65 I got back for home leave and a direct transfer. So I did see the family a couple of times. My wife, because she still had orders to go out to Saigon, she came out to see what it looked like,

right after Christmas 1964.

George Bundy had come out for President Johnson for a look-see during this period. While he was there, the NVA attacked a couple of our bases. Anyway, he went to the hospital and saw some of the wounded soldiers. He was dramatically impressed by what he'd seen. Meantime, Maxwell Taylor, who had been the Ambassador, and General Smolik had been pleading with LBJ to authorize the bombing of North Vietnam, because there had been increasing evidence of North Vietnamese infiltrating South Vietnam. The only way to try to turn this around was to show the North Vietnamese that they couldn't do this. Therefore we ought to start bombing North Vietnam. LBJ said no, he was not prepared to do that so long as there were wives and children in Saigon. There might be possibly be retaliation against them. If we're going into a war zone, we shouldn't have wives and children.

When George Bundy came and he saw this, he sent a cable endorsing Taylor's and Westmoreland's recommendation in the campaign against North Vietnam. He specifically tied it to retaliation attacks on the American camps in Vietnam. LBJ approved it but at the same time ordered the evacuation of all wives and children. Which made sense. It would be disturbing to see a school bus full of American school children driving around the streets of Saigon, easy targets. But they never worried, they were never attacked. Anyway, all the families got evacuated including my wife, who had come out on orders and then was evacuated. So, anyway, that what's happened. She was evacuated to Hong Kong and I went with her.

Q: What were you doing in Saigon?

MATTHEWS: When I got to Saigon in September '64, I was in the political section. My role changed there. Anyway, Maxwell Taylor was the Ambassador and Sam Berger was the Deputy, Melvin Manfull was the Political Counselor and Bob Miller was the Chief of the Political Section.

My job was kind of twofold, one was to be the reports officer in the political section and the other was to be the political-military guy in liaison with MAC-V. What I did in the beginning was, Taylor sent a weekly telegram back to Johnson summarizing the situation. My job was to coordinate that and also a variety of different political reporting. I helped to supervise that .

There was a great deal of political turmoil in this period and eventually we ended up with Thieu and Ky. There was a standing struggle between the two. In the Summer of 1965 I was picked up the family in Spain and returned to Saigon.

By the time I got back Taylor had left and Cabot Lodge had come, second time in Saigon. Sam Berger had left and was replaced by Bill Porter, Manfull left and was replaced by Phil Habib out of Korea, not too long after that, Bob Miller left and I took his place as Chief of the Political Section. Phil Habib was the Minister Counselor for Political Affairs. My role then had become more of Political-Military relationship to MAC-V.

Q: MAC-V was the military headquarters in Vietnam.

MATTHEWS: Military headquarters, General Westmoreland's headquarters.

When I first got to Saigon, the Westmoreland meetings that I would go to, would be held in a room somewhat bigger than this but not a great deal bigger.

Q: This is a very small room we are talking about, 8x10 or something like that.

MATTHEWS: It's a small room. There were about six or eight people sitting around the table with Westmoreland. I think he had maybe two other generals and the embassy representative was very high in the hierarchy there. The whole effort was what we could do to try and support the Vietnamese military units. Everybody there had the job of trying to do what we could to push the Vietnamese along, make sure they got proper equipment they needed, ammunition and intelligence and everything else that went with it. That was a whole effort.

In the spring of '65, after we began the bombing of North Vietnam in that program called "Rolling Thunder." Not too long after that we ended up with landing some marines up around Da Nang and Chulai, and then the 173rd airborne came in, and then the 1st Calvary Division.

The whole nature of the war changed so that before long the MAC-V meetings were held in much bigger quarters. The embassy rep was pushed farther down the end of the table, there were lots and lots of generals around. The people who were in charge of advising the Vietnamese had trouble getting any word in edgewise. All the effort was on bringing the Americans in, getting American troops deployed, building Cam Ranh Bay, the great base that went in there. The whole nature of the war changed completely from trying to help the Vietnamese to our taking it over, trying to do it ourselves. Then of course the pendulum later swung back there.

But this was a fascinating period. I had sort of general supervision of the provincial reporters in the embassy who were six or eight young Foreign Service officers who spoke Vietnamese. Who would fan out around the provinces to try to find out what really was going on. To try and learn things because there was a general, I guess a natural, distrust of the reporting that came in especially from the military but also from the CIA. So we were trying to get our own independent fix on what was going on.

Q: What was the problems with first the military, and then second the CIA, from your perspective of that time.

MATTHEWS: Well I think that the problem with the military, I don't know whether you could pin it all on McNamara, but a major problem they had was in trying to measure something that was not measurable. They came up with all these crazy statistics that became great sources of contention with the press. They had body counts, and they had the numbers of structures destroyed, and acres of land defoliated, and endless numbers of different

Q: Villages were classified in different terms.

MATTHEWS: Then when the famous Robert Komer became the head of pacification in Washington, then we developed the Hamlet Evaluation Survey, the HESS. The whole

complicated list of questions you applied, as to whether the hamlet was this or that or the other thing. Then they put little dots on the maps as to which area was which.

We had a whole series of American officials all over the countryside, advisers to the province chief, advisers to the district chief, advisers to the sector chief and so forth. We had a consulate in Da Nang.

The problem with the military, I think, was that their reports were called progress reports so you could never show anything that was not progress. There was great pressure on military officers to show that things had improved, with the implication being that if things got worse, it was your fault, which was completely a wrong kind of judgement to make. These are dependent on what the enemies efforts were.

I think throughout the Vietnam war we tended to have a strange, I guess a very American feeling, that if something didn't go the way we wanted it to go, it was our fault. We never took into account that this depended on what efforts the enemy made. We could never get through our heads also that if we did something to the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese, they would come back and hit us just as hard as they had before.

Furthermore we had the idea that if we just kept ratcheting up the pressure on them, Westmoreland's famous phrase -- I can't remember what it was -- anyway, it meant, drawing down or attriting, attrition of the Vietnamese, that's right, attriting the Vietnamese, this would gradually bring them to the point where they were just destroyed and couldn't continue. This was especially true over bombing of North Vietnam, the idea of "Rolling Thunder." It'd roll up there, and the thunder got worse and worse and worse, and eventually they would just have to give up and quit. This was a total misreading, it turned out, of the Vietnamese temperament. They were prepared to go on forever, they'd beaten the French this was and they were going to beat us.

The result of all this was, I think in the embassy there was considerable distrust of the military figures, as to what was going on, what was happening. This I think was certainly shown in Tet 1968. The great attack.

Q: Going back to the time that you were there, we're talking about '64 to '66, what about the CIA?

MATTHEWS: I don't think we had any particular problem with the CIA. I think we felt that a lot of them were kind of wild men. We weren't sure if they had any particularly better grasp on what was happening than others. But they were a good balance to what was being reported by the military. This was another reason why we in the embassy, the State Department, tried to bring our own assessments, to attain our own views of what, in fact, was happening on the countryside through the civilian advisers to many of the provinces and to many of the districts. We had a pretty good corps of young officers who were spread around who were doing these things.

Q: Did you have any feel for how the embassy reports were treated back in Washington as opposed to the military?

MATTHEWS: I think I got a better feel for that when I was later transferred in 1966 back to Washington to the Vietnam Working Group. I worked there for 4 years, then I had a better feel for what the relationship was there.

Q: How about your impression of Ambassador Taylor and Ambassador Lodge, how they operated and all that.

MATTHEWS: They were totally different people. Ambassador Taylor was a remarkable military figure. He would come back to Washington about every 3 months to personally brief President Johnson on what was going on. He was a very hard worker. When he came back to Washington, he always brought somebody from the embassy along, sort of his escort, to carry his papers and take care of chores that he might feel were needed in Washington.

I came with him in the Spring of 1965. While we were back here, the embassy was attacked. The famous attack where a taxi cab blew up right outside the embassy. A lot of people were hurt. One American and several local employees were killed. I think if he hadn't brought me on this trip back, I'd have probably been hanging out the window there, looking to see what this was. My window was one of the few that would open in the building. I'm sure I would have been looking to see what this noise was, probably would have had my head blown off.

Anyway, I did come back with him. I noticed on the airplane that he carried with him the *Corriere de la Sera* from Milan

Q: The Italian newspaper.

MATTHEWS: the *Frankfurter Allemande*, *Le Monde* and a Spanish language paper, I think it was from Argentina, a Buenos Aires paper. He read these 4 papers on the plane, among other things. When he came to a word he didn't know, he had a little dictionary and he'd look them up. He was that kind of man. A man of extraordinary discipline. He believed in making the best use that you could of your time but also to keeping your skills up, that military training. This was just simply another example, there he was working to enforce his language skill.

He was very straightforward, he was a straight arrow. A military leader. I think the embassy felt that this was a guy that could lead you on to what your objectives were. Whether the policies worked out while he was there, I guess that could be questioned. In fact, he supported the military pretty much in what they wanted to do.

Cabot Lodge was a totally different kind of character, very emotional, he could go up and down, very excitable. He was a politician. One of the extraordinary things to watch was how this Connecticut Brahmin, a very political figure in his nature, a very social figure, how he related to Phil Habib who was this Lebanese American from Brooklyn. Phil could just wrap Cabot Lodge around his little finger, it was just amazing how the two of them got along. Phil could talk back to Cabot Lodge, could persuade him on virtually anything that he wanted to do. It was just a remarkable combination there. And of course Bill Porter playing the role of the Deputy Ambassador. It was a very good combination.

Lodge was much more quixotic, you were never entirely sure what was going to set him off on some particular tangent, one time or another. He had a lot of memories, of course, of what had gone before when he was there the first time. Some of the memories were correct and some of them really weren't. He managed to try to butter up and assuage Thieu and Ky during this period.

What happened was Ky, who looked as though he was going to be the person who was really going to drive the Vietnamese government, really lead it, he miscalculated and permitted Thieu to be known as President and Ky was going to be Vice President. Ky thought that he was going to be able to run the whole thing, from behind the scenes, but it turned out that Thieu was a stronger character than he thought he was. Thieu had other support.

There was a lot of jealousy of Ky because he was flamboyant, and I think some of the Americans didn't quite trust him either. They were never too sure of what he was up to. Whereas Thieu, they felt he was more amenable to American control. Ky in effect got kind of faked out in the whole process. Thieu very much became the prominent figure in the Vietnamese.

Q: What about General William Westmoreland? He of course was a major figure in the Vietnam thing. In your meetings with him, what was sort of your estimate, that you were getting from others around you, of how he viewed things.

MATTHEWS: He was a straight forward soldier. I don't think that he had a great deal of subtlety in terms of understanding some of the other dimensions of the Vietnamese problems, the political or the social side of it. I think he paid some lip service to it, but I don't think he really appreciated how important it was to "try to win the hearts and minds." The military would often use that phrase, but I think it was more almost in derision, than a real belief that that was needed to be done.

In fact, that was one of the basic problems, that the government of Vietnam became less and less popular. Partly because it couldn't protect the people but also because a lot of corruption, a lot of inability to get things done. I think the vast majority of people simply wanted to be left alone, to continue their traditional way of life. Growing rice in the countryside, a very rich country. The Vietnamese people were caught between the NVA and the Viet Cong on one side and the Vietnamese authorities on the other.

I think that Westmoreland, as well as most of the military, had tremendous faith in the ability of the American soldier, the American troops, the American equipment to accomplish things that these Vietnamese, despite all the training they got from us, they didn't have the same courage or the same willingness to carry through and fight on. One major difference between the Vietnamese and the American soldier, was that the American soldier was there on a specific limited tour, sometimes 6 months maybe sometimes a year.

The Americans knew they were going to be there for that period of time and then they're out. That's it buddy, somebody else is going to come in and finish this job. The Vietnamese, they were there for good. So they're maybe a little less interested in taking chances and making commitments that were irrevocable in terms of the people on the other side. Of course there were a lot of families that were on different sides of the issue among the Vietnamese.

It was a very complicated mission. Despite all the tremendous effort that we put into it, the numbers of troops, well over half a million, the numbers of bases that we established, and the bombing that we conducted against North Vietnam, these things in the end just wasn't enough. I don't think you can entirely blame the South Vietnamese for this, part of this, we continually underestimated the resiliency and the strength of the North Vietnamese and their willingness to take incredible punishment.

Q: You left there in 1966. What was your impression, how did you think things were going when you left that time -- whither Vietnam?

MATTHEWS: I think in '66 we thought that probably we were making progress, the government seemed relatively stable by that time, American troops were coming in in very large numbers, I think we felt that we were beginning to make some progress in the countryside and against the Viet Cong in all the different areas.

In the military side, the political side and the economic side, I think all these things were looking good in '66 when I came back. I think they continued to look good, even Tet '68 when there was this great surprise with the attack of the Viet Cong. You probably heard the opinion, and I think it's true, that the losses that the Viet Cong suffered in that '68 attack, when all of their infrastructure rose up and came out and were mowed down, that they suffered incredible losses.

In fact it was a strictly military victory in 1968. But politically, because of what we had said publicly about what was happening and some of the pictures that the media was able to bring forth, even the American embassy was being attacked. Westmoreland having been back in Christmas '67, I think it was, that speech to the Joint Session of Congress -- the light at the end of the tunnel, it's about over and so forth and so on -- all these optimistic statements blew up in his face.

Even though on the ground, Tet '68 was a definite plus for the South Vietnamese side, it ended up as a great debacle. It was the turning point in the war because the American public, the left-wing here, the students and so forth, the media, they just completely blew up.

Q: After you left Saigon in '66, what did you do?

MATTHEWS: Well I first flew from Saigon to Madrid where my family had been staying during the two years I'd been in Saigon. I picked them up and we came back by ship, either the Constitution or the Independence, the last trip on a boat, came back to the States.

I then went to work in the Vietnam working group. I was there for another four years.

Q: '66 to '70.

MATTHEWS: 1966 to 1970.

Q: What was the Vietnam working group?

MATTHEWS: Basically it was the Vietnam desk at the State Department. It was a very large desk, I think we had as many as 10 officers on the desk at the time. The idea was that we were suppose to be, in a sense, coordinating a lot of US government policy and activity in Vietnam. Of course that was something that could not be done, given the range of activities that were going on.

Q: When you arrived there, who was running it?

MATTHEWS: Robert Miller was the Director. He stayed there, I guess it was another 2 years, then he went on to London to the Imperial Defense College. He was replaced by, I think it was John Burke. Then when Burke left, Chuck Flowerree replaced him. When Flowerree left, I replaced Flowerree. I think that was only for about 6 months at the end. Our bosses were Len Unger and then Bill Sullivan. We also were involved not only with what was going on in Vietnam, but along during that period the Paris peace talks began, we were also kind of attempting to backstop the operations there.

Q: When you talk about Vietnam, were Laos and Cambodia really included? Was it really Indochina? How did they fit into it?

MATTHEWS: We were pretty exclusively concentrated on Vietnam. There were separate desks that dealt with Laos and Cambodia. But of course it was an obvious relationship between the two. Our boss, first Len Unger and then Bill Sullivan, also Phil Habib was involved. I'm a little unclear as to when who was involved in what. But when Phil came back from Vietnam, he'd already been a Deputy Ambassador to Maxwell Taylor. Then he became very much involved in the Vietnam working group.

Our bosses were clearly involved in the bigger picture of Laos and Cambodia but we were attempting to deal specifically with Vietnam.

Q: Strictly Vietnam you mean?

MATTHEWS: It was primarily trying to keep an eye on State Department reporting from Vietnam; relationships with the White House; to some extent involvement with the Pentagon, with AID, CIA, there were frequent interagency meetings that would deal with one subject or another. Our emphases was primarily on the Vietnam side of it.

Q: How did you treat the reports that were coming in? I mean it was the time when we certainly were looking for the good. I mean having been in the field, say -- we know the pressures here. How were you treating these?

MATTHEWS: I think that we certainly gave more credence to reports from the Embassy in the political section than we did to the military reports on what was going on. Already I think there was a lot of lack of confidence, a substantial lack of confidence, in much of the military reporting as well as in the famous Hess survey. I forget when the Hess came in.

Q: That's the Hannah evaluation?

MATTHEWS: The Hamlet evaluation survey that the famous Bob Komer started up. They were, after all, basically called 'progress reports' and so the implication to start with was this was progress. So I think there's a lot of feeling that much of this was just hype, was not really true, that they tried to always look at the brighter side of things.

But nevertheless there seemed to be a general improvement in the situation. That our forces were making a significant difference in what was happening there. There were of course, continuing reports of the increasing and continuing North Vietnamese movements into the South. There was a lot of frustration over our inability to stop the movement down the Ho Chi Minh trail, despite all sorts of efforts to try to stop that. Including, I think they were dropping some kind of detectors along the trail to detect movement, B-52 bombings, all of this kind of thing. But nevertheless, they continued to move things South. So I think there was obvious frustration on the part of the military that this wasn't doing very much.

There was also concern that perhaps the bombing of North Vietnam was not accomplishing what it was intended to do. Once again, I think I mentioned this in a previous session, our whole idea was that a "rolling thunder" which our bombing raids were called, that they would just continue to increase the pressure on North Vietnam. That eventually the North Vietnamese would see that this relentless increasing pressure was going to be such that they were going to have to give up. Well, this didn't work. It was a miscalculation on our part or a misunderstanding of the North Vietnamese determination. They simply just kept going regardless of what the price was.

I think a lot of us also began to have the feeling that air power was not something that ever was going to win the war. I, ever since, have a great deal of skepticism about the possibilities of surgical strikes even when they're wonderful new equipment that were shown in the Persian Gulf War. I think some of that is still a lot of nonsense.

Q: I think Dean Rusk in his memoirs mentioned that all his professional career, he dealt with the promise of air power and the actualities of air power and had to reconcile the difference between them.

MATTHEWS: That's exactly right. The number of times that we tried to hit that famous bridge in North Vietnam, we never did.

Q: Let's talk about the Johnson years first. How did you feel about the White House? Were you feeling that you had to give an optimistic view or did you feel, at your level, did you feel any pressure from the White House, the National Security Council, on how you dealt with things?

MATTHEWS: No, not in the sense of having to show that everything was upbeat. I certainly had no feeling on that. I'm thinking that on the military side, they probably did feel that. The implication, I think, on the military side, especially for those who were dealing with the provinces as distinct from the American military units, I think a lot of the province advisors were under considerable pressure to show progress. The implication being that if the war wasn't going

right in their province, it was their fault. Which of course was a lot of nonsense. It depended on how much effort was being put on the other side.

But as far as the Vietnam working group was concerned, I don't think, I didn't feel any sense of pressure to report or to try to give a rosy view of what was going on. In fact I think, especially Bill Sullivan and Phil Habib, I think their dealings with the White House were often much more on the pessimistic side than perhaps their military colleagues were. So I didn't feel any sense of pressure from that side.

Q: How about the CIA? What was your impression of how they were reporting and dealing?

MATTHEWS: I think the CIA also tended to be somewhat skeptical of the military. That is always a CIA viewpoint, that they kind of mistrust the ability of the military to get things done and to properly appreciate what's going on. The CIA also had a much greater, I don't want to use the word 'stake,' but they were much more involved in direct activities on the ground. So in that sense, they also had some pressure to believe and to show that they were making some progress.

The State Department was in a kind of unique position in that we weren't really, as the State Department, we weren't operating any programs in Vietnam. We did have people who were involved in a lot of the different programs. Many of the provincial advisors or district advisors were State Department officers. But the State Department per se did not have any programs that it was pushing, so we didn't have that particular ax to grind on our own side. Maybe this also made us more skeptical of the activities of other people.

Q: You almost run into these, but at the same time, I mean did you get any sort of the frustration that President Johnson was feeling about this?

MATTHEWS: Well certainly some of it. I think a lot of us felt this frustration, especially those of us who had been involved in Vietnam before the mass of American presence began, before the Spring of '65. Because I got married in '64 and most of the other guys had been there longer than that.

That finally here, once American troops had come in and we'd begun to throw a full weight of our effort into the war, nevertheless, the VC and the North Vietnamese were still able to survive. I think they'd been severely beaten back, especially by Tet '68, they had gone significantly down hill. But nevertheless, they were still there and we hadn't won the war. That showed every evidence of continuing.

I think we all had that sense of frustration that things were not going better than we thought they probably would once our own forces had gotten involved. We were like everybody else in the country. That here we are, an enormous world power and we're not able to take on this small bunch of people.

Q: Did you find, you know, there's intensive, particularly in the military, the Kennedy administration got involved in this, a tendency to look for an American quick solution -- either special forces or getting the right kind of rice in or handing out M-16 rifles to local population.

As you watched this thing over a period of time, did you keep coming up -- there was a technological answer to everything -- did you find?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, I think there was to some extent. There were always new things that were going along. You mentioned the M-16s, I mentioned earlier, I forget what they were called, these kind of pebbles that were dropped along the Ho Chi Minh trail?

Q: These sensors?

MATTHEWS: Sensors that were suppose to detect. There was an outfit, I think it was called "SOG," a Special Operations Group. It was part of the MAG-V effort. They had a lot of crazy, not necessarily crazy, but they had a lot of technological things that they were trying out. Some of the things in fact did work. Defoliation was another thing, I'm not aware that defoliation was used militarily before the Vietnam war. So there were searches for gimmicks like that but I don't think there was sudden great hope that one of these things was going to win the war for us.

Q: After Tet, can you describe what happened when Tet hit. Were you all called back? Can you kind of describe Tet day?

MATTHEWS: I remember Tet day very clearly. My brother had come to town, he lived in California, I forget why he was in town but he had come for whatever reason. I think he was only here a day. So we went out and had a big lunch, just wandered around talking, reminiscing a bit and so forth. So I didn't get back to the office after this long lunch until about 3:00 in the afternoon. All hell had broken loose. I think I was gone maybe 4 hours in this lunch period.

I got back and holy mackerel! Where've you been and all this kind of stuff. Absolute hell had broken loose. I think we were there in the office for the next, certainly, day and a half straight. I don't think we ever went home for quite a bit there, just trying to keep track of what all the different reports were that were coming in. I think there was some telephoning from the Embassy, very dramatic phone calls coming in, the whole thing was just, it became kind of a blur as to what all had happened. But all these different reports of activity, just attacks all over the country. It was really amazing.

Q: What was the feeling? I assume we are talking about surprise.

MATTHEWS: Yes, tremendous surprise.

Q: What was the feeling? Now they've come out, we'll get them. Or something like that?

MATTHEWS: It's hard to remember precisely what the views were. There was certainly astonishment that they had been able to mount such an enormous attack throughout the country, such a highly coordinated effort. I think there was distress that they had as much success as they had. But then as reports began to come in, I think it took a while for an understanding of the severity of the Viet Cong military and infrastructural defeat. It took a while for that kind of information to come in.

When it did come, then we got some hope that this might really turn things around. Because they did lose enormous numbers of their infrastructure, their agents and their covert people, all of whom had surfaced for this one major effort. Lots and lots of them were killed, captured or wounded. Over a period of weeks rather than days, we began to feel that maybe they had been severely hurt. But I think the initial feelings was that this was just a fantastic, dramatic attack, that had had surprising success.

Q: What was the calculation? I mean, there's a certain point, where you're dealing with the fires, as you're able to begin to look at this, what did you feel was the rationale for this at this time?

MATTHEWS: As to why?

Q: Why they did it.

MATTHEWS: Why did they do this? I think there's a lot of truth to the suggestion that they thought that the populace would rise up with them and support them. In fact, the populace, quite the contrary, in many cases showed a lot of bravery in trying to repulse them and turn them back. So I think there was a severe miscalculation on the part of the VC and the North Vietnamese. Otherwise, what was the point in risking such a major loss of many of their forces.

I think perhaps there was, I don't think that they were astute enough to have realized what a major impact this would have on American public opinion. You hear that subsequently this might have been one of the purposes, certainly that was one of the results. But I doubt that they had the sophistication to figure out that -- Aha! Westmoreland made this speech, everybody is being very optimistic, now we'll punch in and show them, Americans will lose heart and back-out.

Q: You never can tell on these thing, they can go the other way. Pearl Harbor is a good case in point.

MATTHEWS: Exactly. But I don't think that was the case. I think it was more that they had been saving up these enormous assets, significant assets that they had throughout the country. They thought that when the people saw how many they were, and where they were, and when they all surfaced and came out, I think they believed their own propaganda that they were fighting to liberate South Vietnam from the colonialists and the corrupt South Vietnamese government.

In fact this didn't happen. In that sense, I think it was a miscalculation on their part. I think the end result was far more significant. In the sense of what it did to destroy American public opinion support for what we were trying to do.

Q: Speaking of public opinion support, here you were, you were there during the really critical time when things were going up then basically down, set the course for how it finally came out. You as an individual, were you sensing the public mood, the protest and all this. How did you feel about this?

MATTHEWS: I think we did sense a lot of this. Many of us, myself included, did a lot of public

speaking both to groups here and around the country, going around and trying to talk to all sorts of different groups. Certainly as time went on, you got more and more a feeling, especially among young people at the universities and so forth, that there was rising opposition and lack of understanding of what was going on in the war.

In fact, I guess the State Department, more than any other part of the government, had to respond to congressional and public inquiries complaining about one or another aspect of what was going on in the war. So we got a full flavor, I think, of the disillusionment that seemed to be spreading about the war.

I think I talked about this before to why the disillusionment came, in essence it basically came back to the press, the media losing confidence in the truthfulness or the ability of the administration, especially the people on the ground in Saigon, to really understand what was going on and to tell the truth to the reporters. The 5:00 Follies in Saigon.

Q: The 5:00 Follies being the press meeting that was held at 5:00.

MATTHEWS: Right, Barry Zorthian. I think there were several incidents that pushed that forward. The things where the press knew what had happened, the Saigon mission attempted to, I don't think mislead them but at least to put a rosier hue on what had actually happened. Then the press thought was warranted. Gradually this built into a lot of cynicism and got worse and worse. I think the journalists had a major impact on the American public.

I think beyond that, the other significant factor of course, was TV. You could sit at home and watch the evening news every night and here are these ghastly pictures of what was happening to Vietnam. Of course the pictures were about what had happened to the civilian side of things. Just because of the way you are able to gather news, there was very little about what the VC and the North Vietnamese had done and the kinds of things they were up to.

So I think all of this built up in terms of the impact we had on the people. I also had the feeling, making talks to different groups, that as far as the colleges were concerned, we did a fair amount of speaking to colleges, there wasn't so much the students as it was the instructors and assistant professors, the younger people, they were the ones who were much more vocal and strong against the administration efforts than the students.

Q: Did you have any feel, or did your group have any feel about why they were of this?

MATTHEWS: I think that maybe they felt that they were more sophisticated, for whatever reason, they were more experienced and therefore felt they weren't going to be sucked in by what the government was saying. Kind of an effort, maybe perhaps to show off in front of their students.

Q: I suspect there's a certain amount of that and a certain amount of power. We're still suffering from that generation which are now the full professors and have not done the educational process well, I'm afraid.

MATTHEWS: That's exactly right.

Q: Just to get a little feel, did you find that when you went to universities to talk, did you get shouted down or have to deal with mobs or anything like that?

MATTHEWS: No, I didn't have that kind of experience. I did have some unpleasant experiences in terms of questioning and that kind of thing. But I never ran into any mobs or severe attacks. I think the worst thing I had was at Princeton. Where that famous professor, Falk, who's still around I think, who is vehemently anti-administration to the extent that I think many of the things he was saying were practically traitorous.

I did go and talk to Princeton, I'm a Princeton graduate, I talked to something up there and he was in the audience. Some of the questions or statements that he made after I had spoken, were pretty bad I think. He flat out accused me of lying and being a dupe of the government and trying to mislead the people. I forget exactly what it was, what the argument was. But he just flat out made misstatements, no facts, and accused me of being a corrupt supporter of the government, pretty distasteful. But that didn't produce a great deal of support on the part of the students that were listening. They let him have his say. I forget how I dealt with it but it was primarily kind of ignoring what he said or trying to refute some of the things.

Q: How did you feel? Did you feel that you were on a pretty short string as far as when you went out there, that you had to support the administration line. I mean when questions would come up, would you give a flat answer? Oh yeah, we're concerned about corruption or something like this. Or did you feel that you had to present a rosy picture?

MATTHEWS: No, I didn't feel that I had to flat out say that everything was great about Vietnam. I think that I, as well as most of the people in the working group, during the period that I was there until 1970, I think the general feeling was that what we were doing was right. There were probably things that we could do better but the cause was the right cause and eventually, we were going to be able to win.

I think it was only after I left working on Vietnam, that it later became clear that we simply were not going to be able to do it. I didn't feel under any pressure to make things sound better than they really were. We all had prepared materials that we used in giving our talks, our speeches around the country. But I didn't feel that it had to be presented more rosily than the facts warranted.

Q: When the Nixon administration came in in 1969, did you find a change in what we were doing, or attitude, with the new administration?

MATTHEWS: Well of course the major difference when Nixon came in was that he had talked about how he was going to end the war, eventually the Vietnamization program came along. That was a major change and effort, to shift more the burden towards the Vietnamese as opposed to our own. But as I recall, even under Nixon, there continued to be an increase in the American troop level. I think it was a small increase, we finally got up to about 550,000 troops. I think that peak was reached after Nixon came into office. I might be wrong on that, but that was the

impression I had.

I might mention before we get to Nixon, that one of my most clear memories is in March 1968, there was a SEATO and 7-nation meeting. 7-nation being the 7 countries that were supporting efforts in Vietnam with troops. 7-nation and SEATO meeting, I think it was Canberra or it could have been Wellington, I think it was Canberra.

In any case, Dean Rusk was the American chief-of-delegation, Secretary of State; and Bill Bundy, who was the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, went on the plane and I did too. I was going from the working group, I was not yet in-charge of the working group, anyway, I was the one who went along on this meeting. We had one of the air force KC-135s, the so-called flying submarines that had no windows on there, you can't see out.

While we were on the plane, LBJ's famous speech in March 1968 was broadcast on our way out there. Bundy had helped write it and he was sitting next to me on the plane. Rusk was up in the forward compartment, sort of curtained off. The speech was broadcast over the loudspeaker on the airplane, it was a little bit hard to hear but otherwise you could pick it up. Bundy was sort of following along on the speech that he had written. Then came the kicker there at the end when LBJ said that he would not accept the nomination of his party and that he would not run and so on.

It was just a gasp on the plane and Bundy was clearly astonished. The curtain was opened and there stood Dean Rusk with a big sort of grin on his face and he said something to the effect -- did that last part of the speech surprise anybody? Obviously he had known it but nobody else had. Anyway, it was really dramatic to hear that.

Then we went on to the SEATO and 7-nation meeting which was not anything unusual that I remember. The effort being to try to keep all the allies going there.

Then on the plane going back, I think it was in Guam or Fiji, the word came that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. As we flew back I think we landed in one of the airbases near San Francisco and we heard these reports of rioting in Washington, and we were all concerned about that. Then as we flew into Andrews Air Force Base, there were some small windows, as I said it was a flying submarine, but there were some small windows where you could see out of, you could see the smoke rising out of the Capitol building.

Everybody was just aghast. We landed there and the 82nd airborne was on the ground at Andrews Air Force Base and we were escorted back into town by military troops. It was just an unbelievable experience to fly back in there. Then of course we got home and everybody was worried about what had happened to families and so forth.

And of course the rioting did not reach the parts of the city that most of us lived in. I lost a car in it, a little fiat car that had been in a garage being repaired, it disappeared. But it was a really dramatic moment.

Q: One of my most vivid moments is seeing paratroopers in helmets and flak jackets walking up

and down Wisconsin Blvd.

Well back to this SEATO thing. How did we look upon the contributions. President Johnson made a tremendous effort to get various countries. How did we feel, I mean, there's the political component but how about the effectiveness or the value of these troops?

MATTHEWS: Well I may mention about that too. I had an absolutely fascinating trip that General Maxwell Taylor, who by then had left Vietnam as Ambassador who was I think basically had retired although he continued to be an advisor to LBJ, and Clark Clifford. The two of them were sent on a trip to the troop contributing nations to try to get some more troops and to get greater support. Again, we went on one of these special aircraft and it was just the two of them plus a fellow from the Defense Department and myself. Just the four of us on this trip.

We went to Saigon, to Australia, to Seoul, to Manila and I guess also to Bangkok although we never got any troops out of Bangkok.

Q: We did have troops.

MATTHEWS: That's right we did have some Thais.

Q: I use to see them in the PX.

MATTHEWS: That's right, we did. Yes, that's why we went there.

So we went to all of these places and then we ended up back in Hawaii to write our report. It was an absolutely fascinating trip to go with these, I'd known Taylor before but I never met Clark Clifford. It was just a really fascinating trip to be with them.

Q: What was their impression of the value and the actual contribution?

MATTHEWS: I think that the general feeling was that more important than the actual material effect of the troops of the other countries, the more important part of it was the psychological impact of the idea that it was not just the United States that was fighting here, that there were allies that were involved in it. I think that was the most significant angle.

Although it had to be said that some of the troops were very good indeed. The Koreans were certainly very tough, they did a great deal of illegal activities in terms of PX. The Filipinos were even worse, I think, in that sense. The Koreans were, I think, very brutal and very cruel in how they enforced the rules in their particular sectors. I'm surprised we didn't have more trouble than we did over the things that some of the Koreans did. But I think it was primarily the fact that these were additional nations that were supporting us, that contributed, that was more important.

Anyway, I think the result of this trip was that this clearly affected Clark Clifford's views when he later became Secretary of Defense. The report that we wrote in Hawaii, an incredible place to be writing it, but anyway, I don't know if you know Fort Darussy?

Q: That's right on Waikiki.

MATTHEWS: Right on Waikiki and that's where we wrote our report. I remember that Waikiki beach was here and a little bitty house that was on this property, and Maxwell Taylor had his back to Waikiki Beach and Clark Clifford was facing it, I and the Defense Department guy were at opposite ends of the table. I remember that Clifford would kick me under the table whenever a pretty girl would walk by.

Anyway, we wrote this report for LBJ on the results of our efforts and I think we did get some more troops, not anything significant but at least statements of continuing support for what we were trying to do.

One other funny thing that happened, when we landed in Saigon we went into this very fancy room in the Presidential Palace. President Thieu was there and General Ky was, I guess, the Vice President. President Thieu greeted me just effusively and throughout the meeting he kept looking over at me and winking and waving. I thought, what the hell is going on? I met him before but I didn't know him very well.

It turned out that shortly before we were there, at least some months before, Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman had been there. And of course, the Freeman Matthews and the Orville Freeman, in fact, I do look a little bit like him.

Q: You do.

MATTHEWS: And he got us confused and he thought this was his old buddy, Orville Freeman, who had brought in a lot of PL 480.

Q: And you know, these occidentals are kind of hard to tell.

MATTHEWS: All these round-eyes look the same. Anyway, Taylor and Clifford were quite impressed with me somehow. Anyway, that was a fascinating little interlude on that trip out there.

Q: Did you get any feel say with the Nixon White House, particularly with Henry Kissinger and all, that he was beginning to intrude, to make changes there or not. Or was it pretty much business-as-usual for the working group.

MATTHEWS: Well there was more emphasis on the Paris peace talks. They were trying to get that moving ahead. I think gradually as time went on, the Vietnamization program came into effect. There was a difference in the kinds of public statements that were being made, in the sense that we would talk more about trying to wind the war down, end American involvement. But that all came, it seems to me, fairly gradually.

I think from my perspective, I didn't see an enormous amount of change on the ground as to what was happening.

Q: All during this time, really from my guess '65 on, when the Americans started coming in, was there any, trying to go back to the period of time, any sort of disquiet on the part of those of us who were dealing with, about the American military presence and the fact that we tended to brush the Vietnamese aside and "let's us do it." That this might be sapping the ability and the will of the Vietnamese to carry the main burden and all that.

MATTHEWS: I think the short answer is "yes," especially those of us who had been there earlier before the American involvement became so heavy. I think there was a very definite feeling that we were placing too much emphasis on what we were trying to do and not enough on trying to support the Vietnamese. I think I mentioned the last time, that when I first went to Vietnam in the Embassy, that I had been the Embassy representative to MAC-V. Going over there and seeing all the efforts being put on trying to advise the Vietnamese and getting them better weapons and all this kind of thing.

Then when we came in the Vietnamese were just forgotten. I mean not totally forgotten but they went way down on the priority list. I think that many of us continued to feel that this was a big mistake, to not put enough effort on trying to keep the Vietnamese going. Because after all, there was only a certain amount that the foreign troops could do, it certainly seemed to me. We didn't have the language, it was a complicated country, very hard to tell who was a friend and who was a foe. Then you certainly needed the Vietnamese.

I think the original idea was that we were going to take on the North Vietnamese and a lot of the fighting against the Viet Cong would be done by the South Vietnamese. That, before long, was forgotten. I think that there was very definitely the impact that you're talking about, that many of the Vietnamese decided -- well, to hell with it, if the Americans are here, we'll let them take it over.

Part of it was that the Americans knew they were only going to be there for a year and then they're out. The Vietnamese were there for the duration, right to the end, so better let these guys take their chances, after all they only had to do it for a year then they'd be gone. The Vietnamese had their families and everything else.

So I think it did, I'm not sure it had a totally negative impact, but it certainly had some of that.

Q: But you didn't feel Henry Kissinger's hand in the period you were there.

MATTHEWS: Well of course, Kissinger had been in the Embassy in Vietnam, LBJ had sent him out when I was in the Embassy. He came out and stayed for about three weeks, he stayed actually with Dick Smeiser in the Embassy. We got to know him fairly well and he seemed like a very smart visiting professor kind of type. So we had known him and then of course he came to this great new eminence in the Nixon White House.

I think he pulled things together. It was very clear as to who was boss. I think one of the problems of course was the distrust between Kissinger and Rogers. That I think did cause some problems at higher levels. I don't recall that too much.

Another one of my memories, I don't know if I mentioned this the last time. At the changeover, when the new Nixon administration came into office in 1969, by then we had reached an agreement with the North Vietnamese that they would not attack the cities. It was part of the efforts, one of the bombing halts, that we wouldn't bomb North Vietnam if they didn't attack the cities. It was only a short period after the Nixon administration came into office in January 1969, I'm trying to piece it together. Nixon went off on a visit to Europe, to France and England and elsewhere, and Rogers went with him leaving Elliot Richardson as Acting Secretary of State.

On the night before they were to leave, the VC did attack way Hue and Da Nang, I think it was, two of the cities that they had promised not to attack. There were rockets that came in from, telegrams that came in from, I guess it was Taylor, Taylor was still there, Taylor and Westmoreland. Saying, we cannot permit this Vietnamese violation to go unchallenged and therefore we must strike back at North Vietnam. So Bundy called me early in the morning, maybe I was in charge of the working group by then, this was about the first thing that happened in the new administration. Bundy called me early in the morning at home and told me, get down there to get the cables from the code room and meet Elliot Richardson down at the Department and brief Richardson on the car going out to the airport, where he was going out to say goodbye to Nixon and Rogers.

I was suppose to give him whatever advice I could on what we should do in response to these cables. I tore down there and I hadn't met Richardson or these other people and got the cables and met him and rode out in the car. And I explained what this was all about and here was the recommendation from General Westmoreland and Maxwell Taylor, that we should resume the bombing in North Vietnam immediately in response to these very clear violations of what the understanding was. So we went back and forth on this.

He finally decided that he would talk to, I guess, Kissinger and Nixon and Rogers out there at the airport, then decide what to do. He never got a chance to do that, of course. He got to the airport with all the goodbyes, he had no chance to raise it. The upshot was that we didn't do anything about that at the time because he was not able to, he felt that he didn't have the authority, he didn't want to take it on himself to go ahead and do that.

Q: That would be really a major thing I suppose.

MATTHEWS: I can't remember now what the upshot of that was. I think, at least as far as those attacks, we did nothing about that at the time. Later on we felt we had to.

Q: Is there anything more we should cover on this Vietnam working group?

MATTHEWS: It was a time of very long hours, fascinating work. On the working group, we were not privy to all that was going on in the Paris peace talks. I think certainly Bill Sullivan wasn't happy. The Company were up to date on it but they kept a lot of this to themselves and to Kissinger. So we weren't fully briefed on that.

One of our jobs was to keep the Paris delegation, we backstopped them in terms of material that they needed for speeches and that kind of thing. So that was a pretty heavy chore to keep going.

But in terms of what really was going on, I think we were not all that privy. Of course, during that period we didn't reach any definitive results.

Q: Nothing much. The line of communication was open and that was about it.

MATTHEWS: That was about it.

Q: You left in 1970 and then you went off in quite a different world.

MATTHEWS: After 6 years in Vietnam, I finally escaped to Mexico City. That was a bit of a fight too because I was only an FSO-3 at this point. I think the job in Mexico City as Political Counselor was a FSO-1 job.

RICHARD E. UNDELAND
Field Operations Officer
Saigon (1964-1969)

Richard E. Undeland was born in 1930 in Omaha, Nebraska. He became deeply interested in Foreign Affairs during World War II. He graduated from Harvard in 1952 with a degree in English Literature and received an MBA from Stanford. One of his professors at Stanford nominated him for a scholarship of unrestricted study in Egypt, where he studied from 1955-1956. In addition to Vietnam, he served in Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy between July until September of 1994.

Q: Dick, I see you served in Saigon from 1964 to 1966. How did that assignment come about?

UNDELAND: I learned of it in a rather bizarre way. Much taken with Alexandria and liking the USIS operation there, I felt an assignment was too short, and I had in my typewriter the draft of a request to be extended for another year, when the unclassified traffic arrived from the Consulate, containing a cable reading, "USIA urgently requires its best young officers for key field positions in Vietnam. Blah, blah, blah. You are transferred immediately." So much for the Alexandria extension. When in Saigon, I found that there was a slight variation in text that went out to the 8 or so of us in that batch; it was whether you merited the word "young" in your telegram or not. I learned that by USIA standards, anyone 38 years old or less you was still young. After that, I guess, you were over the hill, but still eligible to be tapped for Vietnam duty. Anyhow, I made a handful of farewell calls, we put on a large farewell function and I and the two boys flew back to the States. Joan had just given birth to our third child; she and the daughter followed shortly.

I went out to Vietnam after about a week in Washington, with the family coming on a few months later. To continue with the personal, we were together in Saigon for about six months, but after the Viet Cong bombed the American installation in Pleiku, all American dependents were ordered to be evacuated. The only choice was to where; we chose Bangkok, as nearby as

possible, so I could make trips there as often as possible. I got over every six weeks or so. Others went to the Philippines, Hong Kong and Malaysia, as well as Thailand and, of course, the U.S. That was Spring of 1965.

Q: Now, you arrived in Saigon, when did you come to Saigon in 1964?

UNDELAND: In Summer.

Q: What was the situation at that time?

UNDELAND: Bad and steadily getting worse. The Vietnamese army was suffering one defeat after another and had pretty well lost control over the countryside, except for fortified positions. The Viet Cong had almost cut the country in half. Defeat clearly loomed when American forces arrived, the Marines into the Da Nang area in the north and the 1st Infantry Division into the central part of the country. Political confusion in the government abounded, and there seemed to be a diminishing will to fight on, both in government circles and among the people outside them. This defeatism was also apparently widespread among much of the military. More and more the Vietnamese army, or as we called it ARVN, was not fighting, or at least not fighting effectively. The American troops arrived in the nick of time; if they had not, it was pretty generally felt everything would have been soon over.

Q: What were you doing?

UNDELAND: I was a field officer in something called JUSPAO, the Joint United States Public Affairs Office, which was headed up by one of the more colorful characters that USIA/USIS, has ever had, Barry Zorthian. It was called joint, for it had both American Army and USIS officers. The main aim was to help the Vietnamese government in its information and psychological efforts to help wage and win the war.

Those of us in the field operations worked outside Saigon trying to beef up the government's feeble information efforts and promote psychological warfare activities, working with American military advisers and Vietnamese province and district chiefs, all of whom were military officers. Trying to gain the allegiance and loyalty of the people in the countryside was as daunting a challenge as any of us had faced anywhere. To begin with, we sought to do so in many areas where no central Vietnamese government had ever had effective control. How do you do more than go through the motions in places where your enemy either holds or shares sway? Add to that a much dispirited and defeatist government cadre, who saw their main challenge as being to stay alive and in other ways just get by.

Still, it was a time when many Americans believed we were going to prevail, because we had decided to do so and would throw enough resources into the fray to emerge victorious. We were in a never-never land, following the dictates of Johnson Administration and trying to impose our will on people who marched to a different drumbeat and who understood us as little as we did them. The problem for us, which we never really comprehended or fessed up to, was it was their country, where their ways would necessarily prevail unless we put in and used such massive force to make a purely military occupation work.

I started off as the JUSPAO representative in the provinces surrounding the capital, Saigon. They were the capital province of Gia Dinh, plus, if I can still remember all the others, Bien Hoa, Long An, Hau Nghia and Binh Duong. The Information Ministry people and offices in these places were pretty sad and ineffectual, but JUSPAO thought we somehow could make them better by providing products, urging and prodding the officials to get out among the people and sharing the effort with them. We at least had rightly concluded we couldn't do it all ourselves, even using our talented Vietnamese employees, who showed amazing dedication and ability. I rapidly saw there was no way the Information Ministry types were going to amount to much and therefore concentrated my attention on working with district chiefs and in two cases, province chiefs. They were ARVN majors and colonels, fairly receptive and active when once convinced. I was gratified some of them came to seek me out as much as I did them.

My most interesting job came with my involvement in training Vietnamese rural survey teams. They were under province and district chiefs and went into the villages to sound out public opinion in a simple but structured way. The resulting reports had two uses. The first was the information they contained, for although the good district and province chiefs already knew most of what the surveys came up with, they nonetheless usually added details and specifics, and it was a way to be updated, raise questions and offer hints. From comments made in passing to the surveyors outside of the survey questions, gripes and problems were voiced that a couple of district chiefs found more important than the reports themselves. And on at least one occasion significant intelligence emerged, which led to a successful ambush of a Viet Cong unit. However, the aspect found most important, though we hadn't foreseen it at the outset, was the creation of a body of structured, organized information that could be used up the line to back up requests from the central authorities and Americans in Saigon. When justified by survey data, whatever was being sought or proposed became more than just the view of, say, district chief X. The reports proved especially useful in getting funding for projects from AID, which had most of the money. We developed survey teams in Binh Duong, Long An, Bien Hoa and whatever the province is called just south of Da Nang, whose capital is Hoi An. Maybe also in other places after my tour was up and I left, but I haven't heard of them. I'm not sure how well they fared over the long run or even whether they were continued, but it was something that got off to quite an encouraging start.

Q: Could you tell me, describe how you went about this. What would you do in a typical day or week?

UNDELAND: The first steps were to seek out likely places, drawing on as many sources as we had, but most important where we thought the district and province chiefs would react positively and be supportive. Then there were the initial visits to explore and explain and to assure there was not only approval and agreement, but also the availability of local cadre for the team or teams to be formed. We also made sure the American advisors in the area were on board. For example, we delayed in one part of Binh Duong province, when at first the advisors balked, though they not only soon came around but became enthusiastic backers.

With the preliminaries out of the way, we would arrive, rent a house, have more sessions with the authorities, meet with those chosen to be on the team, spending much time with them

convincing as well as instructing, for they were key and had to be truly willing to take on this exposed job. This last was not easy, though only a few backed out. They were mostly minor officials and guards, without much education and with considerable wariness. It was a dangerous, insecure world out there, not a place where commitments and sticking out one's neck were the rule. And what they were being asked to do would take them at times into places where they needed military protection as well as being armed themselves. It is a credit to the JUSPAO training team, all Vietnamese of course, that so many initial reservations were overcome. We went over the questionnaire with them until they understood it well, had practice sessions interviewing first the Vietnamese trainers and then officials before heading into the field. Once there, they were brought along gradually. As they got better at it and found it working, their confidence and enthusiasm rose. I was surprised how successful our trainers were in motivating as well as teaching and how rapidly they could do it. I don't want to oversell what we did, but there was the case of a team formed in Hoi An that got mixed up in a fire fight, in which one team member was killed and another wounded, but the next day the others were back in the villages continuing the surveying.

As to a typical day, it depended where in the roughly three week training cycle we were, but let's say fairly well along. We would meet, usually at the house we had rented, in the morning for breakfast and discussion of where we would be going, review once more the questionnaire and then move out, more often than not with armed escort, although that depended on the degree of Government control. Once there, we would meet with the village leaders, go over what we were up to, and begin. We would hire a villager to fix a lunch for us -- absolutely splendid food, I can't remember a single mediocre meal in a village -- after which we would continue, but by 3 PM or so we would pack up and leave. The late afternoon and early evening were favorite strike times for the Viet Cong. Once back, the trainers and trainees would go over the results, tabulate them and jot down other information they had picked up. The training team and I usually had dinner together, but it was also a time for my schmoozing with Vietnamese officers and American advisors.

I mentioned going out often with security, local defense forces or the Vietnamese army, and once when we went into a village in a hairy part of Binh Duong under escort of a unit of Vietnamese Rangers. We ourselves were armed with a variety of different weapons, I personally with a couple of grenades, a 9mm pistol and a semi-automatic folding stock carbine. One ridiculous part of this job was the immense difficulty in getting weapons for the surveyors being trained. The could not draw on Vietnamese army stocks, I've forgotten just why, so I took on being the gun procurer myself. I never dreamed it would be so complicated, but after jumping through more hoops than I had thought existed, I finally broke loose some CIA weaponry and then got a regular supply source from a U.S. Army depot.

I had, at the outset, wondered if the presence of guns and escort might not be so intimidating that what we got would be worthless, but I soon became convinced my fears were unfounded. From all I and the training team could tell, the surveyors were talked to quite frankly...

Q: You're saying that they tended to be quite open. Why is it that if you come in with guns, taking a poll, or the equivalent of a poll, or finding out things, that you didn't get what they wanted you to hear, or what they thought you wanted to hear?

UNDELAND: I once asked a villager elder, why it was he was speaking out so calmly and openly, telling us all these things and in great detail. He replied in an unemotional, matter of fact way, "I always speak openly and tell the complete truth to people with guns." Not to tell the truth to either the Government or Viet Cong and be found out was to ask for rapid and usually violent retribution. I am sure we were not told everything, but I felt what we did get was accurate and what was left out was, well, that's another matter. The answer I have just cited says a lot about Vietnam in those days, and maybe other times as well.

Back to your question, remember the people being trained were not going out into these villages in a vacuum. They were Vietnamese, who lived in the area. The trainers, on the other hand, were bright, experienced, skilled, who had seen it all come and go. So when answers or comments would come up that seemed off the mark, at least widely off the mark, warning bells would go off. I don't think they got fooled very often.

The Vietnamese of the countryside were people who just wanted to be left alone, as we heard in various ways, usually indirectly, when we talked with them. At heart they had little use for the government, but if anything they had less for the Viet Cong. They disliked the exactions of both sides, mainly manpower and taxes, but I think even more was the fact that neither side could provide them with reliable security. Many of these places were controlled to varying degrees by the Government during the daytime hours and by the Viet Cong at night. The villagers had no choice but to make their peace with both. How could you expect loyalty to one or the other unless it was in control all the time? I recall another conversation, in which a villager told us exactly where the Viet Cong had entered at night, the meetings and their other activities and from where and when they departed. I asked him whether he would tell the Viet Cong everything about our day in the village and got the simple answer, "of course".

Let me expand on this question of loyalty, apart from the surveying project, which indicates what a rare commodity it was to come by. As a field representative, I spent a fair amount of time in Go Vap District, which is a rural area in the north west corner of the capital province, Gia Dinh. Its chief was a Major Vy, an educated, sophisticated, dynamic man and one of the Vietnamese whom I admired most and, indeed, with whom I came to feel quite close. (To insert a personal note, Vy wanted to see me off at the airport when I definitively left Vietnam, but I talked him out of this and instead had a lunch at his place, which was one of the most stimulating and pleasant times of my tour.)

Go Vap under him became the first district in Vietnam declared completely pacified, with local defense forces in place and supposedly control and with all kinds of economic progress being made. Vy was proud of this and delighted in showing off these accomplishments. It was a place visited several times by Secretary McNamara and General Westmoreland. It seemed to show what could be done.

I later heard the Major had been killed, shot by mistake while riding in his jeep on a road in the district. I was shocked to hear this, but much more shocked when I heard the rest of the story. When going through his papers, the authorities were aghast to discover the price of Go Vap's pacification. Running through the mostly uninhabited corner up against Hau Nghia Province was the main north-south Viet Cong supply route, whereby men and material were fed into the

Mekong Delta region. That route was untouched and, in return, so was Go Vap. I wondered how many other Vietnamese had made their arrangements, indeed probably saw no other way out, except to come to terms with both sides. Perhaps, who stood where only became completely clear when the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong took over and started meting out punishment. Maybe not, even then.

It's getting away from your question, but let me go on with what I did in the latter part of my tour, when in addition to the survey team training, I became the JUSPAO representative in a number of sessions and study groups dealing with pacification. This grew out of my work with the rural surveys, and it was perhaps logical I became JUSPAO's pacification specialist, but perhaps the fact that no one else in JUSPAO seemed to want it should not be overlooked. This was not a particularly happy job for me, for after I had been in Vietnam about a year, I came to the conclusion that pacification, at least as designed and practiced was fatally flawed, could not do the job and was conceptually off the mark. Maybe there was no other choice, so that what was tried was the best possible, but it was disturbing to be involved in promoting something in which I had no confidence. It became a case of soldiering on. I voiced my reservations and doubts, but without openly challenging the system. The pacification idea was likened to a spreading oil spot, where the center area is first controlled militarily, then effective local government is installed, a local defense force is recruited and trained, all kinds of development and social projects are put in place, and *voila* the loyalty of the people is gained, with no place remaining for the Viet Cong inside the pacified area. At this point, the oil spot spreads out from a secure center to begin the same process in adjacent areas. It was neat, tidy and logical on paper at the Saigon headquarters, but fundamentally out of tune with the reality that existed in the countryside.

Many of these areas had never had effective government or more than temporary, raw military control, so it was trying to build where no previous groundwork existed, where most of the young men had been drafted or gone over to the Viet Cong or moved away, where suspicion of both sides was deeply ingrained, and for which the personnel needed, were they to be found, had to be formed from the ground up. Persons in the area had been making deals or accommodations with both sides, a frame of mind which would have to be changed. The idea that physical progress -- schools, roads, drainage, agricultural credit and the like -- were going to be determining in a political sense among people who had never been loyal to the central government out of conviction was fundamentally flawed. I could go more deeply into the faults, but I trust this is enough to make my point.

Still, I got a certain stimulation from my involvement, in no small degree because of two others with whom I worked closely on pacification matters, Dick Holbrooke and Bob Montgomery, the former we all know of and the latter a perceptive Army colonel. We three did not always agree on details, but we were almost always on the same wave length.

Now to the military...

Q: *Which military?*

UNDELAND: The American. The MAC/V of General Westmoreland, with whom I spent several informal evenings in a small group at his house. Bob Montgomery was among a group of

officers sharing his quarters, and it was through him I was included. An admirable man, wholly dedicated to his mission and the welfare of his men, Westmoreland felt Vietnam was where history was being made and could not understand how any serious American would not want to a part of it. He fully realized some of the MAC/V limitations and spent nearly an hour one evening asking me to get JUSPAO to take over all parts of the *chu hoi* program, that is trying to induce Viet Cong defections and then taking responsibility for the re-education and indoctrination of those who came over. I told him I'd take his message back, but this was something way beyond the scope and ability of the USIS led JUSPAO. He came back, "But we in the army don't know how to do it at all. You at least understand it better than we do." It was primarily in these sessions, I came to feel the general had little comprehension of the guerrilla nature of the war, which in those days it still very much was, or of the people fighting it or of the vast majority of the countryside who only wanted to be away from it. Maybe, this judgment is too categoric and harsh, for I liked and respected him. It's just I felt he was seeing things only through an American military optic, with the emphasis on fire power, big unit operations and so forth. I don't mean to try to set myself up as a military expert, which I clearly am not, but I had trouble with anyone in a responsible position who couldn't or wouldn't see it necessary to at least consider the war from the Vietnamese viewpoint, maybe viewpoints.

I had two other encounters with Westmoreland. The first was in his office at a debriefing of an advisor, a captain, a survivor of a battle in which the ARVN unit he was with had been badly mauled. Westmoreland listened sympathetically and intently and then broke in, telling the advisor that before going any further to use his phone to call his wife in the States and let her know he was OK. I was moved by this humanity.

The other was in an area north of Da Nang, where a Marine unit had cleared an area and the question of how to secure it permanently was being considered. I was there as part of my pacification involvement, when in came helicopters carrying Westmoreland and General Krulak, the Marine Commandant. By chance, I attended their briefing by the Marine unit commander, a Lt. Colonel Clement. They wanted to know how pacification was going and were bluntly told, "Gentlemen, there is no pacification." They were obviously taken aback and replied that this was our whole policy of winning in South Vietnam. Back came, "perhaps, but we have nothing to pacify with. There are no young men here to put into a defense force. We have only women, old men and children. We have scared people, who give us no problems, but are unwilling to commit themselves to anyone, government or Viet Cong...As long as we keep sufficient force here, this area will remain relatively secure, although even now we can't control it 100%. The moment we move out, the Viet Cong will be back in. Maybe they won't control it, but they will make sure we don't." That ended the discussion of this topic. As they boarded the helicopters to leave, I wondered what impressions they took with them and fear it was little more than perhaps a bit of confusion. It was quite a performance by the Colonel; I would like to think he got the credit he deserved, but I never heard anything of him later, nor did I return to that place.

On the Marines, I got to know fairly well a number of officers, captains, majors and one Lt. colonel, in the Da Nang area. I found in them an understanding of the nature and dynamics of the war that was to me unmatched among others I met in the American military in Vietnam. They realized the only way to fight an essentially guerrilla war in another country was to take into account that country, its people, their reality, their apprehensions and their capabilities. You

could impose only so much from the outside and expect anything more than temporary achievements, if those. And the Marines had some degree of success in putting this thinking into operation, albeit in limited scope, in the area around Da Nang.

Q: You were saying the Marines, you felt, were the most in tune with the actual problem. I would have thought the opposite, for one thinks of the Marines by training and outlook as being warriors in the most basic sense and probably not having the subtlety that maybe some other units might have. Do you have any thoughts about why the Marines seemed to be adapted to this type of thing?

UNDELAND: I don't have a good answer to that, but the ones I'm talking about were bright, on the ground, away from the Saigon or headquarters mentality. Maybe there is something in their training; I can't say. I've never been in the military myself. It is true they look on themselves, and with justice, as an elite fighting force, but I found them much more than that. Sophistication and open-mindedness are two words that come to mind. It's neither here nor there, but I spent an evening with the light colonel in Da Nang, discussing the Vietnamese people and listening to Mozart. He and the others I met had inquisitive minds. Maybe it has something to do with their being a smaller organization, maybe more field oriented. These reasons I'm hazarding don't seem all that convincing an explanation even to me; all I can say is this is what I found.

Q: Well, they had a different approach. They broke themselves down into small units in the I-Corps area if I recall. They would go out in small units, rather than sending out battalions...

UNDELAND: That is part of what I referred to a couple of questions back. They were more into small unit operations, developing the concept of mixed Vietnamese-Marine units, which became closely knit, with a sense of camaraderie, of belonging together, that brought out the best in the Vietnamese soldiers. I leave it to others to pursue this further. My information on this was obviously second hand.

And yet there was another side of the Vietnamese equation that cannot be ignored, which just so happened to involve the Marines. While the survey team was in Hoi An, I attended a morning briefing given to the American advisors by a Vietnamese colonel. All of a sudden a Vietnamese soldier burst into the room and whispered something to the colonel. He, the colonel, left the room, but soon came back with a big smile on his face and said, "Gentlemen, it's nothing really. There has just been a little fist fight, nobody killed, between some Marines and some Vietnamese Rangers...I must tell you the result is two Vietnamese hurt and ten Americans." The Vietnamese present roared with laughter, pleased the Americans had had the worst of it. So, while we were needed, in ways respected and liked, while we had prevented the country from falling to the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese, our presence was so large, so widespread, so domineering we were at the same time much resented.

Q: Did you run up against other resentments of the American military? I would have expected there were lots of such stories.

UNDELAND: I heard reports that the vast differences between what American and Vietnamese soldiers were paid was vastly resented by the latter, but I don't have specific incidents which

come to mind.

But there is one which involved me. I had gotten to know the III Corps commanding general, and he invited me to his headquarters in Bien Hoa for lunch, I forget just why. There he sat me on one side of him and the American colonel, who was the III Corps chief advisor, on his other side. He then talked only to me, ignoring the colonel completely, speaking exclusively in French and asking me to do the same. The advisor was one of the most unpleasant persons with whom I had ever figuratively crossed swords, and I had no problems in helping give him his come-uppance. At the end of the lunch, the general turned to the colonel, saying in English he had invited me to come back another time. (I later had a ride in the colonel's helicopter, an upside down, tree hugging, swooping up and down sort of thing, but if he could take it so could I.) Americans who paid no attention to Vietnamese pride and ways did us no service, whatever their military or other competence might be. Maybe it wouldn't have been so bad had there not been so many Americans in Vietnam, but it would have been helped by a lot more cultural sensitivity on our part.

I found my serviceable French useful with a number of senior Vietnamese types, both civilians and military. In part, some liked it because they were more at home in French than English, but also I think they welcomed the chance to get away from their usual mode of dealing with Americans, even if they were talking to an American. It somehow put things in a different context.

Q: What was your impression of USIS operation in Saigon?

UNDELAND: It was very big, but I didn't have anything to do with much of it, for those of us in field operations were quite off by ourselves and away from the more or less normal USIS components. There was a huge binational center, with its library and English teaching classes in which more than 7,000 were enrolled. There was the gamut of exchange programs. There was a large printing operation, a book translation program. So, while there were the traditional things, which seemed to be functioning relatively smoothly from all I knew, the heart of the operation lay with the war related aspects -- field operations, which I have discussed -- and handling the press. The press briefings were given by JUSPAO in the JUSPAO building; I personally kept my distance from this and otherwise had next to nothing to do with journalists, but could not be unaware that they were very skeptical about the truth and completeness of the information they were getting. If not being lied to outright then being fed half truths and untruths or omissions on purpose was the way they felt about the briefings.

We had lots of money in the JUSPAO budget, and what we did not have could almost always be gotten by glomming onto AID money that was a bottomless pit, a milk cow that never ran dry. I have never been in a post where the cash flowed so freely that it wasn't even a consideration. So long as we could buy it, we got whatever we wanted.

I felt the leadership of JUSPAO tried to bring realism to what we were doing, but neither we nor anybody ever got wholly away from the idea of being in fantasy-land. I recall Barry Zorthian once saying, "I keep hearing these stories of how well we're doing with this project or that, but in fact things are rapidly getting worse. We're losing the war. Let's never confuse a few little

tactical successes with the big picture."

Q: Barry Zorthian was an important figure then because he was the prime person dealing with the press, the media, while also running the show. What was your impression of how he operated?

UNDELAND: Barry Zorthian is one of those bigger than life figures. You have to admire him for what he pulled off, but many who worked for him didn't like him for various reasons and in varying degrees. He had no fan club, not that he sought one or probably would have found one accepted. He operated in an autocratic way and didn't try to hide it. Once, he created a serious morale problem when he tried to extend length of tours without consulting those concerned and then didn't see to it that his message to Washington with proposed names and dates didn't get out. Big brouhaha over that. Also, some felt there was no guarantee that what he said one day would be valid the next. A politician, who kept one step ahead of the rest, he liked the power and position of being JUSPAO's head. Given the hand he was dealt, I can't think how anyone could probably have done a much better job. He's not one of my personal favorites, but then I have nothing against him either. I didn't work directly with him, so my impressions are largely from a certain distance.

Q: Did you find as a field officer that when you came back to Saigon and JUSPAO headquarters you entered another world? Others have felt this difference between Saigon and the field.

UNDELAND: Yes, very definitely two different worlds. There was the physical side. When I went to the field, I was, as I've said, armed. For the provinces around Saigon, I would head off in a Jeep that had a 3/4" steel plate on the floor, topped by sandbags to protect against land mines. I have mentioned the arms I carried. I didn't wear a tie the whole time I was in Vietnam, and when in the field was always in combat boots. Sessions and activities there were few, informal, with virtually no standing on ceremony. In Saigon it was quite different. Endless meetings, particularly, when I got more deeply into pacification. Also a lot of working up papers and taking positions, bureaucratic stuff.

Aside from the physical and procedural, attitudes were far apart. In the field, it was what works, what is real, what is feasible. In Saigon, so much was on concepts and big schemes, and whether they were based on reality or not didn't always seem too important. Political imperatives seemed to outweigh reason on all too many occasions. I preferred the field. Indeed, I sought to get away from Saigon completely during my last 3 months and be assigned to psy-ops with the First Infantry Division, but I was not accepted, purportedly because I had so little time left, but I suspect my tendency to speak out may have been a factor.

Q: One of the things that struck me in the 18 months that I was in Saigon, where I was just learning the Consular thing, was the lack of knowledge on the part of so many Americans, self included. I found myself at one point chairing a committee where I was supposed to have historical perspective on a problem and I had been there only six months. The constant turnover. Did you note this?

UNDELAND: I certainly did. But I noticed even more that a lot of people were there who, from

my perspective, didn't have any idea what was going on and, worse, didn't care or try to find out. It was easy to get lost in the bureaucracy, and all too many not only did it but were happy to do so. There were also many who were there reluctantly, who were putting in their time, 18 months or 2 years, and going through motions until they could leave. I did not choose to go there myself, but once there threw myself into it and did my best. I am contemptuous of those who didn't. For me, you are either professional or not much.

I don't think I need to get into chapter and verse, but you're right in saying there was a lack of continuity and information.

Q: What about the problem of corruption? Did you note this at all? How was the Government's reach beyond the capital?

UNDELAND: Two questions. I of course heard talk of corruption, but I did not personally brush up against it much, at least not so I recognized it. There were the items from the PX and Commissary being sold openly on the street, but was this theft or corruption or both, and anyway how important was it? I sensed that corruption wasn't as major a problem as some thought. There were bigger fish to fry.

You are right on the second one. The central government was essentially a Saigon operation, whose officials rarely if ever got out into the field or were pressed or urged to do so. It was not just the war, but as I understand it, the tradition. Of course you had the governors and other officials outside the capital, but the central government-provinces relationship had long had the character of a considerable distance.

This might be the place to speak of Nguyen van Cat, a thoroughly Saigon bureaucrat in his late 40s, who was concerned with pacification and became intrigued by the rural survey team idea.

I induced Mr. Cat to join me on a field trip, his first in years, outside Saigon. We flew to Da Nang and the next day drove to Hoi An so see the trained survey team in operation. On the drive, he was nervous and apprehensive, but stuck it out, even when an American Marine at a check point said, he personally wouldn't go further down the road. We chatted away in French, he got out into a couple of villages and clearly liked what he saw. I heard later he took back a glowing report to his colleagues in Saigon. I saw him a number of times thereafter and suggested another trip together, but he declined. This one experience was apparently enough for him.

Q: Did you get any feel for the two Ambassadors, Maxwell Taylor and Cabot Lodge while you were there?

UNDELAND: Not at all. I talked once briefly with Taylor, but never even shook Lodge's hand. The distance from a JUSPAO field officer to the ambassador was large.

Q: You left there in 1966?

UNDELAND: That's right.

Q: How did you feel about Vietnam when you left in 1966?

UNDELAND: I was ready to leave. I hadn't asked to go there, and it was in a place for which I was ill prepared, knowing nothing of either language or culture. For me such gaps are always a source of frustration. I felt I had done as good a job as I could, although I came to doubt much the validity and workability of what we were trying to do and the ways we were going about it. I left thinking that without major conceptual changes, we were doomed to failure. Use of added power may have been advisable and necessary, but by itself could never bring more than temporary improvement, never a viable solution. We all too much were trying to solve a political problem militarily. I never felt we were morally wrong or at fault on these grounds, for the idea of preventing a communist take-over had my approval, indeed was admirable. It was only we were going about things in the wrong way. I didn't see what anyone could do about the Vietnamese authorities, who did not seem to come across to most of the people as that much superior to the Viet Cong. At least that's the way the villagers also saw it. Personally, I looked on Vietnam as an interlude in my career. I learned a good deal. I have memories, many positive ones, which will always be with me. I did not like at all the family separation; that was hard to take.

Q: You came back in 1966, towards the end of 1966?

UNDELAND: Mid-66. I picked up the family in Bangkok. We flew to Hong Kong and Japan for short stays, two places I had never visited, before taking the President Cleveland to San Francisco. But leaving Saigon was not without its hitch. I was on an Air Vietnam flight from Saigon's airport, Tan Son Nhut, to Bangkok and looked down to see us flying over Phnom Penh and a few minutes later I saw it again but we were going the other way. Engine trouble dictated a return to Saigon and awaiting another plane. Tough on the family as I couldn't communicate with them and they had no knowledge of what was happening, except the plane didn't arrive.

ROBERT J. MCCLOSKEY
State Department Spokesman
Washington, DC (1964-1973)

Robert J. McCloskey was born in Pennsylvania in 1922. He joined the Department of State in 1955 and served in Hong Kong, and in Washington as a public information officer. He was ambassador to Cyprus, the Netherlands, and Greece. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: How did you view and treat the Vietnam War? You were there from the beginning until we got our troops out.

MCCLOSKEY: That was probably the toughest continuous assignment I guess I've ever had. As I said earlier, there is always something going on around the world that can get your telephone to ringing at home. As this part of the world was going to bed, things were just beginning to happen out in that part of the world.

The coverage of the war was heavy, detailed, saturating at both ends in Washington and Saigon. It was perfectly obvious to anyone with two eyes in his head and two ears that the U.S. government was heading into serious credibility problems. That is a very complex matter, that simply can't be summed up in a very short time. I will say, however, that there was at the same time a very important term, benchmark, if you like, in the history of American journalism, because we began to get what was then being called advocacy journalism.

This is the phenomenon where the reporters covering the war became involved in the story, and became part of the story. There used to be an iron law in journalism, if you permit yourself to become a part of the story you're not serving your responsibility as a reporter. It is still considered an iron law, but it obviously has been breached. I think that breaching began during the Vietnam War.

You remember the call that Kennedy grew so agitated about David Halberstam and his coverage out of Saigon in those days, that Kennedy made the serious mistake of going to the New York Times and asking that Halberstam be reassigned, which was a blunder of the first order in the conduct of government/press relations. But it will give you some sense -- it always reminds me, of how passions were developing over that bloody war, when there were sins of commission, omission, committed by both the government and the news media throughout.

Q: Did you feel that you were being manipulated yourself within the department?

MCCLOSKEY: I can only answer that by citing another anecdote, illustration. Manipulated, I wouldn't go so far, having information withheld, yes. It became evident to me in May of 1965 when we added a very significant number of Marines to our forces in Vietnam. This was the beginning of the use of the word escalation, the deepening of American involvement. It became clear that the Marines were going to be involved much more than just perimeter security, which, I believe, is the way their assignment was being defined by the White House and by the Pentagon.

When you look back at how absurd some of this was, when the administration thought it could conceal this: the fact that the Marines were, in fact, going to be involved in search and destroy operations. With the size of the press corps covering the war in Vietnam, it stuns the imagination to think that this could have been kept very long.

Well, it did by euphemisms and some misleading statements by different sources here in Washington, official and unofficial. My instinct told me, don't touch it. So for a long time, that is to say days, whenever I was asked whether the role or assignment of the Marines in Vietnam had been changed, that is to say, upgraded, I found some way to have no comment.

However, it got to a point where this was no longer tolerable. By which time, I knew, the Marines were, in fact, in combat. I answered a question one day, and I forget whether it was June 5th or sometime in June of 1965, that confirmed this, and led among other things, the New York Times the following day, saying in an editorial that the American people were told by a minor official of the State Department, yesterday, that the country is at war in Vietnam.

To go back to your question about manipulated, I don't want to say that I was manipulated, because if I had known I was being manipulated, I would not have stayed on. I knew that information was being withheld, and I would give anyone the benefit of a doubt for a period. But that doubt became an unreasonable thing after I knew better, had hard information which really was only confirming what reporters out there were telling their home offices back here, but couldn't get official confirmation. We had put ourselves in a box, that was just so untenable.

Q: You mentioned euphemisms. So often words get used like a protective reaction, or this type of thing, rather than saying we're fighting. Did you ever sit down with people and say what kind of words will we use to deal with this which make it sound a little bit better than the straightforward way?

MCCLOSKEY: It happened, but let me say, there is no institution in our lives that isn't seeking always to put its best foot forward, and even the best face possible on something. It is an American custom, in hindsight, can always be made to look totally absurd. I grant that.

WALTER MONDALE
United States Senator
Minnesota (1965)

Vice President Mondale was born and raised in Minnesota. A graduate of the University of Minnesota and its Law School, Mr. Mondale served as State Attorney General before his appointment and subsequent election as United States Senator from the State of Minnesota. Elected Vice President of the United States in 1976, Mr. Mondale served for the duration of the Carter Administration as active participant and advisor. President Clinton nominated him United States Ambassador to Japan, where he served from 1993 through 1996. Throughout his career Mr. Mondale has contributed substantially to the welfare of the nation in both the public and private sectors.

Q: To turn to the larger theme of your participation in foreign affairs and experiences with the foreign affairs community, the Foreign Service, do you recall what your first official visit overseas was?

MONDALE: I believe my first official visit was as a young senator to Vietnam. Another one was to a NATO conference in Brussels. Those were back in '65/'66.

Q: You were senator during the Vietnam War period.

MONDALE: Alas.

Q: So foreign affairs issues have in fact been very much on the horizon for you.

MONDALE: Right.

Q: In the United States, when foreign affairs are raised, there are those who talk about boondoggles and argue that Congress should never travel overseas. From the Foreign Service perspective, in the contrary, there is a strong opinion that we should encourage the Congress to travel overseas, to get the representatives of the people out in the field.

MONDALE: I've talked about that many times, that the most dangerous thing to have in America are ignorant members of Congress who haven't traveled, who don't know what's going on in the world, who are unable to relate what we do here to what happens overseas. I think the better members of the Congress are people that have taken trips and taken them seriously and used them as learning experiences to broaden their understanding. I think that's one of the best things that can happen. Now there are boondoggle types. I'm not endorsing them. But most of the members of the Congress I knew took these trips very seriously.

Q: Despite knowing a large Congressional Delegation coming to Thailand just wanted to do some shopping and some touristy things, our Ambassador met them at the airport in a van that had a microphonet and he briefed them for the 40 minute ride in from the airport. He wasn't going to miss that opportunity to educate.

MONDALE: Yes. I admire him and I don't know why those congressmen just came on a shopping trip.

Q: Well, that was his effort, but there have been congressional trips that have gone awry. Have you ever had that experience?

MONDALE: No. I've read about it. I don't remember any trip that I was on that I didn't think wasn't well handled and didn't contribute to learning more about those countries. My experience has been almost entirely positive. As I sit here, I can't think of one bummer of a trip.

Q: As we were saying earlier, you were a senator at the time of Vietnam, which was a major foreign policy issue at that time. From your position as Senator, how did you see the role of yourself as a representative of Minnesota or your position in the Senate on this kind of a foreign affairs issue?

MONDALE: I came into the Senate the last day of 1964. The war was just starting to heat up. I believed and said that this was analogous to Europe, that we didn't stand up to Hitler and he came to cause all that tragedy, and that this was a similar kind of challenge and we had to stand up to North Vietnam and China and so on. I was wrong. But that was how I started out.

For a few years, I supported the war. But as I watched and listened, that 1965 trip to Vietnam helped me to understand. I remember a general taking me aside to say things weren't going well. Some of the reporters covering that war like Johnny Apple from the New York Times and so on started talking to me about what they were seeing and my doubts began to build. So, I didn't go there with a set foreign policy. I didn't go there in any other pose than to learn, see, try to understand better what was going on.

Q: Which is in one sense an interesting description of the way in which the American government operates, that the Executive proposes and the Congress disposes, or reviews and funds. So it took some time for the Congress to come to a certain amount of skepticism?

MONDALE: And that wasn't to our credit at all. When you have American lives involved, you'd better learn rapidly. You'd better know what you're doing. My excuse - and I don't have one - is really that I was brand new, first impressions, listening to our government, believing what I was hearing, and then slowly becoming aware that there was a much more complex and disturbing underpinning to the whole thing.

Q: That is, at some turning point, the issue becomes how do you extract oneself?

MONDALE: Right, not a dissimilar problem to today.

Q: Does history repeat itself, Sir?

MONDALE: A real problem for Americans who wanted to believe, as I did, that we were in there to do the best, that we wanted to reform this country so that things worked. We put out stories of a number of projects we had done and this and that, stories about how the public liked us and so on, but we now know that the public there saw us more as a successor to the French, as people coming in as colonialists trying to gain influence there in order to block the North Vietnamese and so on. We were never able to shake that idea about ourselves in the eyes of the Vietnamese and we paid an awful price learning that lesson.

RALPH J. KATROSH
Vietnamese Affairs, East Asia Bureau
Washington, DC (1965-1966)

Ralph J. Katrosh was born in 1927 and raised in Kingston, Pennsylvania. He attended Virginia Military Institute. From there, he joined the military and became a part of the Third Army Palace Guard. It was here in Europe that he developed a desire to join the foreign service. Upon returning to the States, he entered the Foreign Service School at Georgetown University. He then went to the State Department to work with China in Taiwan. He has also served in Singapore, Burma, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Israel. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 28, 1992.

Q: You left in 1965 and went where?

KATROSH: I have always had a tour back home after an overseas tour. I was put on the Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos Desk. That was the beginning of a long and complicated period when...my first job on the Desk was liaison with other agencies. I worked with officers in CIA, DIA and the Security Council trying to maintain some kind of continuity in the various programs

that we were developing to assist the Government of South Vietnam.

At that early date no one knew what we were getting into. When you start on Vietnam, from my point of view you have to start back in 1945. Then after Dien Bien Phu we got involved...1954. Then, slowly, slowly we built up.

When I started my assignment, there was still a reasonable amount of popular support for what we were doing. No one at that time realized exactly what we were getting into. Now this may sound like a little bit of horn tooting, but after you have been four years in Taiwan; two years in Singapore, watching that conflict between the locals; and up in Burma watching that conflict; some of us knew that Vietnam was a powder keg. We knew then we were not going to win it. There was no way we were ever going to go in there and structure a government and army that is going to be solid enough to win the support of the people.

Kennedy said he was going to pull troops out. Well, maybe Johnson would too. I think Johnson has been pillaged on Vietnam. I have my own view on it. I think he was misled. I don't think he would have done what he did if his lieutenants had not told him that was the thing to do and that he would be a big hero if he did it.

My personal views aside, 1965 was the time of the big build-up and our job was to get people there; lassoing people in halls trying to persuade them to go, trying to get money, trying to get some consistency in policy, trying to execute the directions received from the White House.

Q: So as liaison you were running around saying you said this, they said this, etc.?

KATROSH: Well, there wasn't much time given as to whether it was good or bad. It was a policy implementation phase rather than the development phase.

In 1966 there was the bombing of the Embassy. That shattered the Embassy structure so I was sent out on TDY, which lasted nine months, to help out.

Q: There was a bomb set off at our old Embassy which killed quite a few people.

KATROSH: Yes. Again I had an "implementation" task. Here is the program, check this, do that, go there, etc. There was no innovation.

Q: Did the situation seem any surprise to you?

KATROSH: Yes. I saw things that were said about Taiwan being said again. It was Singapore again. It was China again. This whole lack of appreciation of the history driving these cultures and subcultures. This is true throughout my career in Asia, frankly. Malaysia and the Philippines come later. If you are sensitive. If you can smell a united Germany in 1945...and you could smell it...that is why you don't want to get into Bosnia. These conflicts do not react well to military forces. Repel aggression yes. Slam the aggressor on the head and get him out of the way, but not this sort of war, not intercultural conflicts. You lose every time. Those involved don't want you there. If they want to kill each other, they want to kill each other and they resent your going in

and trying to stop them from killing each other.

Anyway, during my first stay in Vietnam, people would come to Saigon, programs would come in, Congressmen would come in and need to be briefed. It was just like pushing a button. You would give the spiel and they or it would go away. And another would come in.

I was able to leave there when my mother died. I came back and the Department asked if I would like to go to the Philippines? Oh yes indeed. So in 1966 I went out to the Philippines under Ambassador Blair.

This is nice. The Philippines was our "colony"; in 1966 they were our colony. The interesting thing going on in the Philippines, I guess, was again making sure that the Philippines wouldn't get too far adrift from where we wanted them to be...a strong right arm for our Southeast Asian policy and providing us with what were then strategic bases, Subic Bay and Clark Field.

President Johnson made a visit to Manila while I was there. It took two months before his arrival to get ready and two months after he left were spent in repairing the damage. This happens all the time in most Embassies and I am sure you are familiar with it. That was one of the big events, the Johnson visit, and trying to get the Philippines to support us in Vietnam. Manila wouldn't send combat troops but they did send some rural reconstruction battalions there.

Everything was going swimmingly and I had a two year assignment there. I asked for a third and had it approved and then bang!

Q: We are talking about the TET offensive in Saigon, January, 1968.

KATROSH: Right. Well, I was directed back to Saigon but I don't want to go. I am using all the chips I collected throughout my career trying to get the assignment changed. No way. Your family can stay in Manila. You only have to go for 18 months. They don't even have to move out of the house...it was a lovely house. Everything is going to be fine. You can catch a flight from Saigon to Clark and spend a weekend with your family. They knew I had spent quite a bit of time there earlier and was not very sympathetic about Vietnam...not hostile, but I would say, "let's recognize it." I told them that I didn't want to go back because we had lost it. Not go back? Okay I did.

During this second assignment, I was Ambassador Bunker's special assistant. There is much that I cannot say about this assignment, but my job was to work with the Ambassador and his other assistants in his office in dealings with the senior officials of the South Vietnamese government.

Q: That being?

KATROSH: Thieu, Ky, the prime ministers, industry leaders, etc.

Q: Before we get to that, did you sense...you had been in 1966...did you sense a difference there?

KATROSH: We were in a new building which was big.

Q: Did you sense a difference in the attitude of those dealing...had TET come as a shock to thinking or not?

KATROSH: Not really, because amongst the US faithful, TET was a victory and it truly was, militarily. The Communists took their best shot and didn't make it so now we were going to start rolling them back. That really should have broken the morale of the Communists. The VC did not conquer the South. Regular North Vietnamese divisions conquered the South. It wasn't the people that failed, but the corruption and deterioration of the Thieu government that we structured.

Q: Did you have any impressions of how we operated at that time? I mean the American style of operation in Vietnam...

KATROSH: Stu, I wasn't impressed. The military was given a mission and by God nothing was going to change. They were going to do it, like Grant. I think, frankly the Department as a whole had it right all the way along. People like Marty Hertz, and Berger and Bunker...these fellows tried awfully hard. Westmoreland had his way.

Q: He was the general in command.

KATROSH: Right. Abrams, who followed, was more practical. McNamara, and to a certain extent Rusk, just wouldn't give in. They were going to have it their way. I remember one time going up to see a senior US official with an associate and I said, "Can I tell it like I saw it?" My associate said, "It is kind of dicey. I am going to tell you the policy right now, so don't go in there swinging because you will be picking up your teeth." There wasn't much leeway. Again I am speaking about someone who was a very senior official at the time. You did your job the best way you could seven days a week and sometimes 20 hours a day. And thank God you were able to do so because you would go crazy if you didn't. I literally wanted to work all the time, as did most others.

ROBERT DON LEVINE
Embassy Spokesperson
Saigon (1965-1966)

Robert Levine was born in Germany of American parents in 1924. He joined USIA in 1955, served in Switzerland, France, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed in 1988 by Pat Nieburg.

Q: Bob, let me interrupt for just one minute.

LEVINE: Go ahead.

Q: Would you define a little bit what this job entailed?

LEVINE: With the build up of American forces in Vietnam in 1965, I arrived there in May of 1965, there was increasing interest on the part of the American media in what was going on in Vietnam and in following what was happening to our troops, what they were doing. And that required more work on behalf of the United States Mission dealing with these reporters.

Also at about the same time that I arrived there, it may have been a little later, the normal U.S. Information Service operation in Saigon was transformed into what was called the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office or JUSPAO in Saigon which included both the military and the civilians.

By the time I left, the daily news briefings which were given at the U.S. mission hosted several hundred newspaper, television, wire service and freelance reporters. So the job was primarily one of helping my boss, Harold Kaplan, who was the mission spokesman, to get ready for this briefing at five o'clock, called the five o'clock follies, and find out what was going on, what activities the mission was involved in and what kind of questions he might have to respond to at the daily briefing. The during the day, of course, we had to handle other queries that came along from newsmen and also make some arrangements for them to visit different parts of South Vietnam where our troops were operating or where American civilians including USIA civilians were functioning also. Of course, State Department people were in the some of the larger cities in Vietnam.

The five o'clock briefing was a joint military and civilian briefing. I might say that the military handled their part of the briefing and the civilians handled the civilian part of the briefing but basically we controlled what happened there.

Q: Robert, let me interrupt with one question. Would you describe for me a little bit how does one get ready for that kind of five o'clock follies that you had to face everyday? In other words, where did you get the information? Where did you get the basic data that you had that you needed to prepare to answer the questions of the media?

LEVINE: Well, first of all we had cables to read, outgoing cables from Saigon, incoming cables from Washington. We also talked to mission officers, State Department people, JUSPAO, JUSPAO officers, military officers, to get them to explain certain things that were coming up in the news. We, of course, had the wireless file that we looked at, had some idea from that. I don't recall how quickly we got newspapers there. I don't think it was all that fast. But we did get reports on what the American press and also how the foreign press was playing the situation in Vietnam. And from these reports, press, media reports, we knew what issues were hot. We also knew based on our conversations with correspondents who asked us questions and wanted to know what was going on, what our attitudes was towards, I don't know, whether it was a cease-fire or what have you.

Q: Robert, did you or Harold Kaplan, for example, sit in on mission staff meetings which were either just embassy missions or joint missions with the military. Were you in at the policymaking discussions to get a readout of what was going on?

LEVINE: I never was. Harold Kaplan was to a greater extent than me but not all that much. Primarily it was Barry Zorthian who was then the Director of JUSPAO who sat in on those meetings. This made things a little bit difficult for us admittedly. Although we did find out things through other people at a lower level who were informed, either people in the military or in the civilian part of the operation. I'm talking about the whole entire mission, not just JUSPAO.

Q: Did Barry share the information that he had with you? In other words, did Barry Zorthian actually brief you and/or Kaplan and tell you?

LEVINE: To a certain extent, not as much as we would have liked. I think that he retained for himself a considerable amount of this information to make himself a better source and a single source for newsmen. That was one of the problems. I always thought that Kaplan did a marvelous job given the fact that he wasn't as privy to all the information that the mission had as Zorthian was.

I might also say that part of our work as I started to say earlier was arranging for trips, correspondents that wanted to go into the field. They were usually flown around on MACV, Military Assistance Command Vietnam Aircraft, and were able to get into the field quite a bit. Some of them were wounded. I don't know. Maybe some of them were even killed. I don't recall whether -- you may recall that, whether any correspondents were killed there. I don't think anybody was in my time. But I know some of them were involved in some pretty hot operations.

Q: You may recall Dickie Shapiro, Larry Burrows were casualties in Vietnam.

LEVINE: That's right. I remember reading about Burrows. I don't think that -- that didn't happen when I was there. But he was always -- he was a photographer for Life.

Q: That's correct.

LEVINE: And I can remember seeing some of his photos in print, particularly one very dicey operation which he miraculously got out of alive with helicopters being shot down one after the other.

Q: What was the emphasis? As you remember during those years we had some very famous engagements in '65, '66 when you were there. There were such things as the battle of Ia Drang which was a major battle in the highlands. There was the question of securing the Delta. And then there was the question of pacification. Did you get into all these substantive areas?

LEVINE: I did not. I made a few trips. I read about the Ia Drang Valley battle and some of the other battles. But I did not get close to anything substantive insofar as that was concerned. I did make one rather interesting trip to the Mekong Delta with some Japanese correspondents early on. This was in about, I would say, July of 1965. And with two of our famous Vietnam hands, Ev Bumgardner and Frank Scotton who were then involved in a motivational training exercise which they did with the popular forces and regional forces trying to help the Vietnamese explain to them, the South Vietnamese government, what they had at stake in the fight that was going on. A short part of that trip was by plane. And I don't really remember the names of the towns we

went to. And then we proceeded by jeep almost up to the Cambodian border. Scotton knew a lot of Vietnamese along the way and was sure that the road was secure. And it included, I remember, a ferry ride in our jeep. We had to cross a stream or a river. I don't remember the name of it now. But there were no exciting developments on that trip. I was just intrigued by the fact that we could travel as far as we did by jeep in an area which I assumed had a lot of Viet Cong in it. Apparently they weren't around at the time because obviously we would have been easy picking if they had been.

So I didn't get into the big substantive decisions of the mission. I might mention one thing, that before Zorthian got there, and he got there over a year before I did, there was a situation with the reporters who were much less numerous then. The reporters just simply didn't believe the mission. The mission was putting out a lot of very optimistic information about the situation in Vietnam. The reporters didn't believe it. The reporters were guys like Neil Sheehan of UPI first and then later with the New York Times and David Halberstam who was with the New York Times and is now a freelance writer. He's written a number of books including a couple about Vietnam. And the basic thrust of what we were trying to do with the mission press center was re-establish the credibility of the U.S. mission which I think was done to a certain extent. In spite of what later happened, the fact that we really lost the war there.

Q: What were your guiding principles if you want to call it, or your modus operandi, in order to re-establish the credibility of the -- ?

LEVINE: Well, first of all it was to make it easy for reporters to travel around the country who wanted to, to view American troops in combat, in other words not hiding things from them. That was number one. Number two was to try to answer their questions as candidly as we possibly could given the requirements of military security. The daily briefing by us, and then there was another one by the Vietnamese, which was not held at the same place at least when I was there, the daily briefing was an opportunity for the reporters to ask us questions, if need be sticky questions, nasty questions about things that either they had seen in the field or that they had heard about in the field. And I think that this strategy did succeed to a large extent.

Q: In your tenure in Vietnam, Robert, did any of the Washington VIPs come to Saigon and then make themselves available at press briefings? Did you get involved in that type of operation?

LEVINE: Well, yes. Some came. I mean, Robert McNamara who was Secretary of Defense came at least once, maybe more than once while I was there. Secretary Rusk came once. Averell Harriman who was I believe then Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East came with Rusk. I'm trying to think of who else. There were some other VIPs who came there who were maybe somewhat lower down the line. Of course, even the ambassador, who was, I believe when I got there, Maxwell Taylor and later, Lodge on his second tour in Vietnam, were to a certain extent VIPs, Taylor having been Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Lodge very well known and having been U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and known for other things too. They did make themselves available at news conferences. I don't recall the details of any of their news conferences.

But usually at this five o'clock news conference, we had the five o'clock follies as I mentioned to

you earlier. Any activity that was unusually important and might interest the press was unveiled there. If there was a visitor he would show up there. Sometimes a visitor would give a background briefing to a smaller number of correspondents and instead of several hundred maybe only 20 or so of the key people there. This went on all the time even whether or not there was a VIP there. Then General Westmoreland who was a commander of MACV would see some journalists individually or talk to them on the phone. The ambassador would too occasionally. But I did not have any involvement in that.

Q: But as you look back over this period Robert, tell me a little bit what were some of your satisfactions that you derived from the job and some of the frustrations that you encountered?

LEVINE: Well, I suppose the chief satisfaction was being involved in what was a very big story. I was there in May of '65 to August of '66, about 15 months. And the story was a hot one all the time. It was on page one virtually everyday. And so you felt that whatever information you gave to reporters who asked you questions was going to be fed into a story was going to be used. That was a big satisfaction. The fact that you were a part, even though a very small part, of something that was big and important. The frustration was the fact as I mentioned earlier that we weren't always, well, we weren't often briefed enough to be able to answer questions. And we would have to send a reporter who quizzed us on one thing or another to Barry Zorthian who was pretty well wired in to everything that was going on. I think that was a major frustration. The physical situation there was quite pleasant. I shared a big villa with my boss Kaplan and living was comfortable. There wasn't any problem like that. Unlike the poor GIs who were out in the field, I'm talking about the infantrymen, who had a very rough and bloody time. There was none of that kind of frustration.

Q: What about some of the frustrations working with newsmen who are ever demanding and never satisfied?

LEVINE: Well, I suppose I was to a certain extent used to that. I had started doing it in Geneva. I didn't do much of it in that brief tour in Paris because it wasn't really part of my job, a little bit of it. But that goes with the territory as they say. When you deal with the press there is a funny two prong kind of relationship. It depends upon the individual journalist.

But on the one hand to a certain extent they are part of the operation. They hate to have this said. But in a case where you are fighting a war and they participate by going out on operations with American troops, they become part of the operation willy nilly. It's very difficult to take the enemy's side when you're with some guys who are getting shot at and you see some of them wounded and some of them killed. You take a certain point of view whether you like it or not.

On the other hand, of course, there was a lot of objection which was steadily growing in the United States and which I saw later on incidentally in a tour I did in the State Department after leaving Vietnam. There was all this opposition, a considerable amount of public opposition to our policies there, disbelief about the evaluations of how things were going there given by the top officers of the government from the President, who was then Lyndon Johnson, on down. And that created a certain amount of difficulty. But I don't know if you want me to get into what happened after I left Vietnam because I was still involved in Vietnam affairs at the State

Department.

Q: We might follow up on that after we go through the actual period. But there were stories, you must have had what you would call your favorite or more favorite correspondents. You must have had some that were gadflies or a bane to you. I'm thinking of one correspondent who shall remain nameless who used to wander through the offices and look at people's desk and look for classified material. Do you have any anecdotes and stories?

LEVINE: Well, yes. There was a case of one correspondent, I don't know if he's the same one you're talking about, who was totally obnoxious. I won't name him if I'm saying these nasty things about him. He was a totally obnoxious creature. On the other hand, his copy was very good. He supported us. He had a good relationship with General Westmoreland as a matter of fact. But he looked upon us -- I'm talking about myself, Harold Kaplan, the civilians who worked in JUSPAO as sort of civilian hacks who were doing this because we couldn't do anything else. Nevertheless, his copy was always supportive of everything we did. As a matter of fact, the other newsmen actively disliked him.

On the other hand, there were a few correspondents who visited us. I remember one, I don't recall his name, who took a very anti-U.S. policy view. He was a visitor. He was not stationed in Vietnam. And Frank Scotton took him out on a trip to one of these motivational training centers. And he was, according to Scotton, completely turned around and understood, felt he understood we were fighting the good fight and they were doing something very worthwhile in this motivational training. When he got back to the United States he flipped back again, or flip flopped again, and wrote some very nasty stories. So that's the kind of thing, that isn't something that I personally had to put up with. But I did deal with some correspondents, some of whom were very supportive. One Frenchman, for example, who had fought in Vietnam during the French war. He was a visitor. And I've seen him a number of times since then although I haven't seen him for many years now. I think his name was Pierre Darcourt, D-A-R-C-O-U-R-T. I'm not 100 percent sure of that name. And he went out to visit the first air cavalry division. Of course, if you take a division with 15,000 men you're going to find all kinds of people. Like they had somebody there who spoke fluent French. There were people there, he said there were people who even spoke, they had somebody who spoke Turkish believe it or not. They had somebody who spoke I don't know what. Anyway, other languages.

And when the first air cavalry division arrived, I don't know whether you knew about this or not, there was a massacre of a French unit somewhere on what Bernard Fall called the street without joy, somewhere Route One going up towards the north although it was still in South Vietnam, A French unit as ambushed and virtually wiped out.

Q: North of Tuy Hoa.

LEVINE: Where was it?

Q: North of Tuy Hoa.

LEVINE: North of Tuy Hoa. The French put up some kind of a marker about this. And it was all

overgrown. The first Air Cav found the marker and cleaned it up and, I don't know, presented military honors, raised a flag, blew a bugle, or whatever they did. And Darcourt who was really basically on our side anyway was terribly impressed by this. He just thought it was great. He could probably say no wrong about anything that we were doing there.

Q: Robert, tell about the relationship between the civilians or the USIA staff and the military. Here you were in a way mission spokesmen, but you weren't really spokesmen for the military were you? I mean, how did this whole relationship and interaction work?

LEVINE: Well, Barry Zorthian, of course, covered the whole thing. And the civilians as far as the daily briefing was concerned, the civilians really ran it. And Barry organized it. You know what a dynamic guy he is. He organized all kinds of things. He organized backgrounders, backgrounders by Westmoreland as well as by the Ambassador.

I would say that the relations that we had while I was there in the mission in JUSPAO with the military the relations were very good. If a reporter came to us and wanted to go somewhere out in the field, we would talk to the military and they would see what they could work out, a plane, a ride, what have you. So I think basically our relations were very good. Now, Barry Zorthian being the kind of guy he was I'm sure he rubbed a number of the military information people the wrong way. They didn't like the fact he was civilian even though he was a reserve officer, you know, a Marine Corps reserve officer. They didn't like the fact that he was the one who controlled everything. But I never found at least in my experience there, I never found any difficulty. I remember once when I occasionally did the five o'clock briefing, the civilian side when Kaplan was away. And I remember once I got into some kind of trouble. I couldn't answer a question. And the top military briefer jumped in and helped me out, you know, for which I was very grateful. In fact, I even got helped out once by a correspondent who pointed out something that I had overlooked that was favorable to what we were trying to say.

Q: But you also had, of course, to work with the military on logistics. In other words, you said they were flying in MACV transportation. So you had a continuous liaison with the military

LEVINE: We did. They were in that same building on -- what was it? I can't think of the name of the street. I'll think of it in a minute. Where JUSPAO headquarters were next to the Rex Theater and whatnot. So we would just go to them and say, look, I've got a guy from such and such a newspaper or whatever who's trying to get to this place and see if they can help. Sometimes a correspondent would go directly to them. But if he was a visitor who didn't know his way around too well then we would intervene.

Q: Were these military directly attached to the JUSPAO staff or were they separate? In other words, did they work as part of the JUSPAO team, let's say a transportation officer, a military transportation officer, assigned to JUSPAO?

LEVINE: I don't think they were part of the JUSPAO staff. But they were expected to cooperate with us. As you know we had many military people in JUSPAO. You asked me about the military-civilian relationship. My experience with it was good. But as you know the general idea of Barry Zorthian was to have an information officer on every single province. I think he almost

made it. There may have been one province that didn't have one whose purpose was not to act as a spokesman really, but to beef up the Vietnamese, to give them some ideas about selling their own cause to their own people. What I'm saying now is really mostly hearsay. But it comes from these guys who arrived from all over the world in Saigon, knew nothing about Vietnam. Didn't, of course, know the language. But often didn't know much about the country at all, and had a couple of days of briefings in Saigon and then were shipped out to the provinces to work with the Vietnamese Information Service. All I know is that they had a very difficult time with it. They knew something about Information. But they didn't know anything about the atmosphere of the country, you know, where they were operating.

Q: What about this proposition? If you send a correspondent to anywhere in Vietnam, would you call up the province or wherever he was going and alert the JUSPAO representative in the province to try and be helpful to that man? Or did you turn them over to the military?

LEVINE: Well, we basically turned them over to the military. Because unfortunately -- I say unfortunately although it's normal. These guys are interested in what the American troops are doing in the battles that they were fighting. I am sure I have never seen anybody do this kind of a study. But if you took a survey of what was written, printed, broadcast, what have you, about Vietnam during the years when the fighting was really hot, probably 98 percent of it dealt with military operations, with U.S. military operations, maybe 95 percent. Maybe a few percentage points dealt with what the South Vietnamese were doing. But except for a very rare few correspondents such as Sol Sanders who worked for U.S. News & World Report, Dennis Warner who was an Australian whose copy I think also appeared occasionally in The Reporter which was still in existence.

Q: Shaplen of the New Yorker.

LEVINE: I don't recall him. Oh, Shaplen. Yes, Bob Shaplen whom I knew actually very well. But these there were almost unique in trying to describe what the country was all about, what the cultural background of the war, what the history was, what kind of a government the country had, what the social problems were. And now and then there was a Nisei who worked for the Christian Science Monitor, Takashi Oka. I don't know if you ever dealt with him. He did some of that too. But for the others, all they wanted was the military. As a matter of fact, I can remember -- maybe you had this experience also. But I can remember groups of editors. I remember a gang from Time Magazine who came over, a bunch of their top editors. And I was at a luncheon talking to one of them. I don't remember the man's name. And I made this pitch. I said, why don't you guys write more about the country and stop writing just about the U.S. military operations. And he seemed very sympathetic. But obviously there was no change discernable in Time's coverage. As a matter of fact, some of the Time reporters that I knew there told me that they would constantly get demands, rockets from New York asking for coverage of this or that military operation and expressing very little interest in anything else.

Q: There weren't really in your experience any specialized people, for example, who covered the economy or the AID operation?

LEVINE: No. I mean, there was some writing about some of these things, but not very much. I

mean, there was nobody specializing in the economy. With the exception of the three people that we talked about earlier and a possible fourth, I don't recall anybody even wrote about the politics, you know, who specialized in the politics and let's say ignored the military and decided I'm just going to write about the politics.

Q: Well, you know, what you say is fascinating. Because so many of the books that have since been written about Vietnam dealt very harshly and probably justly so with the corruption of the Saigon government.

LEVINE: Yeah.

Q: Did you have any experience even during the briefing that this subject was raised by correspondents? You mentioned Neil Sheehan whose latest book, of course, is very critical on this particular point. At that point did he raise any do you remember?

LEVINE: I don't recall him raising that issue. But that doesn't mean he didn't raise it. I'm sure he did. I mean, after all there were Vietnamese spokesmen and they talked to them. I think that when an issue really boils up -- for example, while I was there at one point there was one of the perennial Buddhist crises. And it became so big, particularly I believe in Da Nang and -- what's the other city?

Q: Hue.

LEVINE: And Hue, H-U-E, that correspondents had to cover it, you know. I mean, it would just impose itself on them. So there political moves became, got a certain amount of attention. And when there was a coup, just as you know there were many, the coup got attention. But then they quickly slipped back from that into the regular coverage of military operations.

Q: You mentioned in your past experiences that you had with Scotton and Bumgardner who at one time were rather legendary in USIA also for their counter terrorist programs, and ultimately I think were engaged in the Phoenix program probably after you left. What about some of the other colleagues that you worked with? Who was there? Who impressed you? Or did they know what they were doing? What was it like to have all of a sudden a big build up of many Americans drawn from all over the world and somehow being ignorant of what they were even supposed to do?

LEVINE: Well, it's kind of difficult for me to talk about this. I had some contacts. Most of my contacts were just absorbed full time with the daily briefings and dealing with correspondents. In other words, I didn't have too much contact with the other parts of the organization. Now, I did talk at one -- I talked to a few province representatives, as I mentioned earlier, who confessed, as a matter of fact, at being chagrined because they were shoved out into the provinces without any knowledge of really what they were supposed to do, just a very general idea. I'm sure that some of them were good and managed to survive somehow or other. And others were not. But I don't have, I really don't have a good fix on what the other people in JUSPAO were doing.

At one point, for example, I had -- I don't know whether this is amusing for this project's

purposes. But believe it or not, even after there was an enormous amount of copy being filed out of Vietnam everyday with television and radio reporters there as well as print reporters, there was no way for them to get television interviews for example or any kind of film back to the States except by flying it to Manila or Tokyo or what have you. It would always come a day late. And I was given the job of trying to work something out.

I got a fellow whose name I can't recall now who worked for JUSPAO. He was a real ball of fire, an amusing guy, who was sort of an expeditor who used to try to get our pamphlets and propaganda and whatnot shipped out to the field.

Q: Bill Ford?

LEVINE: No, it was an Italian name.

Q: Dino Catarini?

LEVINE: No, it wasn't Catarini either. As a matter of fact he was from somewhere upstate New York I think. I can't think of his name now. It may come back to me. In any case I made the point to several of the wire correspondents, several of the tv correspondents that there's an awful lot of money to be made here if -- not for them personally, but I mean their organizations, if they would be able to file their copy electronically out of Saigon. And we finally got something going. And this fellow whose name I can't think of now got MACV to bring in some equipment from Manila which was finally set up so correspondents could go downtown someplace, I don't know where it was, and file directly to the United States via, I think it was via air to Manila, via cable from Manila back to New York so the stuff could be filed immediately.

Q: Robert, just for clarification when you said file you mean written copy.

LEVINE: No, I'm sorry. I don't mean written copy. I mean video stuff. I mean video copy, audio or video. One of the things that was kind of amusing about that, after working like hell to get this thing all set up and getting everybody involved, the equipment supplied free, brought in to be paid for as a result of the fees that would be sent back to the United States. Because it was obviously an enormous amount of traffic. There wasn't any problem of it being paid for. The equipment landed in Saigon from Manila. And the minister for PTT, I've forgotten his name now, Vietnamese.

Q: For the postal service.

LEVINE: Yeah, for the postal service, postal, telegraph, whatnot. Called me up and said, listen, all this equipment has just landed here. He said, I don't know. There might be bombs in it, you know. After doing all this work -- he spoke in French incidentally. He was an old timer. And I really got sore I suppose like many Americans did who were frustrated by the Vietnamese after all I had gone through to try to get this equipment, number one, supplied, number two, transported to Saigon, we run into a roadblock because this guy was afraid to clear the material to be sent into town. Well, I finally did. I exploded. I've never done that before or since to a minister of any government. And the material came in and was set up and used. Whether it

benefitted what we were trying to do or not I don't know. I suppose some of the negative reports that came out like the famous burning of Cam Ne, I don't remember if that was before or after.

Do you remember about Morley's -- well, it was a famous incident that happened while I was there. Morley Safer who now works on 60 Minutes was a correspondent for CBS there. He was with a unit out in the field. And they had taken some fire from the village. I don't know whether they had anybody killed or wounded. But I know they'd taken fire. And the head of this unit which wasn't very big, it may have been a company. I don't even think it was a battalion, went into the village and with a Zippo lighter simply set fire to huts there. Safer got this on film And it was seen back in the States the same day or the next day, I don't know which, including by the President as a matter of fact. And all hell broke loose because of that. So I don't know that my getting that equipment in benefitted our cause or not. But it created a certain amount of good will, I guess, with the correspondents.

Q: Bob, do you have any comment -- I think tours of duty for USIA officers were rather limited. They were 18 months without home leave as I recall or two years with a break in between and some people left. Was there a problem with --

LEVINE: Well, there was a problem of continuity with this rapid turnover of USIS JUSPAO officials. It was also I think a bigger problem perhaps even with the military who had a shorter tour of duty, just 12 months. As a matter of fact I recall -- you know, I hadn't mentioned this yet, but I had visited Vietnam in 1952 when I was a journalist working in Paris for International News Service. And the French were fighting their war at that time. They did not send draftees to Vietnam; they had draftees but they didn't send them to Vietnam. So all their people were professionals, whether they were noncommissioned officers or privates or officers. Their tour of duty was 27 months.

And I met French officers, and noncoms, who were there on their second tour of duty and some on their third. Obviously this gave them considerable amount of continuity and knowledge. They still didn't achieve what the French government sought to achieve there. But I think it helped them a lot. And we were hampered by this lack of continuity unquestionably.

Q: There was a great deal of world interest too. And you mentioned already you went out with some Japanese reporters. Did we do anything to attract or bring people from the USIS posts around the world? Did they send reporters or television crews to Vietnam? What was interaction between JUSPAO and now USIS post or USIA post around the world if any?

LEVINE: Well, I don't know too much about that. I know in several instances, for example, USIS Tokyo, for example, sent Nat Thayer, who was a fluent Japanese speaker. He's no longer with the agency. And he came down to Saigon to deal with the Japanese press. And the Japanese have media that are so vast, I mean, they have enormous circulation. All their big newspapers are nationally circulated, unlike the United States. And there was a sizeable contingent of Japanese correspondents in Saigon. And Nat came down to deal with them, talk to them, travel with them. So that was one example of it.

Now, correspondents did come in from all over the world. And there was a certain amount of

contact between JUSPAO and at least some of the main posts around the world. I was not involved in that except when people arrived. Sometimes I would help to orient them and maybe fix them up with trips around the country, that sort of thing. So there was a definite attempt to influence public opinion around the world by influencing -- well, the attempt was made on various levels. But one level was to influence their media. I think that most of the media saw that this was a big issue. The war was an important issue even in countries that were not fighting it as we were. And so we got quite a few European correspondents, Japanese, Australian. Of course, there were some Australian troops there, not many, but there were some. Some Korean correspondents too because Korea had, I believe, a division there if I'm not mistaken. Anyway, they had a sizeable contingent. So there was contact with other posts.

Q: Robert, let me just go a little bit to the lighter side. You just alluded to it earlier. You said you and Harold Kaplan shared a house and living was quite comfortable. Can you describe a little bit, were you assigned a house? And that also applies to the correspondents. Did you get into logistics with them like housing or transportation?

LEVINE: No.

Q: What was it like to live in Saigon? What was an average day like for you? Did you observe weekends? Was life normal outside of work? What was it like?

LEVINE: Let me say first of all, we did not get into logistics for correspondents. Aside perhaps from making hotel reservations for visitors. But the ones who were stationed in Vietnam did not benefit from our attempts to get housing for them or anything like that.

Q: But they had access to the PXs.

LEVINE: They had access to the PXs by virtue of being accredited to MACV and that's true. As far as living, those of us who were stationed there, who were members of JUSPAO, as I said, it was comfortable. Kaplan, who got there before I did, he'd been there I think since about February of 1965, had a villa assigned to him. And he asked me if I would like to share it with him. I didn't think it was too good an idea to be living with a guy who was my boss. But it worked out very well. And it was a nice big house on a street there, Phan Dinh Phung, P-H-A-N D-I-N-H P-H-U-N-G.

And we had, you know, several servants. There was a cook. There was what, I think they call a boyess, who sort of cleaned up, like a maid in other words. There were at least those two that I can recall now. Maybe there was a third person there. It was a pretty good sized house. And we were able to put up at least one visitor there. We had one spare bedroom which was used for visiting either USIS or State Department people who came through. We did a fair amount of entertaining. The cook we had was very good.

So I would say that, as I said before, that living there was pleasant. All the creature comforts were certainly there for those of us -- at least it was my case. Maybe I lived in a fancier house because I was working for a higher ranked boss than would have otherwise been the case. But I think most of the homes that I visited there while I was there were comfortable. There was a

certain amount of entertaining back and forth and dinner parties. And we held one big New Year's bash while I was there which was quite successful.

Q: How much business did you do at this famous, or rather infamous, whatever you might think of it, Cercle Sportif, which was the sports club, I mean, which was the swimming pool.

LEVINE: I don't recall really doing business there. I recall going there and swimming and having lunch. Kaplan who was an ardent tennis player played a lot of tennis there. I guess kept his weight down because playing tennis in the Saigon heat would do that. But I don't recall transacting much business there. Most of the business was transacted in the office. And incidentally, the office work was seven days a week. I mean, I remember it being seven days a week. Of course, when I was there I was single. I didn't have a family. So I didn't go on R&R anywhere. I took off at one point in the 15 month tour. I went back to the United States for about a week getting a free ride in one direction on the Secretary of State's airplane.

Q: Now Robert, in retrospect, Vietnam or service in Vietnam also had become a hazard to many USIA officer's families, not only because of family separation, but there were also a lot of family breakups. Do you have any comment on what caused it or what might have been contributing factors?

LEVINE: You know, as I said to you I was single when I was there. So I didn't face that problem myself. I think anytime you have lengthy family separation that's going to put a strain on a marriage. So it certainly put a strain on marriages there. In other words, a marriage has to be pretty solid to be able to withstand that. And I don't know what the statistics would show about the relative stability of families who were separated in Vietnam versus those that didn't have to go through that. Of course, there were people who said that there were other places in the world where they faced family separation also. But the only thing I can say is if the marriage was solid it would probably endure. If it wasn't solid that would weaken it.

Q: There were times especially in Saigon when even some of our military people seem to have gotten involved in various kinds of scandals. I remember a Navy person who was there. Did you have to deal with this in relation to the press? I mean, were questions asked about this? And how did you deal with these things? Or did you refer that back to the military or to other people?

LEVINE: Well, I can recall several scandals there. One was the military. And I don't see any reason not to mention his name because it was a public matter. Archie Kuntze who was a captain, a Navy captain, who was in charge of the PX. Now, that didn't break until after he got back to the United States. And it may have even been after he retired from the Navy. I don't know. But I know he was not in Saigon anymore when he was supposedly, I don't know, finagling money, changing money on the black market and whatnot. The funny thing about that is after that Kuntze left and they got a straight arrow in to run the PX, the stuff that you found there was much less attractive than when Kuntze was running it.

Now, there was another scandal when I was there that did take place while I was in Vietnam which involved one of the top officers in AID, who was having an affair with a Vietnamese woman. He was married. His wife was back in France, not in the United States; she was French.

And I don't remember all the details of it. But it resulted in a murder. That's the reason it became a scandal. This Vietnamese woman who was beautiful had while this AID officer was away on home leave, extended leave that lasted, I don't know, a couple of months or something, quite a bit of time, took up with a younger officer, also an AID officer. When the big boy came back she left the younger man to go back with the older guy, and the younger man shot her and killed her. This became quite a cause celebre. I think we did have to answer questions on that. But then those are the only two scandals that I can recall while I was there.

Q: Bob, looking back on this experience that you have had, I suppose nobody in USIA at that time had much of a choice whether they did want to go or did not want to go. They were sent there. And that was about it. But how would you sum up your experiences? Was it professionally interesting? Was it rewarding? I mean, if you had a choice, I mean looking back now, would you have gone voluntarily rather than been ordered there? What is your summary impression of that year? And what did it do for you as an individual or didn't do for you as an individual?

LEVINE: Well, I suppose I would say number one I would not have gone there voluntarily in the middle of another tour. I had only been in Paris for nine months, a city I knew very well and loved and I spoke the language and all of that. I would have been willing to go there. I would have gone voluntarily if I had been asked at the end of the tour in France. What I got out of it professionally, I got a lot out of it professionally because I learned a lot about dealing with the press which I continued to do to a considerable extent in my career in USIA and even now when I work at the Treasury. I also deal with the press. Of course, the issues are much more low key. They're not hot like that one was.

But I suppose I got an abiding interest in things Vietnamese. I read a number of the books that have come out about the subject. You mentioned Neil Sheehan. I read his book just recently which I found fascinating, the biography of --

Q: John Paul Vann.

LEVINE: Of John Paul Vann, that's right. But it's the Vietnamese experience built around Vann's biography, on which I thought that Sheehan did a terrific job in that book. Obviously he did a lot of research on it. So I still have -- when I see something about Vietnam I read it, I grab it and read it. I don't think it did me any either particular good or harm as far as my career in the Agency was concerned. It did get me the press experience of dealing with a difficult subject.

Then I went on. My next assignment was on loan to the State Department as first Deputy Public Affairs Advisor and then Public Affairs Advisor in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. So I used my Vietnamese experience in dealing with that. And I also made one trip to Vietnam in 1967 when I was still at State for the -- they had national elections. I think it was around September of 1967. And I went with an observer team that went there that the President and the White House put together.

RICHARD M. MCCARTHY

**Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
Saigon (1965-1966)**

Richard M. McCarthy was born in Iowa in 1920. He joined the State Department in 1947 and served in China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan, and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Jack O'Brien in 1988.

MCCARTHY: I was one of the three assistant directors of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, the infamous JUSPAO.

Q: *Reporting to Barry Zorthian.*

MCCARTHY: Reporting to Barry Zorthian.

Q: *What was your special responsibility?*

MCCARTHY: I was in charge of most of the more conventional aspects of the operation, the publications, radio programs, the binational center, library, motion picture showings in the provinces, and certain aspects of the field program. But we also had another assistant director, Bob Delaney, a USIS officer who ran the civilian field program. Then we had Brigadier General Fitz Freund, who ran the military program.

Q: *We forget that there were some fairly regular conventional activities during that period. Did you find that you were up against others for resources, either manpower or money, within JUSPAO?*

MCCARTHY: Not really. If we needed money, it seemed to be there. Or if we needed people, they were hauled in, in some cases kicking and screaming, of course, from all over the world.

Maybe I shouldn't tell this story, but I will. I went out to Saigon. I think it was late in 1964, very early in 1965, when they had finally decided to have a JUSPAO. I went out on TDY. Barry Zorthian had asked me to come out, to put it bluntly, to finger people for his staff. (Laughs) I was there long enough to be greeted with great indignation by some of my good friends who suspected I had something to do with their being there. They were all present at Tan Son Nhut airport in May, when I found that somebody else had fingered me for assignment in Vietnam. As I say, the money was certainly there, the people were there, perhaps more people than we really needed, although I don't want to get into that.

I think one project which is probably worth somebody doing a story on at some time is the arrival of television in Vietnam. Armed Forces Radio people decided that we needed television for the American troops, and the build-up started a couple of months after my arrival. It was also decided that we couldn't have television for our own troops unless we had television for the Vietnamese.

They cast about for some means of transmitting these broadcasts, and they discovered three of these Super-Constellation aircraft that had been converted to military use with television

transmitters. They had been hastily modified for the Cuban missile crisis. They had an interesting capability; they could fly over a target area, they could jam the local television, and on other channels they could transmit our television.

Anyhow, these three Blue Eagle aircraft were brought out to Vietnam. They proved to deliver a surprisingly good signal, but we scratched our heads a little bit when it came time to find out how to get Vietnamese television on the air, because we couldn't find anybody in country, and Vietnamese who had had any experience with television. We finally decided that the only thing we could do was use the resources of their national film studio, which was a very small-scale operation.

There was a problem, of course, of receivers. I remember that we bought 2,000 black and white receivers, very large receivers, from RCA in Camden, New Jersey, and we flew them out at a cost higher than the purchase cost of the receivers. The idea was that these receivers would go into community centers within reach of the transmissions of that Blue Eagle aircraft, and most of them landed up there. Some of them, of course, were diverted into the hands of Vietnamese generals and government officials.

We went on air pretty much on schedule. We had some top names from American commercial TV come out to help. One I remember in particular was Larry Gelbert, who was the presiding genius of "M*A*S*H," and I think some of his better ideas probably came from his experience in Vietnam. Certainly a remarkable and inspirational man.

Q: The idea was not to provide entertainment only to the Vietnamese.

MCCARTHY: No. The idea was to provide practically anything that would move on the screen. We ran old films, Vietnamese opera films, time and time again. It was very difficult to do news or anything live in Vietnamese. One upshot of this, of course, was that a great many Vietnamese watched Armed Forces Radio television programs. I may say that we took one survey that showed that the most popular program the Vietnamese watched was the old American film with Vic Murrow, "Combat." We didn't object to this at all, because, of course, the Americans always won.

Q: But it was justified, the whole effort, as a morale builder. Was that the justification?

MCCARTHY: Yes, and it was that. It was amazing how soon the black market blossomed with Japanese sets, which somehow made their way in country. When the PX got in sets from the U.S., they didn't last more than 15 minutes.

PATRICK E. NIEBURG
Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
Pleiku (1965-1966)

Patrick Nieburg joined USIA in 1962. Early in his career he worked in Bolivia

and Brazil. He was in Vietnam during the Vietnam War and then served in Germany, Sweden and Turkey. Later he was the Director of Radio in the American Sector which is known as RIAS. His last assignment before retirement was as Director of Foreign Language Broadcasts of the Voice of America. He was interviewed in 1988 by Allen Hansen.

NIEBURG: Unfortunately, my tour in Brazil came to an abrupt end. The war in Vietnam was heating up, there were -- in Vietnam -- the first full-scale battalion size battles, and the major attack on the Provincial capital and airfield of Pleiku. I got an immediate -- like to be there yesterday -- transfer to Vietnam.

I need to mention one more anecdote in connection with this transfer. I do so because it reflects on the Brazilian character. If Brazilians like you personally, nothing is impossible. Conversely, if they don't nothing is possible. As I was saying some very hurried goodbyes to some of my Brazilian friends -- many of whom were genuinely shocked at my transfer -- not a few of them asked what they could do to have this USIA decision reversed. I did not encourage them, feeling that I had signed on for world-wide service and that I could not renege when the going got rough. So my Brazilian friends actually mobilized the President of Brazil who, in turn, called Ambassador Gordon to ask him to leave one Pat Nieburg in Brazil. The Ambassador was somewhat surprised by this call -- possibly suspecting that I had initiated this action -- but firmly told the Brazilians, "Sorry, but my President needs him in Vietnam." But I must admit I was touched by this demonstration of friendship by Brazilians in the highest echelons of the media and government.

Just the same, within five days I left Brazil and was on my way to Vietnam. To be specific, I was on my way to Pleiku, a place I had never heard of, nor knew where exactly to locate it on a map. Nor did I know what the job of Senior Field Representative, JUSPAO, for II Corp, meant. I ultimately found out -- because essentially I created the job (it was a new position) -- but not because anyone anywhere really told me, let alone briefed me on what my objectives were to be. But Vietnam, I am afraid, is too long a story to cover here. It would require a separate interview.

Q: Did you have any combat experience during your stay there in Vietnam?

NIEBURG: Yes, on numerous occasions. I was in various scraps that I, in a way, would almost prefer to forget today and was shot at more than once. But one of the things that I did want to point out is that for the Vietnamese -- at least during that particular time -- how important it was to have security in their particular location. And I remember going out on a one week patrol with a Green Beret patrol which was a civic action group rather than one of trying to ambush Viet Cong. We went into the villages and the medics would render medical assistance. They would show people how to dig a well. And I'm impressed to this very day how appreciative these villagers were, because these were solutions to practical problems of real needs that these special action teams, civic action teams, performed. It was also a test of my own mettle because I was not the youngest at this particular time. And to slush through the jungle 20 miles to 25 miles a day is not an easy task. But it was one of the most rewarding experiences that one can have.

I remember another instance which I should mention here because it showed part of the

operations of JUSPAO or USIA there. It was during the siege of a provincial capital which was just south of where I was located. I had gone there because we had intelligence that there was an impending attack by the Viet Cong. And indeed it came. I will never forget it because the Viet Cong used elephants with grapple hooks to attack the strong points in the barbed wire.

During that particular, eight hour, night of fighting, I flew a relay plane, flew in a relay plane I should say, relaying messages. We also had prepared, and that was part of the function that we had in support of the military, surrender leaflets that the Viet Cong could hold up to surrender to the military -- to our military -- when they came close to the wire. Well, I was back on the ground after a very heavy night of fighting and we had repulsed the attack when a second wave of Viet Cong came. Many of them held up the surrender leaflets.

But what happened is that after that heavy night of fighting, understandably probably, there was so much nervousness among the defenders that fire was opened, and a lot of people were killed right at the barbed wire -- still clutching the surrender leaflets. Well, you can say that can happen in the heat of combat, but I can also tell you that set back military operation in terms of getting surrenders or chieu hois for many, many weeks to come because the experience was that the people did have surrender leaflets and were never really given the chance.

Now -- whether the military could have given them the chance and taken the risk of possibly being overrun -- I'm not trying to be the judge. In the heat of the battle much is understandable. But one thing is sure, that in terms of psychological warfare, surrender leaflets did not work for quite a while to come.

Q: After you had been out there in the boondocks did you then get transferred to Saigon and work there for a while?

NIEBURG: Indeed, they pulled me in after a while -- toward the end of my tour to Saigon and tried to take advantage of some of my Latin and other foreign experience and languages. I was put in charge primarily of visiting foreign press. And I remember, since I had had the experience with the Green Berets, going out with a team of Venezuelan cameramen, television cameramen.

Q: Oh, I remember that. I was in Caracas then.

NIEBURG: And showing them around and showing them what really was the contradiction of Vietnam -- and talking to the foreign press whether they were German or Dutch or Venezuelan or what have you. These people would say to me, "what you say is contradictory." The minute they made that statement to me I would say, "ah, this is your first sign of wisdom. Because in Vietnam you learn to live with contradiction." The reason that I say this is that you will go from a combat zone where you're actually being shot at whether by small arms fire or by mortar, and then you go up to a place like Dalat and other provinces and there you would see, at the university, scientists working on an atom reactor as though there were no war at all. There was a normal market. There was normal life going on. And at night, sometimes fighting would break out.

So the contradiction of combat and what was normal was always present. As was the strange fact

that during the time that I was there the one thing that did not happen that usually occurs in war ravaged areas, there was no famine. There was no hunger. Because the Vietnamese grow a great deal on their land, even in the arid areas. There was always enough to eat. And it wasn't just because the U.S. would send aid in terms of rice. A lot was grown and their diet was basically a good diet.

And I remember one thing. The famous Vietnamese fish sauce called Nuocmom, you know, which smells terribly but tastes very well was one of the main ingredients to give them a balanced diet because it contained a lot of protein. People ate a lot of it. So, basically between fruit and fish, and what they could grow on the land, there was no starvation. And that, at least, was something to be thankful for.

Q: I recall I think it was that first meeting, he was a motion picture producer and television producer. He went back to Venezuela and his films were shown on television in Caracas and he had a special supplement in one of the leading daily newspapers and so forth. That was an excellent USIS project on both ends.

NIEBURG: I felt that I was somewhat productive in that particular area because I could do something; a great deal, for example, with some Dutch newspaper people who since have become very good personal friends; with some of the Germans who came out. So it was an international effort. But while you couldn't say -- it would be hard to make the general statement -- that it brought support for the U.S. position, it certainly mitigated against some of the great criticism that existed during that particular time.

Q: Sort of wrap up here on Vietnam, would you like to make some comments about looking at it in perspective now, the whole experience and our involvement there?

NIEBURG: Let me just say very quickly in 1972 I was fortunate in attending the Senior Seminar. There were 17 of us seminarians who had served in Vietnam from the period of 1944 to what was then 1972. All people with different perspectives and different experiences and different functions in Vietnam. We tried very hard to draw on the lessons. One of the things that we agreed to -- there was a whole range of people from super-doves through super-hawks represented in that particular group -- that, given the circumstances that the United States was in, given the information that was available to policymakers at any one moment of life (without benefit of hindsight) we would make the same mistake again. We also found -- and there was no disagreement among us -- that not only were the motives of the policymakers justified and honorable, but that the best judgment was exercised with the information available. And we considered not only Vietnam, but what was going on in Indonesia, what was going on in Europe or other parts of the Far East.

It wasn't a question of war-mongering. It was truly a situation where the facts as they appeared at a specific time could not be projected into the ultimate result that we finally experienced. But I think in retrospect if you ask me, "am I supporter of ..what went on in Vietnam" I will give an unqualified yes with one exception. That was the frustration that I think all of us experienced, that the political imperatives in the United States were such that when you started any program you had to show progress, or success within 48 hours, or else the program was abandoned. The

one lesson that I think that we learned in Vietnam or should have learned is that we never even succeeded in either validating or proving wrong the programs that we introduced. Because none of them were carried out to the logical end. And that was one of the tragedies. We jumped from horse to horse to horse without ever really knowing where we were going, knowing what we'd done right or what we'd done wrong.

Q: Pat, on your next assignment, that was Germany, and by then you were somewhat of a Vietnamese expert having lived and worked there during the Vietnam War, did you use this background on your assignment to Bonn?

NIEBURG: Indeed it turned out that I would. But I should say to you while I was "rewarded" with a Bonn assignment, so was the ambassador in Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge, I had hoped to escape from him because I had a run in with him in Saigon during a cocktail party -- and there were quite a number of those amongst the Saigon warriors, ..as we called them. I had been imbibing a little bit more than I should have, felt no pain. And I talked to the Ambassador. And I asked him, Mr. Ambassador, do you remember when you were running for Vice President in the 1960 campaign? And he said, sure. I said, well, I was running for Congress at that particular time and you came to my district and talked. I was a Democrat. And after you came to my district I think I picked up a couple of hundred votes.

Well, he looked at me and he did not feel amused at all. I had felt no pain. I didn't give it any further thought. But you can imagine that when I was transferred to Bonn I was rather pleased to escape Ambassador Lodge. But lo and behold he too was rewarded for his faithful service in Vietnam and became Ambassador to Bonn. Since I was information officer, and also press attaché, my job also involved some speech writing. I remember being called to his office to discuss a speech. He saw me. He said, not that man. Get him out of my office. I could hear him today because I was so pleased. Speech writing was not one of my favorite occupations. So I was relieved of that particular duty.

While I was in Germany -- because of my relationship with Ambassador Lodge -- I tried to spend as much time out of the office as I could. Actually I arranged for a very extensive, almost continuous on-going lecture program on Vietnam and Vietnamese problems and questions. I lectured at universities, at political clubs, at civic organizations. I remember very vividly being invited by the student body of the Free University of Berlin to talk about Vietnam. When I arrived, there were police. There were police dogs. There was a huge banner of the Viet Cong. And there was a very rowdy group of students and they did not want to let me speak. Which was all right with me, but they had invited me to come in the first place.

They told me, dammit, we know this is a bunch of lies and we don't want to hear about Vietnam. We want you to talk about the Brazilian government's genocide of the Amazon Indians. Well, that may have sounded facetious. But I told them that I was quite willing and quite prepared to talk to them since I had served in Brazil. That ended the argument. I must say I never got to give my speech on Brazilian Indians in the Amazon Basin because the crowd got so unruly. Eggs were thrown. Objects were thrown. I was ultimately rescued by the police and their dogs and went back to my hotel.

That was not one of my more successful lecture pursuits. But I lectured widely and I hope judicially in the sense that I came prepared with a great deal of ..background material, of history and tried to really give a historical approach to these various problems and to defend U.S. Administration policies as best as I could. There was a lot of logic to it. Certainly my heart was in it. So the Agency actually saw fit to reward me for this particular effort.

Q: *This was in what year?*

NIEBURG: That was in '66 to '69.

Q: *Did you lecture in German?*

NIEBURG: In German, yes. Since I am bilingual in German. That surprised many of the audience. Of course, they all remarked that I had somewhat of a Prussian accent which is quite true.

G. CLAY NETTLES
II Corps, USAID
Lam Dung (1965-1967)

George Clay Nettles was born in 1932 in Alabama. He attended the University of Alabama for both a bachelors and a law degree after serving in the US Army. Nettles joined the Foreign Service in 1957 and served overseas in Japan, Vietnam, Venezuela, Lebanon, Pakistan, Zaire, Turkey and Saudi Arabia as well as attending the NATO Defense College. Nettles was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1997.

Q: *So you went to Vietnam, and you went right out to the provinces, or did you spend some time in Saigon?*

NETTLES: I spent three days in Saigon. I was the only one in our group that had been to Saigon before. When I was in Japan, I took a vacation and went to Saigon. A group of us from my class had arranged a meeting at a very good restaurant I remembered. We had a really magnificent dinner. At that time, it was the most expensive dinner I remember that I'd ever had. But all of us were quite happy to pay it, because we didn't know where we were going exactly or what we would be doing.

Q: *So all during this training period, you were the expert on Vietnam; you had been to Saigon. You were the only one.*

NETTLES: I'd only been to Saigon for two or three days, but at least I had been there. The very first night I was in Saigon when I came back, I was invited to a big cocktail party given by the admin. counselor. At this party, I was talking to an officer from the political section of the embassy, and he asked what I was doing. I said, "Well, I'm on detail to AID, and I'm going to be

assigned to II Corps." As you know, there were four divisions, known as corps, in Vietnam. II Corps was basically the central part.

And the political officer said, "That's too bad. We expect II Corps to fall within a few weeks, and we'll probably lose a few people."

Well, that was my introduction. The situation, especially in the highlands, was desperate at that time. Someone compared the situation to a poker game in which one side had won, meaning the Viet Cong, but before they could pick up the chips that were lying there on the table, we changed the rules of the game by sending in combat troops. It was so bad that gasoline that was sent to Pleiku, one of the big U.S. bases in the highlands, had to go through Viet Cong roadblocks, and we had to pay a tax on American military fuel to get to go through the roadblocks.

Q: To the Viet Cong.

NETTLES: They had to pay a tax to the Viet Cong at the Viet Cong roadblocks. Now, of course, it was paid by Vietnamese contractors, the U.S. military didn't directly pay the tax, but indirectly they did. I arrived in July of '65, and the first U.S. troops arrived there in June, just a few weeks before I did. They, for the most part, were in I Corps, which was the extreme northern part, and then later they came further south and west. I was assigned to Lam Dung Province, which is right in the center of the highlands. There were never any U.S. combat troops there, only advisors, while I was in Lan Dung.

Q: In the period that you were there, or ever?

NETTLES: There could have been some later. During the period I was there, there were never any U.S. combat troops other than advisors. I was in charge of the AID program, as I said. Later, they consolidated the various American groups in the field. The USIS (USIA officer today) might have responsibility for two or, in my case, even three provinces, and there would be a resident CIA officer. Of course, the military was by far the largest. They had about 30 advisors within the provincial capital where I was. All of us were separate but equal. Later, USIS, AID, CIA, and the military were combined and were known as MACV. Usually, the senior American military advisor would be the MACV head in the province, but occasionally, it would be an AID officer. But they were all separate when I was there.

Q: So that meant, when you were there as the AID representative in the province, you would report to Saigon?

NETTLES: No, I would report to Na Trang, which was the headquarters for AID within II Corps, and then they would report to Saigon.

Q: And you also had an advisory liaison responsibility with the provincial governor?

NETTLES: Yes, but also with every division of the provincial government, such as education, agriculture, and rural development. We even had a program, Chu Huo, to encourage Viet Cong to defect. Now AID provided support for most of these Vietnamese government agencies. A

hundred percent of the budget, for example, for Chu Huo programs came from AID, but a relatively small percentage of the support for the educational bureau was AID. For the most part, the support was in kind rather than in cash. For example, we would provide bags of cement or roofing materials or bulgur, which is a type of wheat.

Q: And your job was to facilitate all of this flow and to deal with problems.

NETTLES: That's right, and constantly planning for what was to be done the next year. We would work very closely with the division chief to see that the programs were effective and to see that the material was used properly.

When I arrived in Lam Dung Province, the very first night, I was invited to a party given for the head of U.S. military, who was leaving. He commented, "Tomorrow, I'm going back to the States. People will ask me about the war in Vietnam. But all I can tell them is that there are 52 provinces. And I can only tell them a little about the war in Lam Dung Province."

And that was very true. My experience the entire 18 months in Vietnam was in Lam Dung Province. And Lam Dung was not typical. For one thing, two thirds of the people there were refugees who had come from North Vietnam in 1954, at the time of the partition of Vietnam, and were staunchly anti-Communist. They were very receptive to what we were trying to do.

About a third of the people in the province, though, were Montagnards. And the Montagnards were in various degrees of civilization. Those in Lam Dung Province were very primitive. I would say they weren't even in the Iron Age.

Q: What would you say about the caliber of the Vietnamese officials that you worked with in the province?

NETTLES: I found them, for the most part, very impressive. And one must remember, too, that despite the American casualties, the Vietnamese consistently had far higher casualties. In fact, their casualties were usually about five times what ours were. That tends to be overlooked by a lot of the people.

Q: Were the officials honest? Was there a lot of corruption evident?

NETTLES: I did not see any. I remember, though, we had one province chief who, when he arrived, told me and the senior military advisor, "Gentlemen, you don't have to worry about me. I've been province chief twice before. I've made my money." But I never saw any corruption. That was my job, to run the AID program, and I think we could account for all of the funds and material that we received. And I did not see any misuse.

Sometimes, though, things might require a little explanation. I remember one of the programs that AID sponsored were self-help programs. Usually, these were wells for the small villages, or a small bridge, something like that. But the first thing the province chief wanted to do was to build a tennis court. I protested, and he said, "This is very important. It's not for me. It's for all of the government employees. The roads have been cut. It's impossible for them to get out to go to

Saigon anymore, or to go anywhere. I think this will be essential for morale." And he was correct. It was used by the lower- ranking bureaucrats, and it was used properly.

Q: The province chief was not from the local area, he was sent in by Saigon. He was a civilian or a military person?

NETTLES: Military. All the province chiefs, to my knowledge, were military. There may have been some civilians, but I never learned of any.

Q: If you wanted to go to Saigon, how would you get there?

NETTLES: Normally, I would go in on an Australian Caribou, a Canadian-made plane. But the Australian government was involved in the war effort in Vietnam, and basically what they did was to furnish military transports. They provided cargo flights to six provinces in II Corps. It was three days a week, and the last stop was in Lam Dung Province. So it was very easy for me to get into Saigon. Now if I wanted to go back on a military transport, I had to do it in reverse and make five stops before I got there. So I tried to get a flight some other way. The U.S. military had frequent flights in and out, and they were good about letting me know when one might be going directly. I don't believe I ever made that circuit with six stops before getting back. The roads in my area were controlled by the Viet Cong.

Q: The full route.

NETTLES: Yes. AID had its own planes. For example, they would provide one for me to go into their headquarters about once a month, to go over all the accounting. They were very strict about that type of thing.

Q: Did you have to spend a lot of time taking care of visitors who would come to your province?

NETTLES: Well, we did have a number of visitors. Marietta Tree, for example, came through. I had a good cook, and word got out that I was happy to receive visitors and served a good meal... And we had an interesting program. So we got more visitors than we might have otherwise.

Q: How about the Viet Cong? How present were they in the province?

NETTLES: There were very few local Viet Cong, but the composition of the population of the province was not typical of the country as a whole. However, the Ho Chi Minh Trail went through the province, so there were quite a few at the time. We would get reports when large units were going through. We knew that the Viet Cong could always take the province any time they wanted to, but we didn't think they could hold it. But we were constantly aware they were there. For example, my first month, they blew up my house. That makes an impression on you.

Q: Were you in the house?

NETTLES: Yes. And to be awakened by the roof falling on top of you is a little disconcerting. There were three of us in the house. At that time, I was the assistant AID provincial representative. Three of us were sharing the house, the provincial representative, myself, and a

summer intern from Berkeley.

Q: The AID representative.

NETTLES: Right. The house was part of an agricultural college, which had been built some years before by AID. There were three bedrooms in the house, across the back of the house. My bedroom was the middle bedroom. The only hotel in town sold rooms by the hour, so we put up any visitors in our guest bedroom, which had a single bed and double-decker bunk. This happened, as I say, my first month. The only north-south road in Vietnam went through the province. And the week before I arrived, the Viet Cong blew up the two main bridges on this road. We had experts from the U.S. military come and look at it, and they said that it was a really professional job. They said, you don't know how difficult it is to blow up a big bridge and do it properly. Well, they obviously had left behind explosives, because a week later, there was an attempt to blow a very small bridge. The bridge wasn't damaged, but two of the people doing it were killed.

Well, some of these leftover explosives they decided they would be used to take out us, the three American civilians. They planted the charge on a tripod against the corner room where the summer intern was staying, perhaps because it had three beds. The other two rooms each had a single bed. We were very lucky, because, as the U.S. military experts told us, they used probably about 20 pounds of plastique, a type of explosive. They put it on a tripod, but they didn't try to shape it, so about 90 percent of it just dissipated. Had they shaped it, they said there wouldn't have been anything left of the house or of us. As it was, the blast blew out most of the back wall and part of the roof. My bed was in a corner, right below a large picture window, and the picture window was blown over me and blew out the next wall. The wall between my room and the summer intern's was blown out also. The electricity went off at 10 o'clock every night, so I always slept with a flashlight right by my bed, and, miraculously, it was still there. I reached down and found it. Ted, the summer intern, was screaming, because he thought he was on fire from the blast. He could only see red. And I thought his screams were charging VC (Viet Cong). My initial reaction was, this couldn't be happening to me, I'm a Foreign Service officer. Well, Bob, the AID provincial representative, said he was alright. And even though I was concerned about VC, I didn't think I could let Ted, the intern, bleed to death. He said he was hurt. So I snapped on my flashlight for just a second or two, because I knew it would make us a better target for VC that I thought might still be there. Ted said he would never forget that I exclaimed, "My lord, there are no walls!" Ted looked like raw hamburger, from his knees down and his chest up. He had heard a noise and was sitting on the side of his bed when the blast went off. There wasn't a piece of his bed left as large as the palm of my hand. But other than one very bad cut on his instep and a ruptured eardrum, all of his wounds turned out to be superficial. They were puncture wounds, so they weren't bleeding.

So, again, being concerned about VC, I wanted to do something to let them know that we weren't helpless, so I told Ted, just stay there. He had been thrown into a corner when his bed blew into pieces. I was going to throw a grenade, but our grenades had been in the top of the closet, which was all blown out, so those were gone. My carbine at the bottom of the closet was still there, so Bob and I fired a few rounds from our carbines, just to let the VC know we were alive and well.

Then we moved Ted to the living room, the least damaged part of the house, without any light, of course, and put him on the sofa, not realizing that it had been covered with broken glass, and he got a few more cuts from that. Fortunately, not serious, either.

The U.S. military compound, with about 30 military advisors, was about 300 yards away. We thought they'd be over to help us, but they weren't about to leave their compound at night. They came over at daybreak. The blast occurred about 10:45 pm.

Q: Even though they had heard the explosion.

NETTLES: Yes. But they weren't getting out of their compound until the dawn. It was a long night. But it all worked out fine.

I should add that Ted, the summer intern, recovered fully, and went back to Berkeley.

Q: So you had to find a new place to live.

NETTLES: That's right. And taking advantage of the fact that we had been blown up, I told Bob, the provincial representative, that I would arrange for a new house. Bob was a Mennonite and had previously been in Vietnam under a Mennonite assistance program to the Montagnards. He had had no experience in dealing with U.S. bureaucracy. I hadn't had much, but I had had enough to realize this was an opportunity to find a good house. So I leased the largest house available in town. Only the province chief had a larger house. At the time, AID complained that the rent was rather expensive. But with inflation, it quickly became a bargain. It was quite useful because we had many official visitors and had quite a few visitors, and we had a place where we could put them up. So it all worked out very well.

Q: Did the Viet Cong keep coming back and doing this kind of thing again? Or was that just one episode early that didn't continue?

NETTLES: That was the only instance of that type that happened while I was there. It was unique at that time in Vietnam. Some AID people were killed or captured, but during the period that I was there, they were not singled out. They happened to have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, but there were no deliberate, specific attacks on Americans. I believe it stayed that way right up until the Tet Offensive.

Q: In '68.

NETTLES: I'm not certain of that, but I do know, the time that I was there, '65 and '66, I don't think there was any single, specific attack upon American civilians...

Q: You, Clay, said that you were the assistant provincial representative for a while, and then became the representative. How much time did you serve in both those capacities? And how did you happen to become the senior representative? Did you have an assistant at that point, or were you the only one?

NETTLES: I was the assistant for about six months, and then I was provincial representative for a year. I did not have a formal assistant, but instead I had a young lieutenant as my assistant for the second year, a great guy. He was a former football player at the University of Florida, who had majored in agriculture. The U.S. military advisor was rather annoyed that a lieutenant was assigned to report to me rather than to him, so he said, "All right, he's your responsibility completely. You can take care of him logistically." So he lived in this large house that I had. He did a very effective job.

He was a perfect example that although language training is very helpful; it's not essential. He did not have any language training, but had the ability to identify with people and was extremely effective. Of course, he had a Vietnamese assistant.

Later, an 18-man U.S. military unit was sent to the province and reported to me rather than the military advisor. This was part of the MILSAP program of military physicians and assistants. Normally, there were 18 in each unit -- two doctors and about 16 corpsmen.

Q: They were physicians, medical people.

NETTLES: All were medical -- two or three doctors, and the rest corpsmen. In our province (at that time, I think it was unique), we split the MILSAP unit up. We had 12 in the provincial capital, and six in a district capital.

Once a week, I would go to the district capital. AID would provide a helicopter once a week. It was actually two helicopters, because the helicopter for transportation came with another one, which was a gun ship. A gun ship was an armor-plated helicopter that simply was so heavy it couldn't take any passengers or cargo. But they flew together just in case one was forced down, the other could provide cover, or help, possibly even rescue people.

So, once a week, I would go to the district capital.

I would arrive, and the very first thing I would do would be go to a local restaurant, which was run by a Frenchman, who had a Vietnamese wife, and tell him that I would be there for lunch with the people who were traveling with me. He would send his wife to the market to buy whatever was available. You didn't order, because you didn't know what was available, but you knew you would have a good meal.

Then I would go to see the military unit, the MILSAP team, because they were my responsibility.

Then I would begin a tour program with the Vietnamese district chief, who was very good. Unfortunately, the month after I left, he and 43 other people were killed in an ambush.

Then I would have a late lunch. Usually a few French people would be there, and I'd talk to them. When the day was over, I would have talked first to the Americans, then to the Vietnamese, and then to the French. If they were all saying the same thing, I thought, well, perhaps I know what's going on.

Q: Let me ask two questions. First, tell me a little bit more about the MILSAP team that reported to you. What was their function and purpose, to provide medical assistance to you?

NETTLES: No, to the Vietnamese, strictly the Vietnamese.

Q: For public health and vaccinations and that sort of thing?

NETTLES: In this province, the medical facilities were primitive in the extreme and transportation to large cities was difficult.

Q: Basic health care.

NETTLES: Right, for the entire province.

Q: My second question is, you talked about going to this district capital and talking to all these different people, and maybe you had a good feel for what was happening locally. How much of your function, your responsibility was reporting to Saigon or whoever about conditions in the province?

NETTLES: Once a month, each agency in the field would get a joint report. These agencies were the U.S. military, AID (I being the AID representative), CIA, and USIA. Well, USIA's representative had two other provinces and only spent about one week a month in the province, so he obviously couldn't write the report. The CIA representative was good, but he was one of those people who just had a great deal of difficulty writing or drafting. And, as you know, we Foreign Service officers are supposed to be good drafters. If we aren't, we're in trouble. But the military, who had some very capable drafters, would insist that I write the reports, because the provincial U.S. military said, you can send it directly to Saigon. In fact, you must send it directly to Saigon, because we cannot do that. We would have to send it to our headquarters, and they would send it back, because we reported the situation as we saw it, and the situation was pretty grim. The U.S. military told me, "If we say that we've got a problem, then that's an admission that we're not doing our job properly. We cannot write anything negative. However, we can sign off on what you write."

I remember specifically, once, and this was when a unit was ambushed in our province. There were approximately 50 people killed, including a U.S. officer who had been at Fort Bragg with me. They were killed within six kilometers of where I lived. It was an ambush... they were just wiped out, and no Viet Cong were killed. Well, the local U.S. military reported on it, and the U.S. military report came back. Headquarters said, "Look for enemy bodies."

The local U.S. military sent it back again and said, "We looked, and we didn't find any."

And the report came back again from military headquarters, saying, "Look again."

Then the local U.S. military reported that artillery fire and an air strike had probably resulted in at least 150 enemy killed and 200 enemy wounded. This was, of course, strictly fiction.

Q: But it satisfied the higher headquarters?

NETTLES: That's right and, I'm afraid, was indicative of much of the military reporting.

Q: You were there in Lang Dong province about a year and a half? You left in the summer of '65?

NETTLES: No, I arrived in the summer of '65 and I was there for 18 months.

Q: When did you leave there, the end of '66?

NETTLES: Yes.

Q: What was the situation at the time you left as compared to when you arrived? Had it gone downhill steadily?

NETTLES: No, I arrived shortly after the first U.S. combat troops arrived. Had they not arrived, all II Corps would have fallen within a matter of weeks. As I mentioned earlier, that was what I was told upon my initial arrival by someone in the Political Section that they expected II Corps to fall. It was very clear when I left 18 months later that as long as the U.S. troops were there, the country was not about to be taken over by the Communists. The question was what would happen when and if U.S. troops left. The U.S. involvement was apparently a limited relation and the goal being to train the Southern Vietnamese so that they could sustain themselves after we left. Unfortunately, it turned out that they could not.

Q: This happened well after your period there. You went on, as we will hear, to a number of other assignments. Did you ever think about volunteering or asking for another assignment in Vietnam with your language? It sounds like a pretty positive experience that you had there overall.

NETTLES: It was a positive experience. I found the Vietnamese to be a very sympathetic people and I liked them. However, and I give the State Department sent out officers to the field to rate all of us on detail to AID and we got a formal efficiency report. That was toward the end of my 18-month tour. The senior officer who did the report counseled me and said, "I recommend that you do not extend." I was thinking about extending for a year because I enjoyed the work and I thought I was doing a good job, but he said "you are still a junior officer and it would be good experience, but counting the year of training you had, you will have been out two and a half years and you really need more experience in the normal career type work. Later if you want to come back to Vietnam, fine, but you need more experience before that." I took his advice and applied for the Economic Training Program at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington. I had enjoyed my economic-commercial assignment in Venezuela, but I knew if I were to work within that field in the State Department, I had to have more training so I took the FSI course which was at that time a six months course. Then I had an assignment in the bureau doing economic reporting in Latin America area. After that I had a year at Harvard studying.

ROBERT B. OAKLEY
Political Officer
Saigon (1965-1967)

Ambassador Robert B. Oakley was born in 1931 in Texas. He graduated from Princeton University in 1952 and served in the US Navy until 1955. Oakley joined the Foreign Service in 1957 and served overseas in Sudan, the Ivory Coast, Vietnam, France, Lebanon, and as Ambassador to Zaire, Somalia and Pakistan. In Washington DC, Oakley served in the Office of UN Political Affairs, the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, as the Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and for the National Security Council. Oakley was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kenney and Thomas Stern in 1992.

Q: *In 1965, you were assigned to Saigon. How were you so lucky?*

OAKLEY: It was totally unexpected. In the first place, I was a French language officer. Secondly, Cleo Noel was the Personnel Officer responsible for staffing of Far East posts. We had talked in 1964 and he asked me whether I was looking for something different outside of Africa. In fact, I was getting a little tired of African Affairs, having spent a lot of time on its issues. Cleo suggested that I look to Vietnam where he felt there were some very interesting jobs. This was just at the beginning of our major involvement in that country. So I consulted Phyllis and she was willing to go. That was supposed to take the Oakley family to Saigon.

However, between the time the assignment was made and my departure, the security situation in Saigon changed dramatically. Families were no longer allowed to accompany official personnel. Phyllis was greatly displeased by this turn of events, but we finally agreed that the best thing for her and the children would be to for them to go to Shreveport, LA, where I had grown up and where I had a lot of friends. But it was a strange place for her. Those two years of separation - the first in our married life - were not particularly enjoyable for her or me. But we were sufficiently impressed by the fact that our soldiers were actually risking their lives in Vietnam and could not see any way around the moral dilemma that my refusal to go to Saigon would have created. I would not be subjected to physical danger unlike our soldiers; they too were separated from their families and we didn't see how I could now seek another assignment with a clear conscience. We weren't happy with the prospect of separation, but felt that it was part of a Foreign Service career commitment. Fortunately for all of us, my best friend from childhood, Stanton Dossett, and his wife and children lived across the street from Phyllis and Tom and Mary. They probably saved Phyllis' family and my marriage.

When I arrived in Saigon, I became one of Phil Habib's "boys" - a member of a 26 man Political Section. That was an experience! I was first assigned to work with John Burke on internal political affairs; we were part of the Embassy's Political Section under Phil Habib. Someone should write up the history of that section; it was absolutely extraordinary. Dave Lambertson, Dick Teare, John Negrofonte, Paul Hare, Bill Marsh, Tom Corcoran, Bob Miller, John Burke, Freeman Matthews, Richard Smyser, and Ken Quinn were all members of the section at the time;

most of them rose to be ambassadors. They were outstanding in their knowledge of Vietnam, SE Asia, and Asia generally, and also innovative, intellectually curious and excellent at interpersonal relations. Dick Holbrooke and Frank Wisner were working as special assistants to Ambassadors Lodge and Porter, but were really part of Phil's group. The section included a special section of language officers who reported on activities in the provinces; they went out in the countryside for 2-3 weeks at a time to get first-hand views of the situation and then came back to write up their reports. These collected reports provided the most accurate information of activities and trends in the countryside. Too bad they were largely ignored at the policy level in Washington. In fact, worse than ignored, they were denounced by agencies other than State that found them too pessimistic. Eventually, the U.S. Pacific Command and the Pentagon succeeded in having the provincial reports stopped and the section disbanded on the spurious grounds that the reporting was too subjective. They were replaced with a new, objective measure of the situation in the countryside, which came to be called the Hamlet Evaluation Program. Everyone recalls that it measured the provinces as over 95 percent secure and stable just before the Tet Offensive.

Our living conditions in those days were very good. We lived in a compound of five houses; Habib, naturally, occupied the one in the middle and his acolytes lived around him. The security situation was well in hand and didn't have any fears for our security even though we were not heavily guarded. The Ambassador was Henry Cabot Lodge - his second tour. The Deputy Ambassador was Bill Porter - in addition to his DCM duties, he was also the head of CORDS (a program to try to stabilize the provinces with assistance). I found my assignment fascinating - very exciting. My work was on internal Vietnamese political affairs. I got to Saigon shortly after the old Embassy had been blown up and left just before the new one suffered the same fate. Fortunately, the old building had been repaired by the time I arrived.

As I said, I worked on matters relating to the political situation in Saigon. I was supposed to try to understand and analyze South Vietnamese politics. Before my arrival, there was a period of "rolling coups." - that is one government after another. My job also included working with the U.S. military to try to understand the political role of the Vietnamese military. They had a tremendous amount of political information but did not understand it. I remember one day going to MACV - the U.S. military headquarters - to see a couple of generals. I needed some information about some Vietnamese officers which I thought they might have. They met my inquiries with the answer: "But they are involved in military affairs; they have nothing to do with politics. We can't answer your questions and give you any information." I was pretty sure that the Americans knew, but were not prepared to provide it to me. I think it was clear to many of us that the American military was quite aware of the political activities of their Vietnamese counterparts, but were not ready to share their knowledge with the Embassy.

My dealings with the U.S. military were primarily because I was assigned as head of a committee dealing with the Montagnards (tribal people living in the highlands who worked with the U.S.). The committee had on it representatives from the military, CIA and AID. The purpose of the committee was to coordinate all the programs and activities that the U.S. government carried on in support of the Montagnards. That brought me into contact with the U.S. military; tangentially, I had contacts with the military on other issues as well. We worked very diligently on this coordinating committee because we found out that - unconsciously - our Special Forces

and the CIA had picked up where the French had left off, treating the Montagnards as a special group, providing assistance and protection far more generously than that received by other indigenous groups; in fact, we protected the Montagnards against the South Vietnamese government. One day, we attended a graduation ceremony at the Montagnard training center, a group trained by the U.S. was ready to go into the field. It was a big event with lots of fanfare and pomp - wives were invited to attend. Ambassador Lodge was there for the U.S..

At one moment during the day, we noticed all of a sudden a lot of scurrying around; people bringing messages to Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky. It turned out that a number of Montagnard units had rebelled; they had pillaged a number of South Vietnam towns and had then retreated into the countryside. These units happened to be crack units that we had trained to fight the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese. They had rebelled against their South Vietnamese leadership. When members of one of these units returned to town, they were arrested and put in jail along with a U.S. Army major who was with the Montagnards. The major had been assigned as an advisor to these units and in an act of loyalty decided to go to jail with "his" men to try to protect them from any retribution that the Vietnamese might have wished to mete out. He was upset that the Montagnards had been arrested. Our relationship with the Montagnards had reached the point at which we not only treated them better than other indigenous groups; we in fact sheltered them, just as the French had done.

The events of that day made me become aware of what was going on generally. I recognized that we had fallen into the same mental trap as the French had and that instead of trying to bring about a *rapprochement* between the Vietnamese government and the Montagnards, we were continuing the policy of separation. We failed to realize that one day we would leave Vietnam and that made it imperative that the Montagnards and the Vietnamese be able to live together. So I took the issue up with Ambassador Lodge and the Embassy leadership. That brought the development of a new U.S. stand vis-a-vis the Montagnards and the establishment of the coordinating committee I chaired. As I suggested, our policy of treating the Montagnards differently from the Vietnamese just developed unconsciously and before we were aware of it, we were following the policies of the French. We did then make the conscious decision to bring the Vietnamese and Montagnards closer together, enabling us to abandon the role of intermediary which we - the U.S. military and the CIA - had unconsciously assumed. These two American agencies had trained the Montagnards, as they were supposed to do, but in the process had become so close to them that they became the protectors thereby perpetuating the French policy of separation. The Montagnards of course did not object to having this special status; they had become accustomed to their role during the French rule of Vietnam. In fact, they really didn't like the Vietnamese; so this separation suited them.

The internal political situation in Saigon was always full of intrigue. We didn't know as much about what was going on as we should have. That was the main reason that we were continually surprised by a new coup, which as I mentioned had happened frequently in the period preceding my assignment to Saigon. While I was there, Ambassador Lodge received orders from the White House to transform Vietnam into a democracy. Those instructions were passed on to Phil Habib and the Political Section. This seemed highly unrealistic but President Johnson insisted. I worked on that effort, which was an interesting experience. Phil and I along with a professor of political science from Penn State started a joint project with the South Vietnamese government. Our first

objective was to write a draft constitution. That was followed by the election of a constituent assembly to ratify the document so as to make it the supreme law of the land. After that, there were presidential elections.

The Embassy trio - Habib, the professor and me - set to work and ended with a Vietnamese version of the U.S. Constitution. It had three separate power centers: the executive, the legislature and a judiciary. The president was to be elected by the Vietnamese voters. When we had finished with our draft, we sent it over to the Constituent Assembly which fiddled around with it. But the "fine tuning" did not change the essence of our draft. I must say that from the outset we did not think that a constitution based on Western principles was likely to work in an Eastern culture. The question for us was not would the new constitution be in effect while the U.S. was present in Vietnam, but what would happen after we left? The concepts underlying the document were alien to the Vietnamese and we did not give them a very great chance of becoming permanent. We did it because we were instructed to do so.

We then got the word from Washington that the presidential candidates would be General Thieu and Air Marshal Ky. This was somewhat contrary to our hopes. We had hoped that a fine civilian, Mr. Huang, would step up and become a candidate. But Washington felt that we could not afford to take any chances; i.e. we had to stick with those we knew. A new candidate would be unpredictable and Washington didn't want to take any risks. It was satisfied with the *status quo* and didn't want to rock the boat. We proceeded with elections and a new Constituent Assembly and President were elected. General Thieu was elected President.

I have been asked whether the approach we took to political reform in Vietnam bore any similarity to what General MacArthur did in Japan. We did not really review that experience primarily because the situations were so different. We occupied Japan and we were completely in charge of all governmental functions for a period after WW II. MacArthur had many experts on his staff who could not only develop appropriate legislative approaches, but could also over a period of time correct any processes that seemed ineffective. We in Vietnam, never did quite figure out what our role was. We were not an occupying power; we were allies, but how far did that allow us to interfere with domestic affairs? Were we the "big brothers" with all the responsibilities that that term often connotes? We were in fact ambivalent about our role and the South Vietnamese were not any clearer about this question than we were. I think that in the absence of a clear understanding of our role, the Vietnamese leaders manipulated us to a great extent; we did not ever manage to understand or lead them. Of course, the Vietnamese had had a lot more practice at manipulating Westerners - starting with their former colonial masters. But we created a situation which was neither fish or fowl. We left ourselves open to charges by Vietcong and their Hanoi masters that we were acting just like the French had during their colonial rule. It wasn't true because we never managed to achieve that level of influence because we wanted the Vietnamese to maintain a certain amount of sovereignty. So it was a strange situation. The Vietnamese played the "game" because it was obviously to their advantage; they adopted some of the outward attributes of democracy knowing full well that the full concept would never be acceptable to them. Of course, our role in selecting presidential candidates was hardly a model of democracy; the Vietnamese learned that lesson fast. In fact, once the South Vietnamese army leaders made their choice of winner known, that was it; he was elected. We all knew that Thieu was going to win.

Although I am not a cultural anthropologist, it was quite clear to everyone that often we and the Vietnamese talked past each other. For example, I remember the day when several mid-grade Vietnamese Army officers came to see Frank Wisner and myself. Frank at the time was working for Bill Porter. The officers asked us whether we realized what General Westmoreland was about to do. He was going to remove all Vietnamese troops from the front lines; they would be exclusively devoted to the pacification efforts. The front would be manned entirely by American and South Korean troops. These officers pointed out that regardless of our opinion of individual Vietnamese units, such a move on the part of Westmoreland would have a devastating effect on all Vietnamese troops. Their morale and self-image would be completely destroyed; the Americans were in fact saying that the Vietnamese were not good enough to fight their own war, fight for their own country. My answer was that they obviously had misunderstood the import of Westmoreland's concept; he and we felt that pacification was extremely important. Their comment was something along the lines: "For us and our men, it is the garbage detail!" One of the officer pointed out that he had been a regimental commander in an airborne division; he was then the chief of staff to Minister of Defense Co - who by the way was a complete crook. He said that the airborne men had a tremendous amount of pride; he thought that the airborne troops were still very good. There were other units that were mediocre and some that were poor, but he was sure that if Westmoreland followed through on his plans, all the South Vietnamese troops would end up being poor. There wouldn't be any left to fight. Frank Wisner and I understood the Vietnamese anxieties and agreed with them. We got Habib to support us. He got Ambassador Lodge to see Westmoreland and held a long meeting with him. At the end, Westmoreland said: "I am in charge of military operations in Vietnam. This is a military issue. I have the support of all of the Vietnamese command. End of conversation!" He did not have sufficient feel for Vietnamese "face saving" needs. Of course, later Westmoreland was replaced by General Abrams to "Vietnamize" the conflict, to bring the South Vietnamese army back into the war. That was too late because by that time there were no effective Vietnamese fighting forces left. Westmoreland's move destroyed the morale of the Vietnamese troops so that Abrams had nothing to work with when he arrived.

This story also illustrates the American command structure in Saigon. On "military" matters, the CINC [Commander-in-Chief] called the shots. The issue of what units would fight where was perceived to be a "military matter." Habib was frustrated by the situation. We understood that there were very few matters, if any, which were strictly "military." He and others like myself tried to interject ourselves when we thought that larger political objectives were at stake. We did our job as best we could, recognizing the limitations dictated by the situation. It is true that we managed to force some decisions to the Washington level and that would end the local debate. I should note that episodes such as the one I described seem to have been overlooked by McNamara in his book on Vietnam. I have mentioned CIA. I should note that the relationships between the Political Section and the Station were quite good, although we did not always agree with what they did. On a minor scale, I think they may have been undertaking actions which were not known to Ambassador Lodge, but this was not a major problem. There was one specific problem that we had. As I mentioned earlier, we received word from the White House that either Thieu or Ky would be South Vietnam's next President. The choice of the winner was to be left to the Vietnamese military command. CIA sources maintained that Ky was going to be the winner and so reported to Washington. We in the Political Section maintained that it would be Thieu.

John Negroponte was by this time working with me on internal Vietnamese political affairs. We were certain it would be Thieu because he was much more Vietnamese; Ky appeared to be much more western. I had left Saigon by the time the final choice was made, but John told me later that the last report from the CIA - still predicting Ky - was filed just at the time that Ambassador Lodge was called to a meeting with the military command at which he was told that its candidate would be Thieu. CIA had had a very close relationship with Ky for a long time; so they had a bias in his favor which undoubtedly colored their reporting.

When I left in 1967, I was not optimistic about Vietnam's future. I could not predict the outcome of that struggle, but I was less than sanguine about the possibility of a free South Vietnam - much less a democratic one. I remember one day attending a Westmoreland briefing as the representative of the Embassy. He was talking about building a large military complex in the Delta which would have cost millions and millions. At one moment, he looked at me - as if I were representing the enemy - and said: "If you think this is a waste of money, you are wrong! We will still be using this facility ten years from now." It was at that moment that I recognized that we had no strategy which would permit us to leave Vietnam under less than panic circumstances. It was inconceivable that any one could seriously believe that we would still have a major presence in Vietnam in ten years. I had a sinking feeling at that moment; the lack of an exit strategy did not bode well for the success of our efforts in Vietnam. Our military command at least and others as well did not have the slightest idea how to bring our involvement in Vietnam to a conclusion. That was a disturbing thought since I was certain that the American public would not support our involvement in Vietnam for anything close to another ten years. I am not sure that it took a rocket scientist to figure that out; I was only a mid-level political officer, but I knew that Westmoreland's statement lacked credibility.

Joe Alsop came to Saigon at one time. Many of my bosses were in Manila for a high level conference with LBJ. Alsop maintained that a major victory was just around the corner and that we would be leaving South Vietnam in triumph in six months' time. He and I had a very strong argument about that. I told him that I thought he had lost his mind. I may have expressed my doubts a little more vigorously than others, but I don't remember any great feeling of optimism in the Embassy about Vietnam's future. But we had not yet reached the point at which "exit strategies" were not only acceptable, but as is the case today, mandatory. There are some who will maintain that our effort to bring democracy to South Vietnam was in fact an "exit strategy." If we had been successful and if the concept would have won the "minds and hearts" of the Vietnamese, then perhaps those analysts would have been right. But in fact, beyond writing a new constitution, I don't remember any other efforts made by the U.S. to bring democracy to Vietnam. CORDS may have been thought to have been an effort along those lines, if you believe that bringing better administration is fundamental to democratic development by winning the loyalty of the population and reducing corruption. But I don't think the basic goal of CORDS was to bring democracy to Vietnam; it was designed to bring support to our friends in the government in Saigon. We did have democratization as a political goal, but our implementation efforts were very shallow and superficial. I suppose the Vietnamese themselves could have taken greater advantage of the opportunities for democratization that we would have supported, but when we write the constitution and dictate who should be the candidates for the highest office in the land, it is a little hard to fault the Vietnamese for not taking democratization a little more seriously. Our policy of democracy was not an "exit strategy"; I think it was a cynical move dictated

primarily by U.S. domestic politics.

I might mention a couple of other efforts in which I was personally involved. We tried to establish a youth committee for younger Vietnamese - student leaders, recent graduates. I was personally interested in this project because it related to my interests in trying to do something about the city of Saigon. I spent a lot of time working with the Mayor and other city officials on the subjects related to the administration of Saigon. CORDS and AID focused on the rural areas and other cities besides Saigon. I thought that our target was somewhat misdirected because the real action was in Saigon where the politics was focused, where most of the people were. I thought it imperative that assistance be provided to Saigon because in addition to the problems it had under the French, it was being overwhelmed by a flow of refugees from the countryside. So I managed to get some assistance directed to improving the administration of the city, its public transportation, infrastructure, etc. AID helped us to get some projects going, even though its principal target was still the countryside.

I found a project headed by Charlie Sweet, an AID advisor, to be one of the most intriguing efforts. Together with Frank Wisner and Sweet we were able to get the Vietnamese themselves to establish self-help programs in the Saigon's outlying districts - 6, 7 and 8 - which were filled with refugees. Some of the former student leaders, who had led demonstrations against their government while at university, found a challenge in helping to bring some order to the chaotic situation in those districts. It was a satisfying experience for those young men and women. We worked with them to improve the infrastructure and housing conditions by trucking building materials to these young people in the middle of the night so our help would not be visible. At our request, Lodge issued an order that no Americans were to enter those districts without the explicit approval of his office. That insured that the effort would be seen as entirely Vietnamese. The young people managed to get the refugees to provide the "sweat" labor; they put up the housing. SEABEES would go in at night to lay the concrete slabs - the young people and the refugees didn't have enough skills to do that, but the Vietnamese built the rest of the houses. So it could be and was said that this was a Vietnamese self-help project, which I think was a very important symbol.

In fact, these self help measures assisted the inhabitants to take the political process into their own hands. In those three district, they held elections and voted for their own municipal officials. That did make the rest of the city officials very uneasy because the representatives of those three districts were not corruptible at all. As I said, most of them were student leaders who were not interested in "feathering their own nests." That made the others very nervous. They began to wonder what the Americans and the students were doing in these three districts. These new political development came to a crunch when the Tet offensive took place; it was that part of the city that we destroyed to get the Vietcong out of Saigon. That was most unfortunate. It put an end to what was an inspiring, growing project.

I just mention one incident which I believe is instructive for anyone trying to understand our role in Vietnam. On one occasion, a team from the Pentagon and CINCPAC came out. Habib was gone. I was the senior officer in the Political Section at the time. They presented a plan which would have changed the nature and methodology being used by the Provincial Reporting Section of our Office. Negroponte, Teare, Lambertson were part of that staff. Ken Quinn was a member

of that section - he just went out as our Ambassador to Cambodia. All the members of that section spoke Vietnamese or Khmer. They would go into the countryside for 18-19 days and then return to Saigon to write their report which would take approximately a week and a half and then they would head back into the field. They gathered information about conditions and programs from whomever would talk to them - Vietnamese, Americans, civilians, military. Their reports provided us and Washington with a composite picture of the situation in particular provinces. It was not long before some of the other agencies staffs - CIA, military, army civilians, AID - began to mumble resentment about these reports. That was because the reports from our provincial reporting staff did not square with the usually optimistic and up-beat tones of the reports that the representatives of these other agencies were submitting to Saigon and Washington. So this Pentagon-CINCPAC team wanted to change our reporting system - they considered the reports to be "faulty." The team complained that our reports were "subjective"; they insisted that only "objective" measures be used to measure what progress we were making in the countryside. So I asked what the team suggested as "objective" criteria that might be used. The answer was a classic; I was told by the team that the war was progressing much more favorably for our side than our Embassy officers were reporting. They had looked at certain statistics such as the number of local officials killed or wounded; that number had dropped from the previous year and therefore they concluded, and thought that I would conclude, that the war was obviously going our way. I think the team was somewhat startled when we told them that the reason for that "improvement" was because the local officials had all moved back into safe military bases; there were in fact very few local officials left in the countryside. Their "cause and effect" analysis was completely mistaken; we just had to laugh. Unfortunately, these kinds of analyses led to the end of the Embassy provincial reporting and to the quantified "hamlet evaluation" program which was intended to prove how well pacification was working. It showed 96% success just prior to Tet. False premises lead to false conclusions!

In general I found the younger generation - the student leaders for example - much more progressive than the power structure. I was greatly impressed by the young people. They lived in those districts among the refugees. Initially, they viewed us as the "enemy"; when they saw that we were also interested in their agenda and were willing to give them support, their whole attitude towards us changed. Sweet worked with them constantly; there were some NGOs [non-governmental organizations] out there as well, but we tried to stay in the background as much as we could. We had no U.S. military involved nor any senior people from the U.S. civilian agencies. The emphasis was Vietnamese management and it worked. Perhaps even more importantly, the people who lived in those districts became strong supporters and vocal fans of the students, in part because the students withstood considerable pressure and intimidation from City Hall and other power centers. I suspect that we might find similar circumstances if in a large U.S. city run by a political machine all of a sudden finds wards declaring their independence and distancing themselves from City Hall.

There was no question that corruption ran rampant in the government. I remember one time Bob Komer coming out to Saigon; he gave us a briefing of Washington's views of the situation. During his presentation, he insisted that we should get rid of the corruption. I and some others asked him whether he wanted to get rid of the whole Vietnamese government? That upset him. But we kept insisting that Washington face reality; it had to understand and accept that most of the Vietnamese leadership was extremely corrupt. They were pocketing a lot of money. We

named the Minister of Defense and others as illustrations. Washington knew that the Vietnam leadership and much of the bureaucracy was corrupt. But what to do about it was another question. Our only solution - inadequate at best - was to run our own programs as honestly as we could and to target areas that were likely to be less corrupt or quite clean like the three districts in Saigon I mentioned earlier.

Corruption is very hard to ferret out. If we are occupying a country, such as Japan, then it is possible to have control of the process. But where we are “advisors” at best, as we were in Vietnam, the best we could do is observe, preach and try to protect our own programs from the insidiousness of corruption. In Vietnam, we were trying to prop up a leadership and a process that was not able to gather sufficient popular support on its own; and therefore failed.

Occasionally I had an opportunity to discuss the Vietnam situation with American journalists. I had to use my own best judgement in those discussions; I was not under any censorship, but I certainly was not giving a prediction of gloom and doom. There was no “party” line, but I tried to stay as positive as I could. I think Habib certainly agreed with my assessment of the situation.

During my tour in Saigon, the Buddhists were a very important element in the political process. They were very much opposed to American involvement. At one point there was a civil war in Hue and Da Nang; some Vietnamese army units actually revolted against the central government; they were led by some Buddhists. So we had to keep a wary eye on the Buddhist monks. I find it interesting today to recollect this religious involvement because it comes as a great shock to the American public when it is mentioned that a major religion and its leaders - Islam - are involved in a political process. That is nothing new to those of us who watched the Buddhist monks leading political actions in Vietnam. Of course, we also used the Catholic Church in Poland to put pressure on the Soviets to leave that country. The use of religion for political purposes has a centuries long history - e.g. the Crusades - , but somehow or other many Americans found the Buddhist involvement novel and unacceptable. Much of this is discussed in Don Oberdorfer's excellent book on the Tet offensive and its effects. He and I - we are good friends - have discussed that issue on more than one occasion.

I must say that my Saigon tour was an extremely busy one. It was fun; I enjoyed it, despite the family separation. I spent a lot of time in the office and going around Saigon to talk to people. For a change of pace, John Negroponte and I spent a lot of time playing badminton; it was a healthier form of release than bar hopping or finding female companionship. Sometimes, we would find two other officers and play tennis. Most Embassy officers, including Ambassador Lodge, belonged to *Cercle Sportive de Saigon* - a Vietnamese club that we could join. That is where we played because the Embassy had no facilities of its own. Of course the Vietnamese used the club and some of them used to petition Ambassador Lodge with one favor or another or provide some advice to him.

There were a number of lessons that I learned from my Vietnam experience. In the first place, I found out first hand how complicated situations could be. Secondly, I learned that the U.S. had to be very careful about its involvement in matters outside this country; it is far easier to become involved than to disengage. As I mentioned earlier, we had no exit strategy in Vietnam and therefore suffered frequently from the law of unintended consequences. That lesson was an

important one when later I was confronted with the Somalia situation; I knew by then that all the facets of U.S. involvement had to be drawn together - political, economic, humanitarian and military. When I got to Mogadishu, in fact, I put three very good political officers together with some AID folks - from the disaster relief program - and started a mini-CORDS program. I would send them around to certain locations in Somalia to work with the military teams and NGOs that were already stationed there in an effort to pull all activities together towards some common objectives. I think that was a very useful management technique.

I also learned in Vietnam - and later in other situations - to not mislead one's friends. It was better to be above board - even if it was bad news - than to take a position which later would obviously be seen as not honest. I think we did that in some respects in Vietnam. We led some people down "a garden path" - not necessarily deliberately or with malice of forethought - but some of our analyses were obviously too optimistic. I had some qualms about that approach, and I tried never to repeat what I consider to be a major mistake.

I learned another lesson too, as illustrated by the following anecdote. I used to talk to a Vietnamese journalist because he often had information that he could not print.. On one occasion, he finally turned to me and said: "You know, you Americans look on us as if we were just a basket of crabs. You don't really care what the crabs are doing in that basket as long as they don't escape or as long as someone is not stealing the basket away from you." I thought then that he had that right. It was exactly the way we viewed South Vietnam. These were "our" crabs; they could do whatever they wanted in that basket as long as we held on to the basket. It was obvious to the journalist and to others, I suspect, that our motives were often quite selfish even when disguised in very noble terms.

There is no question in my mind that my tour in Vietnam stood me in good stead for some of my later assignments. I look back on it frequently. For example, during my first week in Somalia, I sat down with the Marine generals and discussed the lessons of that "police action" and our unhappy experience in Lebanon to make sure that we tried as best we could do avoid the mistakes made during those U.S. actions.

Vietnam was interesting. The only problem was that between the time I decided to go to Vietnam and the time that I actually went, the Department had changed its policy and was barring dependents from going with their sponsors. So that made it tough on my wife Phyllis. We were separated for twenty months during which I came back to the States once - on Lodge's plane. Lodge had been unable to convince the Department to authorize Embassy officers to travel back to the U.S. to see their families. It was alright to see the families somewhere overseas, but not in the U.S.. Other agencies however authorized their officers to fly back to the States for family visits. That was a major discrepancy in the personnel policies of different agencies of the U.S. government and not helpful to the morale of State employees. Finally, on one occasion, Lodge had to return to Washington to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; he was going to tell them how well things were going in Vietnam. While in Washington, he went into Bill Crockett's office - who was then the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration. Lodge told him that he would not leave that office until the travel regulations were changed. It is wonderful how quickly an immutable regulation can be revised! But for me, by that time it was too late. So except for that one time, I did not see Phyllis for twenty months.

ROBERT W. GARRITY
Assistant Press Officer, USIS
Saigon (1965-1967)

Robert W. Garrity was born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts. He graduated from Boston College in 1957. In addition to serving in Japan, Mr. Garrity served in Vietnam, Germany and Iceland. He was interviewed by Patrick Nieburg in 1989 and Hans N. Tuch on June 5, 1990.

GARRITY: My Vietnam experience was my first assignment with USIA. I came to the agency in 1965, after a three-week orientation at the State Department on Vietnam, was assigned to Vietnam. I arrived there in early September, 1965. I was there from September, '65 until early May, 1967, when I was transferred to Munich -- although I actually left Saigon on orders to Vienna, which caused quite a sensation because nobody had ever received orders to Vienna from Saigon before.

Q: Bob, you are one of the few people who not only had an illustrious career, but who have changed areas -- rather violently, if I may say so; from Europe to the Far East, and study at Harvard. How do you feel about your career?

GARRITY: Well, I always say there's a pattern there somewhere, but I've never been able to figure out what it is. I must say, with all of the mayhem in Vietnam, I had more direct exposure to violence when I got to Germany, because of the rather strong anti-Vietnam sentiment expressed by the students at the various universities on a rather constant basis. For that reason, we were unable to have any programs directly identified with Vietnam.

Q: That was in Germany?

GARRITY: That was in Germany.

Q: So your Vietnam experience actually went somewhat for naught, in Germany?

GARRITY: Well, like yourself -- not to the extent that you did -- but around the Bavarian part of Germany, I did get out and meet with groups. I remember one very funny meeting, as it turned out, with a group of German students who were in a state of high dudgeon over Vietnam and American policy there. When they were sort of pausing for breath, they said, "Oh, by the way, what do American students think of our protest against Vietnam?"

I said, "They don't think anything of it; they don't even know about it. They're too busy protecting themselves." They were quite disappointed; in fact, they were really downcast after that; it took all the starch out of them.

Q: Tell me, you said that your first assignment was Vietnam; what made you leave what you

were doing, and what were you doing to join the agency and go to Vietnam?

GARRITY: I had been in the Navy for three years, following college, then worked for Little, Brown and Company in Boston, which was my home town. While I was at Little, Brown and Company -- perhaps because of being stationed in Puerto Rico in the Navy -- I just felt that was something I should do again. Fortunately, my wife agreed; although she had become a New England housewife by that time.

Nevertheless, we began a career with USIA, having three young children, and not much idea of what we were getting into. We had great assurance from the panel that interviewed us. In those days your wife was interviewed as well as yourself, or your spouse, I should say. We were quite assured that I would never be ordered to Vietnam.

And sure enough, as soon as I was sworn in and was assured of the usual six months of training, everything fell apart. They had an immediate need for someone in Saigon. The training was scrapped, and replaced by a three-week Vietnam orientation course in the State Department; which did nothing but raise doubts, by the way. It certainly didn't reinforce, in any way, an argument for being there.

So we set off for Vietnam, over the agency's assurances that we would never be sent there on a first assignment.

Q: Robert, when you say we, where did Joanne and the children go while you went to Saigon?

GARRITY: Well, I first went down to Washington, and left her in Marlborough, Massachusetts. I called her up and said, "My god, we're supposed to go to Saigon, and we're leaving in three weeks."

She said, "What does that mean?"

I said, "It means you have a choice of going to Hong Kong, or Baguio."

She said, "Baguio, where's that?"

I said, "It's supposed to be a very nice place in the Philippines, or Bangkok." So I said, "You have to decide." I called her back a couple of days later, and she said she had decided. I said, "How did you do it?"

And she said, "I went to the Marlborough library, and I got all the materials on the three places, and decided on Bangkok."

And I said, "Well, did it seem the most comfortable?"

She said, "No, it's the closest." So that was the basis of her decision, and as it turned out, it was a very good decision.

Q: In effect then, did you take Joanne and the children to Bangkok, and get them settled? Or did you go your separate ways?

GARRITY: Well, the agency wanted us to all take a plane that landed in Saigon, and then continued on to Bangkok. I refused to do that. I said I wanted to accompany them to Bangkok, and get them settled. It was the first time overseas. And they said, "Well, you can't do that because you don't have any leave time accumulated."

I said, "Well, that's not my fault. You folks changed the whole schedule." Vietnam threw a lot of agency programs into a tizzy, because of the need for personnel. So they finally agreed to give me a couple of days, and I did get to Bangkok. Somebody had found us an apartment. It was Carol Forte, who was the senior wife among the Saigon widows. She very nicely found us an apartment, which was so far beyond our means that we quickly had to find someplace else, and get it lined up for a move.

I arrived in Saigon five days after we'd landed in Bangkok. I was supposed to replace someone on an emergency basis, and when I got there the person I was supposed to replace -- Pete Hickman--announced that he wasn't leaving for another six or eight weeks. I said, "Oh, what happened?"

And he said, "He had won an extension in a poker game with the Public Affairs Officer." He was so reluctant to leave Saigon, that he decided to bet an extension as part of an ante in a poker game, and won.

Q: Who was the Public Affairs Officer then?

GARRITY: That was Barry Zorthian.

Q: Barry was known for the famous poker games.

GARRITY: That's right.

Q: And that was one in which Hickman won an extension, rather than transfer back home?

GARRITY: That's right.

Q: That is fabulous. When was that, in '65?

GARRITY: Right, 1965, in early September. As it turned out, I worked in the JUSPAO Press Center for 89 days. I remember that very clearly. My boss was Harold Kaplan, who was an absolutely superb gentleman, briefer, and head of the Press Center. We also had Bob Levine, or Don -- he goes by both; he was on the staff then. It was a very exciting 89 days.

Q: Were you assigned housing, and then what was your assigned job?

GARRITY: I recall staying in a hotel for some weeks, and then eventually shared an apartment

with another officer, who was brand new -- Mark Crocker. He was very skilled in the language, and had been there in the Army; he was very, very fluent in Vietnamese.

Q: Then what was your assignment, actually, in JUSPAO?

GARRITY: My first assignment was Assistant Press Officer. I remember two major events. One was escorting the press, with Senator Kennedy, who was making a whirlwind trip around the country. It was very exciting, because just as we started out, an unexpected -- or at least unannounced -- strike, began.

Q: By whom?

GARRITY: By the American forces, with the result that each stop along the way -- and there were six of them -- we lost our press plane. I recall having to get -- six different times -- having to beseech the local authorities to give us a plane, to continue on, so that the press could fly with him.

Q: When you say a strike, do you mean military? Not the usual labor strike?

GARRITY: No, a military air strike.

Q: And they preempted your planes for that military strike?

GARRITY: Yes.

Q: But you went in transport planes.

GARRITY: That's right, they needed more transport planes each step along the way. But somehow we managed to procure a replacement.

Q: What areas did you cover? Where did you go on this particular trip? What did they try to show Kennedy?

GARRITY: I remember we went to Ban Me Thuot. I believe on the same trip we went to the province where you were.

Q: Yes, you came to Pleiku; I remember that. But Ban Me Thuot was the former imperial seat, and Bao Dai had a summer, or hunting cottage there. Is that where you stayed?

GARRITY: No, that's not where we stayed, if it's the place I can remember. We went to a Montagnard village, where Senator Kennedy was treated with some rather poisonous rice wine, and made a political speech.

Q: Was it a home-town speech kind of thing, to the troops?

GARRITY: It was a speech to the Montagnards, which none of them understood. They knew the

name Kennedy. I had a very strong impression when I first was in Vietnam. The three most famous people in the world, to Vietnamese, were John F. Kennedy, Pope John XXIII, and Ho Chi Minh. Those were the three figures that all Vietnamese seemed to know about.

Q: That, to me, is a very interesting side line, because you went to Ban Me Thuot at the time when the Vietnamese government was the most suspicious of the Montagnard. Prior to that, we'd had some Montagnard uprisings, was that deliberate?

GARRITY: Well, Kennedy had made a specific request to visit a Montagnard village, and every effort was made to accommodate him. And, of course, the fact that this trip was a precedent, and covered by American press, and international press -- for the whole two days of the trip.

Q: Do you recall any infamous, or famous names among the press who covered that event?

GARRITY: I'd have to go back and think about that.

Q: But there wasn't a Neil Sheehan, or a chaplain?

GARRITY: I believe one of the people along was Ron Nesson, who later became press secretary to President Ford. Names are starting to come back.

Q: And from Ban Me Thuot you went on to Pleiku, which I remember.

GARRITY: Then we had several stops I cannot remember, but we wound up in Da Nang.

Q: Robert, you said at the beginning that you had 89 days at the Press Center, which was only a very partial time of your entire tour. What happened after the Press Center?

GARRITY: I remember the 89 days because when I suddenly was transferred out of the Press Center, I never got an evaluation for what seemed to be the most exciting 89 days of my entire life up to that point; and I was very chagrined, because it sort of disappeared, and was never recorded.

It was a sudden decision to have a Japanese language-capable officer in the Press Center; and since there was a limit on the number of positions, and I was the newest, I was sent up to become Assistant Publications Officer, and was replaced by Jim Seece, who spoke Japanese.

Q: But before we leave the Press Center, you said that there were two events. One was the Kennedy visit; what was the other?

GARRITY: The other was what became a very famous visit, of ten governors to Vietnam. I was the press escort for the entire trip. Governor Romney was the governor of Michigan at the time, and he is the name that stood out later, when he was running for President. He said of that trip, that he was brainwashed in Vietnam; and it was very amusing having been with him the entire time he was there. I couldn't imagine when it happened, unless it was during his sleep, because being a good politician, he never stopped talking for the entire time he was there, and did very

little listening.

Q: Just as a point of interest, Robert, do you recall, were there embassy people going with them? Were there people from MACV going on these trips, as briefers or guides?

GARRITY: There were some military escorts, but essentially they were briefed at each stop along the way. They went to places like Nha Trang, Gha Nang, and a trip out to the Enterprise. So it was a very quick and frenetic kind of trip.

There was a wonderful incident, and I think it was either outside of Na Trang, or outside of Da Nang. I think it was outside of Na Trang, near the village that was famous for the fish sauce, Nuoc Man. We were on a bridge, and Romney was having a conversation with a Vietnamese peasant. Neither one of them was being translated accurately to the other, with the idea that neither one would have been able to make any sense out of what the other was saying because of the cultural barrier.

Q: So they literally talked by each other?

GARRITY: Exactly!

Q: Is that one of the incidents that Romney cited as an example for being brainwashed?

GARRITY: It had to be, along with, again, one of the incidents where he did all the talking. The idea of having 20% of the nation's governors in Vietnam at one time was quite extraordinary.

Q: So, a lot of the time the governors would address the accompanying press, rather than anybody else?

GARRITY: That's right. Quite often it was a conversation between the visitor and the press.

Q: Were they critical of what was going on in Vietnam at that time?

GARRITY: I think most of them were there to find out what was going on, because they really weren't very well informed. That was really typical of most visitors; they really did come there to find out what was happening. Some of them realized that in four days they couldn't find out much; others felt that they had learned everything during that time. But the typical visit, for a VIP of that nature, would be the four-day visit, after which they would become expert.

Q: During some of these visits, where you were press escort, did you actually come under fire? Or how close did you come to fire? I know nobody wanted to expose VIP's to any hazards, but how close did you come?

GARRITY: The only time I really can recall was when I was escorting John Steinbeck, who was probably one of the most illustrious of the correspondents we had; we very seldom got prize winners of that sort. He was visiting in Tay Ninh, where Don Besom was the field rep. When we were taking off from Tay Ninh, going back to Saigon, the chopper suddenly made some rather

strange, sharp movements. The pilot told us afterwards the reason for it was we were being shot at.

Q: Did you feel that actually in the chopper?

GARRITY: We knew something was happening; Steinbeck was quite delighted by the whole thing.

Q: So he could say that he was actually there when it happened?

GARRITY: Right. I was just delighted nothing worse than that happened.

Q: Bob, we've all heard these stories about Barry Zorthian, and the Hickman story reminds me -- and I want to ask you -- before you left Vietnam, did Barry ever ask you to extend?

GARRITY: Oh, very definitely. We had set up a schedule that involved getting back to Boston for a wedding, which because of the date meant that we would actually extend an additional month in Saigon. So I figured that was good reason to be able to leave gracefully; but I reminded him weekly that I was leaving. At that time I was serving as Press Attaché to Ambassador Lodge; and a sort of liaison between Barry Zorthian and the Ambassador. It wasn't until the week before, he finally said, "You can't leave."

I said, "I have to. We've got everything booked, and we're ready to go. The lease is up in Bangkok, and there's no way. We've already extended for an additional month."

He was very angry with me at that time. We were good friends afterwards, but he was not happy to see me go.

Q: You said you were Press Liaison to Ambassador Lodge. That implies that during your tour of duty, you'd been in the JUSPAO Press Center as Assistant Press officer; you were a Publication Officer; you went back into the press business as a liaison. What other jobs did you hold, that you had to do while you were there?

GARRITY: Those were the three. The third job was for about a year; the last year I was there, working with the Ambassador, handling his press affairs.

Q: You were not a Vietnamese speaker, I take it?

GARRITY: That's right.

Q: You were in the Publication section.

GARRITY: That's right.

Q: What did you publish, and what was it all about?

GARRITY: We published a series of pamphlets, inserts in magazines. The Agency had a number of magazines that were published in Vietnam, in Vietnamese -- also some in English. But we did a series of pamphlets on various events, or situations, or developments in Vietnam, to try to explain to the Vietnamese readers what was happening; particularly positive developments, encouraging agriculture, encouraging pacification, so forth and so on.

Q: What would be a press-run for a publication?

GARRITY: Oh, it was way in the tens of thousands; I'd have to go back.

Q: I'm just looking for magnitude. With all that paper, and we used to have a saying in Vietnam, "We could have papered Vietnam over, with everything that was printed there." Who would be the consumers, in terms of your outlets for distribution?

GARRITY: The field rep offices. These pamphlets would go out to their offices, and they would deliver them to various villages, or readers they felt would benefit by reading them. The material was quite varied. I remember there was a refugee group, who was transported from Da Nang to Na Trang, in some sort of barge. During the course of the trip, which was maybe an overnight, a woman on the barge gave birth to a baby. The baby was given the Vietnamese name for Phoenix. The connotation, which in Vietnam wasn't that different from the old Egyptian legend of rising from the ashes. The phoenix, of course, is one of the four great animal symbols. So this became material for a story to be put into a pamphlet.

Another time we took a couple of Vietnamese high school students out to the carrier Enterprise. And we gave them a day on board; met with the Captain, steered the ship, and then came back and appeared on radio and t.v. Of course, that became the subject of a pamphlet, also.

Q: Would you explain how this worked? Take the barge story; who wrote it, who actually got the story, how did it come to you, what happened? Did it go into a translation to Vietnamese, who did the translating, who did the checking? And where was the printing done?

GARRITY: We had some American writers assigned to do nothing but write stories. As Assistant Publications Officer, I did go out and develop stories, and I did write some stories myself. These would then be translated by our Vietnamese staff. The actual printing would be done in Manila, at the Regional Service Center.

Q: So what was the time lag, from the conception of a story, to its distribution to the field reps?

GARRITY: Probably several months.

Q: So you couldn't do any quick reaction, basically. There was always considerable lead time?

GARRITY: That's right, these were stories that would conceivably have a longer kind of shelf-life.

Q: Were there also quick-reaction types of material put out?

GARRITY: The wireless file, but that was part of the Information Division, not specifically under Publications. That was circulated, and items which would be more important would be reproduced in greater numbers, and circulated.

Q: Do you recall how many writers there actually were for your section?

GARRITY: It was a pretty big section. I think maybe there were a couple of officers assigned to do nothing but write. We had at least one full-time photographer, who was Vietnamese. The editors, and translators, and so forth, were Vietnamese with professional experience. Then there was the Publications Officer, and Assistant Publications Officer. We reported to the Information Officer, who was David Briggs at that time. He was eventually replaced by Clyde Hess, just as I got transferred back down to the Press Office for the job with Ambassador Lodge.

Q: Robert, when you were still an Assistant Press Officer, and going on press tours, describe a little of what an ordinary day was like. What was involved in setting up a press tour?

GARRITY: The JUSPAO Press Center was a unique operation. We had some military assigned to the Press Office, usually headed by a Navy captain, or an Army or Air Force colonel -- rank. And then a staff. These people would try to set up logistics for getting correspondents out and around the country, to various places.

If you were up in Pleiku and a correspondent came in, and had an interest that we felt that you could respond to, we could then go to the military and say, "Would you set this journalist up with a trip to Pleiku, to see Pat Nieburg?" And they would handle the logistics.

The only problem was they all got to work at 7:00 or 7:30 in the morning, when there were no correspondents around. And their day officially ended between 4:30 and 5:00. 5:00, of course, was when the daily news briefing took place -- "The 5 o'clock follies". So we tried to plead with them to change their schedule, and they were very sympathetic, but they couldn't get permission from the military command, because that was the military day.

So the only way we managed to get late-breaking logistics set up was if these military logistics folks would stay behind, and just work overtime. Otherwise, they'd all be gone just at the time when all the correspondents were there, looking for help.

Q: But basically, for them, it was business as usual, as they had done in the barracks back home?

GARRITY: That's about it. For the rest of us -- we'd get in there about 8:00, and we got out of there at 8:00 at night if we were very lucky. This was pretty much six to seven days a week. Of course, there was a briefing every day at 5:00. It was a very full day. If you got in early, at 8:00, which is what you tried to do, you'd get a chance to get ahead of your paperwork -- figure out who was coming, and who was to do what. You had a resident press corps, which in 1966 and 1967 was about 600 full-time foreign correspondents. I'd say half of them were American, and the other half were from all over the world.

In addition to that, you had a number of visiting correspondents, from various countries, including the U.S. We had some pretty unusual people. For instance, we had the Archduke Otto Von Hapsburg visit. When we asked him how we should address him, he said, "Archduke will do." He came in as a correspondent for the Indianapolis Star, and we outfitted him with fatigues, and boots, and sent him off into the jungle.

Q: Did the correspondents have to pay for these goodies?

GARRITY: The transportation was courtesy of the Army, and any kind of equipment the correspondent would pay for if he could. Sometimes there was no way to pay for it. For instance, one of the more infamous instances of this was a visit by Mary McCarthy. Mary McCarthy had nothing to wear out into the field, so she was the recipient of a whole outfit from one of our colleagues -- Rube Munson, who shared an office with me. He saw his fatigues and his boots next when he saw her picture in Time Magazine. She was wearing Rube's outfit. I guess she took it back with her as a souvenir.

Q: Did the correspondents make a lot of demands on you, including trips to the PX. How did you handle that?

GARRITY: Well, the correspondents were always trying to get people to buy things for them. Generally, they received enough of an allowance from their own organizations, that they could take care of whatever they needed. Anything you wanted was available in Saigon, if you could pay for it; and generally, they had enough money to pay for things.

I'm sure they did get a few things from the PX, but then again the PX was somewhat overrated as a source of gifts and treasures. As I recall, if you wanted to buy tennis shoes, during a good part of my time in Vietnam, you couldn't do so unless you wore size 8 narrow. Somebody had ordered 10,000 pairs of one size; and they couldn't order any others until those were sold! They're probably still trying to get rid of them on the black market in Saigon.

Q: Were all the military PXs, clubs, and so forth open to correspondents?

GARRITY: They certainly had the clubs open to them. The famous one on top of the Rex Hotel, where JUSPAO had its headquarters.

Q: You must have run into some strange characters, especially amongst the resident correspondents. What kind of demands did they make on you, on a daily basis?

GARRITY: Constant demands. Of course, one of the most cantankerous ones, who's not with us anymore, was a correspondent for the New York Daily News, and also for Mutual Radio, Joe Freid. Joe Freid would come into your office, and go through your in-and-out boxes. It didn't matter whether you were sitting there or not. If you weren't there he'd probably go through the drawers, too! His famous line was, "What'd ya got?", hoping that somebody would have something that would result in a story.

I remember one time another correspondent was sitting in my office; he had made an appointment -- Ray Coffee, who was working for the Chicago Sun Times. Joe Freid burst into the office, and started in with, "What'd ya got?" and going through the boxes.

And Ray Coffee stood up, and said, "Freid, if you don't get out of here, I'm going to punch you out!" So Freid left.

Q: Well, Freid was a well-known character around Saigon. I think he never moved out of the city, actually.

GARRITY: Nobody could remember any time when he left Saigon. And whenever confronted with this, he'd say he had to file so regularly that he couldn't afford to be out of the city.

Q: Well, when you got in, in the morning for example; would you have access to cables from embassy on what was going on? How were you briefed? How could you actually stay up to date with what was going on, even in country?

GARRITY: Well, of course with all of the correspondents running around, there was a limit on what we could have available for ourselves. I remember the great ploy that Harold Kaplan used when he briefed. He carried a huge book marked classified, with a red stripe and white letters. It really impressed all the correspondents that he was supposed to be quoting from this huge book of classified information. But truthfully, most of the classified information was kept upstairs, beyond the Marine guards. We were supposed to get up there as often as we could -- at least once during the day; hopefully once in the morning, and once in the afternoon, to check on what was incoming and even what was outgoing, that we may have missed.

Q: How would you keep up, for example, with what was going on in the field? Did you have access to field reps' reports? If a correspondent wanted to go out in the field, and asked you, "Hey, where's the action?", how could you advise them?

GARRITY: The biggest asset I had, in this regard, was having my wife in Bangkok. The Bangkok connection proved to be the most helpful thing for me, and to many, many correspondents. I was able to meet so many field reps, because of their dependents being in Bangkok.

I remember the first Christmas, Joe and Carolyn Forte had a party, and the wives were all introducing the husbands to each other, because so many hadn't met; they were posted all over the country. As a result of getting to know all of these field reps, when they came in to Saigon, they would always stop in my office. As a matter of fact, I got to visit a lot of them at various times during my stay in Vietnam, on one occasion or another. We developed relationships such that I was able to send really qualified correspondents; correspondents who were serious, and could do a good job, out to see a representative situation, and talk to a reliable, intelligent representative of ours, in almost any part of the country.

It was really because of the Bangkok connection that I was able to do that.

Q: Did you feel, when you were doing it, that you were manipulating the press?

GARRITY: No, because I found that our JUSPAO field reps had the best handle, the most accurate grasp of what was going on, in Vietnam. There's no question about that. And I felt that a most important job for us, was telling the story of what was happening in Vietnam. And to the best of my ability, I tried to put correspondents together with responsible individuals, who were in strategically important parts of the country, and who could discuss what was happening in their area.

Q: From your experience, Robert, and knowing so many of the field reps personally, you must have had a feel that many of them were doubtful, critical of some phase or the other. So you were taking a deliberate risk, if you will, in having the correspondent exposed to that kind of reaction by field reps. What kind of feedback did you get from the correspondents?

GARRITY: The correspondents, to my way of thinking -- always certainly the intelligent ones -- always appreciated being able to get a frank picture, with a good amount of candor about what was happening in Pleiku, or Da Nang, or Hue, or down in the Delta.

Q: Did anyone ever hold you responsible for the lousy story that came out of this correspondent, who talked to this field rep?

GARRITY: No, if it happened to anyone else, I don't know, but I certainly never had any problem myself. There was so much information available in Vietnam that no correspondent was without material to file.

In fact, most correspondents that I knew, including television correspondents, filed far more material than ever was used. So the coverage of the war in Vietnam was largely decided by editors back in the United States.

For example, CBS News -- T.V. -- would send back at least 20 stories a week. And at that time, the mid-'60s, on the CBS Evening News, they were using a Vietnam story -- four times out of five -- for the evening broadcasts. They probably upped that to a Vietnam story every day later on. But they were choosing four stories, out of 20 that were filed. If somebody ever complained that they should have covered something else, they probably found out that they had; but when it got back to New York, it was an editorial decision on the part of the network not to use it, or to use it.

Q: Much of the coverage, though, was military action. But as we both know, there were tremendously important civilian developments; anything from black market, to a certain amount of pacification -- where agriculture resumed, or dropped out. Was there a contradiction between, for example, what the JUSPAO field reps told the correspondents, and what the military told them? Was that a problem?

GARRITY: Well, it wasn't so much a contradiction. The military stories were so specifically military that there was no way of contradicting. The field rep would look at the situation from a psychological point of view, a sociological point of view, the political situation, the economic

situation, and so forth. So they were commenting, overall on what was the basic thing that was going on in a province at a particular time. Whereas, the military brief would talk about a specific strike, or a specific military incident -- how many were killed, how many captured, so forth.

Q: It becomes, ultimately, a judgment. What is the security of a certain province if there are some differences of opinion, between, say, the civilian assessment and the military?

GARRITY: Well, there probably were. I don't think, somehow, that these found their way into print, in a way that would make a pattern; which is probably unfortunate. There's no question that correspondents in Vietnam did cover pacification stories, or non-military stories; it wasn't that they weren't covered. We all felt, while we were there, that these were terribly important. There was a lot of incredible effort put into making a story available for coverage, and promoting revolutionary development, and democratization, and so forth. But these were covered by the correspondents. If they did not appear in hometown newspapers, or on network television, this was an editorial decision made in the U.S.; not one made by the reporters in Saigon, or wherever they were in Vietnam.

Q: So what you're really telling me is that the correspondents were pretty conscientious in covering the whole spectrum, but that the gate-keepers back home filtered out what they considered to be the sexy, or appealing stories; and that is what influenced the reporting of the Vietnam War?

GARRITY: If something had a specially sexy kind of angle to it, and was non-military, then it could get covered. For instance, there was a school in Vung Tau -- which is a very pretty resort, or formerly a resort area, on the coast.

Q: It was also called Cap St. Jacques.

GARRITY: Yes, east of Saigon. There was a School of Revolutionary Development Cadres, which is a mouthful. But what this translated into was training young Vietnamese to go into villages, somewhat like a Peace Corps group, to try to develop projects and to make life better for the villagers. They were not specifically supposed to be engaged in warfare; they were supposed to be doing Peace Corps type work. And it was a very badly kept secret that the school was run by the CIA.

Until one Sunday, we'd had very little coverage of the Revolutionary Development Cadres. But it happened to be a slow weekend, and so a reporter whose name is quite well-known -- with the New York Times, Johnny Apple, wrote a story about the training school at Vung Tau, and that it was run by the CIA. Well, that produced a front-page story; it was the bottom of the front page, but nevertheless, front page in the Sunday Times. As the story goes, when the President saw that story, the school was immediately transferred from CIA sponsorship to what we now call AID.

Q: Wasn't that also the school that had some input by Frank Scotten, and Ed Baumgartner? So there was more to it than just the Peace Corps; they were also taught ambushes, and village defense, and the emphasis was more on that than on the Peace Corps aspect?

GARRITY: There were two aspects. In fact, I believe there were two different kinds of cadres; one was more of a Peace Corps variety, and then there was another that specialized in what you might call hit-squad tactics. They all wore black pajamas; it was hard to tell them apart, which was maybe unfortunate for those who were doing strictly pacification work.

Q: You were always great in absorbing the humor of a situation. Do you recall any of the jokes, the humor that went around-Saigon during the time you were there? Some of the black humor, too, at ourselves?

GARRITY: I have a terrible memory for jokes. Maybe some will come to me along the way. There was an incredible amount of humor, and a lot of writing of song lyrics to well-known melodies, describing the situation.

Q: Do you remember something called the Turtle Club?

GARRITY: Turtle Club?

Q: You became a turtle if you were willing to stick your neck out. There was the Bob Delaney club, primarily started by the field reps; those who were willing to speak up and stick their necks out.

Let's go for a second to your job with Ambassador Lodge. He was a legend, in a sense. How did you get assigned to it, and what was your actual function?

GARRITY: As I recall, the person who had the job before me didn't have a very happy relationship with Lodge's office, or with Lodge himself. And Lodge had requested someone else. Zorthian set up three candidates for the job, and I was one of them. I was interviewed by the Ambassador, and was selected by him for the job.

The idea was that I would sit down with him every day at 12:30, and we would go over anything that had appeared in the press that he had participated in, or upcoming press plans that would involve him. The Ambassador was not anxious to be continually in the press, or continually giving press conferences. But on a selected basis, he was happy to do so. And he was, I found, very effective at doing so. I would talk with Barry Zorthian beforehand, and afterwards, to be sure it was something he thought was important.

For instance, the New York Times had approached the Ambassador, and Barry, for a sort of round table interview, giving an overview of the whole situation for the past year or so. And the Ambassador wasn't awfully sure he wanted to do this; it was a very time consuming thing. But we did convince him it was important, and he did do the interview.

In fact, I'll never forget it because I had to have five different secretaries type up the transcript; four of the secretaries were terrific, but the fifth one happened to work in Lodge's outer office. His inner office was manned by the incredible Eva Kim, who is probably the greatest secretary who ever lived. But the outer office was manned by someone else, and she gave to me the last of

her section; what I didn't realize was a couple of pages had fallen under her desk. Lodge was very anxious to see this transcript, because this was going to be a big spread in the New York Times. The transcript was about 20 pages long. We were going through it, and there were three pages missing. At that point I had no idea where they were; I'd even forgotten which secretary had done which section.

He said, "Where are those?"

I said, "Well, I'll have to find them."

He turned to me, and said, "Bob, I just know this is an example. You want me to take care of the details, and you want to think about the big things. But I want you to take care of the details, and leave the big thoughts to me." He was so delighted having said that. Then I went out and found the missing pages.

Q: Tell me, how did you prepare for the 12:30 meeting with Lodge?

GARRITY: I usually would talk to Barry, and to Jack Stuart, who was the director of the Press Center. We had a pretty good idea of what we wanted Lodge to be aware of, and which requests came in. We didn't want to overwork him, but on certain occasions it was necessary to put him before the camera.

For instance, NBC wanted to do an interview, and he agreed to do it. We set this up in Barry Zorthian's office. As I recall, Barry took a field trip that day, so the Ambassador had the use of this office. This was a fairly new reporter, and the interview wasn't going terribly well. Of course, this was in the days before video tape, so there was a 16-mm camera grinding away. The reporter was talking to Lodge about B-52s being used by the U.S. against an enemy that would hide in the water, and breathe through a bamboo shoot, and how could we ever put the two together?

The Ambassador was just not answering the question. So at one point the reporter said, "Stop the camera." He turned to me and said, "Bob, would you please explain to the Ambassador what my question is, so that I can get an answer?"

So I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I think what he wants you to comment on is the idea that we're trying to kill a gnat with a cannon."

And he said, "Oh, well," and he gave an answer. I can't quote it, but he was fun to work with. He just didn't cotton to the reporter. We got along very well.

Q: Barry Zorthian was known during his "reign," to play the top echelon very close to his vest. Whether it was his colleagues in JUSPAO, or with the press, Barry was the tsar. What was your relationship with Barry? This must have been a very delicate kind of relationship with Barry? You have the triangle of the ambassador, Barry, and Garrity.

GARRITY: Barry himself said, "You're a lightning rod." He called me the lightning rod, and he

said any time there was a lot of electricity, I was the one who was going to get shocked.

Q: One of the things that Barry was known to hog was information. To what degree did he share with you, so your relationship with the ambassador could be a satisfactory one? Or to what degree were you left defenseless, for lack of information?

GARRITY: I don't feel that I was privy to nearly all of what I should have known, but I guess it was a matter of keeping your eyes and ears open. That's how Barry got his information.

Q: But that means, in a sense, that you must have spent a good bit of your time trying to attempt end-runs to get at information, which you probably could have spent more profitably otherwise.

GARRITY: Well, that's true, but it didn't seem to me -- at the time, at least -- to be an overwhelming problem. So much was happening, and information became so quickly outdated. And really, Lodge's role with the press was not to talk about very specific things, but more the overall trend. And he himself was much more in touch with the political feeling of the situation.

He would say, "What this country needs is a good police force." He said, "You know, if you're out in a village, and somebody tries to murder you, there's no police!" He had kind of a New England sense of -- if we just had some town meetings, and got these things going, this would all work out a lot better. I think he felt more comfortable analyzing the political side of it, than the military.

Q: As a person, Lodge was very imperial. Was that a problem, vis-a-vis the press? It wasn't easy to cotton up to Henry Cabot Lodge.

GARRITY: It's very interesting; he was very tough on his senior officers, but he was very kind to his junior officers. And personally, I found he was very kind to me. With the press, when you finally set up an appointment, he was very good; he would be a good interview. The one correspondent that always could get in to him, without ever going through anyone -- outside of Lodge -- was Joe Freid. And nobody could ever figure out -- I'm not sure even Barry knew the real answer -- to what was responsible for Joe Freid's access to Lodge; but he certainly had it. It was an odd combination.

Q: Do you have any feeling of what the relationship was between Lodge and Bunker?

GARRITY: They succeeded each other; Lodge was gone when Bunker arrived. Part of my agreement, and part of my timing, was that I would be there for Bunker's first week; so I was there for Bunker's first week, and that was quite a week!

Q: When interviews were requested, were they of the generic type, that somebody wanted to see the ambassador? Or were these interviews often tied to specific events, or developments in the war in Vietnam?

GARRITY: They tended to be more generic, or very broad kinds of developments. The other kinds of developments were tactical matters, better addressed to the military. So he would talk

about things on a broader basis. For instance, when Joe Alsop came to town, he always had to see the ambassador, naturally.

In fact, a funny situation happened one day. I had a call from a weeping secretary, from Lodge's office -- I believe the same one that lost my three pages -- saying, "Bob, you've got to help me!"

And I said, "What's wrong?"

She said, "I just had a call from Mr. Alsop, and he's having lunch with the ambassador, but he doesn't know whether he's the guest or the host."

I said, "Well, why don't you ask the ambassador?"

She said, "He's all tied up in a meeting, and I can't get in to him. And Mr. Alsop won't speak to me anymore." So I called Alsop at his hotel, and I said I was the press attaché.

He said, "I don't speak with press attachés."

So I said, "You'd better speak to this one, or you won't have any lunch!"

I explained the situation to him, and he said, "If it's that much up in the air, then I'll be the guest and Cabot can be the host.'" So he went off to Lodge's for lunch and Lodge never knew about the exchange.

There were so many notables who rolled through town. Every Thursday evening Barry Zorthian had a backgrounder in his living room; and the press was just unbelievable. We'd have Chet Huntley, or Walter Cronkite. Every week there would be several world famous correspondents sitting among a group of 20 or so -- corps correspondents that he wanted to really give as much access as possible.

Q: Did you attend any of these backgrounders?

GARRITY: Oh yes.

Q: Who would be present, other than the correspondent from the USIA contingent? Yourself, and who else?

GARRITY: Barry usually had a guest. He might have the Secretary of Defense as a guest, because there were so many visitors. If there were no visitors, he would always have Phil Habib, who was the Minister Counselor for Political Affairs, at that time, at the embassy. Every week, there was a chance for the correspondents to talk about what had been going on during the previous week.

The mixture would be the top resident foreign press, and any notable visitors. You know, the New York Times would always be here. Time and Newsweek would always be there. CBS, ABC, and BC were always there. Washington Post would always be there. Wire services would

be there. It was very informal, and it was, I think, very much appreciated as a chance for the correspondents to have background access. This was not for attribution; these were on background. And yet, it was intended to be educational, and helpful for the correspondents.

Q: During sessions of that sort, did they address the political situation?

GARRITY: Every aspect of the situation; I don't think anything was not covered.

Q: During your time in Saigon, Robert, there were several scandals, which permeated. I think of a Navy captain who was running either the clubs or the PX's. Did things of that nature come to the surface?

GARRITY: If whoever was the guest that week knew anything about it. Generally, that kind of thing would be referred back to the military spokesman, for comment. Of course, they were doing their own investigation, and so forth.

Q: How about discussions of the Vietnamese government? General Ky, General Chou -- their capabilities, or incapacities? Much of the problem we had at that strata was with the government, and the possibility that it could function effectively. These things were discussed I take it?

GARRITY: Not so much in terms of the personalities involved, as in terms of U.S. desires, or U.S. objectives. And I think it was felt that if these objectives got out, they would be read by the personalities. But the backgrounders were not engaging in any kind of character analysis, or assassination, or whatever.

Q: To what degree did you experience that the embassy, or JUSPAO used -- and I say this in quotation marks -- the press to put pressure, let's say, on the Vietnamese, for whatever reason? Either to be more aggressive in their military operations, to institute reforms that would capture the hearts and minds. Do you have any feel for that aspect of the operation?

GARRITY: I think just by telling the story of the ongoing process -- coverage of the kinds of things you're talking about -- naturally were followed by the Vietnamese government. Now whether briefings on these developments were made only so that coverage could be generated, which would influence the Vietnamese government, or whether they were influenced in the process of telling the story .

I think that JUSPAO's role seemed to be telling the story both ways -- internally in Vietnam, and externally to the rest of the world. It was certainly a unique thing for USIA to be involved in, because although we deal with American press, and other foreign press at whatever post we're at, our prime responsibility is usually the domestic press in whatever country we are then stationed in.

And of course, we had a liaison with the Vietnamese press, in Vietnam. But this huge press center was engaged in talking to the foreign press -- American and the rest of the world. Of course, we brought a lot of press -- sponsored a lot of -- journalists to come to Vietnam, to

supposedly learn about the war. And I think that our whole purpose was to be as open as possible, and generate as much information as possible.

Q: If I'm not mistaken, Bob, there was also a Vietnamese press briefing regularly, or irregularly, almost catty-corner from where JUSPAO's press center was?

GARRITY: That would precede the 5:00 follies.

Q: To what degree did you ever steer the press in that direction?

GARRITY: Some of the press attended it, but they didn't find it very useful, as I recall. The general view of the correspondents was that the Vietnamese briefing was either too far behind the curve, or not willing to be as open as the American briefing would be.

Q: Bob, in retrospect now, we've read a lot about Vietnam since we've been out of there. We've had a lot of comments from reporters going back. And one of the charges that has always been hurled at us who were participants in those years, is that we were lying; the U.S. government wasn't telling the truth. How do you feel about it now?

GARRITY: In all of the time I was at JUSPAO, whether it was in publications or in the press center, there was no known lying going on. Certain developments the mission wanted emphasized; you know, pacification, the non-military side of the war, which was very important.

And the fact is that in a country with very little democratic institution, some grass roots notion of democracy was beginning to catch on, and bear some fruit. As we know later, when Vietnam fell, that was one of the great tragedies, that some of the work that had been done, had been effective, and left behind people who were doomed because they had participated and become democratic, and had taken on these rather strange notions for their culture -- of man deciding his own fate, and being his own individual, and having his own vote.

But as far as lying to the press at that foreign press center, if there was any ever done it was by omission of fact and with the feeling that certain information had to be withheld for the safety of the troops. I know the approach on the part of JUSPAO was always "when in doubt, tell it." It's more important to get the story out. So JUSPAO was always pushing for publicizing the story, getting the story out. And sometimes, I think, it was resented by the military for that reason.

Q: Did the protests that occurred, not that infrequently -- especially by the Buddhist monks -- have an impact on your work? I remember going to a protest meeting, where the monks were in a pagoda, and nothing really happened until television arrived there. Was that a problem for you? How did we handle internal protests against the Vietnamese government?

GARRITY: It was covered just like anything else. The journalists generally would find a way to cover it themselves. If they didn't, or weren't able to, or wanted some analysis of what was going on, we had people in-house who could talk about Buddhist affairs, or what they were protesting, without perhaps making a judgment on it -- to get the facts together for the correspondents.

We did an awful lot of backgrounding; we had people like Doug Pike, who knew so much about the Viet Cong. We would save people like Doug for especially able journalists, who really could digest, and employ that kind of background information in their coverage. The emphasis in that case was not to propagandize, but to really project an accurate picture. Quite often somebody would take the accurate picture, and draw a negative conclusion; and many of these negative conclusions were well-drawn. But I think Barry Zorthian, and so many of us, always felt that the chips had to fall where they would; but the most important thing was to get the real story out.

Q: To what degree, Bob, did we get information from the press that we didn't get otherwise? To what degree was the learning process reversed? Did we learn things from the press we might not have found out otherwise?

GARRITY: Certain of the correspondents -- certainly the Neil Sheehans, and the Malcolm Browns -- were exceptionally active, and able in following the story for a long time; either in books that they wrote, or articles and so forth, and they themselves became historians of the war.

In that sense, the fact that they used continuity -- long time assignments, repeat assignments; the kind of continuity where they knew all the characters, and they knew all the developments, and they really became tremendous sources of information themselves. Vietnam was a situation where, in fact, you would use correspondents to brief other correspondents, simply because they knew so much.

Q: In retrospect, how do you evaluate the work that USIA did in Vietnam?

GARRITY: I would give USIA's performance in Vietnam very high marks. Certainly the result in Vietnam was not a very happy one, and there are a lot of reasons for that. I don't think USIA was one of them. I think that USIA's role, and what USIA did in Vietnam, was perhaps one of the few positive programs; one that really took into account the people of Vietnam, as well as the American audience. And one that was ultimately done in by other policies. The agency has always wanted a chance to be in on the take-off, as Murrow said; and always wanted to be part of the action. Here, they were part of the action, but ultimately the policies, and the approach followed in waging the war was simply a matter beyond USIA's control.

I would say that if there was a real element of honesty in the whole effort, stemmed from what USIA was trying to do. I found that USIA was probably well-known now, largely because of Barry Zorthian, who was responsible for the lack of censorship in the war. If there had been censorship, with the same kind of policy, we might have been in much worse shape.

Q: You made an interesting observation, that we were part of the action. Should we have been that much involved -- as actors -- rather than being more like the press was -- the observers; and putting out the story that way. You know, following, but as a good American instinct of doing -- rather than thinking, and reflecting, and interpreting, which should maybe have been JUSPAO's role. We were part of the war, rather than the observers who could interpret. If we had it to do over again, would or should we do the same thing?

GARRITY: I certainly hope we would never get in a situation like that again. It was an ill-

begotten war. It was badly conceived, badly carried out, and it's no surprise to me, at least, that it ended up the way it did. I think whether USIA was playing a part or not, it would have ended up the same way. Whether we should have had field reps in provinces, liaising between the Vietnamese province chiefs and the American military commanders -- I think those were not always very pleasant jobs. But perhaps these were some of the few voices of sanity in the situation. It may have been a lot worse without the influence of our JUSPAO field reps.

It's hard to say whether we should have done it, because, in fact, we did do it; it might have been worse without it. I think the policies that were applied were policies that ignored a great deal of wisdom and background knowledge, of the kind that USIA acquired during its experience in Vietnam; when we did have all the field rep expertise, and the information that came from these field reps about the real situation of security, the political complexion, what is going on in a particular province. I think if that information had been better employed, we might have had a different kind of situation.

Q: Robert, again in retrospect, what did the Vietnamese experience do for, or to, you and your family?

GARRITY: The first thing it did was separate us for the first time, and I think there are still a few scars from that. It's very difficult with young children. But then again, there were a lot of people in the same boat, so it's hard to say you feel sorry for just yourself. It was a situation that was not easy.

Certainly the experience of being there, and what I learned about the world, and other cultures, is something that will remain with me forever. I'm not sure how I can ever employ this to the benefit of U.S. policy again, now that I'm retired.

I read today, in the New York Times' science section, that psychiatrists have made the remarkable discovery that cultural differences account for the need for different kinds of psychiatric treatment, for different kinds of psychiatric problems. It's as if science has suddenly discovered something they never knew before; that there are essential, cultural differences between East and West, and North and South. Something, I think, almost anyone who has had a career in USIA's foreign service should -- or ought to know.

Q: What did it do to Joanne, and the children? Have they ever reflected on it? Have there been complaints about the times you have been separated?

GARRITY: I think my wife had to become very independent in handling the situation.

HOWARD FRANK NEEDHAM
Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
City Unspecified, Vietnam (1965-1967)

Howard Frank Needham began his work career in journalism, with the San

Francisco Chronicle. In 1942, he enlisted in the Army. After the Army, he went back to the San Francisco Chronicle. He became interested in Foreign Service when answering President Truman's International Campaign of Truth for media specialist. He has also served in India, Guatemala, Paraguay, Lagos, and Nigeria. He was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt on March 29, 1990.

NEEDHAM: I continued in this capacity until late 1965, when it came my turn to do a tour in Vietnam. I was in Vietnam, with JUSPAO, under Barry Zorthian and Harry Casler, first as press attaché to the ambassador, who was Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge at that time, and then later on special duty developing materials for the South Vietnamese Government; materials of a feature nature.

Q: I know several of our people had some doubts as to how effective the JUSPAO program was, and I wonder whether or not you have any opinion as to whether we, in JUSPAO, had any substantial long-range or short-range effect in Vietnam?

NEEDHAM: Well, Lew, we certainly had some effect just by being there. But that has to be largely on a short-range basis. We had representatives in the provinces and I have no doubt that, to a certain extent, at that time there was some advantage gained. But I don't think it was of a lasting nature. And I would say that holds true for the largest part of the JUSPAO program, except for the work that Douglas Pike did in research and study, which was very deep, very substantive, and which I understand is still of considerable current value and use.

Q: Yes, it certainly is. We have an interview with Doug Pike, in which he goes into his opinions and his work in Vietnam. He was there for 15 years. He's now, of course, with the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of California, at Berkeley, where he continues to be considered, practically, the country's expert on Vietnam.

LEONARD UNGER
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Far East Affairs
Washington, DC (1965-1967)

Ambassador Leonard Unger was born in California in 1917. He joined the Department of State in 1941 and later the Foreign Service. He served in Italy, Thailand, Laos and Taiwan. He was ambassador to both Thailand and Taiwan. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: We've now reached the point where it's 1965 and you have become a Deputy Assistant Secretary dealing with Far Eastern affairs in Washington. What were your responsibilities?

UNGER: I'm trying to reconstruct the situation in Washington, i.e. who was where and doing what at that point.

Bill Bundy was the Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific. At least that's what we call

it now. I was his deputy for Southeast Asia. That meant that I had pretty much direct supervision over the pertinent desk officers and for the work of the Economic Deputy Assistant Secretary which related to that area.

This was a period of considerable turmoil in Southeast Asia. I'm trying to establish the setting as of that particular moment. The situation in South Vietnam was beginning to become more and more active in a military sense as the struggle with the North became more and more acute.

In Cambodia the government was becoming more and more disturbed about the use of Cambodian territory by both of the factions in Vietnam. The South occasionally trespassed on Cambodian territory and, of course, the North by this time had established its infiltration route; northeastern Cambodia was being very heavily used for that.

The Thai and the Cambodians had long-standing differences, including differences over small, but to both of them, important, geography along their boundary.

The Thai and the Burmese were having occasional little dust-ups, sometimes with relation to the situation in the Shan States, Burmese territory just north of Thailand and northeast of central Burma. Sometimes there were problems with reference to some of the frontier areas down south in the Malay Peninsula, the area of the Kra Isthmus and so on.

It was a period of constantly deepening crisis, with its focus principally on Vietnam, but with repercussions and expressions all over the Southeast Asian area. It was an era when U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China were very strained, and when there was constant tension in the Taiwan Straits. And a period when Sukarno had just been ousted in Indonesia, which had been a critical moment there. This is an era when the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization was still functioning, but it had lost a good deal of its credibility and importance. Pakistan had, I believe by that time, been separated from India, and Bangladesh had been separated off.

Q: Bangladesh was Henry Kissinger's time. We're talking about '65 to '67. So Bangladesh was still part of Pakistan. Did you have prime responsibility through Bundy for Vietnam or were you really dealing more with the other parts of Southeast Asia?

UNGER: Well, at that time, and increasingly from that time on, Vietnam became not just the responsibility of a desk officer or of a Deputy Assistant Secretary or of an Assistant Secretary. It moved right up to the very top echelons in the Department because it was becoming a more and more serious matter. The United States involvement, including the military involvement, was constantly increasing.

So I guess you could say that my position, as far as Vietnam goes, was for a time the desk officer for it. I had a fairly large staff, including a number of young FSO's, some of whom had served out there. We were trying to handle the problems relating to Vietnam without letting them become prime international issues.

But there was a high level of interest right up to the top, including the President. So what would

have been a usual country desk officer kind of responsibility had changed into a very special operation, in which much higher-level interest was constantly involved.

Q: What was your attitude at the time? How did you see the Vietnam thing? We had just started the build-up, starting really inserting combat troops for the first time. How did you see what we were doing there at the time?

UNGER: I would say that I was apprehensive about our turning this into a major military contest. I think that was the concern that I know I felt, and I think that some of our people in Vietnam and, certainly many of the people working in Southeast Asia, either in the field or in Washington, felt. It would be a mistake to try to turn what was essentially a political problem into an essentially military problem. There was a feeling that if the government in South Vietnam could pull itself together, operate more effectively, take more account of the kinds of internal measures that needed to be taken, that there was a much better chance of getting some stability in the South and frustrating any efforts of the North to move in and take the country over.

But there was, as you know, a succession of Vietnamese governments, with one leader after another. First, the unhappy history of Diem. And then finally Ky. There didn't seem to be a capacity on the part of the government in Vietnam to recognize what we saw as the central problems. Or, if they did, to organize the government resources and the bureaucracy to deal effectively with these problems, in order to enlist a much fuller support from the population.

The debate raged as to how much the Vietnam War was, in a sense, a conventional war, with the North simply being an invader with perhaps a number of superior arms and no inhibitions. Or the extent to which it was a situation in the South, in which government was steadily losing support, in which it was not effective in many areas of the country, and in which either direct military pressure from the North, or all the subversive activities engineered and carried out by the North constantly weakened the South, until it finally was clearly unable to protect itself.

The debate raged also over what the U.S. role should be. A military commander like Westmoreland was devoted to what we thought of as generally conventional ideas of warfare. Whereas many of the people who had served out there (including quite a number of Foreign Service officers who had been stationed in a lot of the outlining areas of the country, and who had had a pretty good chance to get a feel for the positions and the political problems in the villages and out in the countryside, as well as in Saigon) considered that the problem was one of poverty and of their government's lack of attention to improving their situation. Also there were the problems of corruption in government, not only at the center in Saigon, but throughout the country and, there was the view that for these reasons as well, the South Vietnamese military were not effective. The North was able to infiltrate into many areas and destroy the stability that the country needed.

Q: Were you able to get these officers talking to William Bundy and move their thoughts up the line? Was there a good flow of communication of, you might say, the ones who saw this as political rather than Military?

UNGER: Yes. I think, certainly as far as Bill Bundy was concerned, there is no question but that

he interested himself and became involved. There were many sessions in which he had a pretty good opportunity to hear what these people had to say.

One of the people who began to show up in the scene in those years was a professor from Harvard who came down and was fairly well acquainted in certain circles in Washington and was sent out to the field, in Vietnam, at the time that I was concerned on the desk with that country. He usually spent several weeks out there and he was already well acquainted with a group of French political scientists who knew the area from an earlier time, and who had some perspectives on it worth listening to, even though one couldn't, by any means buy the whole analysis that they presented. This fellow was named Henry Kissinger and I found, when he went out to the area and saw a number of contacts he had in South Vietnam, and occasionally some others in the area although mostly right in South Vietnam, that he usually had a very perceptive and useful analysis to pass along to us. He had suggestions that were definitely worth listening to about our programs in Vietnam and how they might be altered to make them more effective.

At that time Kissinger was still teaching at Harvard and he would make these occasional visits to Washington when he came by and we talked. I tried to give him a thorough briefing of the situation, as it had changed from the last time he had been out there, always on the understanding that when he came back, we would debrief him and get his judgment on the situation. I would say this probably happened about three times in the course of my dealing with Vietnam.

Q: What was his message that he was bringing back? Was it a political, rather than a military war?

UNGER: I wish I could reconstruct with any reliability. I'm sure that there are places where this sort of thing is on the record. But he certainly tended to emphasize the political, as opposed to the strictly military approach, but not to the extent that some of the officers in the embassy in Saigon were doing. In other words, as I recall, he felt there had to be some military strength to back up the political program when it was necessary. There was no question that the North Vietnamese, either directly on the frontier, i.e. the 17th Parallel, or pushing in and probing from Southern Laos or Cambodia, were using military means. They also had an extremely widely proliferated network of operatives, intelligence and people who were working for them clandestinely throughout South Vietnam.

Q: Did you feel that there was a solid debate going on between you and what the others on the desk at the Bureau were saying about yes, it's military, but mainly political? Those in the Pentagon were saying just give us more forces and we can take care of this problem.

UNGER: You're asking if I felt there was a debate going on?

Q: A debate between the defense side and the state side?

UNGER: Yes, there was no question that these were issues that were being debated and argued passionately and quite continuously, as I recall it, through this period. This is the period when people talked about "the hearts and minds", a phrase that recalls the U.S. Colonel Ed Lansdale, who developed programs for Vietnam and who had earlier worked very effectively with

President Magsaysay in the Philippines. When the State Department people, who had been sent out there and had served in the various provinces, put their emphasis on the economic and the political. There were very few that denied there was a military aspect to it, but I guess you could say they felt the South Vietnamese forces could handle the North Vietnamese with the pressures that were being exerted, if the situation within the country in South Vietnam were a stable and a secure one.

But that wasn't the case; this was primarily because of the actions and the policies of the government in South Vietnam, which never figured out an effective program to assure the loyalties of the population, particularly in rural areas, of the country. (This is an awfully big subject. It's one where I would like to refresh myself on some of the communications at that time).

Q: As a matter of fact, we are hoping to get an oral history program concentrated on the Foreign Services role in Vietnam. Hence, I'm going to just touch this one lightly because it is big and it is major. So at this point I think we might move on.

How did you see William Bundy? How did he operate?

UNGER: He operated effectively at upper levels. In addition to his own considerable reputation and valuable connections, he also obviously had a very close relationship with somebody who was right there in The White House, namely his brother Mac. The communication between Bill and Mac was practically continuous; I can remember innumerable occasions when I would walk into his office and he was on the phone with Mac.

So I guess going back to the Kennedy days, and certainly also into the Johnson period, there was a very close and immediate connection with The White House. Those of us who were working in concentrated fashion on Vietnam, although we were in State -- and I guess Dean Rusk was Secretary at that time -- we were frequently called over for meetings and discussions at the White House.

When Johnson was President, meetings were held in his office on a number of occasions. He was very deeply concerned and distressed about the situation. He wanted to be briefed and took a very direct personal role in many of the decisions that were being made. (I'm trying to reconstruct the period and relate it to the events that precede it. When I was first back in Washington, Kennedy was President, and then Johnson, following Kennedy's assassination).

Q: In '65 when you went there, of course, Johnson had been President for more than a year at that point.

UNGER: Yes. Kennedy was killed in the fall of '63.

Q: And you were ambassador in Laos from '62 to '65.

UNGER: I finished up in Laos, I think, in December of '64 and came back to Washington. I hadn't been there more than about ten days or two weeks, when one of the kinds of trips that

became fairly routine was getting organized, involving Robert McNamara (Secretary of Defense), Mac Bundy, Bill Bundy and several others of us who flew out in McNamara's plane; it was non-stop from Washington to Saigon. We spent about three or four, maybe five days at most, in Vietnam; went up to Pleiku, which about a week or ten days before, had just had a very disastrous incident in which the Viet Cong had moved in and assaulted what had been regarded as a rather secure post. They killed a lot of people, including some American military, and generally terrorized the population. It was a typical action of the Communists, just to demonstrate how insecure the country was and how uncertain was the hold of the government.

Q: Was this the action that a number of Americans were killed too?

UNGER: Yes.

Q: And this was really, in a way, what triggered our response almost from that point on.

UNGER: When we came back to Washington, the debate began as to what should be the U.S. role. Should we continue as we had been in the past, with a lot of advisors, a tremendous amount of military and economic assistance, but without any U.S. forces, or at least any considerable number of American personnel, beyond advisory groups. That debate led -- and this is a matter on which I'm not too sure of my recollection -- to a decision made, probably in March, to send about 10,000 American military to Vietnam -- and the following summer, a very much larger number. This was Lyndon Johnson reluctantly going ahead with something I think he very definitely had not expected, or wanted to do, i.e. to authorize such a degree of American military involvement in Vietnam.

He was looking for advice from every corner that he could get it. He was dependent on Mac and on McNamara. I'm trying to remember to what extent Henry Kissinger was involved at that time.

Q: Probably only at the peripheral of things.

UNGER: I think so. I don't remember his being central at that point. He was certainly becoming a State Department central figure. But I would say, that although he was always there, always had something to say, he was not much of an activist, not as far as McNamara. And always somewhat cautious as to what he felt should be done. But on the other hand, not ever, that I can recall, taking a very strong and determined position in opposition. I think whatever his own personal thinking may have been, the impression one got was that at that time he was unprepared to be the President's informant and advisor.

Q: How did you feel about the embassy? There you were on the desk; did you feel that you were getting good information? Did you feel that you had a strong embassy there or was there a concern?

UNGER: Earlier there certainly had been a concern; I'm talking about back when I was in Washington before my assignment to Laos. And also we felt more confident of our judgements by the time we had got this whole company -- I don't remember how many there would have been; 20, 25 -- young Foreign Service officers who were trained in the language and were sent

out to work in the provinces in Vietnam in order to give us good reporting directly from the field. By that time, I felt that we were getting a pretty reliable picture.

There was, of course, tremendous competition on the Washington scene for getting nearer to the President to press various proposals, positions and points of view, various courses of action. There were groups like Ed Lansdale's, in Saigon; his group included some Foreign Service officers but was a special, "hearts and minds" group. They had their ideas about countering insurgency, which Lansdale developed from his experience in the Philippines.

Q: That's the understanding.

UNGER: And he was thinking of applying in Vietnam some of the kinds of concepts, programs and approaches that he felt had been successful there. I think he introduced some ideas that were adaptable to Vietnam and useful, but by and large I don't think he had a major impact. I think what happened, was that the military were more and more in control of the situation, and by the time this was happening I was on my way out of Washington and going on out to Bangkok. In the "grass roots" situations, in the small towns and rural areas these groups of young Foreign Service officers were sent in order to provide Saigon and Washington with an informed judgment of what were the problems in this country; they tried to identify what were the kinds of programs that were effective; what ought we to be doing? Obviously, what was being done was not succeeding.

Those people, more and more, got caught up into the kind of military network. Also, given the rapidly expanding numbers of military in the country and the various roles they were to play, they were inevitably a major source to whom the President and Defense, and to some extent State, had to look for information about local situations; as time went on they were more and more the qualified Americans, on the spot, more than anybody from the Foreign Service.

They were good and bad and indifferent. Some of the reporting that came from those young military figures was first class, and some was very unreliable.

Q: How about the CIA? Were you in competition with the CIA? Or did you feel the CIA had their own point of view? How did you feel about it? We're talking about the '65 to '67 period.

UNGER: Looking at it from a Washington point of view, I would say the relationship was reasonably good. I remember Bill Colby and George Carver and others in the CIA with whom we were in close touch. The feeling was that the CIA and the State Department were not very far apart in terms of analyzing what needed to be done, and in putting less of an emphasis on military actions than did the U.S. Military. To be sure, there were those in the Military who also saw it as a problem with a very heavy civilian aspect, as something that could not be handled or solved on a purely military basis.

The CIA people had much more in the way of resources and flexibility to work with. They had a lot of people who had had experience living in villages and so on, or they had access to such people. But my recollection is of a fairly good, cooperative feeling with the CIA. We in the Foreign Service had to depend on their resources in some areas and when it came to the Embassy

in Saigon, they would depend on our resources. There were certainly some areas where there was keen competition, for example, some of the places where we had consuls. I think we had a consul in Da Nang and Nha Trang and probably in Dalat.

My recollection is that even though there were differences in interpretation, and differences in opinion, by and large the cooperation was pretty good. They both had, of course, a much more political element in their analysis, political and economic, than did the Military who tended to see it as either a large scale military operation or a military subversive and local village problem, but always with a military emphasis.

Q: I'd like to move on now to your assignment to Thailand as ambassador. How did this come about?

UNGER: I suppose one of the reasons they asked me to go out to Bangkok in the fall of 1967 was because of my earlier experience there and in Laos. Let's see, did I follow Ken Young?

Q: It was Graham Martin.

UNGER: Excuse me, Graham Martin. Yes, that's right.

Q: You presented your credentials in October of 1967.

JAMES R. MEENAN
Audit Branch, Office of the Comptroller, USAID
Saigon (1965-1967)

Mr. Meenan was born in Rhode Island and raised in California. After graduating from Woodbury College he entered government service. Joining USAID in 1965, Mr. Meenan had a distinguished career with that Agency, serving as Mission and Program Auditor in USAID Missions throughout the world. His foreign postings include Liberia, Vietnam, Brazil, Chile, Panama, Sri Lanka and Philippines. Among his Washington assignments was Committee Staff Member in the Office of Senator Max Baucus. Mr. Meenan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: Was any specific Vietnam training provided?

MEENAN: When I returned from the Liberia review, I entered a Vietnam specific training program that was conducted in the Rosslyn, Virginia training center. The course covered guerrilla warfare and Vietnam area studies. The trainees comprised a unit from Air Force Intelligence, one of its members I had met earlier in a USAG training program, and Colonel (Col.) John Paul Vann. Col. Vann had earlier served with the Army in Vietnam and had his own views on how the war should be conducted. Now with USAID, he had the authority to better put his views into action.

Mr. Mike Bengé, who worked with the Montagnards in the central highlands of Vietnam, also participated and added good insights to the real world situation in the country. He later was captured by the Viet Cong and became a Prisoner of War. Upon securing his freedom, he continued his USAID career.

Q: How was work in Vietnam?

MEENAN: I was assigned to the Audit Branch of the Comptroller's Office in Saigon, when the operation was still referred to as the U.S. Operations Mission. A short time later, it was renamed USAID/Vietnam. I started out in auditing at a point where no one in the mission seemed to want audits undertaken. There was, however, strong congressional interest in our oversight work. Some staff changes were made including the posting of a new comptroller.

At the time of the arrival of the new comptroller, I was in the midst of performing an audit of the countrywide cashiering operations. Since there was no national banking system, the local payments for project work was carried out through cashiers in each region. The air transport services of Air America, which functioned as our regional taxi service, facilitated my unannounced spot audits.

I was in the midst of one of these spot audits when I received word to report back to the new comptroller in Saigon. Mr. David Curtain, Comptroller, surprised me with a request that I take up the post of managing all the USAID local currency in the country. I was only two years or so out of college, and I was being placed in charge of well over a billion dollars in local currency. All the local currency records had been hand kept by Vietnamese staff. There was not a direct American manager involved which could pose a breakdown in internal controls.

The records were all hand written, so the first thing I did was to contact the local National Cash Register (NCR) representative to explore establishing an updated mechanical accounting system. We worked out the introduction of a NCR posting machine along with a new chart of accounts. I shortly learned that the programming of these local currencies wasn't of interest to the program office, so I assumed this responsibility. The programming aspect encompassed determining where and when local currency was needed and how it would be delivered.

I learned that the finance ministry had issues with Nguyen Cao Key, the country leader, and blocked the funding of some favored local projects. The ministry officials left me with the impression that they didn't like Americans much, favoring their older ties with the French. They would erect all sorts of roadblocks in providing official Vietnamese money that should have supported economic development projects to counter the Viet Cong.

One such issue developed when the ministry froze the funding for the collection of garbage in Saigon. The trash was piling up on the streets so we had to run quickly and set up a payroll operation for the garbage collectors. We actually went out and paid the garbage collectors in Saigon to clean up the trash and keep the thing going until we could bring enough pressure to restore the regular flow of Vietnamese currency, the Piasta.

Q: What was the problem?

MEENAN: Internal battles within the Vietnamese government, particularly the finance ministry not supporting Nguyen Cao Key and others in his administration. We also had a devaluation of the Piasta, pushed by the U.S. When they negotiated that devaluation between our two governments, they executed an agreement that threw a monkey wrench into our local currency operations. The agreement changed the method of collecting all of the local currency generated by the Food for Peace (Public Law 480) shipments, which funded a great number of our programs. The agreement changed the method for computing the local currency due from the available data on shipments from the U.S. to the undocumented arrivals in Vietnam.

Since there was no data on food shipment arrivals in Vietnam on which to base our billings to collect the Piastas due for the food provided, the Vietnamese commingled the local currency funds in its general import currency generation account. As a result, quite a few millions of dollars in local currency funds due the U.S. were blocked.

One key beneficiary of the Food for Peace funds was the U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV) that relied on receiving USAID funding on a regular basis in order to pay the salaries of the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces. When this blockage happened, it threw these payments into limbo.

Two courses of action were developed to address the commingled funds and to rectify the problem created by the devaluation agreement. For the commingled fund problem, we determined the rough amount of funds that were due the U.S. from the existing balance in the ministry's account. In a meeting with finance ministry officials, we proposed a percentage split for the local currency due the U.S. be applied to the balance in the account. The ministry initially balked at our proposal, wanting to keep the fund blocked until it could come up with its own computations. I pointed out to the officials that this blockage would directly impact the funds going to MACV and the ARVN forces for payrolls, unless they agreed to the split. It was further noted that the interested parties would be advised that the delayed funding was the due to finance ministry actions. When it learned of these potential impacts, it saw the light of day and negotiated a split of the blocked funding.

In regards to the complication imposed by the devaluation agreement, we learned that the U.S. Embassy and the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry did exchange notes correcting the situation, but the embassy staff could not locate the documents. My chief local accountant was of North Vietnamese descent with many good contacts in the South Vietnam government. He was instrumental in making use of his contacts in the foreign ministry and secured a copy of the exchange of notes correcting the devaluation agreement. With the notes in hand, we were able to present them to both the embassy and finance ministry staff to resolve the issue for future collections of local currency due from Food for Peace shipments.

Q: We're going through similar problems with Iraq right now. Was most of the economic assistance provided for stabilization purposes?

MEENAN: Yes. We were building power generating plants, distribution systems, roads, and providing a full range of basic economic development projects to improve the living standards

for a more stable country, even under wartime conditions. Much of the focus was on decentralized regional development and growth that directly supported village level activity. There was some real progress being made in this area including the fine work of Colonel Vann, who later perished in an aircraft accident. The USAID staff was dedicated and committed. Under difficult conditions, whether it be war, ethnic violence, or poor emerging economies, I strongly believe the best approach is to undertake assistance efforts that directly supports keeping the local population actively employed in one form or another and with a source of food for nourishment. With the basic population's needs being addressed, the country can more effectively advance with more progressive economic growth activities. However, as an outsider, the U.S. can do nothing until the local leaders and population take the lead in improving their own lot. This approach could have helped Russia when it transitioned to a market economy as well as now in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This point was made even clearer when I worked in Sri Lanka. I witnessed, first hand, what ethnic violence, between Tamils and Sinhalese, can do to impede a country's great economic growth. Unfortunately, the violence is still on going today. Applying this perspective to Iraq, the violence is similarly ethnic driven and not a political war for territory expansion, as we have seen in past world wars. Ethnic violence seems much more vicious and targeted at specific individuals or groups in a community. As an outsider, the U.S. is very restricted as to what it can do to help, until the local populations take the lead in creating a reasonable working environment.

Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese government that you were dealing with?

MEENAN: I felt that the Vietnamese government needed a lot of support and, unfortunately, the U.S. in many cases had to step in and take the lead in providing the impetus to stabilization as well as economic development activities. The government seemed to be doing what it could, given its limited capacities. While some in government like the finance ministry official's actions seemed to be counter productive. You try to deal with them the best you can.

There was a marked difference between North and South Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese seemed more agriculture focused while the North was more industrially productive. That's why my chief accountant was a North Vietnamese, who was fairly aggressive with many contacts.

Q: Was there much pressure put on your team by the South Vietnamese to cook the figures?

MEENAN: No, none whatsoever. The program was project driven with each activity carried its own funding requirements. Of course, the project activities were worked out in advance with Vietnam officials. One such project was a power distribution project being implemented by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) from the U.S. The project entailed constructing wood pole treatment plants to support the expansion of power lines. It was a good effort being carried out under difficult circumstances.

One thing I did notice was the weapon of preference by the Viet Cong in Saigon seemed to be the Claymore Mine. It was a small rectangular mine that sprayed steel balls from its flat surface, thus making it well suited for placing in saddlebags on a bike that is parked at a strategic location. One such use was against customers on the Mekong Floating Restaurant. The attackers

would set off an initial Claymore to get people fleeing. The real damage came with the backup Claymores that would catch the fleeing customers. We were advised that if there was an explosion, you should promptly drop and face your feet in the direction of the blast to minimize personal injury.

Q: How long were you in Saigon?

MEENAN: I was posted to Vietnam for an eighteen month assignment starting in 1965 and ending in 1967, just before the Tet Offensive.

Q: How did you feel about how things were going there?

MEENAN: During my assignment the size of the USAID mission more than doubled. It was a difficult situation, trying to blend military action with economic pacification. I was hopeful that our efforts could work to provide some economic balance in the regions and help the population determine their own fate. As soon as one plays the military option, effective negotiations and economic persuasion to neutralize a situation, goes out the window. If one utilizes diplomacy and economic persuasion, there is a much better chance of achieving the objectives and insuring economic and political stability. This is particularly true for the U.S., because we carry a lot of extra baggage and resentment as a result of any intervention. If the U.S. can actively work with foreign countries to assist to get their economic houses in order, then we can often avoid a destabilizing situation.

Often enough we don't pay that much attention to the economics of a situation. The U.S. seems to be overly focused on the political and military options and not the economics that may be driving the problem. USAID, with its multiple congressional mandates, seems to have lost its way and now is trying to manage, through contractors, a convoluted program of non-economic activities. At the end of the day, USAID will have spent the appropriated funding but not have improved the economic wellbeing of the recipients or necessarily have that much to show for the expenditures.

In the older days, following my Vietnam assignment, I had the pleasure to serve in Brazil, where real economic development was underway laying the foundation for the country's current good fortunes.

EDWARD L. LEE II
U.S Marine Corps
Da Nang (1965-1968)

Mr. Lee was born and raised in Michigan, educated at Delta College and American University. After seven years service with the US Marine Corp, he joined the State Department as Agent in the Office of Security. Mr. Lee's entire career in the Foreign Service was devoted to Security matters in Washington and in diplomatic posts throughout the world. His postings as Regional Security

Officer include Cyprus, South Korea, Thailand and Panama. Mr. Lee was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: When did you go to Vietnam?

LEE: I went to Vietnam in March of 1965, which was really the first landing or the official deployment of troops beyond advisors in Vietnam. I went to Da Nang.

Q: That's where you all went in.

LEE: Right. I spent some time briefly in Chu Lai. Mainly in the early years it was not as bad as during the period of Tet and thereafter. We had engagements. We had losses. There were some things in Vietnam in the Marines that dispelled what people have seen in movies. There was not drugs. The entire period I was in Vietnam, I don't know a person who used drugs. That whole thing was either a manufacture of Hollywood or happened to somebody else.

Q: I also think it happened later, too. I think it was after Tet.

LEE: Demoralization was a big part of that.

Q: The Marines had a record of having these... Were you in a core infantry unit or in the civil action type of programs?

LEE: We were primarily patrolling roads. We'd try to get the ARVN, the Vietnamese soldiers, to participate in patrols with us. That didn't go too well. We had problems in that we had bad weapons for Vietnam. We had been trained with a rifle called the M14, which was a very good rifle for different types of tactics but in jungles, for example, it had a flash suppressor at the end of it. If you were going through a thicket or a jungle and you banged it against something or somebody, that flash suppressor would get bent. The next time you fired rounds through it, the rounds would be sheared off. It was not until '67 or '68 that they came up with the AR15 and the M16 and that kind of thing. We had a hard time. We had heavy losses in Quang Mi and Quang Tri, which another one of our units was in. One of our companies lost 70%, which is a lot of people. Most of the people that I went through boot camp with died. Very few survived. I sometimes wonder how I sort of escaped it all, but I did.

Q: What was the feeling within your Marine unit about the war?

LEE: You take a group of young people that probably come from the lower socioeconomic part of the system, not well educated, don't understand macroeconomics and politics and things like that. You don't really think about it. You're basically told, "You're here to save your country." In actuality, that's not what Vietnam was all about. Vietnam was about political paranoia and economics. Everybody thought they were fighting for their country. They really weren't. They were fighting for someone else's political agenda. The 63,000 people that died in Vietnam during '61-'75 in many respects died for nothing. Maybe a lot of people wouldn't share that, but that's the way I view it. You have somebody like McNamara, who had been the former Secretary of Defense, who really helped get Vietnam off the ground during the Kennedy administration,

wrote a book a few years ago basically stating that he made a mistake in pushing this whole Vietnam period. Well, why say it now? The money that he earned from that book should have been donated to the survivors of Vietnam KIAs (killed in action). But it goes to show you how politics works. It's very imprecise, it's very unscientific. I think my general feeling about the war is, it was wrong, it took the lives of a lot of people, it achieved no political objective, it was never an ulterior war, it was a political war.

Q: What was your reaction and that of your comrades about the ARVN, the South Vietnamese army?

LEE: There was an awful lot of prejudice by us, a good bit of it unjustified. We were harsh on the Vietnamese because we didn't understand them. We didn't understand where they came from or anything about their history. I had one advantage in that before I went to Vietnam I spent six months in the Vietnamese language school. So, I understood things about Vietnam that a lot of people didn't understand. Basically Vietnamese, North or South, really didn't care who was in charge. They just wanted to be able to plant their crops. They wanted to be left alone. I think we made a lot of big mistakes in not educating our military better about Vietnam. But there was an awful lot of prejudice, racism if you will, calling Vietnamese all kinds of terrible names. It was definitely a black hour in U.S. history.

Q: They gave you an aptitude test and found out you were good in languages?

LEE: Yes. I spent the first couple of months in Vietnam teaching infantrymen how to speak certain things in Vietnamese when they would go into villages. It was by no means a high level of Vietnamese but it was basically certain questions to ask, directions, the nuances of getting around and that kind of thing.

Q: Did you find yourself being used as "Hey, let's get Sergeant Lee to tell them what...?"

LEE: Yes. I would say that there were times when I felt my loyalties were a little bit mixed because I was being asked to fulfill objectives I really didn't agree with. Actually, when I left Vietnam and when I got out of the Marine Corps, I wrote a number of letters to the editor that were pretty harsh about the Vietnam War, namely just to vent my feelings toward it.

Q: Having spent seven years in the Marine Corps, this was more than just getting out of your hometown. It sounds like you might be becoming what was known as a "lifer," a career Marine. Was it Vietnam that changed you?

LEE: After I left Vietnam, I got back to the United States. I really wanted to stay in the Marine Corps. They came around wanting someone to go to Marine security guard school. I could see the handwriting on the wall. This was 1967. I knew that if I went back to the United States and I didn't get out of the infantry, I'd be going back there. That didn't appeal to me at all. So, when someone said, "Look, you have the opportunity of living in Paris and wearing civilian clothes and having something close to a real life," I said to myself, "This is a good opportunity." I went on line embassy duty, which was very plush for a Marine, and I ended up going back to Vietnam, to Saigon. I spent a year in Saigon as a Marine security guard. I continued to go up in rank. Then

I was assigned a year after that just before Tet to Bangkok where I became in charge of the Marine security detachment. I would have probably continued in the Marine Corps, but I began to see things that were different from what I had been used to and I made the decision to get out of the Marine Corps in 1968.

Q: Tell me about being a Marine security guard in Saigon. Were you there when they had the new embassy?

LEE: I was there during the old embassy. The new embassy was under construction. There were an awful lot of bombings in Saigon at that time. In fact, I was working in a building where a bomb had gone off and I was knocked about 100 feet down the hallway. Fortunately, I was not seriously injured. But there was an awful lot of city type attacks. MPs were being shot and killed. Bombs were being thrown. Hand grenades... It was not by any means a really healthy environment either. It was very unpredictable. We had a large Marine security guard detachment in Vietnam about that time. About 100 Marines. I left literally three months before Tet. One of the Marines that I had trained was the only Marine security guard to have been killed in combat in the Marine Security Guard Program, Marshall. He was up on the wall of the new embassy and was killed.

DAVID LAMBERTSON
Mekong Delta Reporter
Saigon (1965-1968)

David Lambertson was born in Kansas in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Redlands in 1962. He entered the Foreign Service in 1963, and his assignments abroad included Saigon, Medan, Paris, Canberra and Seoul with an ambassadorship to Thailand.

Q: Now, you were telling me earlier that that group that was to be seconded to AID included Frank Wisner.

LAMBERTSON: Frank Wisner, Desaix Anderson, Steve Ledogar, Rich Brown, Clay Nettles. I don't know if you've ever run across Clay Nettles, he's a wonderful fellow. Paul London who was a very good officer; he left the Service early and made an interesting career on the Hill and other places. I've got that whole list downstairs along with a picture of the group as it appeared in the State Department newsletter. Would you like to have it? We were the first group of draftees for Vietnam and we were about half FSO and half AID direct-hires. The direct-hires included older guys who came from the LAPD and places like that and were in the Public Safety division of AID, as well as younger guys right off the street. We didn't know it, but we were the first cadre in what later became CORDS.

Q: I think that would be very interesting and we can add things like that to this record, but you're not going into CORDS, you're going into the embassy after more Vietnamese language. So, when did you actually arrive in Saigon?

LAMBERTSON: I arrived in Saigon in July of 1965.

Q: In the political section. How was the political section organized at that time?

LAMBERTSON: I think it was organized as any political section was, with the unusual exception of the so-called provincial reporting unit. The embassy had its traditional economic section, political section, consular section, AID and a huge CIA station, and then was of course operating side by side with and always in danger of being overwhelmed by MACV, the military headquarters. The provincial reporting unit was generally about a half dozen junior Foreign Service Officers who were assigned to the provinces, but traveled to those areas from Saigon. My territory in the beginning was the lower part of the Mekong Delta. We would stay on the road two, three or four days, come back, write a report about what we had seen and do the same thing the next week.

Q: You would touch bases with both Vietnamese officials and Americans that were out in these provinces. So, you'd speak to the governor and the district chief?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. I'd always see the governor, the members of the provincial council - provincial councils were more honorary than substantive, but they were reflective of what politics there were in the provinces. Prominent people. People who had something to say about the situation in Chuong Thien or Bac Lieu. Then always I would be in contact with the AID provincial representative, often one of my former colleagues from FSI, and with the U.S. military people who were there.

Q: Now describe the area that you were originally assigned to, what provinces or districts were those?

LAMBERTSON: It was the lower, the southern part of Four Corps. Vietnam was militarily divided into four corps areas. I Corps being in the North, II Corps being the Central Highlands and central coast, III Corps the area right around Saigon extending over to the Cambodian border, and IV Corps being the Mekong Delta. IV Corps was in turn divided into what I believe was the ninth infantry's area of responsibility and the 21st infantry's. These were Vietnamese military unit designations - no U.S. troop units were in the Delta at that time. The lower part of the Mekong Delta was about as far off the map as you could get, the kind of place that the brand new guy in the provincial reporting unit would be assigned to. It included the southern tip of the Camau peninsula, mostly mangrove swamps and heavily infested with Viet Cong—Bac Lieu, Ba Xuyen, Chuong Thien right in the middle, Kien Giang on the Gulf of Siam side and An Giang, which was the stronghold of the Hoa Hao - a fundamentalist Buddhist religious sect and a fairly safe place because it was an unusually cohesive population. Can Tho was the biggest city in "my" region.

Q: You would meet with the Hoa Hao leaders?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. In the manner of traditional Foreign Service work, in all of these places I tried to get to know people who knew something or were in some way influential. The Hoa Hao

were quite effective in knitting the community together and keeping out alien influences such as the Viet Cong.

Q: Would you describe your duties primarily as observing and reporting on what was going on and what resources were there?

LAMBERTSON: That's precisely what it was. It was nothing more. It was a very good job in terms of the opportunity it provided to travel rather widely in a particular area of Vietnam and be able to compare the way things were done in one province with the way they were done in another. It gave you therefore a slightly broader perspective than my AID colleagues would have had. But it wasn't as meaty as being a provincial representative in other ways. I wasn't handing out money. I wasn't a decision maker in a particular province. I was simply a guy passing through and reporting back to Saigon.

Q: What was traveling like in those days?

LAMBERTSON: Well, it was by air almost exclusively.

Q: An Otter or something like that?

LAMBERTSON: Usually by Air America transport, and Air America flew twin engine Beechcraft, tail draggers, not the more modern turbo props or King Air type Beechcraft although a few of those were coming into the inventory by the time I left Saigon. That was probably the most common type of airplane that I flew in, but I also flew in the latest Pilatus Porters, a wonderful turbo prop, high-wing, single engine thing that could take off in about a hundred yards, literally. There were Dorniers, a funny French twin engine high-winged airplane, with the engines down on the wing struts. Yes, Otters as well. The Otters, however, were always U.S. army aircraft, but we used them. Then very often helicopters. Also C-46s and C-47s. Caribous, C-123s. I could go on

Q: Air was chosen over land?

LAMBERTSON: Air was chosen over land because land travel would have required a heavily armed military convoy to get from Saigon to virtually anywhere I was going. You could drive from Saigon to My Tho, where Frank Wisner worked. I think in good periods you could perhaps drive all the way to Vinh Long, one of "my" provinces which was the next one down, but you were risking things to try to go much beyond that. The roads very often were out. They had been sabotaged and/or fallen into total disrepair because of nonuse. So, to get to a provincial capital from Saigon, you almost always had to go by air. I went back to Vietnam as a tourist in 1995 and we drove all the way from Hue to Saigon and My Tho. It was quite wonderful because I saw country that I'd only seen from the air in the sixties, including much of that beautiful central coastline.

Q: The requirement to use air all the time must have underscored the idea that it wasn't secure and there were things that needed to be done.

LAMBERTSON: There was no doubt about that. I think the war in the Delta was always pretty low intensity. There were rarely major battles that resulted in huge numbers of casualties. There were often large sweeps by Vietnamese military units and later by the U.S. 25th infantry division, but they rarely resulted in major contacts with hundreds of people killed. Most of the war in the Delta, right up to the end of the Vietnam War, was ambushes and attacks on isolated outposts by roving bands of guerrillas or increasingly well armed units of one kind or another. It made the whole area insecure in the sense that it was certainly unsafe to be out on the road and a long way from home. As I say, within the various provinces there were safe areas. I think for example in Vinh Long province you could easily drive from Vinh Long to Sa Dec which was a major district capital 30 or 40 miles away. In An Giang province, the Hoa Hao area, there were broad areas in which you could travel safely. But in most of the Delta it was quite risky. You couldn't really safely plan a Sunday afternoon drive through the countryside.

Q: So, what then was the theme that you'd say would come out of your reporting for this period?

LAMBERTSON: I'd be interested and probably embarrassed to read some of my provincial reports from that first six or eight months on the job. I imagine I was far less critical than I should have been and far less discerning - probably just generally naive. But there was a lot of variation. I think probably after I'd been to An Giang or Kien Giang I would write a pretty doggone upbeat report about prospects for security and stability in that province and the way the war was going there. But after visiting Vi Thanh, the capital of Chuong Tien province, there was very little positive one could have possibly said, because Vi Thanh was an island in a sort of rice paddy sea of hostility as I remember it. You really couldn't go anywhere outside that little town unless you were armed and accompanied by lots of guys.

Q: So, you were in the provincial reporting unit of the political section. Who are some of the other PRU people?

LAMBERTSON: When I arrived there Bill Marsh was the head of the provincial reporting unit. Bill had been there at least a couple of years by then, a very good officer. He was a strong intellect. He wrote well, he spoke well. He had an ebullient, expansive personality. Still does. After a year or so, Dick Teare replaced Bill as head of the unit.

Q: Here we go. Vlad Lehovich?

LAMBERTSON: Vlad had arrived a year or two before me. I think he and Dick Holbrooke took language training together. I'm not sure if they had a full ten months of it, but they had some Vietnamese language training together and I think arrived in '62 or early '63. Steve Lyne, later an ambassador in Africa, was provincial reporter for the mountainous regions and our man among the Montagnards. He was not a Vietnamese language speaker, but he didn't really have to be for that particular portfolio because he was dealing with tribesmen who were a non-Vietnamese people.

David Engel was in the section when I arrived. David Engel was a wonderful Vietnamese speaker, the best I think the Foreign Service ever had. He was later Henry Kissinger's interpreter in private meetings with Le Duc Tho in Paris. He was assigned to the upper part of the Delta.

Later on we had two David Browns. David E. Brown and David G. Brown who shared an office in the new embassy when we moved there – desks back to back. Both of them were very good writers and very good reporters I thought.

Jim Bullington arrived in Vietnam when I did or shortly thereafter. I'm not sure what his language training route had been because he wasn't in my class and he was not in the AID class, but I think he'd had some training. He spent a little bit of time in Saigon and then was almost immediately assigned to Hue or Da Nang. He was in both Da Nang and Hue.

Tim Carney was a provincial reporter at one point. Spence Richardson arrived a year after me and we were housemates after Dick Teare left. Harry Dunlop replaced Dick as chief of the unit. By and large I thought it was a very good group of people, some talented FSOs who had good careers later on.

Q: Now in terms of covering and reporting on Vietnam, the PRU is in the embassy; are Da Nang and Hue going to have PRU reporting for their areas, because Saigon is not all of Vietnam?

LAMBERTSON: I Corps was basically not covered from Saigon. It was covered from Da Nang/Hue, and this varied. We had a consulate in Hue and we at one point moved it to Da Nang, but we had had a consulate in Hue for a good long time. John Helble was consul there years ago. As I recall, I Corps provincial reporting was done by the people in Hue and/or Da Nang. We didn't have anybody who was in Saigon and traveled regularly to I Corps.

Q: There was a PRU type of reporting going on for every district.

LAMBERTSON: For every province.

Q: For every province. Actually that's a pretty impressive list of officers. Now, you're saying Holbrooke was in the PRU unit?

LAMBERTSON: No, Holbrooke actually was an AID provincial representative, before the term was coined perhaps.

Q: So, he was in the field.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. He spent at least six months in, I believe, Ba Xuyen province. In fact the first time I met Dick was when we were going through language training in the fall of '64 and he came back as a grizzled veteran and spoke to our group about what it was really like. By the time I got to Saigon, Dick was in the embassy. He had somehow moved from being a provincial representative in a very obscure part of the Delta to being the ambassador's special assistant or staff aid, to Maxwell Taylor. I'm not sure what Dick was doing when I got there. He was between opportunities perhaps. Henry Cabot Lodge had just returned. Dick didn't stay too long after I got there, but he was, I think, attached to the political section. He had long since stopped being a provincial representative. He had spent time in the front office. He was on his way.

Q: The PRU central reporting unit was part of the political section, but there was a political section doing sort of standard political reporting?

LAMBERTSON: The political section, the internal unit, was run by John Burke when I arrived. Burke was replaced by Ted Heavner, a very good officer. And there was an external unit, which had Dick Smyser, at one point Roger Kirk, and working in it for a time was Frederick Flott.

Did you ever hear of Fred Flott? Frederick W. Flott, whose job was to keep in touch with officials of allied embassies - at that time we were desperately trying to increase the numbers of "flags" that were flying in South Vietnam. So we made major efforts internationally to get other governments to send troops, even if we paid the freight. Today we would call it a "coalition of the willing." Fred Flott spent a lot of time liaising with the embassies of troop-contributing countries, and so inevitably Frederick W. Flott was known as "Free World Freddy." That might have been Phil Habib's doing.

Q: You were saying Desaix Anderson was in that group that was seconded to AID. Was he out there at that time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, they all arrived in the spring of 1965 and I didn't get out there until July of '65.

Q: They're provincial reporters?

LAMBERTSON: No, they're provincial representatives.

Q: Yes, they're out there and you're cycling through there if you will.

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: Was Negroponte out there at that time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes. John had been a provincial reporter but had moved over to the internal unit of the political section and was working for John Burke, following Saigon domestic politics. Then I eventually moved in that direction myself and worked closely with John in the constitution building process that we attempted in South Vietnam.

Q: Was Hal Colbaugh around at this time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, definitely. He came in probably six or eight months after I got there and he was assigned to I Corps. He was a great linguist. I believe he was based in Da Nang as a provincial reporting officer assigned to that office. I believe we still had the consulate in Hue. Da Nang was not a consulate, but it operated like one, to a greater extent than the other corps headquarters did. II Corps was headquartered in Nha Trang, III Corps was in Bien Hoa, and IV Corps was in Can Tho. But only Da Nang had an office that operated like a consulate.

Q: Standing back for a moment, Vietnam is becoming a major issue. Administratively State has

an embassy, it has a consulate there and now they're adding these other reporting tools so it can report what's going on in Vietnam. So did State have a separate stream of information from MACV? I mean that's what the provincial reporters do. That's what the people who are now in place are doing. So, State has actually made a major commitment of manpower and resources to the whole Vietnam circumstances and you're listing names of people who have become quite noted years later from that experience who like yourself would become ambassadors and what not. It must have been a very...I don't want to say driving experience, but a very fulsome experience. It was an incredible introduction to the Foreign Service world.

LAMBERTSON: It was very intense. It was very absorbing. It was something you lived 24 hours. For a young guy it was exciting, extremely interesting. I felt like I was exactly where I wanted to be. Not everybody shared those feelings. A lot of people were sent there against their wishes, but for me it was something I really wanted to do. I've always felt that when something important is going on, it's better to be close to the action rather than to be out on the periphery. It's the same principle that would hold, for example, when there's a presidential visit coming to your country and you have a chance to work on the trip or to try to insulate yourself from it to the extent possible. The best thing to do is to plunge in and be part of it and be close to the action. In Saigon I felt very close to the action. I liked that. It was exciting.

Q: Was your entire tour spent in the provincial reporting unit or you were saying that you were moving onto other duties in time?

LAMBERTSON: My provincial reporting experience actually was in two parts. Most of it was in the Lower Mekong Delta, but I also did a few months as a provincial reporter in the central coastal provinces, replacing Vlad Lehovich who by then had finished at least three years. That was a good change of scene for me and it broadened my perspective a bit. A different kind of war in the central provinces, much more main force action - and more intense politics traditionally, because that had always been a more highly developed part of the country. Then in the...I would say...the spring of 1966, we - the United States government - came to the conclusion that something better had to be done in terms of developing a viable South Vietnamese government that might command the respect of its people.

There had been a series of coups and revolving-door military governments in Saigon ever since the November 1963 assassination of Diem. There were Nguyen Khanh, "Big" Minh, Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu, jousting with each other. It was a mess, and a situation that was causing a rapid diminution of confidence in the United States in addition to the effect that it was having within South Vietnam. There was no real effective government in Saigon; therefore, the war effort in the provinces was hampered and diluted and made ineffective. In the United States people were beginning to wonder what this was all about. So, in the spring of '66, we began a process of constitutional government building. It was, I'm sure, more our initiative than the initiative of the South Vietnamese, but we guided them through a process - electing a constituent assembly, i.e., a constitutional assembly, drafting a constitution and then on the basis of that constitution, electing a president - between 1966 and the end of 1967. When that happened I moved to the internal unit of the political section and this constitution building effort became my full-time job, mine and John Negroponte's.

Q: How does that express itself?

LAMBERTSON: Well, first, we were involved in organizing and developing the rules for the constituent assembly election as I remember. I don't recall exactly what entities we were working with or through. The ambassador and the big guns in the embassy worked with the South Vietnamese leadership establishing the ground rules and timing for the constituent assembly election. For me it meant a lot of traveling prior to the constituent assembly election to the provinces, including places I'd never been to before, to talk with local officials and encourage people to run for office, and to talk with American officials and explain to them what this was going to be all about and encourage them to watch the process closely and let us know what was happening. In that brief period I traveled to darn near every province in the country. I recall returning to the embassy at midnight from one such trip and writing up a long report on a yellow legal pad and taking it directly to the code room. There was a response to it the next day, commenting on some issues I had raised. I later learned it had been written personally by Dean Rusk. That seemed perfectly natural somehow. The election was held in, you probably know this from your chronology, the summer of '66 and a constituent assembly was convened in Saigon and began the process of drafting a constitution. Negroponte and I were basically the embassy's lobbyists. We spent all day in the old opera house advising these Vietnamese politicians on how to draft a really good constitution.

Q: Not exactly a reprise of what MacArthur did in Tokyo; there were other things quite distracting at the time going on.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and MacArthur had full authority, we didn't, notwithstanding what some people thought. We learned our limitations as this process went forward. We did have some influence, undoubtedly, on the shape of the constitution. We had a guy attached at that time to the political section - Phil Habib was political counselor - a fellow by the name of Bert Flanz, who was an academic and whose specialty was constitutions. He had been sent out to Seoul in the early sixties when Phil was the political counselor there to help us help the Koreans write a constitution. In any event, he was there and we had lots of people with lots of fixed ideas about what ought to be in that constitution and what ought not be in it. One of the points that we worked hardest on was Article IV, which as written would have prohibited anyone who was ever a member of the Viet Cong from ever having any role in the political life of South Vietnam. We wanted to eliminate that or change it so that in the future in South Vietnam there could be some degree of political reconciliation in which former Viet Cong could be members of the national assembly or otherwise participate in politics. The constituent assembly members were very strongly set against that and it was not changed. I think the constituent assembly was a group of authentic representatives of their communities. Article IV was something that they felt strongly about and that probably a great many of their constituents also felt strongly about. A spirit of reconciliation was not abroad in the land. In any event we certainly lost on that provision, and on others.

Q: You were mentioning a moment ago that Phil Habib comes in as a political counselor. What's it like to work for Phil Habib?

LAMBERTSON: I always thought it was great working for Phil Habib. He arrived in the

political section shortly after I did. When I got there the previous Counselor, Mel Manfull, was just leaving. I was kind of inhibited by Phil when I first saw him and I thought, man, he comes on awfully strong. You know, brusque, a lot of humor there, but you don't necessarily recognize it right at first. Very smart. He soon became very popular with everybody who worked for him. He was a much-loved guy. I felt that way about him in Saigon and I was lucky to work for him, there and in a couple of other places.

Q: So, that admiration was professional?

LAMBERTSON: Professional and personal. Personally he was always entertaining to be around. He had boundless energy. He and Barry Zorthian, the public affairs counselor, and John Negroponce, the most sophisticated junior officer I ever came across, and one other guy would have an all night poker game once a week. I don't know how they did it, but Phil was able to burn the candle at both ends in those days and he kept doing it until he had the first of his heart attacks. I was still in Saigon, and Phil was by then back in Washington when he came out to Saigon for a visit shortly after the Tet Offensive. Phil came out to assess the situation and to go back with his own views as to what we ought to be doing. More troops, fewer troops, etc. During his visit he had what I'll bet was a mild heart attack. He sort of collapsed at Arch Calhoun's house on a Sunday afternoon. He didn't have a full-scale heart attack as far as I know until he was ambassador to Seoul, but he was clearly on the way. Anyway, he was extremely energetic, very bright, a man with a complete common touch, no pretensions about him at all. You couldn't help but like him.

Q: His guidance on the reporting from the section, was he saying, go for it guys?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, yes, Phil would never have suggested that anybody shade the truth as they saw it for the sake of some sort of harmonious product. He wasn't like that. You always felt that you had his backing and that he intended for people to call the shots as they saw them.

Q: You were suggesting a little mentoring perhaps on his part, talk to the officers on a personal level, what are you going to do after this. By then he had seen quite a bit of the Foreign Service.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I think he was good at giving career advice. I probably had better conversations with him later on in Paris and in Washington than I did in Saigon where he was busier and I was one of a great many chicks in his flock. I remember in Paris once talking with Phil about his work as a deputy assistant secretary just after he'd gotten back from being political counselor in Saigon, and in that capacity he was probably the Department's senior guy who did nothing but Vietnam. He had a lot of contact as a result with all the big players in the administration right up to and including Lyndon Johnson. He sort of marveled at the idea that he, Phil Habib, a kid from Brooklyn, was moving in those circles and he appreciated it. It was touching.

Q: You were talking about a visit that he made later, but you had recalled for me that when you were in this assignment as provincial reporter in the central provinces that you had a visit from Henry Kissinger.

LAMBERTSON: Kissinger back in the mid '60s was a consultant to the Johnson administration on Vietnam, a country about which he knew very little. But nevertheless, he had his views and he paid periodic visits in his consultancy capacity. Sam Huntington also came out once or twice, along with Allan Goodman who was a graduate student then and is now dean at Georgetown. In any event, one time when Kissinger came, Harry Dunlop and I accompanied him to Qui Nhon, capital of Binh Dinh province, where he was to get briefings on the pacification program and how things were going in the war in Binh Dinh province. We flew up in a twin engine Cessna. I think the army might have called it a U-21. Anyway it was a small aircraft, but adequate to the task. We got to Qui Nhon and went through briefings, carefully prepared briefings, by Vietnamese and U.S. army officers. Kissinger was bored by it all and I think got very little out of it, and his boredom was evident to everyone. As I recall it was a little bit embarrassing. When it came time to return to Saigon, we went out to the airport at Qui Nhon, which was U.S. army-controlled, run by a U.S. army colonel. Gale force winds had come up during the course of the day and the airport was closed. Sandbags were being placed on top of the wings of the airplanes lined up along the tarmac. Kissinger was dismayed because he had a dinner appointment that night with Henry Cabot Lodge; this was a big deal and he wanted to keep that appointment. Our pilot was a very senior colonel and held a rating of master pilot, which he contended allowed him to override the wishes of base commanders. So he and the base commander had a nasty argument after which we took off. There was a small mountain at the end of that runway and I remember when he pulled the nose up we seemed to almost bounce off the ground. It was one of the scariest flights I ever made, and I made a lot of questionable flights in small aircraft while I was in Vietnam. Kissinger was in a white knuckle condition the entire way back to Saigon as Harry and I were too, I imagine. But he got to his dinner appointment with Henry Cabot Lodge on time and so he was presumably happy at the end of the day. Kissinger, we knew, was a guy who didn't like flying much except in very large aircraft. Thus, he was really making a risky move by his lights to get in this little airplane under those conditions. That's how important that dinner with Henry Cabot Lodge was for him.

Q: He white knuckled it the whole way down.

LAMBERTSON: You bet.

Q: Vietnam is a major issue and is going to attract a lot of visitors. Were there any others that you recall? My notes say that McNamara came out in August of '65. There must have been others that you were involved with.

LAMBERTSON: When is your McNamara trip?

Q: It's August of '65.

LAMBERTSON: Actually I am thinking of Thanksgiving of '65. I was with Bill Marsh. We were having our Thanksgiving with the Special Forces "A" team on Phu Quoc Island and we got word while we were there that SECDEF was on his way and we were needed back in Saigon, so they sent an airplane for us. I don't remember the first McNamara visit and I don't remember a whole lot about the visit that we returned for in November of '65. We had a whole host of prominent congressional people coming through, including a Senate Foreign Relations

Committee delegation led by Mike Mansfield. Mansfield was of course a strong skeptic of our Vietnam effort. I remember sitting in on a briefing for him in the political counselor's living room. Presidential hopefuls visited, and other prominent people. I met Richard Nixon in Phil Habib's upstairs lounge – he was traveling under Pepsi Cola auspices. Ed Muskie visited around the time of the constituent assembly election I believe, and I accompanied him around town and interpreted for him. George Romney of Michigan, of course, famously visited Vietnam and my housemate Dick Teare was in charge of his visit and therefore presumably was at least partially responsible for “brainwashing” him. I had lunch one time at Ambassador Lodge's table on his patio, where he always had lunch in good weather, with Walter Mondale, who at that time was the up and coming young Attorney General of Minnesota.

There were other prominent people from other walks of life who would breeze through Saigon to see the place, to boost the morale of the troops in one way or another, or for other reasons of their own. Many of them would somehow end up being in our care for a few hours or a few days. I took Mary McCarthy around Saigon one time. Mary was acerbic and didn't seem real interested in what we were doing, but I tried to put Saigon's best face forward in our afternoon together. We visited several of the local sights including the opera house where the constituent assembly was in session and then we went across the street to the veranda of the Continental Hotel - a very pleasant spot - where we had coffee and I asked her what she thought of Saigon. She said, “It's a dreadful place.”

Q: So, you stopped going into the tour business.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. It was as Baghdad would be today, where for one reason or another, politicians felt compelled to go, and when they went they required escorts, and very often that duty fell to the political section.

Q: Let's see, where are we? Why don't we take a break for a second? We were talking about the other experiences you were having out of the political section. You have a note here that in the spring of '66 you got involved in some interesting negotiations. You had spoken earlier about helping the constituent assembly do the constitution.

LAMBERTSON: Now, you're speaking of?

Q: This is a standoff in Hue?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, yes. Hue in the spring of '66 as I recall. This is before the constituent assembly process got started and it, in fact, was one of the events that gave a little bit of impetus to that process because it once again seemed to indicate that South Vietnam was coming apart at the seams. In the spring of '66, Nguyen Chanh Thi, who was the commander of I Corps as I remember it, was very much in opposition to the government in Saigon of Nguyen Cao Ky, a general in the air force. I don't remember what his exact grievances were, but he essentially was challenging the authority of Nguyen Cao Ky and in effect threatening to go his own way. His stance was completely unacceptable in Saigon, and it was troubling in the extreme to the United States as well, and we wanted to put an end to this incipient rebellion. We brokered a meeting between Nguyen Chanh Thi and Nguyen Cao Ky and the meeting was to take place at the villa

on the beach in Da Nang of General Lou Walt, commander of the Third Marine Amphibious Force, the senior U.S. military officer in I Corps. Before the meeting took place we sent someone up to Da Nang to “wire” the room so that we would have our own independent record of what actually was said. The meeting took place on schedule and the tape was urgently flown back to Saigon. An interpreter/translator for another agency was going to attempt to transcribe the tape. Phil Habib instructed me to help him. So I and the other fellow went into a soundproof room somewhere in the bowels of that old embassy on Ham Nghi Street in Saigon and turned on the tape recorder. We could hear snatches of conversation, but primarily only the hum of a big floor fan as it rotated across the room. We couldn’t get anything useful out of that tape. I think the floor fan was placed there because both Nguyen Chanh Thi and Nguyen Cao Ky suspected what we were trying to do and they didn’t want us to hear what they were saying. I told Phil, “Sorry, there’s nothing useful on this tape.” You can probably imagine his reaction.

Q: High standards indeed. Actually you were noted or it was remarked by other people at the time that you were one of the best Vietnamese linguists in the mission at that time. In fact you tell another story here about translating between embassy and the South Vietnamese cabinet from time to time?

LAMBERTSON: That was not a translating or interpreting situation. That was a note-taking situation. The American Embassy country team, which naturally in Saigon had to be called something grander - it was the “mission council” – met on a regular basis with the cabinet of South Vietnam, as if these were two co-equal bodies. In fact in many respects, we of course had the final say. In any event, there would be regular meetings between the prime minister and the ambassador and their respective staffs, i.e., the South Vietnamese cabinet and the American Embassy Mission Council. It would actually alternate between the presidential palace and the American Embassy. Even at the time it seemed to me that this was a demeaning practice to put the South Vietnamese through. They were after all, at least theoretically a sovereign government, and to have them troop over to the American Embassy for a meeting was really quite astounding when you think about it. I was the note taker for that meeting at least once, and had there been any need for translation it would have been French to English, not Vietnamese. All of the cabinet members spoke French fluently and fortunately almost all of them spoke English quite adequately. So, as I recall the meeting was almost entirely in English.

Q: But isn't this an interesting issue as you were just saying, the symbolic relationship between the embassy and the government of South Vietnam, I mean how would their own press play such a meeting or did they not?

LAMBERTSON: They probably did not. Their own press counted for very little really. This is an issue that we’ve faced in other places around the world and that we’re facing in spades - John Negroponte is facing - right now in Iraq. How do you conduct yourselves when you have overweening power and authority and yet you’re trying to stress the independence and sovereignty of your host government? You’ve got to really be careful about it, and we were not nearly as careful as we should have been in Saigon, and to some extent that weakened the South Vietnamese government.

Q: The host audience for that is the national citizens.

LAMBERTSON: You bet. The people who see it happening. We needed more than anything else in Vietnam a government that truly commanded the respect and allegiance of the South Vietnamese people, and I doubt that the way we treated the government necessarily contributed to that goal. It goes right to the point of the nature of our role in Vietnam, as it was transformed by us from a supportive one on the periphery of the conflict to being at the very center of that conflict and in fact carrying the main load.

Q: Once you grabbed the metal.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. So, this practice of frequent meetings between the cabinet of an independent and sovereign government and the American Embassy was just a reflection of the way the relationship actually had evolved.

Q: When did that set up start? Had that been going on sometime by the time you got there?

LAMBERTSON: I think it probably had, perhaps not for a long time, but it was certainly not new when I was introduced to it. We'd had a central role in Vietnamese politics since before the overthrow and assassination of Diem. We had just become a little bit too obvious about it.

Q: This would proceed until when? These meetings, in this manner?

LAMBERTSON: I suppose they continued. I don't know if they were still going on in the latter years of our presence in Vietnam, but certainly in '65, '66, '67, that was the routine practice. I'd like to think it stopped after the 1967 election, but I don't recall, or at least that we went to their offices rather than they to ours.

Q: Speaking of routine, I mean here it is '66, '67, the war is being more militarized, but your daily life operating in Saigon was...

LAMBERTSON: Well, particularly after I left the provincial reporting business which did let you sort of brush up against realities and the war in various ways, working in Saigon was like working in a lot of other capitals I suppose. Even in 1966, '67, '68 when Saigon had been...

Q: This is tape two, side A. You were talking about sort of your daily life. What were your living accommodations?

LAMBERTSON: In the spring of '65 after the embassy had been car-bombed, all the dependents in Saigon were sent home so that by the time I got there in July it was a bachelor post. I shared a house with Dick Teare, my language-training partner and Dick was there for a two-year tour as Provincial Reporting Chief. When he left, Spence Richardson became my housemate and we shared that house for another year. I lived in a separate house within a five house compound that had been owned by a French bank. The largest house on the compound was the residence of the political counselor and the others were either political officers or the number two guy in USIS. The political counselor's house had a small swimming pool, which was the site of frequent Sunday afternoon water polo games. George H. W. Bush participated in one of those water polo

games once. He was visiting as a newly elected congressman from Houston. He was about 40 years old and looked like he was 25.

Q: In addition to your duties, did you have any off duty interests that you could or did pursue?

LAMBERTSON: No, not really. There were plenty of places to eat and drink in Saigon at night. Tu Do Street was extremely lively. There were quite a number of good places to have a meal. There were always parties to attend, plenty to do after hours, even though our hours tended to be very long. We worked until the early evening routinely. We always worked at least Saturday mornings, often Saturday afternoons, and sometimes Sundays as well. It seemed like the job was kind of always with you, but at the same time you were surrounded by people in the same boat and there was a lot of camaraderie and a lot of fun as I remember.

Q: Now, the ambassador most of that time was Bunker?

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall exactly when Henry Cabot Lodge left and Bunker arrived, but, yes, by sometime in '66 probably, Ellsworth Bunker had arrived in Saigon. A very fine gentleman. I liked him very much.

Q: Did his arrival make any atmospheric difference for the embassy and its work?

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall that it did for me, quite frankly. But I'm sure that people closer to the top felt a difference. His personal style and Henry Cabot Lodge's were quite different. Bunker must have been a much easier man to be around than Henry Cabot Lodge. It seemed to me to be that way at least, and I suspect that was in truth the nature of his personality.

Q: Was this the time that there were deputy ambassadors?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: How was the embassy organized now by '66 or '67?

LAMBERTSON: Well, there was a deputy ambassador, Sam Berger, and then Bill Porter or perhaps Bill Porter and then Sam Berger.

Q: In NSC?

LAMBERTSON: No, no. That's Sandy. This is Sam.

Q: Okay.

LAMBERTSON: He was a distinguished career Foreign Service Officer. There was beneath the deputy ambassador in the hierarchy, a guy called the "Mission Coordinator," who at first was Phil Chadbourn, a French specialist who spent years as consul general in Marseilles. I think his was kind of an administrative role and not analogous to a DCM. He was more a very senior special assistant perhaps, to the two ambassadors. There was nobody called DCM. The political

minister ran the political section. You had very senior talented people in the economic section. Chuck Cooper was the Economic Minister most of the time I was in Saigon; he was an AID star who later did other senior jobs within the administration on the economic side. The station chief was Bill Colby. For a time, Ed Lansdale had his own, sort of parallel political section. The embassy must have had an interesting looking organization chart. There were two MACV chiefs while I was there - MACV was part of the Mission Council even though it was an 800-pound gorilla - William Westmoreland was followed by Creighton Abrams.

Q: Was there a POL/MIL counselor there?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, there was a POL/MIL section in the embassy. That may have been Roger Kirk's job in fact. I said earlier in our conversation that he had been on the external side, but I think he was political-military when he was in Saigon. There were several officers doing that sort of thing with MACV and you can imagine the range of issues that they had to deal with in an operation like that.

Q: In these kinds of very interesting environments, all kinds of sort of unusual circumstances come up. You were telling me about Dick Teare's trip to Hong Kong where he had his own airplane?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, the point I was making was that during the Vietnam War, and I'm sure this is the case right now in Baghdad, resources were not an issue. If something needed to be done and it required calling up a special flight for somebody to do it, that was never a problem. In this particular case, just as an example, a congressional delegation, I think perhaps the one that was led by Mike Mansfield, had come through Saigon. Some record of their conversations was being written up. Or possibly they had asked for an analytical paper of some kind. They wanted to have that as soon as possible. They had moved on to Hong Kong. Dick Teare took the paper in question to them in Hong Kong with his own private jet. This was not particularly unusual. There was an embarrassment of resources. What did the Vietnam War cost us? It's an astounding figure and some small portion of it went for things like that.

Q: One of the other points you were making though is the difference in technology that we might not understand now 40 years later.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. The reason there had to be a paper delivered in Hong Kong was because there was no way to transmit a lengthy document more quickly. Obviously we did not have e-mail. That was 30 years in the future. We did a lot of our provincial reporting by way of typed airgrams.

Q: Which was the green paper, type the report, put it in the pouch.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. I remember it as being yellow, but in any event, it was on paper.

Q: Yes, it was yellow and cables were green.

LAMBERTSON: Everything was cumbersome and quite slow. It was very difficult to make a

phone call to Washington. Or should I say it was certainly not routine to make a phone call to Washington, although there was a lot of telephoning done between the embassy and Washington because of the priority of the issue - but it was expensive and not something undertaken lightly.

Q: How about internal communication within the embassy? You had a telephone at your house, did it work?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, telephones as I recall worked pretty well and I don't remember whether we were on the regular Saigon phone system or whether we were knit together in some sort of special system that linked us to the embassy. I quite frankly don't remember that. We may have had two phones.

Q: Did you have individual radios?

LAMBERTSON: No. I don't think I had a radio in my house. If I did I never used it. There may have been one within the compound. The political counselor's house may have had something like that. It was sort of the dark ages as far as modern communication is concerned.

Q: You were in Saigon for the Tet Offensive, which started the evening of January 31, 1968?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: What was that like?

LAMBERTSON: Well, I distinguished myself at the very beginning of the Tet Offensive by sleeping through it. I'd been out late the night before with Hal Colbaugh and if I heard anything during the night I probably assumed it was Tet fireworks going off. I woke up at the usual time in the morning, turned on the radio to the armed forces radio station, and the announcer was telling everyone that this was not a normal day and that the embassy would not be opening on time inasmuch as it was still occupied by a squad of Viet Cong. So, I got dressed and went next door to the political counselor's house where he was on the phone with Washington and with Allan Wendt, the duty officer who was inside the embassy. There were other people there as well and I was more than a little put out that nobody had seen fit to wake me up. By then Arch Calhoun was the political counselor and he was dealing with the situation, I guess conveying information from Allan Wendt back to the Department via the telephone.

Q: Now, Allan's being in the embassy, the duty officer in the embassy? If you're duty officer, do you go to the embassy?

LAMBERTSON: The duty officer slept in the embassy. There was a room with a bed in it up near the code room and that's where he was when the attack happened. I got to the embassy I think by around 9:00 am, just about the time that Bunker showed up. On the front lawn of the embassy were a number of deceased Viet Cong. The place was a mess, as you can imagine. There weren't shattered windows because some kind of plexiglass window had been used in that building, someone having had this sort of thing in mind. One of the things that quickly changed in the architecture of the place was that the large decorative planters spotted around the lawn of

the embassy were removed - they had been very good firing positions for the Viet Cong. They were sort of like concrete lily pads. It was a very strange thing to see. The dead bodies on the lawn. The hole blasted in the perimeter wall. The guard booth where the American GIs had been shot. The mission counselor's house, by then occupied by George Jacobsen, was an old French villa within the embassy compound and it had been the scene of some dramatic action. A Viet Cong soldier, or one or more, was actually going up the stairs ready to dispatch George Jacobsen when one of the marine security guards threw a pistol up to his bedroom window and he caught it and shot the guy as he came in his door. It was that close and there was a picture in Life Magazine of the security officer - it wasn't a marine - it was a security officer, crawling along outside this villa getting ready to throw the gun up to George. Do you remember that?

Q: Yes, as a matter of fact I do. So, people didn't have personal weapons up to that time?

LAMBERTSON: I would have thought Jacobsen would have had. I think he was a retired military officer, but apparently he didn't have one where he needed it. It might have been downstairs. After the Tet Offensive, fighting continued around Saigon sporadically, quite a lot in the days immediately after the Tet Offensive when there was also continued fighting in Nha Trang and of course in Hue. Scattered around Saigon, particularly in Cholon, there were still communist units present and causing havoc. It was easy to get a gun if you wanted one, so I got one at that point, a .38. I kept it beside my bed at night. There were several times in the ensuing weeks when at night it seemed like something was happening right outside my house. At night gunfire can be misleading I think if you're not experienced with it. There were certainly little skirmishes that took place not very far from where I lived. There were also incoming rockets during that period and one of them landed on one of the houses in our compound. Gil Sheinbaum's house across the way. You know Gil?

Q: Why yes. We're currently serving together as Retiree Representatives on the Board of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA).

LAMBERTSON: Yes, well, ask him about that; although Gil might have left Vietnam by then. So, it was a very strange period. We had seemed to be making a lot of progress in Vietnam, particularly through this political process that we had pushed. The constitution was drafted. It was ratified. A presidential election was held. It was a pretty good election - free if not entirely fair. Nguyen Van Thieu had won with a plurality of the vote in a multi-candidate contest, monitored by international observers. It was one of the first elections in which that sort of thing was done. When Thieu was inaugurated (our new embassy was dedicated at about the same time), Hubert Humphrey came out for the occasion. That was in November of 1967 and we were beginning to be a little bit optimistic about the prospects for a happy outcome to this whole thing. Then in January of '68 the Tet Offensive took place - less than two months later - and it basically rendered moot anything that had been going on politically in Vietnam and it essentially wrote an end to any possibility of a successful military outcome as well. I would not have imagined in the aftermath of Tet and the aftermath of Lyndon Johnson's decision to not run again that there would have been four more years of pretty intense warfare, as there were, before our withdrawal. Tet fundamentally changed things. It changed the atmosphere in Saigon. I don't recall exactly what I was doing in the political section the last six months that I was there, but I think everybody believed we were just treading water.

Q: Can you give us a better sense of what you mean by a changed atmosphere in Saigon?

LAMBERTSON: Prior to Tet there was, as I said, a feeling that we were on the road to something that could be called a success. The military campaign had been going reasonably well and we were very much encouraged by the political developments that had taken place. It seemed like we, or they, had at last established a really legitimate government that no one could dispute. Maybe we were going to come out all right. I think at the end of 1967 that was a pretty widespread feeling, perhaps not in the country at large, but among those of us in Saigon and probably in Washington. And then came the Tet Offensive - which militarily was a net loss for the communist side. But it represented a huge political victory for them and a tremendous political defeat for us. That was obvious to everyone who was there and it sort of zapped morale.

Q: Because by '68 we had so identified with a specific outcome in Saigon. When you arrived in '64 could we say that we weren't as tightly identified with what was going to happen?

LAMBERTSON: Had I arrived in '64 we could have said that, but I arrived in '65.

Q: Okay, '65.

LAMBERTSON: By which time we already had 65,000 or 70,000 U.S. forces on the ground in Vietnam, mostly up in I Corps, but we were there, we were engaged in combat operations, not just in an advisory role. It probably was already a little bit too late. But by the time Tet '68 rolled around we had well over 500,000 troops in-country.

Q: Now, as you know AFSA keeps an honor roll in the lobby of the Department and on that honor roll there are quite a number of people from this period of Foreign Service Officers killed in Vietnam. Did you know any of those people?

LAMBERTSON: I think the only guy I knew and then only slightly was Dwight Owen, who was a young summer intern in the political section.

Q: We had summer interns?

LAMBERTSON: We had one. He's the only one I remember and I think he perhaps had some connection that enabled him to do it. He was a very bright young man and he was out in the countryside, I think in Binh Dinh province, and he was killed by a mortar. I recall David Engel having a narrow escape from a land mine. He ended up bloodied a bit, but not hurt seriously. Of course there were a number of Foreign Service Officers who were injured in the bombing of the embassy in March of '65 before I got there, including Jim Rosenthal who was badly cut up. Edie Apple, who later became the wife of R.W. Apple of the New York Times, was in the consular section. Eva Kim I think was hurt in that bombing.

Q: Was she there at that time?

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

Q: Okay. '68 is the end of your tour. Did you get extensions or were you given different assignments, because I mean it was a normal two year tour, wasn't it?

LAMBERTSON: I think there was an option for three years with perhaps a home leave thrown in at the middle of the three years. At least I did have a home leave. I was a bachelor and so I had no good reason to make it a two-year tour, which is what it was for Dick Teare. I was there three years, yes.

JOHN W. HOLMES
Economic Officer
Saigon (1965-1968)

John W. Holmes was born in 1935 and raised in Quincy, Massachusetts. He graduated from Columbia in 1957 with a degree focusing on European Cultural History. He has also served in Iran, Italy, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Italy. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 18, 1996.

Q: You left there in what?

HOLMES: August of 1965 to go to Vietnam. Most of this period from 1964-1965 I had spent being assigned to Vietnam and then having assignments quashed. The first two times I was supposed to become one of what were then called Assistant Prov Reps (Provincial Representatives). It didn't happen the first time because the Economic Bureau's executive director, a formidable woman, managed to stand in the way of it. Another time the Aid Director in Vietnam decided not to expand the program in the provinces. The third time I was assigned to the Embassy Economic Section in Saigon and I was advised that I might as well go, at least this was better than going to Soc Trang. And the choice then was between going or resigning. So, I went.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when?

HOLMES: From August of 1965 until June of 1968.

Q: Can you describe our embassy when you went in 1965 and how it operated? You were sort of the new boy and not an area you knew particularly...first of all, did you get any training before you went out there?

HOLMES: There was some area training. If I had got one of those jobs which I didn't want, as a Prov Rep, I probably would have gotten Vietnamese language training. I still remember that somewhere in the course of the assignment process I was given the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) and I got a score which was high enough to qualify for language training, but not a very high score. It was noted that I had 3's or better in both French and Italian by that time. And I got a call from somebody in Personnel accusing me of trying to throw the exam. That wasn't

true, I just found the sort of abstract approach of the MLAT Exam frustrating. I had a little bit of area training but that's all. I didn't have any Vietnamese. I found that insofar as I was dealing with the Vietnamese government and I was...and even with Vietnamese businessmen and agriculturists, French was very useful and in fact I probably used French more in Vietnam than anywhere else.

Q: In the first place, what was the situation in 1965 when you got out there?

HOLMES: Well, I find it a little bit hard to separate what I remember and what I've read in recent years -- because occasionally I'll read a book about Vietnam, though for a long time I took a vow not to think about it. My memory of some things may be weakened by shutting off my mind regarding Vietnam for awhile. Ngo Dinh Diem had been assassinated in November of 1963. There were still people around the Embassy who had been there at that time. At least the ones I talked to thought the United States had erred in its role. In any event Diem had been succeeded by a bunch of laughable of successors like General Khanh. By the time I arrived, the unlikely duo of Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu had arrived on the scene and seemed to be running things as a duo. The Embassy was still in its old building, not the one that was attacked in 1968 and evacuated in 1975. It was a rather crummy old building down near the waterfront.

Q: Near a big market area or something...

HOLMES: Not too far. A totally unimpressive structure. By then I had been in the Foreign Service enough to think that DCM's were sort of important but it was one of the few Embassies of the post war period that did not have a DCM. It didn't during any of the last years we were involved in Vietnam. It had lots of high powered people around with various Ambassadorial titles -- U. Alexis Johnson at that point, for example, was Deputy Ambassador (and temporarily Chargé). The biggest impression I got was of the similarities to what I'd heard about the Second World War. Places with huge staffs, sort of clumsily coordinating with each other, with a big military presence, with the civilians having a hard time staying on top of the military -- or even along side the military. It was not just a matter of State and the military. There were divisions within the military and there were all sorts of civilian agencies.

Another interesting aspect was provided by an active American press corps. They came around to see us: relations with the Press were better by 1965 than they had been in 1963. So, we saw quite a bit of them.

I was personally a dove before my time. I still remember in Washington, I think it was in 1964, listening on the radio to a public discussion of what should we do in Vietnam, held here in Washington. I was impressed by George Kennan saying "Well, we should get out," that we had no interest in that place. Which I think reawakened my "Realpolitik" views. And I was never shaken in the view that didn't matter a goddamn what happened there, that we were wasting our time and our lives as the well as those of the Vietnamese by being involved. But, that being said, I found the situation fascinating. Here I was, involved in something that I'd only read about before. And the attention that Washington gave almost anything that went on in Vietnam, made it, even if it wasn't intrinsically important, seem important.

Q: What was the, as you saw it, let's start with 1965 when you arrived, the Vietnam government, the War, the country?

HOLMES: What struck me first was that Saigon was sort of a besieged city. You couldn't safely, or even moderately unsafely, drive from Saigon to almost anywhere. If you were nuts you could drive to My Tho, the next provincial capital south of Saigon. But our part of Vietnam was really a bunch of little safe areas and the communications between them, at least for Americans, were almost all by airplane or helicopter. Around Saigon, you didn't have to go very far to get to an unsafe area; cross a bridge or two and you had it.

The place was booming. It took me a little to realize it, but Saigon was enjoying a sort of war time boom, with a lot of cruddy construction going on, a lot of inflation, usually the signs of a boom. The American forces had started arriving in an overtly combat mode, real fighting types as opposed to real or alleged trainers or technical advisors, not very long before I arrived. Just a few months before I arrived. They weren't so obvious in Saigon. The first large contingents went to Central Vietnam. It took time for them to be so obvious in Saigon.

What I got involved in pretty quickly was the rice situation in the country. Vietnam had been a big exporter of rice before the Second World War and even after the Second World War. But, a combination of things, the disruption of the countryside and the new opportunities for the Vietnamese to do something else, a combination of bad and good, had reduced rice production to below the subsistence level. So, we began pumping in huge amounts of rice. The peak reached during my period of responsibility was something like 700,000 tons [in one year] -- which is a lot of rice. So, I wound up traveling a lot around the country, to talk to rice merchants, farmers, officials, basically with a focus on the agricultural economy, but picking up other things as well. I traveled mostly to the South of Saigon, although eventually I saw most of the country. Charming place. Unlike in Iran, I didn't think the people were anti-foreign in a dogmatic sort of way. Obviously a lot of them wanted the United States to get out but it wasn't based on thinking that foreigners were monsters.

Pretty obviously to me, the South Vietnamese government had turned over and was progressively turning over more of the fighting of the war to the United States, and that continued during the most of the time I was in Vietnam. There was a constantly used cant phrase about how we have to get the Vietnamese more involved but in the years of the middle 1960's the movement was in the other direction with the fighting but not necessarily the dying) being carried out by the Americans. An interesting place.

Q: What...did you have any meetings with the Vietnamese government?

HOLMES: Yes. I had my own contacts who were pretty high level officials usually from the Economic Ministry and places like that. The Embassy Economic Section shortly after I arrived got folded into AID's Economic Office. We -- AID -- we eventually had a joint commission with the Vietnamese government that was supposed to run the economy of the country for the Vietnamese, and I took part in it. I saw a lot of Vietnamese civilian ministers and civilian officials, but I didn't see so many military officers except in the provinces when I would always

see the local military officials. I didn't see so many of the Vietnamese military rulers, although I encountered them to some degree.

Q: You had come from Khorramshahr and then Naples, not exactly two hotbeds of pristine government. How did you find, particularly dealing with the commodities such as rice, which I mean, is a staple, pushing it in...how did you see the distribution system?

HOLMES: The Vietnamese government had a rationing system for rice. It was full of opportunities for corruption and rice merchants had their own interest in hoarding and speculating although their hoarding was exaggerated. We became more and more free marketish in our efforts, finally deciding that details didn't matter. We would simply pump the rice in and eventually there would be so damned much that it would force the prices down. And we succeeded. The rice was available at a reasonable price. Then we began to worry, and I began doing some of the tiny amount of semi-abstract, semi-theoretical economics I'd done in my life. We became conscious of the need to avoid going too far and to avoid crushing production by having too low a price. I did analyses for the Mission Council on the supply response to rice prices. One thing led to another and I came to realize how, as in lots of less developed countries, local government only cared about the urban dwellers. We Americans wound up being spokesman for the peasants in a certain abstract way.

But the corruption was obvious. I remember one occasion when a ship came from Thailand. We were paying for imports from Thailand. I think in this case it was corn that was on board rather than rice but we couldn't get the ship unloaded. I knew the Vietnamese in authority and I finally told the American commercial types who were involved that (unofficially, of course, and choosing my words carefully) I strongly suspected that the only way they were going to get that corn unloaded was by administering a bribe and probably if they talked to so and so he would not be reticent about telling them how much. They would have to decide whether it was worth it. It was a matter of a few thousand dollars, which they no doubt could afford. I've been conscious of corruption in several places, but that was one of the few times I've been so close to it.

Q: What was your impression of the American business community there?

HOLMES: It wasn't very strong in numbers at that time. There were some rather fishy types who may have been, for all I know, undercover types who means of income were not entirely clear but there weren't very many American business men there. It was considered too dangerous and not very profitable, I think, for most of them. There were a few...very few.

Q: What about your local staff? Did you find them useful...the Vietnamese who worked for the Embassy?

HOLMES: They were very competent, at least the ones I dealt with myself. You know, very pleasant personally usually, very competent at doing their work, not very imaginative. Good clerical types but this may have been because of the way we used them, I don't know. Yes. They were better by far than one would expect in a Third World country.

Q: When you were there, who were the Ambassadors?

HOLMES: We shuffled Ambassadors frequently. Maxwell Taylor left about the time I arrived, I believe. Henry Cabot Lodge then came for his second round as Ambassador. Finally, there was Ellsworth Bunker.

Q: Did you have any impression of their interests or were you so removed...?

HOLMES: I can't say anything about Taylor. Lodge? I can't say too much about his operations but he impressed me as being very shrewd fellow in what encounters I had with him. I was also aware from the times that I was Embassy Duty Officer of his enormous telegraphic reports to Lyndon Johnson. He used to dictate these things on the old fashioned big dictaphone reels and they were massively long. Ellsworth Bunker I had more contact with, partly because after the Tet attacks in February 1968, Bunker got worried because there was a big rethink going on in Washington on what to do about Vietnam. It had something to do about Lyndon Johnson's eventual decision not to run for reelection.

Q: This was the assembling of the wise men...it was called...

HOLMES: Yes. But rethinking went on elsewhere. Bunker decided he wanted his own process on Vietnam. So a group was organized and I became one of the members of this. I remember being really shocked by one suggestion of dropping a nuclear weapon or weapons on Haiphong and I wrote a memorandum to Bunker saying that from what I knew about the Nuremberg Trials, etc., to allow this sort of thing, such an incommensurate act, even to be suggested, would be hard to justify as legitimate under international law. Anyway, Bunker called me up very quickly and I think it was expunged from the documents. But, I liked Bunker. It seemed to me that he was a really nice man. I don't know what I would say about him in terms of policy. I don't know how much influence he had on policy. The policy in Vietnam was usually made in Washington. Even though there were lots of high ranking people in Saigon, they didn't have a great deal to say about it. I don't think that he was against the policy, I'm just implying I don't know how significant he was. On the other hand, when Henry Cabot Lodge was Ambassador the first time, he certainly bore a fair amount of the responsibility for the conniving in the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem. Yes, Lodge had some distinct influence. And later Lodge -- and we heard echoes of this in Saigon -- did start putting out feelers to the Poles and others in order to try to come to a peaceful settlement of things in Vietnam. But this was one of the rare exceptions so far as I recall or no to the rule that policy was made in Washington, and that Saigon mainly implemented it.

Q: Were you in Vietnam during the Tet attack of February 1968 which had so much to do with Johnson's eventual decision not to run for reelection?

HOLMES: I wouldn't claim that I have or had powers of prophecy. But I was always nervous about the possibilities of a Communist attack at Tet. Our South Vietnamese allies took those holidays very seriously -- they let down their guard, while everyone celebrated. So, I arranged to be out of the country two out of the three Tet seasons that occurred during my tour in Vietnam. I was in Indonesia in February 1968; I learned of the attack the day before I was supposed to return to Saigon. I decided to go ahead and take the UTA (French) plane I had a ticket for. It overflew Saigon and landed in Phnom Penh. We didn't then have relations with Cambodia but I

talked my way into the country. After a few days it was clear that Saigon was still not cleared of Communists, and I managed to get Royal Air Cambodge to accept a personal check and flew to Angkor Wat. After a few dazzling days there, my money was running out, and with some Italians I rented a Land Rover and drove to the Thai border, where we caught a steam-propelled train to Bangkok. There I got in touch with U.S. authorities. After a few days I was told I was on a priority list to return to Saigon, which I did on an Air America C-46.

Well, I came back and the city was still under siege. A colleague from my office -- Allan Wendt -- had been the Embassy Duty Officer the night of the Tet attack. He told us about what happened as seen from within the Embassy, as well as writing his thoughts down in a report which got picked up by Peter Kann and published in the Wall Street Journal. From him I got a pretty good idea of what had gone on.

A lot of people had become quite optimistic during 1967. I had become somewhat more optimistic myself. At least, I thought, things were going better. The Tet attack, although I believe military historians think that the Viet Cong lost more than they gained militarily from the attack, had a sudden and tremendous impression on the morale of everybody in the US government, perhaps especially on those who had become quite optimistic. As I mentioned, we shortly thereafter plunged into an examination of whether the US should stay in Vietnam.

That time soon after Tet was an odd period in another sense in that the U.S. Mission was functioning, but the Vietnamese employees were generally not coming to the office anymore. Things that we normally did in our office, a mundane example being doing a cost of living survey, became difficult. It was hard for a foreigner to get a real price in an Asian market. Fortunately we had a Japanese-American whom we sent down to the market; he was able to do somewhat better than the rest of us.

I think clearly the Tet attack shook everybody and shook the US government. Whatever the military result, the political result was a disaster.

Q: One question on this and then we'll wrap this up. Did Miracle Rice enter your calculations at all while you were there?

HOLMES: A little bit. I made a couple of trips to Los Banos to...

Q: Los Banos was in the Philippines?

HOLMES: Yes, the Rockefeller-financed International Rice Research Institute. In fact, we got into importing a little bit of it in Vietnam. The Vietnamese were very resistant to eating it. The Vietnamese traditional rice varieties were long grain. Although a lot of it breaks up in milling, it is still a rather superior rice. And the Los Banos rice was a somewhat stubbier sort of grain and the Vietnamese claimed it had a different odor as well. In lots of Oriental countries, there is a highly developed connoisseurship about rice that was violated by the Miracle rice. I don't know what has happened since but this had not got very far in my time.

Q: Next time we'll pick this up...is there anything else we should cover in Vietnam? So where did

you go, just so we'll have this...?

HOLMES: After Vietnam, I got a sort of reward of spending a year at the University of California, Berkeley, doing Atlantic studies.

Q: So next time we'll pick up Berkeley, which was another war zone.

HOLMES: Yes, it was. 1968-69 was the peak year for troubles at Berkeley.

The other things are about Vietnam. As I mentioned, I haven't thought much or talked much about Vietnam in the last 25 years or 30 years, so things escaped my mind. This is a series of random observations.

One is that there was one area in working on the economic side occasionally gave one some insights. One case I drag out of my memory is recorded in Stanley Karnow's book "Vietnam: A History." I remember my own slight role in it. In 1966 the Vietnamese government in one of its fake anti-corruption campaigns decided to execute one Chinese merchant for being corrupt.

Q: I recall that.

HOLMES: Yes. Ta Vinh was his name. I wouldn't have remembered the name -- Karnow's book reminded me of it -- but I remembered the incident. Some of us in the Economic Office, I among them, who had contacts in the merchant class, were bombarded with angry complaints that this action a) was inherently hypocritical on the part of a corrupt government and b) that the economy couldn't get along without these "wretched middle men" -- the merchants. We fed this into the Mission Council through our bosses. I don't think it had any particular policy impact but it seemed to come as a surprise to the upper levels of the Mission people that General Nguyen Cao Ky was viewed as the most corrupt person in Vietnam and that his ostensible anti-corruption campaign wasn't winning hearts and minds.

Q: Was he Vice President at that time?

HOLMES: He was the Prime Minister under Thieu at that time. It was sort of an uncomfortable duumvirate at that point. Later Ky got shoved out.

The second thing is that I've been reading Prochnau's book, "Once Upon a Distant War." I was in Vietnam in a later period but some of the same characters he writes about in that book had come back or had remained there -- like Neil Sheehan, who was back on his second tour. I think things had eased somewhat in the relationship between the American mission and the journalistic community in the few years between 1963 and 1965. We used to provide multiple press briefings, there was such a large press corps that they would attend briefings on any subject. And they actually showed up. I also remember Barry Zorthian who was the Public Affairs Officer in my time in Vietnam, holding evening drinks and food parties at which a few selected correspondents and a few relatively opened minded members of the mission would talk fairly freely; I attended some of these sessions. It was a different atmosphere at any rate from the trench warfare that existed during 1962-63. Ironically so, because it was during my period in

Vietnam, from 1965-68 that some journalists, as well as other people, actually started questioning the premises of the Vietnam War, whereas in 1962-63 the argument was about the tactics being followed. Anyway the atmosphere had cleared up a little bit. That was true within the Embassy as well. I used to go to the political section's weekly staff meetings as the economic office's representative. These meetings were great fun. Phil Habib, who was the Political Counselor, was a natural born (I'm tempted to say) cynic. At any rate he refused to be blinded to reality and at least within that room people would say things that were fairly objective about how things were going in Vietnam. Aided, I must say, by some of the participants. The one I remember best was Bob Oakley who was somewhat older than most of the officers, although he was hardly very old at that time, and who also had an independent streak. He and Habib would fight, but the fights were friendly. I thought it was quite different from the "lock step" atmosphere that at times prevailed at the Embassy. Unfortunately, I think that such free thinking and objectivity later declined within the Political Section, not to speak of the impact still later of Graham Martin on the internal processes of the Embassy.

One reason I stayed on as long as I did in Vietnam, was that after my normal year and a half assignment was over I thought I was going to be able to slip off to a delightful assignment on a US secondment to the OECD International Staff in Paris. But the State Department's Vietnam working group decided it needed me as a replacement. I acquired a fair amount of bureaucratic sense while I was in Vietnam and realized that the Vietnam Working Group was at that point a dreadful place to work. It had lots of work but almost no influence. I didn't feel like doing that so I signed up for another year in Vietnam...as a better fate, doing something significant than doing something invisible back in Washington on the same subject. Also, if I can say so, more pleasurable.

Q: You went to Berkeley. In the first place, having gotten out of Vietnam, I imagine by the time you got assigned to Berkeley, Berkeley had a reputation, it and Columbia, as being the hotbeds of student unrest...or had it?

HOLMES: Yes, it had. The Professor of Italian History at Berkeley -- we became friends after I had been in effect his only graduate student -- lamented that most of his academic career had gone in the wrong direction. He had gone to Harvard as an undergraduate, then got his Ph.D. from Columbia and then went to Berkeley as a professor. Both Columbia and Berkeley had gone to the dogs. In fact, the student troubles at Berkeley had started long before anywhere else in the United States or in the world.

People associate Berkeley with the wave of 1968 but the student movement had started there in 1964-65 and hadn't ever really died out. But it became more political and less a movement complaining about the education delivered by the University than it had been in 1964-65. In 1968-69, there was a somewhat Marxist, radical group that dominated the students and some of the faculty at Berkeley. There was clash built in because Ronald Reagan had become Governor of California and just as he later demonstrated during the Air Traffic Controllers' strike, showed that he might be a nice guy but he was also very tough. So Berkeley was dogged during the 1968-69 academic year by riots. The one advantage I drew from having been in Vietnam is that I had been in riots and I had smelled tear gas before and had some idea of what you did when it started being used.

During that time, if asked, and only if asked, I would admit that I was an employee of the State

Department, a Foreign Service Officer. If asked twice, I'd say that I had been in Vietnam. But I certainly did not go around advertising that.

JAMES R. BULLINGTON
Provincial Reporter
Hue (1965-1966)

Aide to Ambassador
Saigon (1966-1967)

Province Representative, USAID
Quang Tri (1967-1968)

State Department, Vietnam Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1968)

Ambassador James R. Bullington was born in Tennessee in 1940, and received his BA from Auburn University in 1962, when he entered the Foreign Service. His assignments abroad include Hue, Saigon, Quang Tri, Chiang Mai, Mandalay, Rangoon, N'Djamena and Contonou, with an ambassadorship to Burundi. In 2001 Ambassador Bullington was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Well, then you went in '65 where?

BULLINGTON: In '65, I was assigned to Vietnam.

Q: Was this by mutual agreement?

BULLINGTON: It came out of the blue, actually. One day I got the call that 'Hey, you're going to go to FSI and study Vietnamese for awhile and go to Vietnam.' They assigned me to Hue as Vice Consul. I'd never followed Vietnam affairs. I'd heard of it, but that's about all. The war at that time was not really a big deal like it later became. We had military advisors there, but we didn't have any American combat units. Vietnam was still seen as pretty remote, and our involvement was only at the margins, or so it seemed. But it was obviously a growing concern, and growing very quickly. The State Department was rapidly building up the Embassy and what was called the Provincial Reporting Unit, which I was to be a part of even though I was stationed in Hue. It was a unit within the Political Section.

Q: You said you're going to be in Hue, but acting as the Provincial Reporting Officer.

BULLINGTON: That's right. That's what I was to do. Travel around in the five provinces of I Corps, the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam. I was to send in reports to the Embassy on the political situation, economic situation, pacification in the countryside, those sorts of things.

Q: Well, first let's talk a bit about the training. You took Vietnamese at the Vietnam training center?

BULLINGTON: Yes. Not the full course, I think eight or ten weeks, so I could get by but I wasn't really fluent in Vietnamese. It got a little better after I'd been there for awhile, but I did have French, so I could use French with most Vietnamese I needed to talk to. All educated Vietnamese at that time spoke French.

Q: Around you was Vietnam, before you went out has it become controversial, our commitment there...

BULLINGTON: No, it wasn't really all that controversial at that time, in early 1965. I'm sure there were some people in academia and elsewhere that were criticizing the involvement already, but it wasn't something you saw in the papers. There were no demonstrations or anything like that. It was not that big a deal in 1965.

Q: So you went out in late '65?

BULLINGTON: I went out in July '65.

Q: July of '65, and right to, did they sort of brief you in Saigon first?

BULLINGTON: Yes, I spent two weeks, maybe three, in Saigon, went around with some of the people in the Provincial Reporting Unit there. People like Bill Marsh, John Negrofonte, Dick Holbrooke, Dick Teare, David Lambert, Vlad Lehovich.

Q: By the way, who was taking Vietnamese with you? Were you taking Vietnamese with other Foreign Service Officers?

BULLINGTON: There were just three of us in the class. Lyn Baldyga was one, a USIA officer. I don't remember the other.

Q: Well, when you got to Vietnam in '65, how did the situation on the ground seem? What was the image you were getting?

BULLINGTON: It was deteriorating. That seemed to be pretty well established. The Provincial Reporting Unit was the part of the Mission that would bring the bad news, more than any other. The official MACV military chain of command was not giving as realistic reports as the State Department provincial reporters. Or the journalists. That was when the journalists were beginning to change from supportive to more and more questioning and sometimes downright hostile.

Q: Were you given any kind of firm, the Embassy Reporting Unit, were you given any equivalent of marching orders, go out and find this or find that?

BULLINGTON: No, no it was not to prove any point, or to look for anything in particular other than the normal things you would look for: how is the government doing, what do the people think, is there corruption, is the government winning or losing, are the hamlets safe or not safe?

Q: When you moved to Hue, what did we have in Hue at that time?

BULLINGTON: We had a small Consulate there. Sam Thomsen was the Consul and I was Vice Consul. There were the two of us, plus the communicator, Joe O'Neal, who later went on to become a Foreign Service Officer, along with three or four Foreign Service National support people. And that was it.

Q: That was, Hue was what, was it Marine or Army?

BULLINGTON: It was in the Marine AOR, Area of Responsibility.

Q: How did you find relations with the Marines at that time?

BULLINGTON: The first Marine combat units got there not long before I did, in March of 1965. At first they were only in Da Nang, protecting the airbase. We had the MACV advisors, and they were mostly Army. Those were the people I interacted with much more than Marines during that period. I was traveling, visiting the provinces (or sectors as they were called in military terms) and districts (sub-sectors in military terminology). The Americans I dealt with were mostly career Army people. I also visited some of the Army Special Forces teams, including one in Khe Sahn. There were lots of places in the mountains where we had Special Forces A-teams, they were called. I'd spend two, three, four nights usually, staying with the military folks in those districts or provinces or in villages with the A-teams. I'd use those as a base of operations and talk to the Vietnamese government people and military, and to anybody else who seemed to have information about what was going on. I'd gather information and try to develop a feel for the situation, and then come back to Hue and write a report on "The Situation in Quang Tri Province," or something like that. It was very akin to journalism.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the military reporting and the CORDS reporting was very much, you know, body count, pacified / non-pacified villages, it got very quantified in all that. Was the feeling that this is really not giving a very good picture?

BULLINGTON: This was before CORDS, which came later. Hamlet evaluation surveys, which sought to quantify everything regarding pacification, were begun later, '66 and '67. In '65, the only other reporting was in the military channel from the MACV sectors and sub-sectors. Yes, that did tend to be less than full. It relied on body counts and other numbers too much, largely overlooked the political and economic context, and really didn't give a good picture of what was going on, or so most of us in the Embassy felt.

Q: Well, there was a lot of pressure on the military people, to show improvement.

BULLINGTON: Oh, yes, their performance was measured in how many new hamlets their team had pacified. Of course they were just advisors, and it seemed to me awfully unfair to hold them

responsible for the performance of the South Vietnamese military forces and government. It also led to overly optimistic reports.

Q: What was the impression you were getting of the South Vietnamese forces?

BULLINGTON: Mixed. In some areas, they were darn good. And in some areas they were awful. In northern I Corps, Quang Tri and Hue, was the ARVN First Division. That was reputed to be and was, in my opinion, a fine military outfit. It remained so through the rest of the war. The leadership was good, and so were the soldiers. In southern I Corps it was much different. The Second ARVN Division and some of the other forces down there were not nearly as good. The Rangers and other specialized units were quite good, but they were part of the central reserve and would only be deployed from time to time. When they did come they were quite effective. The militia, the Regional Forces and Popular Forces, would vary even within a province, according to the leadership of the district chief and other officials there. In some districts they were good and in others they were not.

Q: Well what was going on, sort of one of the, North Vietnamese was it or was it mainly Vietcong in that area when you were there?

BULLINGTON: In I Corps, by then at least half the problem was regular NVA units. Also, they had reinforced Vietcong units with a lot of NVA troops. By that time we had regular NVA regiments in both northern and southern I Corps.

Q: Well, it must have been pretty dangerous, prancing around from place to place.

BULLINGTON: Well, hell when you're 24, 25 years old you're invulnerable. You don't worry about that sort of thing. It was foolhardy, but I never felt a great sense of fear as I was traveling around. I did get shot at a couple of times, but as with most young people, personal safety wasn't at the top of my concerns. Should have been.

Q: How about, did you have problems with your reports, did you get any feedback on what was going, what you were reporting?

BULLINGTON: Some, but after I'd been there a few months, domestic politics began to take over from the provincial reporting. This was the time of Thich Tri Quang, whose headquarters was in Hue. He and his An Quang Buddhist movement began to make all kinds of problems for the central government, as did one of the leading military figures, Lt. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi, who had been I Corps commander and before that, ARVN First Division commander. The political situation was really spiraling out of control, with a lot of student demonstrations and Buddhist demonstrations. After November, December of '65, that became the consuming issue we were focused on, reporting on the political unrest in I Corps. Hue was correctly seen as the center of it, although it was going on in Saigon and other places as well. Hue was particularly important for the political stability of the country, so I began reporting more and more on those sorts of things, talking to the Buddhist leadership, the dissident military leadership, folks like that. Those reports were very much noticed. I was front and center among Embassy reporters, as a matter of fact, because of being in Hue. I remember one occasion in early '66 when there had

been lots of protests and student demonstrations, and the central government had replaced the commander of I Corps in an effort to get better control of the political situation. The new commander was coming up to visit his division in Hue for the first time, but the division was essentially in rebellion and didn't want to receive him. I'd gone out to the division headquarters compound for the arrival ceremony. All the MACV advisors were there as well. At the same time the students were demonstrating, and they decided to march out to the First Division to protest against this new I Corps commander. Moreover, some of the First Division soldiers had entered a conspiracy to assassinate him. And indeed, after he made his speech and as he got into his helicopter to take off, some of the First Division soldiers started shooting at the helicopter, to try to kill him. It was an American helicopter, with an American crew and the commander's MACV advisor accompanying him. In self defense the door gunners on the helicopter started shooting back and killed some of the people on the ground that were shooting at them. But Thich Tri Quang and the students got it wrong. They claimed the Americans had come in and wantonly attacked their compatriots and killed their brethren. I started driving back to town just as the students got there, and they poured over my car, banging on the roof and shouting anti-American slogans. I thought they were going to take me out and kill me, but they didn't. After they passed by I went on to an appointment with Thich Tri Quang, the leader of the Buddhists. He was well known, had even been on the cover of *Time* magazine just a couple of weeks earlier. The previous week he had sent a message through me to President Johnson, and I was to deliver that day the President's response. So I went to his headquarters at Tu Dam Pagoda and delivered the message. One of the Consulate FSNs, Tuy-Cam, who is now my wife, was with me to interpret, since Tri Quang spoke no French. Just as I was finishing that task, a firefright broke out between the Vietnamese troops around the pagoda and the Catholics in the neighboring area. We couldn't get back to the Consulate for awhile. But when we did, I wrote all this up, the assassination attempt on the Corps commander, the demonstrations, delivering the President's message to Tri Quang, the Buddhist-Catholic firefright in the middle of Hue. This was a hell of a report, a good day's work for a young FSO-8. Sam Thomsen, the Consul, had gone to Da Nang on temporary duty, and I was Acting Consul at the time. That report went all the way to the White House, and Dean Rusk was kind enough to send a special commendation, which was surely helpful when the next promotion panel met. Those anti-government demonstrations continued and became increasingly anti-American. There were daily demonstrations outside the Consulate. And finally in March student demonstrators burned down the Consulate and the USIA library.

Q: Well, Tony Lake was there at the time, was he?

BULLINGTON: No, I replaced Tony Lake. Tony had been there before, in my job. Shortly before the Consulate was burned, the Embassy sent up Tom Corcoran. He was Deputy Chief of the Political Section in Saigon. Since I was one lonely FSO-8 up there in Hue, and all these things were going on, they sent Tom to fill in as Consul.

Q: Well, Tom was the last man out of Hanoi too.

BULLINGTON: He closed down Hanoi and Hue and... Vientiane as well, I think?

Q: I think Vientiane, at least for a little while.

BULLINGTON: He was quite a guy. We did a lot of reporting on that crisis, and had to evacuate American citizens from Hue. Both Tom and I were given Superior Honor Awards for our performance.

Q: What was your reading at that time of the Buddhist leadership?

BULLINGTON: Thich Tri Quang?

Q: Thich Tri Quang and all. Where were they coming from? How did you see them?

BULLINGTON: A lot of people felt they were basically tools of the communists. I think probably they were, but unwittingly so. They served some communist objectives, and the communists certainly got behind them and were pushing that kind of anti-government and anti-American position. But the Buddhist leadership was not communist. That was pretty well demonstrated after the war. Thich Tri Quang was eventually imprisoned, but I don't know what happened to him thereafter. He certainly didn't emerge as a leader of the new society when the communists took over.

Q: Who was the head of Provincial Reporting in Saigon?

BULLINGTON: Bill Marsh was head of the Provincial Reporting Unit. His boss was Phil Habib, the Political Counselor.

Q: Did you feel that the Embassy was sort of with you, often if you were in the Consulate that they don't understand us or they're getting it wrong, did you feel for that?

BULLINGTON: They got it pretty well right. They kept sending up people for TDY, during the course of this Buddhist "struggle movement." John Negroponce was one. He was in the Provincial Reporting Unit. He came and stayed for two or three weeks. Colonel Sam Wilson, who was the military advisor to the Ambassador, came and stayed for two or three weeks. They not only were getting my reporting, they were sending people up to be on the ground from time to time, where I could talk to them and brief them, and they could see the situation for themselves. So I think they had a pretty good handle on what was going on.

Q: What was your feeling, by the time you left there when?

BULLINGTON: I left right after the Consulate was burned down in March.

Q: '68?

BULLINGTON: No, this was March of '66. After that, the Embassy (primarily Phil Habib) brought me down to be staff aide to Henry Cabot Lodge.

Q: Let's talk a bit about your impression of Henry Cabot Lodge.

BULLINGTON: I liked him. It was a really heady experience for me to be a young FSO right at

the very heart of the most important American international engagement at the time. Obviously I didn't have any decision power, but I was certainly sitting at the right hand of power, filtering all the information coming and going to the Ambassador. It was an exciting time. I liked Lodge, thought he was competent, thought he was a decent man. I got along with him quite well.

Q: Did he get out much?

BULLINGTON: Some. In fact I usually went with him. I carried his briefcase on several trips. He both got out some himself, and he would listen to the other people in the Embassy that got out, especially the young officers in the Provincial Reporting Unit. I remember one time he went on home leave for a month. I didn't have anything to do during that month, so I asked if I could go spend some time in the provinces. He agreed that I could go to Long An province down in the Mekong Delta where they were having a special experiment at the time involving Colonel Sam Wilson, who had been with me in Hue for awhile. They put him in charge of both the American combat units in the province and the MACV military advisors and civilians involved in pacification. This was something that had not been done before. So I thought it'd be interesting to go down and do some reporting on how that was going. I wrote a long report to Lodge when he got back. He sent it on to the President.

Q: How were things going that sort of southern tip of South Vietnam?

BULLINGTON: It was going pretty well, by this time. In '65 the security situation was clearly deteriorating. In '66, once we got through the political turbulence, it had become stabilized. I'm not sure that we were making much progress, but the overall situation there and in most of the country was no longer deteriorating and had been stabilized.

Q: Were you able to develop sort of good relations with your Vietnamese counterparts or was this a problem?

BULLINGTON: Oh, yes, good relations. Obviously it depends on the individuals, but for the most part we were able to develop quite close relations with them. In fact I married a Vietnamese..

Q: Where did you meet your wife?

BULLINGTON: She was a Foreign Service National employee working at the Consulate in Hue. As I mentioned before, she was my interpreter when I met with Thich Tri Quang. We had developed an interest in each other when I was there. After I went to the Embassy as Lodge's aide, she was transferred to AID in Saigon, and the courtship became more serious. I'd been engaged to a woman in Washington before I left for Vietnam, and the idea was when I finished my tour in Vietnam we were going to get married. But when I finished that first tour and came back I found that she had decided she didn't like the Vietnam War or anything to do with it including me. Then my courtship with Tuy-Cam really got serious. We were married right before I left Vietnam in '68.

Q: Well, a lot of relationships have broken up over the Vietnam war.

BULLINGTON: No doubt.

Q: Were you aware of the building intensity of the anti-Vietnam movement in the United States?

BULLINGTON: I was aware of it in the sense that I was reading *Stars and Stripes* and occasionally *Time* and *Newsweek*, but I guess I was not really personally, dramatically aware of it until I came back, after I had completed my time with Lodge. That was when my lady friend in Washington told me she didn't want anything to do with me or the War. Moreover, I saw all the snow and ice around Washington (it was in January), and I quickly decided I wanted to go back to Vietnam.

Q: '68.

BULLINGTON: No, January '67. It was then that I first got a feel for what was going on in the U.S., and how much anti-war sentiment there was.

Q: When you came back, you came back in '67 to when?

BULLINGTON: I was there until March of '68. This was my third job in Vietnam. First Hue, and then staff aide to Lodge, and the third tour I came back to work in what by then was the CORDS program in Quang Tri province, the northernmost province of South Vietnam. I could have gone other places. I had an interview with John Paul Vann in III Corps, and he wanted me to work for him. But I went back to I Corps, mainly because by this time Tuy-Cam was there. She was in Da Nang, where the US Consulate had been moved after it was burned in Hue. I wanted to be in that region so we could continue the courtship.

Q: Well, before we leave, your time with Henry Cabot Lodge... What were his work habits?

BULLINGTON: He was a methodical sort of guy. He would listen, especially to Phil Habib, who I think was by far the most influential person in the Embassy. He had regular relations with Westy, General Westmoreland. I didn't see them either as particularly close or particularly negative in any way. It was a businesslike relationship. Westy would come over once or twice a week and that was about it. The CIA Chief of Station was also influential, as was Barry Zorthian, the JUSPAO chief.

Q: U.S. Public Affairs Office.

BULLINGTON: Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office.

Q: Did you deal at all with the press or have any social contact with the press at that time?

BULLINGTON: Yes, even in Hue. With my background in journalism I was interested in the press, and there were a lot of journalists who came through when I was in Hue. Joe Alsop, Frankie Fitzgerald, Johnny Apple, Neil Sheehan, Don Oberdorfer, several others. There was Keyes Beach, Chicago *Daily News*. A reporter I got to know well when I was in Saigon was

George MacArthur, with Associated Press and the *Los Angeles Times*, mainly because George was dating Eva Kim. Eva was Cabot Lodge's secretary and I was the staff aide, so we were in the same social circle there. In fact I had dinner with George and Eva last night.

Q: I tried to interview Eva, but she didn't want to.

BULLINGTON: She would be a wealth of information.

Q: Oh, I know, she was the institution.

BULLINGTON: She's a dear friend.

Q: Well then, you were up in Quang Tri...

BULLINGTON: The northernmost province, right up on the DMZ.

Q: What was the situation in '67, you know, prior to Tet?

BULLINGTON: We had the big war up there. There were large combat units, mostly Marines at that time. All along route 9, which runs south of the DMZ from the coast to the main road junction in Laos, called Tchepone, there were heavy battles. Camp Carroll, the Rockpile, Cam Lo, scenes of big, big battles.

Q: So what were you doing?

BULLINGTON: At that time with CORDS there was a senior province representative in each province, and under the province rep were two deputies, at least this is the way it was in Quang Tri, one for the military side, and one for the civilian side of the pacification effort. I was the deputy for the civilian side. That was the position. But the first job really was totally focused on an operation to remove about 10,000 people from the southern half of the DMZ. The DMZ was a river and a strip of a couple kilometers on each side of the river. McNamara had come up with this scheme (which did not work at all) to have electronic barriers along the DMZ to prevent infiltration from the north. We called it derisively the McNamara Line. We had to remove these people from the southern half of the DMZ preparatory to building this McNamara Line. My job was to take care of the refugees and help resettle them south of there in a place called Cam Lo. The first day I got to Quang Tri they started coming, about 10,000 refugees to organize feeding and care for. The Marines assigned a colonel to work with me. I also had an ARVN colonel for a counterpart. And we got 'em resettled.

Q: Well, you can resettle people but we're talking about people who are working and fishing and farming and all that, you move them and you give them shelter and all, but were they able to sort of gainfully support themselves?

BULLINGTON: No, they were basically on the dole. And we had to feed them with bulgur wheat and other things that they didn't much want to eat. Some of them were able to do a little bit of farming eventually. Largely they were on the dole or they were employed as militia, in the

Popular Forces. These people were mostly Catholics, and there was a very active priest who got them organized.

Q: So, was there a major invasion down there, or was this... What were the northern Vietnamese doing, just testing or were they really trying to get across.

BULLINGTON: Some were coming across the DMZ, right through the McNamara Line. But they were mostly going around it, going around through Laos down the Ho Chi Minh trail and then coming back into areas of northern and southern I Corps and attacking all along a north-south front.

Q: At one point, it was later I guess after you left, at Khe-Sahn?

BULLINGTON: Oh, no, I was there. In Quang Tri. Khe Sahn is in Quang Tri province. I visited it a couple times. During the Tet offensive is when it became so notable. I had quite an adventure during the Tet Offensive.

Q: Let's talk about the Tet Offensive.

BULLINGTON: I was working in Quang Tri, but I had decided to go down to visit Hue, to see Tuy-Cam. We were engaged by this time. She was working in the Consulate General in Da Nang and had come up to her home in Hue, and I was to come down from Quang Tri, to be with her for her last Tet in Vietnam before we were to be married in March and go off to the U.S. So it was a big deal for her and the family. I had done some favors for a French guy, he was Franco-Vietnamese actually, whose company ran the power plants in Hue and Quang Tri. I had put him on some Air America flights when the roads were blocked. So he had invited me when I visited Hue to stay in a little guesthouse they had at the power plant there. I flew down on the afternoon Air America flight from Quang Tri, arriving in Hue on the afternoon of January 30th, 1968. This proved to be a poor choice of time to visit Hue. I went by the CORDS headquarters, and was able to borrow one of their USAID jeeps to get around town. We'd had some intelligence in Quang Tri that there might be attacks during that period, but it didn't seem to be anything unusual. There were always attacks of one sort or another. When I got to Hue I asked at CORDS headquarters if anything special was going on, and they said no, though there were some low-level rumors that there might be problems during the Tet holidays. But nobody seemed to be especially concerned. We had dinner that night at Tuy-Cam's house. We had two other Americans there. One was Steve Miller, who was the USIA representative in Thua Thin province, where Hue is located. He had been a Foreign Service classmate of mine. The other was Steve Haukness, who was a friend of Tuy-Cam's at the Consulate in Da Nang. He was a Foreign Service communicator. He had never visited Hue so he wanted to come up to the old imperial capital for some tourism. After a nice Vietnamese dinner at Tuy-Cam's house, the two Steves went to Steve Miller's house, and I went back to the power plant, to the guest room, to spend the night. About two a.m., I was awakened by the sounds of incoming mortars. It was evident that there was some serious fighting going on. Of course there wasn't much I could do about it. I expected that it would be over by dawn. There had never been a North Vietnamese or VC attack in a major city where they had come and stayed. It was always a hit and run thing. They would get out of town by dawn because by occupying fixed positions in an urban area they became

vulnerable to counterattacks. By dawn things had quieted down, so I figured that's what had happened, they had come in and raided the town and blew up a bridge or something like that and were gone. I walked out of the door of the guest room and across the courtyard into the power plant looking for my French friend. He was in the power plant, but when I got there he said, "Oh, my god, don't you see what's happened? There they are!" And he pointed to the other end of the courtyard where for the first time I saw armed men with pith helmets. They obviously weren't friendlies. My friend said "Get back, get back," and I did. I went back to the guest room and spent several very anxious hours there. Eventually that afternoon my friend came by and knocked on the door. It was with some terror that I opened that door, not knowing what I would find, but thankfully it was my friend instead of the NVA. He told me a little more about what was going on. The power plant obviously was a main target of any invading army that's going to occupy a city. The NVA had set up a command post right there in the power plant, not more than 25, 30 yards from the guest room where I was staying. My friend said that it's not a good idea to stay at the power plant, and I certainly agreed with that. So we worked out a signal. That evening he was to stand across the courtyard and give me a thumbs-up when it was clear to move across. The first time we tried he gave me a 'don't come' signal because the NVA were evidently looking. But the next time, about sundown, they were all busily cooking dinner around a campfire, and he signaled me to 'come on.' I walked across the courtyard with my heart in my throat. If the NVA soldiers noticed me they didn't do anything. They probably assumed I was a Frenchman working at the power plant. I passed within 25, 30 yards of them. When I got to the other side of the courtyard my friend guided me over some fences, through some backyards to a house where two French priests welcomed me. One, Father Cressonier, had been in Hue for 30 years with the *Société des Missions Etrangères*, the missionary society headquartered in Paris that was active in Vietnam. The other, Father Poncet, had been at Khe Sahn. Because of the fighting at Khe Sahn he had to leave a few weeks before that and was staying with Father Cressonier in Hue. Cressonier was a big guy like me, and he gave me one of his *soutanes*, the black gown, and the beads and the whole priestly outfit; so for the next nine days I became a French priest behind the North Vietnamese lines in Hue. For an East Tennessee hillbilly raised in the Church of Christ, that it itself was quite a thrill. A couple of times the local VC cadre came to the door, but they didn't demand to come in. If they did, the story was going to be that I was a visiting French-Canadian priest. I don't know whether that would have worked or not, but thankfully we didn't have to put it to the test. The greatest danger turned out to be the counterattack, especially incoming artillery from friendly forces. The fighting was pretty intense around there, and we saw a lot of refugees and a lot of North Vietnamese units, including one tank, which they had evidently captured from the ARVN. There was a lot of incoming mortar and artillery fire. Father Cressonier's house was a two-story French Colonial type. When the artillery starting coming in heavily we would all go downstairs, and huddle under the staircase. And thankfully so, because we took a direct hit from what was probably a 105 mm artillery shell. The house became one-story all of a sudden. The second story just was no longer there. But we were downstairs and didn't get hurt. After nine days of this, the U.S. Marines, working their way house to house in fierce combat throughout Hue, got to where I was, the priest's house, and liberated me. The company commander was Ron Christmas. He later went on to become a Marine Lieutenant General. I was never so glad to see anyone as Captain Christmas and his Marines. They wrapped me in a blanket and carried me out as if I were a wounded Marine, so the neighbors would not see that these priests had been harboring an American. I had invited, in fact urged, the two priests to come with me to safety, but they had pastoral duties they felt kept them

there. There were Catholic refugees they could now get to at a nearby cathedral, several thousand people. They wanted to stay and minister to the flock. The Marines took me to MACV headquarters. I spent one night there, and was interviewed by reporters. The next day the story of my liberation was on the front page of the *Washington Post*. In fact that's how my parents found out about it, through a newspaper report. They'd been told by the State Department that I was missing. They eventually saw the newspaper report from the *Washington Post* via the Chattanooga paper. After another day at MACV, I went to Da Nang to take a bath, which I hadn't had in nearly two weeks, and get some food as well as to report in to the CORDS regional headquarters there. After the staff at CORDS debriefed me, I told them I had to go back to look for Tuy-Cam. Even though the house where she lived was no more than 500 yards away from Father Cressonier's house, there was no way I could get there because it was on the other side of the Phu Cam canal, which was one of the many lines along which the fighting took place. I knew the Marines would eventually get there, so I wanted to go back to Hue. My CORDS bosses told me no, you can't go. I told them the hell with that, I'm going. By that time I'd been around long enough and knew the territory well enough to arrange my own travel, so I just went out to Da Nang airbase where I knew the appropriate sergeant. I got on a helicopter back to Hue, to look for Tuy-Cam. When I landed at the helicopter pad, she was there! She and her family had just made it to safety that morning, and she had come to the helicopter pad to look for me, and was trying to go to Da Nang. So that's where I found her. We were reunited on Valentine's Day at the helicopter pad outside the MACV compound in Hue. Her family was at a nearby refugee camp. She had two brothers who were military officers, one was an ARVN officer and the other was an Air Force cadet. They were both home on leave for Tet. They had successfully hidden in the attic of the house for the first few days. But eventually because of all the incoming ordnance they decided it wouldn't be safe where they were. The family all left the house and was on the way out of town with other refugees when a group of VC or NVA stopped them and took out all the young males in the group. Tuy-Cam's two brothers were taken out and apparently shot. They were never heard from again.

Q: What happened, let's see, Haukness was killed there, wasn't he?

BULLINGTON: And Miller. After I got back and found Tuy-Cam, I began looking for them too. A couple of days later the Marines found Steve Miller's body with his hands tied behind him. He had evidently been executed, shot in the back of the head. Haukness was last seen being led off toward the west, out into the jungle. We never did find his body at the time. I don't know whether his remains have ever been found since then.

Q: What happened to you... she was your fiancé still?

BULLINGTON: Yes.

Q: What happened then?

BULLINGTON: We got married. It was near the end of my tour, in March. We got married at the Consulate General in Da Nang. Before Tet, we had planned a traditional Vietnamese style wedding in Hue, but now we couldn't do that. We organized the wedding right at the Consulate.

Q: Who was consul general?

BULLINGTON: Chuck Cross.

Q: He's now in Seattle.

BULLINGTON: Is he? Chuck had been in Da Nang only a few months. Barney Koren was before him, Chuck replaced Barney. Chuck was away on vacation, and at his invitation we spent our wedding night in the Consul General's residence.

Q: Then you went back to the states?

BULLINGTON: Not immediately. After about a week, we went down to Saigon, but had all kinds of trouble getting Tuy-Cam's passport. They kept asking for official papers that were in Hue. We pointed out that we couldn't go back to Hue, and since Hue was largely destroyed, particularly the government buildings, we couldn't get those papers even if we went there. Eventually I had to get Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky to intervene. I was able to do this because I knew Ky's aide from the time I had been Lodge's aide.

Q: So, you then at that point went back to the States?

BULLINGTON: Went back to the States, and spent three or four months working in the Department on the Vietnam desk and getting ready to go to Harvard. The State Department decided that I needed more education, and they sent me off to the Kennedy School of Government. A real battlefield, as it turned out.

RICHARD W. TEARE
Political Officer
Saigon (1965-1967)

INR, South Vietnam Analyst
Washington, DC (1967-1969)

State Department, Vietnamese Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1969-1971)

Richard W. Teare was born in Ohio in 1937. He received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1948. His career includes positions in Barbados, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, New Zealand, and Australia. Mr. Teare was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in July 1998.

Q: How did you find Vietnamese?

TEARE: Well it's a tonal language. It's difficult I think for Westerners. The principle advantage

over Japanese or Korean or Thai or Chinese is that it is written in the Western alphabet now, thanks to some Portuguese missionaries four hundred years ago. And it is relatively accurate phonetically with a few ringers in it. The tones are indicated by diacritical marks. So from a fairly early stage anything you can say or understand you can also read and write in Vietnamese, which is not the case with the others. Vietnamese was taught in one year, ten months actually, whereas the others were and still are taught in two years, that is the Japanese and Chinese and I think Korean, too. Typically one year in Washington and one year in field school.

So we came out of Vietnamese speaking like educated foreigners with limited vocabularies I guess is the way to put it. Furthermore at least in my case very much a hothouse sort of thing. I could understand everything the tutors said to me but when I first got into a real life situation in Saigon, hey, there was traffic going by, horns honking... I find this in any language, people hear you say a couple of words and they think you understand full speed so they make no concessions anymore and that was pretty hard. I am only a middling linguist.

Q: You arrived out there in '65, I take it with your family?

TEARE: No. No. Families were no longer allowed to go to post because in early '65 there was the incident in Pleiku. McGeorge Bundy was visiting, being run around the country and was at a Vietcong border town and he took it personally, or Lyndon Johnson did and thought hey, this is a dangerous place. So from that time on I guess families were evacuated, families already there. Certainly no new families were allowed to go. That is when we got into the safehaven business in a big way.

We had I think a couple of hundred families, mainly AID, some State and CIA in Manila. We had about as many in Bangkok, maybe even more.

Q: So where did your family go?

TEARE: When I left for Saigon my wife was pregnant with our second child, the first one had been born in the Philippines. And so we decided that she would stay in the U.S. through the birth of the child at least and then see how things stood. And so she went to stay with my parents in Cleveland and that is where our second child was born and that was in October of '65. In early January of '66 she and the two children came out to Manila. And of course we had left there only a year and a half before. I had made a trip over and managed to rent the very same house we had occupied while assigned there. So she knew exactly where she was going and what to take and so forth.

And so she and the children stayed there from January of '66 until the end of my tour which was April of '67. I would come over and visit every couple of months. For the first several months where was no money for such travel so we did it space available with the military or else paid out of our own pocket. I did Space A which was sometimes pretty grueling. Go to Tan Son Nhut airbase outside Saigon, get a military flight over to Clark and then to get from Clark to Manila was something of an ordeal. A couple of times I took the Philippine Rabbit Bus which is about as reliable and safe as it sounds and go tearing down the highway to Manila at high speed and get to the Manila bus terminal and get a cab and go to the house. But I did all those things. I'm not sure

I would do them again today!

Then sometime in mid '66, I guess, they introduced visitation travel at \$2,400 a year. That was the maximum and was the same for everybody. And that would finance I think six round trips to Manila and twelve or thirteen to Bangkok, except you had to be back 28 days or 30 days between trips so the Bangkok people couldn't use all their money. So I made four or five trips to Singapore and so forth. So that made life easier. Although I remember on one trip coming back, must have been in the beginning of '67, Pan American was in a dispute with the Government of Vietnam. We were the guinea pigs, the first flight in after the agreement had collapsed or whatever. We were kept on the tarmac for two or three hours and not allowed to get off the plane. I believe it was the Deputy Ambassador, Bill Porter, who intervened with Ky, the Prime Minister, to get us off. We were reduced to little pools of sweat and were mightily annoyed at the Government of Vietnam.

Anyway that was the basis on which the visitation program worked.

In Saigon we lived in the houses previously occupied by embassy families and typically it was two Officers or more sharing the quarters. Lambertson and I shared a house. The house had previously been occupied by Jim Rosenthal, the first chief of the provincial reporting unit.

Q: I've interviewed Jim.

TEARE: Well he can tell you, I'm sure has told you, how all that got started. The second chief, who inherited from him, was Bill Marsh, who'd be worth interviewing if you haven't, and I was the third. I took over when Marsh left which was after I'd been there nearly a year. That was a unit within the Political Section, alongside the Internal Unit, the External Unit and the North Vietnam Communist Watcher Unit.

Q: First, what was the situation when you arrived in 1965?

TEARE: At that time the first U.S. combat troops as opposed to Advisors had been on the ground since March, I think. Just as I went out there President Johnson had announced a big increment which I think took it up to 128,000. In those early weeks there were some very encouraging signs, or at least encouraging as we read about them in the papers and in the newsmagazines. I'm sure there was a lot of White House spin on it. In particular Operation Starlight on a peninsula up in ICOR where U.S. Marines trapped a Vietcong unit and pretty well did away with it.

This was the early surge of there was nothing the United States can't do and now that our guys are getting in there directly this is going to be it, we are going to save that country! That sort of spirit lasted for a number of months but it rather quickly wore down as we failed to repeat that success very many times. We wanted an enemy who would stand and fight and of course that is what the Vietcong and North Vietnamese wouldn't do, they realized it was highly unprofitable. So they would strike at times of their choosing, to their advantage and then disappear. And we would go chasing them all over the countryside and sometimes, as at Que Son later on, get ourselves into a real fix. So it was not a totally satisfactory undertaking in that respect.

But the part I saw more of was really the Advisory effort because I was supposed to go out into the field and judge how well the Government of Vietnam was doing, particularly on the civil administration and political organizing side. We had an Advisory Program, military, that was paralleling the Vietnamese structure not only in the units, corps, division, regiment, battalion on down to company, I think, but also in the administrative structure. We had U.S. Military Officers advising the Province Chiefs who were all concurrently Sector Commanders. We had more junior U.S. military, almost all Army, advising the District Chiefs who were concurrently Sub Sector Commanders. So we were cheek by jowl with the enemies down to a fairly low level. But, whereas we went out there gung-ho, full of enthusiasm and on our, in the case of the military twelve month tours, thirteen months for the Marines in ICOR, the Vietnamese had no similar motivation.

Some of them had already been fighting this war for ten or fifteen years and for them it was a 40 hour a week proposition, five days a week, which is of course not the way to fight a war, particularly not in one's own country. But it was a different kind of war and they had been brought up under the French tradition and then I think some of their worst talents were ingrained by us, particularly organizational structure. It was essentially a war for small maneuver units; battalion was the largest that we needed according to a number of my Army friends. But we created a Vietnamese Army in our own image. It was corps, division, and regiment and so forth, which was ridiculous. A top-heavy structure and just wrong for the nature of the combat but it was what we had and what there was.

Q: I take it you were probably spending a certain amount of time in Saigon and then go out in the field and examine?

TEARE: That's right. We had divided up the country. Again, the consulate in Hue as it was then, later moved to Da Nang, took care of ICOR, the five northern most provinces. Saigon took care of the remaining three core areas in I guess it would have been the 38th Province. So we divided it up and I had the upper half of Four Corps. David Lambertson had the southern half of Four Corps. Bill Marsh and somebody else took care of Three Corps, the area around Saigon, ten provinces, so quite a lot of territory. Then someone else did the central coast and yet another person did the central highlands.

The guy for the highlands in my time was Steve Lyne, later Ambassador to Ghana and now a Professor at Boston University. Steve did not know Vietnamese but he had good French. He would be very good for this project. He had served earlier in Cambodia and spoke Khmer and the logical place to use him would have been in the western Mekong Delta where there is a considerable Cambodian minority and where the border is very sensitive. Precisely for that reason he was not sent there. That would have been seen as messing around with the Cambodians, which Embassy Phnom Penh didn't want and we didn't want really. We didn't want to encourage the Vietnamese to hire or create any more Khmer units. So Steve covered the highlands and dealt with the Montagnard, most of whom spoke French and on principle refused to learn Vietnamese.

So that is the way it worked for awhile and I visited my first seven provinces, some of them only

once, others perhaps as many as three times, and then, after all it was a short tour, I had been there eight months, Marsh left. I was moved up to be Chief of the Unit. I inherited part of Three Corps from him. I visited most of those provinces maybe four or five times for most of them and one or two of them only once. I had supervisory duties. I was clearing the other guys' reports and I was escorting visitors more. I was sometimes going to country team meetings and so forth so I sort of was sucked up into management of a low order even before I knew the ground in Vietnam all that well.

Q: How were reports treated? You had the military making their reports and this was a time when McNamara had all sorts of criteria for making reports at various levels. Everybody was making reports. When you have a very powerful President, Lyndon Johnson who wanted to hear certain news and this was what he wanted to hear, could you talk about the dynamics in the embassy on this?

TEARE: Let me try. I'm not sure I have the best perspective. Yes, you are right of course that it was Johnson who wanted to hear news and it was McNamara who wanted to present news, and particularly statistical news. And McNamara would visit Saigon at least a couple of times a year and those would be major occasions and we would all be turned inside out preparing Briefing Papers and so forth.

Occasionally a big question would be asked such as should the United States use tactical air in support of its own and of South Vietnamese ground operations in the south? To ask the question was almost to answer it and the answer clearly was going to be yes. But I remember we all were sent to work, in fact I think we each made a special trip to a province and went around and talked to Vietnamese opinion leaders about that. I remember talking to priests and monks and schoolteachers and so forth. Essentially the attitude was, as I look back on it, well we'll tell this man what we think he wants to hear, but essentially it was we don't welcome destruction but we do want to defeat the Communists and if this is the way to do it, so be it. And that's what we reported back and that's the word that went back to Washington and very soon back there was instituted support of ground operations in the south.

I think what really counted was the highly secret NODIS message traffic that I only rarely got a glimpse of or had any input into. Ambassador Lodge and I think Taylor in between, Lodge a second time, and later Bunker, supplied weekly or more frequent notices back to Rusk and the White House that were the truly influential documents. Our stuff, our provincial reports, generally went in as attachments to Airgrams, that old hectograph on pink paper when it was classified, which it almost always was. They would take days to get typed in Saigon. They would take I suppose a couple of weeks to get to Washington by pouch and get around. They tended to be long and low level and anything but earth shaking for the most part. In retrospect, I have to think that we could not have had much influence at all with any given report. Maybe the cumulative picture that we presented as it was read and promulgated by INR and CIA in particular contributed to the relative pessimism of those organizations as against more optimistic outlooks.

Q: One thinks that we know how these things work in the military. If they tell you that you are supposed to go out and pacify a district, by God, when you report that district will be pacified,

no matter what the situation is on the ground! I mean you are expected to give a positive response. Did you find at all that your people were acting as almost Devil's Advocates or looking at the situation somewhat differently from the American military?

TEARE: Oh, absolutely. The hamlet evaluation system was tested and officially introduced during my time. That was where each hamlet was rated on a variety of criteria, given a letter grade A, B, C, D, E.

Q: Whether you slept in the town or not?

TEARE: Yes and whether the local officials did and road access and do the farmers get to market and all of that. Do they go to the fields? We were around long enough, longer than any of the military, to see a pattern. A sub-sector advisor would arrive and he would say "Good grief, this place is Dodge City, everything is messed up" and then he would work there for a few months and he would do his utmost. And, yes, you could drive a little farther or somebody would sometimes go out at night and gradually things would creep up. Of course his evaluation was riding on what he accomplished and by the end of his six-month tour he would have quite a few A and B hamlets, nobody below C probably. And then the next guy would come in and get shot at his first week on the job and say the whole thing was padded and rigged, let's get honest about this. It is all D and E, its Indian country and then this pattern would go down, things would get better in his mind and in his official evaluations the longer he was there. We were the opposite. We had no vested interest, no ax to grind.

I remember visiting one of the most obscure backwater provinces I had, Kimtung, for the first and maybe the only time. I didn't have much to compare it with except the report of a previous visit by one of my predecessors a year or so earlier. The whole U.S. side had turned over during that time. Most of the Vietnamese were still there. I talked to some of them and tried to get some idea. I came back and titled my report 'A Year Without Progress' and sent it in. A month or two later I heard from the Sector Advisor, that is the Military Province Advisor, quite a blast back taking exception to it. He had received a copy down through the MAC V chain and said look, this, that and the other thing had improved, mostly in his time, and in fact I don't think there was objectively very much difference at all. Indeed some of it was definitely backsliding, so far as I could tell, from a year earlier. But that is the only time I can think of when anyone specifically challenged one of my reports.

Q: Was the Political Section in the embassy divided up? Was there much communication there and were there camps about whither Vietnam and all that?

TEARE: I don't think so. I think in those days we were all sort of...or thought of ourselves anyway...as cynical, tough, well aware of the defects of the Vietnamese but at the same time determined to prod them into doing better.

Just as I arrived Philip Habib came on board as Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs and we had a Political Counselor, Tom Corcoran, and the units within the Section that I mentioned earlier. Lodge was the Ambassador, back for the second time, for his second tour. Bill Porter was newly arrived as Deputy Ambassador. Somebody observed in '65 or '66 that we had as

Ambassador a politician from a predominantly or heavily Catholic state and then under him a Deputy Ambassador, a Political Minister Counselor, a Political Counselor and the Chief of the Internal Unit, John Burke, all of whom were Roman Catholics themselves. That this was sort of a built-in bias in favor of, well, if Diem had been around it would have been in favor of Diem, then in favor of Win Van Kew who was Roman Catholic himself and against all the non Catholic elements and supremely so against the Buddhists of Vietnam. Including those who had gone out and immolated themselves in '63 and so forth. Certain others, notably John Negroponte, were caught up in a vague sort of way as more sympathetic toward the Buddhists, also David Engle in the Provincial Reporting Unit. I think there was even a term "Bud-symp reporting". But Negroponte, at least in later years, became identified with the forces of reaction and conservatism in this hemisphere, so I don't know how accurate that was in his case.

I think a lot of us were very skeptical about the ability of the Vietnamese, the Government side, ever to do any better than they were doing. We certainly saw their defects, the laziness, the corruption, essentially telegraphing their military operation so that the Vietcong would have plenty of time to get out of the way and no contact would occur if the Government side were lucky. At the same time I think most of us believed that the goal was a worthy one, that is keeping that country out of Communist hands. We had seen what had happened in Eastern Europe. We had seen the invasion of South Korea by the North. We knew what had happened in China and so forth. We were I guess vaguely aware of the Sino-Soviet split but world Communism was still, we thought, a monolith and Ho Chi Minh was one extension thereof and it would be better for the people of South Vietnam if the Communists never came to power. I think that is undeniable.

Q: Yes. I was there '69 to '70 and that is exactly the way I felt.

TEARE: But history began to undercut even those assumptions. May I suggest that we call it?

Q: I think we'll call it at this point. I just want to put at the end of this tape, so we can pick it up, before we leave Vietnam were there any major developments that we could put on here that we should talk about?

TEARE: Not too many because I left in '67 and was back in INR working on Vietnam by the time the TET Offensive came along. There are some other stories and anecdotes that I can toss in and would like to.

Q: Alright well do you want to just put a clue what they are or make a note to tell me?

TEARE: Why don't I make some notes?

Q: Okay, just make some notes and we'll do that. Great. Okay, we'll pick it up then.

It is the 12th of August 1998. Dick, you said you had a couple of things you wanted to mention about the Philippines, going back?

TEARE: Yes, I did, if I may. One thing that I was involved in myself quite a bit in the Consular Section in Special Consular Services Unit was work with the U.S. Military. I worked with the Navy at Sangley Point, which we still had then and at Subic Bay and the Air Force at Clark Field or Clark Air Base...CAB as the Filipinos called it.

The dependents of the U.S. Military came in on regular tourist passports with a category of visa. The Filipinos had modeled theirs after ours. For tourists it was '9A'. Diplomats were '9E' and so forth. Merchant seamen I think were '9D', a close copy of ours. They didn't want to treat military dependents as regular tourists and indeed of course they stayed longer than tourists ordinarily would. At the same time they couldn't be put to all of the strictures, requirements, that resident aliens were, mainly Chinese. So they developed a category called the '9A Special' visa for military dependents. They were good for single entry only. So whenever a military dependent wanted to travel outside the Philippines, they had to come to the embassy and get the form signed, something like an affidavit, which a courier then took over to Immigration and got them a new visa for re-entry. Some of the military spouses in particular traveled a lot of the time, made circle tours, shopping trips and so forth. So I used to sign I suppose a couple of hundred of those every week.

I also had something to do with the hospitals at all three of the bases over the registration of births. The military had its own registration certificates but a lot of people like to get the consular certificate and particularly our blue form that looked like a stateside birth certificate on top of it. So I did that and all of that was sort of interesting in light of my connections with the military at virtually every subsequent post and of course my last job in Honolulu.

The other point I wanted to recall, I think I mentioned previously, I'm sure I did, my boss Lou Gleeck, who was the consul general. He ran a good section and had a lot of time to go over to the coffeehouse, La Casa De Ore, where he picked up a lot of political gossip and polished his Tagalog and so forth. I think I said also that Gleeck played golf with Ferdinand Marcos. I don't think though that I took this to where I was going with it. That is that Gleeck studied Marcos very carefully and wrote a long biographic study of him which he compared in length and depth to a *New Yorker* profile, the *New Yorker* of the old days. He finished this document sometime while I was still there, I suppose in the spring of 1964. It was clear by then that Marcos was going to get the nomination of the Nationalistic Party having bolted the Liberals, and run for President in '65 against Macapagal.

Although the United States is universally seen as having been in bed with Marcos since day one, this was not true in fact. The preponderance of feeling in 1964, when I left and on into the next year I'm sure, was that Macapagal while not very effective was at least a known quantity, whereas Marcos was unknown and therefore to be suspicious of. Gleeck meanwhile was championing his friend Marcos and pushing this document. The Ambassador, Bill Stevenson, did not want it to go forward to Washington because it was ultimately quite favorable to Marcos and that just didn't fit with his reading. I think he didn't quite understand the difference between reporting and advocating. He thought if we sent this in we would be seen to be advocating Marcos's ascension, which nobody was really. The embassy leadership, the Station, the Defense Attaché people all seemed to be inclined toward Macapagal and I think Washington was.

Finally Bill Stevenson, the Ambassador, left and Gleeck kept working on the Chargé, Dick Service, to submit this document. Finally Service did. He sent it in as an enclosure to a very short Airgram and the Airgram simply said something like: this reflects the views of the author who is well acquainted with the subject but not necessarily the views of the embassy. That is how it got in. Gleeck seemed to believe that his friendship with Marcos and this big document that was put on file, plus his seniority because he had been promoted by this time to I guess to old O-1.... No, sorry, what had done it was that he had obtained the title of counselor of embassy for Consular Affairs, which vaulted him over all the other counselors to whom he was senior in personal rank. He was an O-2 with umpteen years. He really hoped, and he confirmed this to me in later years, that he would be made DCM when Service left in '65. In the event he was not even though he was perhaps the only person in the embassy in Manila who welcomed the Marcos' victory when it came later in '65.

So Gleeck stayed on as consul general until '69 and retired. By this time he was divorced from either wife number two or number three and later married a Filipino research assistant and had another child named Eddie-Boy, or nicknamed Eddie-Boy. Freddie was his child of the marriage I knew and it was Freddie who was the childhood playmate of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., alias Bong-Bong, who just a few weeks ago was elected Governor of the Ilocos Norte Province.

Q: Did Gleeck stay on in the Philippines?

TEARE: After retirement he did and he became, unofficially at least, the historian of the American community in the Philippines which goes way back to 1898, and he also did some stuff about American firms. I think I have three or four of his thin, little books that he gave me on a later trip somewhere in my attic probably. Okay so much for the Philippines.

Q: So we're coming back. You left Vietnam but you didn't leave Vietnam. You came back to Washington and you were in INR, is that right?

TEARE: That's right.

Q: I just want to get the dates... '67 to?

TEARE: '69 in INR and then '69 to '71 on the desk as one of two Officers doing essentially South Vietnamese internal stuff.

Q: Well let's talk about INR in '67. Was there a fairly large INR establishment devoted to Vietnam at that point?

TEARE: I suppose in relative terms yes. There were at least three of us junior Officer analysts working on Vietnam or Vietnam-Cambodia or some combination. That was not North Vietnam, either, they were across the hall. In the old days East Asia...the Far East Bureau, had an Asian Communist Affairs Office that looked after not only China but also Mongolia and North Korea and North Vietnam. The China Desk still looks after Mongolia. Above us was sort of a straw boss, Lou Sarris, a civil servant, and above him Evelyn Colbert, who was the Deputy Office

Director, I guess. And then Fred Green, an academic from Williams College who had come into government for just a couple of years, was the Director of the Office of Research and Analysis for Far East or East Asia and the Pacific.

Q: I think he taught me for awhile at Williams!

TEARE: Very possibly. A good guy. And Evelyn Colbert is a wonderful person. The problem for the analysts, and me I think, I know that to be the case with one or two of them anyway, was Sarris, our boss. Sarris was an enormously bright guy but he was a terrible manager. He should have been left as an individual analyst. He and Colbert were among those who, along with some of the people in DDI at CIA, raised the biggest questions earliest on about the likely success, or lack of it of our involvement there and they deserve a lot of credit for that. I have sometimes said since that my sojourn with Sarris was the only bad job I ever had, not because of the subject matter which continued to interest me but because he would never get around to dealing with any drafts that had to go through him. Never. He'd sit on them for weeks or months and by that time they'd lose their currency.

Of course what I didn't appreciate going into that was the premium that the intelligence business puts on being first. In the morning you had to be in there by five and publishing your morning notes to the Secretary and things like that. They had other people doing that essentially. I got in at 8 or 8:15 or whatever it was and it seemed to me that the hot stuff for the day had almost all been done by that time by other people in INR or CIA, DIA. There wasn't a lot left for the rest of us. But again what incentive I had to do bigger and longer-range projects tended to disappear because I'd never get them cleared out.

For example I remember writing a study based in part on sensitive intelligence of the personalities who were going to make up the South Vietnamese Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks. They were not all government apparatchiks...well maybe they were ultimately but a couple were Foreign Office, a couple were military. We had a fair line on the personal views and biographies of three or four of them. I put all of this together in a paper of I suppose ten or fifteen pages. I would ask Lou about it every couple of days and nothing would happen, nothing would happen. Negotiations began and this document that I thought might have been of some use to our negotiators was...I don't know what ever became of it. It certainly wasn't published while I was still there.

So I tried to get out of INR. Much as I liked Evelyn Colbert and Fred Green. I couldn't report directly to them. I had to go through Sarris to get there. I tried to get out after a year and switch to the Desk that had a vacancy and wanted me. I was not allowed to do it. Although I was told I could go off for a year of area studies at a university of my choice. That seemed like a generous offer but I wasn't interested. The family was just back, kids starting school and I didn't want to relocate to Ann Arbor or New Haven or something just for one year and then probably have to come back to Washington. So I said no thanks and the result was a second year in INR and then finally I was allowed to move to the Desk in '69.

The first year there I understudied Jim Rosenthal who was the senior guy on internal political stuff and had been the first Chief of the Provincial Reporting Unit in Saigon. Then he left in

1970 and I moved up and became the senior internal political guy. The junior one was a woman named Theresa Tull who came back from Saigon at that point. So she understudied me and I believe took over when I left.

We had a lot of frustration there but at least what we got done had some demonstrable use.

Q: I'd like to go back to when you were in INR...was there any intimation of the '68 TET attacks and all?

TEARE: I don't think so except in maybe the most generalized way. That is we had a pretty good idea that infiltration was increasing, that the North Vietnamese troops in whatever number, and that is a separate subject perhaps, were probably going to try to do something one of these days. But the idea of a spectacular, coordinated countrywide offensive, such as we saw in 1968, I don't think had really occurred to anybody. In part I think the North Vietnamese buildup was being interpreted at the time as a reaction to the very substantial introduction of U.S. combat forces. How were the North Vietnamese to deal with this? They soon learned that the way to deal with it was not to stand still and fight for ground but rather to retreat and fight in times and places of their choosing and let us be the ones exposed or surrounded in Khe Sanh; the Dien Bin Phu lesson over again, if you will.

But one of the most interest aspects and here I am dealing partly with other people's published recollections I think, is of a conference I attended as a representative of INR. In September of '67, my first trip back, I had been recruited by the East Asia Bureau, by Phil Habib in fact, to go as an escort for an election observer mission, which is yet another story. These were the elections in which Thieu and Ky became President and Vice President, respectively. I had done a lot of work while they were on the constituent assembly election of 1966 and so I was a natural for it, I guess. INR rather grudgingly let me go even though East Asia was paying expenses.

We went out with a group that included the Chaplain of the Senate, who was Erland Heginbotham's father in law, and a Rabbi and the Archbishop of San Antonio. They were about the only clergymen in the entire country who would have gone along on such a mission! We had the Governor of North Dakota, we had Senator Hughes of Iowa and a bunch of others. I was also involved a little bit with the White House on getting instructions out to the field. The White House's general idea was that the observers should be taken out and kept running around all day so that they would be exhausted when they got back to town. Some of them we were told were pretty elderly but we didn't want to say that to Ambassador Bunker who had replaced Lodge by that time because he was in his upper seventies by then.

Anyway, once out there I was asked by INR if I would stay on to participate in a major intelligence conference 'guess-timating' enemy strength. I had been with INR only three or four months at this point and had not tried to do battle order, enemy strength in particular, and didn't know much about the subject. But INR could afford to send me because they would only have to pay my way home commercially and a few days per diem. So I joined in this conference along with some people who were then or later became pretty well known. I think General Graham who later headed DIA was the J-2 of MAC V at that time. Bill Hyland and Sam Adams of CIA. I can't remember whom all else.

The big question was how many troops and cadre should we credit the Vietcong and North Vietnamese with having. The basic answer was, well, we should give our best estimate provided it didn't go higher than a given number. I think this was right at the time that Westmoreland was out arguing for an additional 200,000 Americans. I've forgotten now, I'd have to refresh my memory what our ceiling was, but the main point was that we could mix and match provided we did not go above a certain figure because MAC V, J-2, would not agree to anything higher. It didn't matter what there was evidence for or what the best minds of Washington could come up with. MAC V was going to dig in firmly. Sam Adams was the young analyst for CIA who had developed a type strength for the Vietcong infrastructure and it had postulated so many committee members, so many armed cadre, so on and so forth in a District. It multiplied that by 240 some Districts, which was the total in the country.

If you did that you got very considerable strength figures because the District for which we had the good documentation was a very healthy one. I forget now which Province, which District. But Sam championed the argument that this was a typical District structure and that if we were going to be conservative about it we should postulate that the Vietcong had something approximating this nationwide and that made quite a difference in the strength figures.

The other point was whether or not we believed in a force known as the secret guerrillas. If we did, then they added another ten or fifteen thousand to the enemy strength total. That would have put us over MAC V's unstated numerical ceiling. So there was a lot of argument back and forth about that, all of it quite new to me. I found it intellectually stimulating but also I began to see just how subject to pressure and even dishonest the intelligence business could be.

We went in as a group to see General Westmoreland to present our findings. We were waiting there in his outer office and Joe Alsop came out. He had just had a long session with Westmoreland.

Q: Joe Alsop being a Conservative columnist in the United States.

TEARE: Yes he was. And the next week in his column, I was back in Washington by that time, I saw a couple of references to very sensitive code word intelligence information and to high sources in Saigon and so forth. I am sure what happened was that Westmoreland was selectively feeding him intelligence. Anyway we did present our findings to Westmoreland and I don't think there was any blood on the carpet in front of him. I think it had all been sort of negotiated out by the other people from Washington; most of them were fencing with the MAC V J-2 and me. It is a little bit like Henry Ford and the Model T. You could have any color you want so long as it was black. Well in this case we could postulate any strength figure we wanted for the VC and NVA provided it was no more than whatever...and I think the limit essentially was whatever MAC V itself had previously estimated in the spring in the same year.

Q: It was an eye opener. The whole war, particularly under McNamara turned very statistical.

TEARE: It did. I think I told you last time my recollection of the hamlet evaluation system. Every hamlet was rated on a scale of A through E, I think. A new District Advisor would come

in, American military, find out it was no man's land and he would rate everything D and E. Then he would realize that over his six months in the job he was going to be rated on the improvement in the security situation. So a lot of hamlets went up to D and A by the end of his time. The next guy would come in. Indian country. Be horrified. All the ratings would drop again. And I may have quoted Ward Just who said that all the numbers were positive and all the numbers were irrelevant, speaking of McNamara.

Q: When about were you doing internal affairs in Vietnam, when you were in INR?

TEARE: Yes and more specifically on the Desk there was a division between internal and external and POLMIL and so forth.

Q: While you were in INR the TET Offensive happened in January and February of 1968.

TEARE: Correct, end of January.

Q: Were you able to come up with an evaluation of what this really meant in Vietnam itself?

TEARE: I don't think that what it meant in Vietnam was really the most important thing. In fact if you look at the casualty statistics, at least what was reported back to Washington, it was a serious military defeat for the NVA. They took a lot of casualties over the three or four weeks it took to clear out Hue, for example. In body count alone it was a loss for them, materiel and all that. The real change as everyone has commented, I'm sure, was psychological.

Q: You were saying the upshot was?

TEARE: The picture that the Administration had tried to paint of a winning struggle was shattered. Within weeks, by the end of March as I recall, Lyndon Johnson announced he would not run again. Bobby Kennedy had entered the race and been killed and all that. And there was the famous wise men's group, Clark Clifford had taken over as Secretary of Defense, and Phil Habib's report to them in which he told them that things were not going well. For the first time I guess Johnson's other advisors mostly lined up with Clifford and said we had to stop this.

Q: Well in a way we are coming up with two things. I mean we are looking at what I think most people could say was essentially a military defeat of the Vietcong.

TEARE: Yes, on the ground at TET.

Q: While on the ground in Vietnam. So in a way things were going well in Vietnam weren't they? The American view and all is almost a different factor. You are looking at Vietnam. Were you seeing a decrease in Vietcong activity? Do you recall?

TEARE: I don't recall specifically what we were seeing in terms of enemy activity. We did think that there were some fairly good signs of progress. One was on the electoral front. Although I am much more cynical about elections now than I was in those days. We'd had the successful one in 1966 for the Constituent Assembly and when I was back out there in '67 and it looked pretty

good in the sense that a lot of people turned out. In fact in '66 one Province reported that 103 ½ percent of all registered voters had voted! Barry Zorthian who was Public Affairs Officer at the time came around the Political Section in '66 and we were sort of celebrating the successful Constituent Assembly election and Zorthian said to Habib, "Well, Phil, it is a victory for my policy of maximum candor." And Habib said, "You mean maximum pander" to the press.

Also in '66 I had joined Phil for a background briefing at Zorthian's house, I think it was, for a bunch of American correspondents and one of them asked Phil, "Well what sort of Assembly do we see coming out of these elections? I mean is it going to be animal, vegetable, mineral, what?" That gave Phil an opening and he said, "Well, at a minimum vegetable...but we hope there are going to be some live animals." But sure 60 or 70 percent of registered voters would sometimes brave bullets and bad weather and they'd go out there and vote. But that is because they knew that that was what was expected of them. If you weren't able to prove that you had voted life might be more difficult the next time you wanted something from the government. And so in that sense and I think that continues down to Cambodia last month, elections in that part of the world are not necessarily to be taken at face value.

But we wanted things to be good and we had eleven Presidential-Vice Presidential tickets in the race in '67. Thieu and Ky had won with I think only about 35 percent of the vote. The other tickets had finished more or less in the order that any observer of Vietnamese politics would have predicted in light of the strength and reputation of the people involved. The surprise of course was the so-called peace ticket of Trum din Ziu which came in second. He had adopted the dove of peace as a symbol, clipped off a UNICEF green card. In retrospect again I would say that the vote for Ziu, although he himself was not a very reputable person, sort of a crooked lawyer with a shady history. The size of the vote he got, let's say somewhere around 20 percent was probably illustrative of war weariness and a desire for peace in the electorate, the populace. I forget who was third.

The guy I had kept in contact with, about my only regular Saigon political contact, Ha Thieu Ky of the old Diviat, or Revolutionary Diviat Party, finished fourth, which is about where he should have finished. He had ten or eleven percent of the vote.

It was all very plausible. So if you were looking at it in Political Science terms, the '67 election, like the '66 election for the Constituent Assembly, was not a bad exercise. Of course then we had a bicameral legislature in Saigon which spent most of its time arguing with each other and Thieu and Ky didn't have to pay much attention to them and didn't. So it was anything but a Westminster or Washington type democracy and nobody really claimed that it was. Well, yes, I guess we had to, but without a great deal of heartiness in our claims.

Meanwhile I had settled down in the internal job on the desk where we had to deal with a lot of things. For example the tiger cages, the revelation that the Thieu Government had perpetuated the practice of the Diem Government before it of incarcerating people in pits. That was a hard one, believe me.

Q: Tell me, what was the issue?

TEARE: Well the issue was how could the United States be supporting a government so corrupt and so cruel that it does this to its political opponents? In a nutshell. And the short answer was that it is very difficult to support such a government except that the alternative was seen as being even worse. Another incident I remember from that era was that Senator Fulbright wrote a letter to General Westmoreland who was then Chief of Staff of the Army saying would you please identify for me the request from the Vietnamese Government to which we responded by sending combat troops?

That turned out to be very difficult to do. In fact, almost impossible. The period in which we began sending troops was the period of '64, early '65, before Ky took over as Prime Minister, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee or whatever he was called. The last Prime Minister before him was Dr. Phan Huy Quat and that was the fourth or fifth government in the 18 or 22 or however months since Diem had been overthrown.

Quat was a medical doctor and he had a couple of other doctors in his cabinet which therefore became known as the Medicine Cabinet. From all the archives that I could get at in Washington, and I had no knowledge that the Pentagon papers were being put together and so forth, though I knew some of the people involved. The closest I could get was sort of a weaseling formulation suggesting that there had been an implicit request by the Quat Government during I guess the very early months of 1965 for help from the United States in fending off the Vietcong and the invading North Vietnamese. Invading as we saw it.

My draft went up the line in the East Asia Bureau and over to the Legal Advisor's Office and it went hither and yon, over to the Pentagon, and it bounced back a couple of times. Other people tried to strengthen it. I'm not sure that anybody ever came up with a satisfactory answer but I do recall hearing that Westmoreland eventually signed some sort of reply to Fulbright. I've never seen it and don't know what it says but it was a long stretch because essentially we had decided in our own interests and on the basis of our own assessment that something needed to be done to stave off collapse. So we had decided to send in troops. But we also made the point that we were there at the request of the legitimate authorities of South Vietnam. Well what request was the question and there wasn't really a totally satisfactory answer for it.

Q: You worked on the desk in '69 to '71.

TEARE: That is correct. The Office Directors in those days were first, John Burke and then Freeman Matthews, Jr. and then just at the end there, Jim Engle.

Q: Well now were we sort of scratching around trying to find good news? The TET Offensive had come and gone.

TEARE: Well we would point to such things as the fact that the government had continued to function or had restored its control in Hue and Da Nang and Quang Trach and elsewhere. That conditions were returning more or less to what they'd been before and that the Vietcong had probably only alienated a lot of people who had been sitting on the fence by their vicious tactics and so forth and so on. But I don't know how many people we convinced. Probably not very many.

In this era also we were going out and doing quite a bit of public speaking at teach-ins and other sorts of spots.

Q: Did you do any of that?

TEARE: I did some, yes.

Q: That couldn't have been fun.

TEARE: No, I didn't mind it. I was never subjected to any personal abuse and I think I tried to come across as reasonable and open-minded although certainly with a point of view. I did one at Colgate University. I did another one in some places in Iowa. I did one in Columbus, Ohio, and vicinity. We went out to several colleges. I went to Ohio Wesleyan. This was not the big time teach-in circuit. I was never up against the Berrigans or anybody like that.

No, I got a polite hearing almost everywhere and although probably not many people agreed with me.

Q: Well what was the feeling in the '69 to '71 periods whither Vietnam? I mean when you were back in Washington?

TEARE: Well as best I can recall we had this feeling that the losses of the TET Offensive period on the ground had been largely overcome. Things were back to somewhere like they'd been before. We still held some hope for improvement of the Vietnamese armed forces. At the same time we had embarked on the program of 'Vietnamization' under the Nixon Administration under which we were turning things over to them progressively. I forget when we actually began reducing troop numbers but I think certainly by '70 or '71.

Q: Around '70, I believe.

TEARE: Yes. On the other hand I don't think we had many illusions about Thieu, Ky or the political process in Vietnam.

In 1967 when I was newly back from Saigon I was put on guide duty, escort duty, for some Vietnamese legislators who had been brought to this country. By now it was '68. They had been elected in '67. We brought this over to this country. One was a guy in his sixties who had an overcoat he had bought in Paris as a student in the 1930s. It went down to his ankles.

We took them all to Annapolis and we had a cruise on the yacht of Governor Agnew. This was a few weeks before lightning struck him and he learned that he was going to be the Republican Vice Presidential nominee. Maybe I told you this story?

Q: No.

TEARE: One of the legislators came from Quang Trach, where Agnew's son, Randy, was

stationed in the Marine Corps at that time. He had brought some photos of Randy. This guy was pretty sharp. He knew he was going to meet the Governor of Maryland, got photos of his son. Randy looked pretty good out there, stripped to his waist, passing the ammunition to the next guy beside the artillery piece, so the Agnews were overwhelmed with these photos and so forth. Later of course it turned out that Randy Agnew was a homosexual and ran off with a hairdresser, a male hairdresser, and I don't think that cheered the family to the same degree.

Then we split up and my group went to Philadelphia and San Antonio and Austin and back to New York where we all met up again. They were really nice guys. Two of the three spoke pretty good English. We were riding in a cab in Austin, this was May of '68, LBJ had just announced that he was not going to run again, so I said to myself well, I'll engage this cab driver in some political conversation. These cab drivers are always good at that and these guys will get a kick out of it. So I asked him what he thought about Johnson's decision and resulting fallout from it. He said, "Son, I've known that Johnson-Connolly crowd, man and boy these thirty years, and I can tell you it don't matter whose elected in the fall, whoever gets to Washington is going to find there is not one red cent left in the Treasury. That Austin crowd have cleaned it all out!" And I said that was enough, we didn't need to hear anymore for the innocent ears of these Vietnamese politicians!

So there were little things like that happening along the way. But it was not a good democracy, the political process was not really going anywhere on the Government's side and I think everybody knew this. By '71 there was another Presidential election. I had already left by that time, I think, Ky ran against Thieu, that time, I believe. Thieu was re-elected with somebody else as Vice President and so forth.

Well I went off to Mexico City as Political Officer. It was Free Matthews for whom I had worked on the desk who'd offered me the job. And about the same time John Burke, his predecessor, who was by then DCM in Port Au Prince had offered me a job in Haiti, where I would have been Chief of the Political Section. At that point I thought Duvalier would last forever, Papa Doc, so Mexico sounded a little better for the family. So I decided to take the offer to go to Mexico.

I had been there a year and a half when the Paris Agreements were signed at the end of January in 1973 and at that point the Department brought back 44 Officers who had served in Vietnam previously, plus one guy who had not but who spoke Polish. The idea was that he would be the liaison with the Polish contingent of the International Commission on Control and Supervision that was established to monitor the Paris Agreements, originally Canada, Indonesia, Poland and Hungary. So I was one of those called back. If I had been in Haiti I don't suppose I would have because there I would have been Chief of Section or maybe the only Political Officer and could not have been spared. But from Mexico City I was. So I got back to Vietnam at the end of January 1973, right at TET in fact, five years after we passed it.

They had parceled us out. We had created instant consulates general on the shells of the MAC V and CORDS regional headquarters. We already had a consulate general in Da Nang. So we set up one at Nha Trang, a MR-2; at Bien Hoa a MR-3 and Can Tho a MR-4. I had not spent a lot of time in Central Vietnam previously so I was glad to go up there. The way it sorted out I was

deputy principal officer to Jim Engle, whom I had known for just a few weeks in Washington, the end of my time on the desk. That turned out to be a very good arrangement.

Q: Before we go into Vietnam again, you were on the desk in the spring of 1970 when there was the incursion or whatever you want to call it of Cambodia. This caused great outrage on campuses.

TEARE: It was right at the time of Kent State.

Q: There were petitions. Kent State was involved in the protest. Did that have any effect? I mean were you involved in the protests of some Officers and all that?

TEARE: No, I was not. I regarded most anything we did to Cambodia at that time as pretty legitimate. Sihanouk had been harboring the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong for years at that point. Now maybe he had no choice. That is about the best thing I ever heard in his defense. But it seemed to me that to hit them where they lived was legitimate. I knew more about, and was more disturbed by, the incursion into Laos about the same time. Operation Lang Son 719 which was more a joint enterprise, I think, in the sense that the Vietnamese were more involved. They were at the front but they would not have done it without our pushing and our air and artillery support. That one turned sour very quickly. It was generally regarded as an almost total failure and the South Vietnamese got whipped soundly and came running home in disorder.

No, maybe I was not sensitive enough politically or not bothered as much as I should have been by the duplicity of the Nixon White House. But I didn't particularly get outraged and take the Tony Lake approach on that one.

Q: I was consul general in Saigon at that time and I thought bloody good show!

TEARE: I remember demonstrators outside the Department, though, right around the D Street entrance for example as I was getting a bus to go to some other building. And of course where were teach-ins and big demonstrations here and elsewhere. I have a friend who is a Protestant Minister who came with his wife from Cleveland to participate in one of the big anti-war demonstrations of that era. They left their car in a church parking lot in the middle of town, hiked on down to the Mall and their car was broken into. I said, "Jeez, it seems to me we have some pretty big domestic problems, too, that we ought to be worrying about, not just the foreign ones."

Most of the people I knew outside Government were totally out of sympathy with the Administration. I don't think I had any friendships dissolve over it but certainly there were people, including my own mother for example, who were decidedly against Nixon. She'd hated him for many years. She was against his policies in Southeast Asia. She was quite well informed about him and had very good arguments that were very hard to rebut.

STEPHEN J. LEDOGAR
USAID Representative

Quang Tri (1965-1966)

**Interagency Study
Saigon (1966)**

**CORDS
Saigon (1966-1967)**

**Defense Department, National Military Command Center
Washington, DC (1967)**

**State Department, Vietnam Information Office
Washington, DC (1967-1968)**

**EAP, Vietnam Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1968-1969)**

Ambassador Stephen Ledogar was born in New York in 1929, and received his BA from Fordham University. He served overseas in the US Navy from 1949-1952. Ledogar entered the Foreign Service in 1959 and was posted in Montreal, Milan, Quang Tri Province, Saigon, Paris, Brussels and Geneva. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 1, 2000.

Q: You got out there in '65. You were there from '65 to when?

LEDOGAR: Early '67.

Q: Talk about getting there. You went to Saigon and they looked you over and assigned you?

LEDOGAR: I went to Saigon and reported to USOM [United States Operation Mission], which was the name for the AID field office. I was told to take the next plane and go to Quang Tri Province, which was the northernmost province in South Vietnam and included the southern half of the DMZ (De-Militarized Zone). It was rather quiet at that time. I went up there. Later on, a few weeks later, a classmate was assigned as my deputy. Most of the others in my group of FSOs were sent out as deputy province representatives.

Q: Were you in Quang Tri the whole time?

LEDOGAR: I was in Quang Tri for about a year, during which time the security situation deteriorated rapidly. But, just about the time that things were getting extremely bad in terms of security, I was pulled down to Saigon to participate in a special interagency study. It was called the Revolutionary Development Joint Task Force. The idea was to take a close up look at roles and missions and to try to recommend clear distinctions as to which agency would perform which mission. There was quite a bit of overlap among U.S. field agencies, and friction between programs. Who was to advise the Vietnamese on pacification, on psychological warfare, on public works, etc.?

Q: Let's go to Quang Tri. Could you describe Quang Tri at that time? It was right on the DMZ. Quang Tri City is the only city there.

LEDOGAR: It's about the only city, but another important feature is that about halfway north on Route 1 between Quang Tri City, the capital, and the southern half of the De-Militarized Zone, was a town called Dong Ha. It was there that one of the major national roads, Indochina Route 9, went off to the west. It went into Laos and then it turned directly south. Actually, that was a shorter way to get to Saigon from Quang Tri, because South Vietnam is shaped like a banana or a bow (convex to the east). If you went over at the very northern part of Quang Tri and took this Route 9 down south, it was like a western string to the bow and it was quicker and fewer kilometers to get to Saigon.

But on the way up into the mountains on Route 9, you came to Khe Sanh, which later became quite infamous. That was one of the districts of the Quang Tri province. There were a couple of other districts, two of them on the plains, a couple in the foothills. The whole province was relatively secure at the time I first got there, except that Route 9 had been cut and parts were in the hands of the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong. So, Khe Sanh was isolated from the capital and accessible only by air. There were several other areas in this province that were kind of rough. The famous "Street Without Joy" was along the ocean in the southern part of the province. That had been made famous by Bernard Fall writing about the French experience in Indochina in the early '50s.

Like most of the provinces, Quang Tri was mountainous in the west and then the foothills and the sandy plains are along the coast. Not a wealthy province. There wasn't much in the way of raw material there. There was coffee and some tea in the mountainous area, some highland rice, mostly lowland rice in the flatlands along the side of Route 1. Mostly Buddhist. Some Catholic. In a way, Quang Tri depended on the city of Hué, which was the capital of the next province to the south. Hué was an old time city where there were universities and cultural attractions and so forth. Quang Tri was very much a backwater.

Q: What was the situation along the DMZ?

LEDOGAR: We still had to respect the demilitarized concept. The friendly half of this DMZ was one of Quang Tri province's districts, so Quang Tri had to have a civilian province chief, unlike every other province in South Vietnam which had military chiefs. There were no military forces in the DMZ, but there were police. They were, maybe, paramilitary. They carried machine guns, not just pistols and clubs. But there was not much population there. Each side of the river which formed the border had a flagpole, and the two flagpoles were getting taller and taller and the flags were getting bigger and bigger. Both North Vietnam and South Vietnam would blare propaganda back and forth at each other across a river with smashed railroad and automobile bridges lying in it. So, there wasn't much purpose in going up there.

Q: You didn't have an American military up there.

LEDOGAR: We had American military advisors to the South Vietnamese (ARVN) units that

were stationed there. There were considerable South Vietnamese forces in Quang Tri province. There were three battalions. There was one up beyond Khe Sanh. There was a U.S. Special Forces team that had so-called mercenaries (native Montagnard recruits) at Khe Sanh itself. There were two battalions in closer to Quang Tri. Each district had advisors to the district chief and his district forces, and that would require a small unit of U.S. military advisors.

Q: Was there much concern at that time, the time you were in Quang Tri, about infiltration through the DMZ?

LEDOGAR: The strict answer to your question is, during the time I was there, it went from very little concern to outright North Vietnamese invasion right through the DMZ in that one year. But in the beginning, Quang Tri province was being bypassed by the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which ran down through Laos at that latitude. The North Vietnamese infiltration was further south through Laos and into the so-called Highlands of South Vietnam's II CORPS. That's where the roughest part was prior to 1966. The United States Marines when they arrived in country were assigned to I CORPS or the northern five provinces, and headquartered in Danang. These All-American units were building up during my time, but we still had U.S. Army officers as advisors to the regular South Vietnamese units and also to the district forces.

Q: Before the outright invasion, what was your job?

LEDOGAR: It was to oversee and dispense U.S. development programs and materials in cooperation with the province chief. There was cement. There was roofing. There were pigs and corn. We had medical teams that worked in various places, sometimes setting up shop just to do a series of operations like on hare-lip kids. We had programs in public health, public works, agriculture. We had a couple of guys on my team who ran around helping farmers deal with animal diseases and other kinds of agricultural extension services to... In a sense my job was making sure AID kept our provincial warehouse fully stocked, and then working with the province chief to help empty it out and get stuff out to the various programs. That was a lot of work. But also, you went around as an advisor to him. I traveled a lot with the province chief. As I said, he was a civilian because one of his districts which was in the DMZ had a civilian chief, unlike the rest of South Vietnam. But we always traveled with a military escort. When moving about with an escort I always had a weapon handy, so as not to be an unnecessary burden to the escort if we got into a firefight. My deputy, Richard Brown, myself, and one or two other civilian officials lived in a reasonably nice house on the northern edge of Quang Tri City. We had two bodyguards outside the house at night. I had an M-1 carbine that stayed in my bedroom at night and in my vehicle when my driver was on duty. I also had a Belgian 9 MM handgun that lived in my attaché case.

Q: What was your impression of the province chief?

LEDOGAR: I think he was a moderately competent fellow. He was probably skimming off a little bit at the edges, but I would not call him corrupt, using the criteria of the rest of the country. He was quite conscientious and courageous. Unfortunately, he didn't speak much English.

Q: Was he from the area himself?

LEDOGAR: Yes, he was, but that brings up a phenomenon that was one of the major problems of U.S. experience in Vietnam. Going back into the history of the French experience, after the border was drawn between North Vietnam and South Vietnam and the DMZ was established, there was a period of time when the border was open to whomever wanted to travel north or south. The Catholics, especially the educated Catholics, especially the Frenchified Catholics from the north, came down in hundreds of thousands to the south, recognizing that there was not much future for them with the Communist Viet Minh administration in the North. A small number of Communist cadre were brought from the south to the north for training and to form the nucleus of the guerrilla forces to be reintroduced back to the south. But of the northerners who came down, they were of a higher social class for the most part than the average southern farmer. They had an accent that was quite harsh to the southerners. They had a certain arrogance and sense of superiority. They quickly came into leadership positions. They filled up the army and many of the government positions. So, you had the phenomenon of the battle for the hearts and minds of the Southern refugees and the farmers. The local senior military officers of the ARVN spoke with a harsh northern dialect. They tended to treat farmers like imbeciles. At nighttime, the local Viet Cong guy who had training in the north came into the village and was one of them. He spoke their dialect and was a farm kid himself. So, you had this very difficult circumstance.

Q: Had we reached the point where there was a rather elaborate system of reporting on the American part about the pacification effort in villages and districts?

LEDOGAR: Yes, that was being codified when I got there. It was being abused and that was really scandalous. Our gung-ho leaders in Saigon designed reporting forms where you had to be objective and check boxes. They would read, "How is security in X village? Your choices were "much better," "a little bit better," or "about the same." So there was no box to say "This place has gotten worse" or "This problem has gotten worse." We were coloring maps blue at times, meaning secure for political reasons. This was true especially when American military forces started operating themselves, and not just advising South Vietnamese forces. In a way you had to have a certain amount of understanding. The American forces would mount an operation, go in, clean out some valley, and at the end of the day, they would stand holding the ground, and there would be 100 dead North Vietnamese young men and 10 dead Americans; the U.S. commander, as far as he understood things, had won. He had just won that battle. This was the problem of the entire war. Then the helicopters come and he returns to base. It comes time to write the report and he says, "Color that valley blue. We just pacified it." They didn't do a damn thing. All they did was go in, have a battle, and kill more folks than they lost. But as soon as they left, the place belonged to the Viet Cong again. That went on over and over again in that province, in the other provinces, and throughout the entire country. We never could understand that we were winning the battles but losing the war. We never could understand that a body count of ten dead Viet Cong to one American killed was perfectly acceptable to the Communist side. Pretty soon, there would be no more Americans. There were a whole lot of mistakes we made of this kind. I stayed with Vietnam for eight years. I saw and heard and participated in and was involved at policy levels and defended our policy in Vietnam for a long period of time. I still haven't resolved my doubts, except I believe our cause was just, but our grasp was faulty.

Q: Did you get any feel about how the central government in Saigon was taking hold down at the district and village level?

LEDOGAR: Yes. It was not doing very well. That became increasingly clear. One of the things that was a constant problem and became a very real crisis in I CORPS was that the radical Buddhist clergy in Saigon started this terrible movement against the central government, and they started exposing corruption and mismanagement. They caused the government entities in the northern provinces to separate from Saigon control. So, we had the circumstance there where we Americans were advising in the CORPS area in the northern provinces, but the folks who we were advising were no longer connected to Saigon. Of course, that meant that their troops were not being paid and all kinds of other problems. We had to deal with the Buddhist clergy. There were all kinds of problems that were involved.

Q: On your part, how did you work with the Buddhist clergy? Were they approachable?

LEDOGAR: They were approachable, but they were a little bit difficult. They had chips on their shoulders and there was a good reason for that. Because of U.S. legislation and the nature of our aid programs, we were prohibited from giving any U.S. aid for religious purposes unless it clearly was consistent with one of our programs and only incidentally attached to a religious institution. The Catholic church - and here the Catholic clergy was very smart - would say, "We want to build a health clinic. Can you help us?" And we were allowed to do that, provided they didn't divert any of the materials to the church. The Buddhists would see them and come in and say, "We want to build a pagoda." We would have to explain to them, "Build a health clinic, I can help you out. Build something that's consistent with something social and we can help you out, but I can't help you build a religious building." They'd say, "See, you favor the Catholics." This went on over and over again. I don't know why we were unable to make this distinction, but we were seen by the Buddhist clergy as favoring the Christians.

Q: With the village and district leaders, did you have any particular control or would you just keep an eye out and say, "Let's try to deal with this or make them a little more aggressive in making programs work?"

LEDOGAR: Well, first of all, I and members of my AID team visited districts as often as we safely could. We tried to work through the American military advisors at district level. For the most part they understood the programs and tried to make them work. Also, we dispensed material "goodies" through the district teams. I would say that it was a totally engrossing 24 hour a day job. You lived and breathed every aspect of the problem. You had nothing else to do in this rural province. There was essentially nothing else. Furthermore, it was so far away from Saigon that it was difficult to go down there on weekends. I found out that by the time I would get to Saigon on a Saturday, the American AID employees stationed there were running out of the building to go off to Bangkok to be with their families. It was terribly annoying to come in from the field and find out that you were working that weekend and nobody else was. So, it was kind of a "we-they" attitude that developed between the AID people in the field and the headquarters folks.

Back to the field again, a lot of the work that an AID field representative did, if he were wise,

was with the resident senior U.S. military advisor. This was the officer usually around lieutenant colonel level who was in charge of the compound where all the U.S. advisors to the local Vietnamese units had their bases and where the advisors would come for a shower and a hot meal at the end of the week. If you were lucky, you had a fellow who would pay attention and who would motivate his district advisors to work with AID programs. But many of our military folks were really not terribly skilled in dealing with the citizenry. They felt they were in a hostile environment and couldn't trust any of these natives. That was a big problem, the inability to distinguish friend from foe. There was not a very high sensitivity about the negative impact that certain military actions can have on the livelihood of farmers. Timber was extremely precious and soldiers would come along and grab major pieces of wood from houses to build bunkers. Well, that's the backbone of the farmer's house. All kinds of things like that. You spent a lot of time trying to influence the American military and help them understand. At the same time, I was in a province that spoke a different dialect than I had been trained in, so I found that my advantage in Vietnamese was not all that great. I spoke French to the province chief, but his French was not famous.

I can recall one time when we AID advisors in the northern five provinces were pulled in by the regional AID director to Danang to meet with a visiting U.S. congressional delegation that included Senator Ted Kennedy and Senator John Tunney of California. We had been briefed to make sure that during the course of this reception, our province chiefs each had a chance to speak privately with each of the Senators. I brought my chief over to see Senator Kennedy, and he with his bad back said, "Come on, let's go over here and sit down." We sat down on the couch. The Senator knew how to use an interpreter. The province chief got all flustered and he couldn't speak French all of a sudden. Kennedy was trying French but he was not doing very well. So, the chief said, "Ledogar here can speak Vietnamese. He'll interpret for me." I panicked. That's a tough job. But Kennedy sat himself in the middle facing the chief there and I was back over here, which is the proper setup. Fortunately, the questions remained general. Kennedy said, "Mr. Province Chief, tell me what your biggest problems are." So, the chief started rattling off a mile a minute and I'd pick up a few words like 'security' or 'refugees.' But, I knew his problems as well as he did. I was his advisor. In fact, I'd try to focus him more intently on some of his problems and less on others. So I let him go on for a while. Then I spilled it all out as though he had said it all. I do remember that the Senator was quite amazed and complimented me after this interview on how well I spoke the language. Well, it was a sham. I picked up a few words and using clues and my knowledge of the general situation just elaborated.

The war was an all-engrossing situation and one could clearly see things were deteriorating. U.S. troops were moving in. They had not yet come into Quang Tri province. The Marines were assigned to I CORPS by this time, so we were still working with the U.S. military advisors, who were Army. But there were signs that the North Vietnamese, taking advantage of the Buddhist struggle movement, were beginning to infiltrate major units directly across the DMZ. Indeed, shortly after I was pulled down to Saigon, all hell broke loose. They had several big battles around the DMZ between the U.S. Marines and the North Vietnamese.

Q: These were American Marines. While you were there, a place like Khe Sanh and all that, which later in '69 or so became quite a hotspot, was that country up in the hills pretty much Viet Cong/North Vietnamese territory?

LEDOGAR: Not downtown Khe Sanh and not the military base or the airfield. So, we would fly in there - and I did several times - and we could visit the district headquarters and the local units, the regional forces, and the Montagnard units that the U.S. Special Forces team was training and really commanding. But without heavy military escort, you couldn't go very far from that airport. You could not go back down Route 9 to Dong Ha at that time. The first of the U.S. Marine operations which did occur while I was still living in Quang Tri was exactly to try to clear that route. They brought a reinforced battalion to Khe Sanh, flew them in and had them march the road down eastward towards the coast, the old French national route. Of course, they fought their way through and the Communists closed in behind them. That was the first operation in the province by main U.S. forces. It was called "Operation Virginia."

Q: Did we have a fairly elaborate setup along the DMZ to pick up who was coming across?

LEDOGAR: I don't think so, but all I would get was processed intelligence reports. I'm not sure how they were gathered. We had what were called LRRP [long range reconnaissance patrols]. These so-called 'lurps' were made up of mixed U.S. and Vietnamese forces. They would have random places to land and then they would patrol in patterns around those places. They picked up quite a bit of intelligence. Then I didn't know how much was being gotten by signal intelligence nor how much was being gotten by other sources. But I think that it became quite clear that main force North Vietnamese units were moving into the province through the DMZ. That became very vivid when, shortly after I was pulled down to Saigon, there were great big battles that occurred between the U.S. Marines right there in Northern Quang Tri province. We called them "Operation Hastings" and "Operation Prairie." Clearly, the North Vietnamese were coming right through the DMZ.

Q: By the time you left Quang Tri after about a year, I take it you were not very optimistic about how the government rule and pacification was taking place?

LEDOGAR: No, I saw a year-long downward trend throughout the area. On the other hand, U.S. forces were just beginning to be engaged, and we were seeking main force contact in order to try to get away from this guerrilla hit and run sort of stuff where we were not doing very well. One of the metaphors I used at that time was that it was like a master surgeon was advising a local surgeon, but the patient on the operating table was getting worse and was going to die. Maybe the advisor ought to take the scalpel. We were going to have to solve the basic security problem ourselves, and not try simply to advise the South Vietnamese forces.

Q: In '66, when did you come down to Saigon?

LEDOGAR: It was '66. It was approximately June.

Q: You were in Saigon from when to when?

LEDOGAR: For about six months. I still was technically the AID province representative on loan to the Saigon Embassy for this study. It was to be overseen by the Deputy Ambassador who then was Bill Porter. He commissioned an interagency study team that included representatives

from each of the U.S. agencies involved in field operations. Where they could, they tried to get someone who was from another agency on loan to the agency that was contributing someone. So, I was a State Department officer on loan to AID, so I came down as the representative of AID on this. There was another guy in our group who was a USIS officer who was on loan to the Embassy. They kind of got people who had more than one discipline, allegiance, or point of view.

Q: What were you looking at?

LEDOGAR: We had a license to hunt that was unlimited. We were looking at the entire effort. We had resources put at our disposition - helicopters and other means of transportation - and a proper introduction that would tell anybody all the way up to a two or three star general that we were people working for the Ambassador and they should answer our questions. We were trying to find out "How do you see your task? What are its limits?" Where there were two organizations - let's say one from USIA (U.S. Information Agency) and one from the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) - who were both trying to run cadre programs, one for information purposes, the other for security programs, we sought to identify how their roles and missions overlapped or left gaps. Was there a good division of labor or could we make a clearer line or could we assign the responsibility to one group and leave the other free to do one of their other assignments? But we were looking not only at the U.S. units but also at the South Vietnamese units. So, were the South Vietnamese rangers so ruthless that they were causing more people to side with the Communists than they were killing Communists? In other words, were they part of the problem, as seemed to be the case? They were a wild bunch who were given to terrible behavior. It was like 16th century mercenary forces who after they had finished the killing would go on looting and rampaging and raping, and they had no connection whatsoever with the people in that area. Some pretty tough recommendations came out of this. In our group was Daniel Ellsberg, who was then a hawk. He was borrowed from Ed Lansdale, who had a special mission there in pacification in connection with Lansdale's famous work in the Philippines. Ellsberg, of course, later became a famous anti-war dove, and infamous leaker of the "Pentagon Papers."

Q: That's right. One of the problems that everyone who has dealt with the American military, particularly coming out of the non-military side, is that the reports tend to be either quite optimistic or "we can do the job" or "the job is getting done" or of this nature. I think that causes a problem because you tend not to see how the situation actually is on the ground.

LEDOGAR: That's true. Part of it is cultural. It's the "can do" optimism and the "we'll prevail," sort of football spirit that has virtue but sometimes lacks in the sophistication that is going to help you uncover some of your basic problems. We also had a phenomenon that was pernicious in that Robert Komer had established himself as the special assistant to President Johnson for the conduct of the war, and was trying to run everything out of Washington. All reports were directed to the White House. Then Komer was suddenly, after my time in Quang Tri province, sent out to Vietnam to be in charge of the pacification program. He then gathered all reporting lines directly to himself in Saigon, so Washington suddenly was totally cut out. Then we had these new reporting forms where it was impossible to report lack of progress, because you could only comment on how well we were doing. They were called "progress reports." There was no way that you could squeeze in *lack* of progress or deterioration.

There were a number of structural mistakes of that sort that we were making in Vietnam, where we were kidding ourselves. When you look back on it, we never figured out what the other side did with its wounded. The other side prevailed in that conflict and never flew a single combat air sortie. They had some logistical sorties with their helicopters up and down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but in country we never had any combat sorties. Folks who were bombing the north ran into trouble with MIGs, some of which were flown probably by Russians or Chinese. There were an awful lot of mistakes, and yet as I look back on it - and for a number of years after my eight year stint on Vietnam affairs, I kind of blanked it all out and tried to forget the whole thing, figuring nothing was going to be sensible for years to come and just didn't bother reading and analyzing the early books written about the U.S. experience in Vietnam.

Q: In a way, it's helpful to capture now that it's been percolating for some time, but also to capture how we saw it at that time. What was the feeling about the advantages and disadvantages and whither should we go about the introduction of main line American troops into the battle as opposed to trying to beef up the ARVN?

LEDOGAR: I think we were doing this at the same time. The South Vietnamese were very much in favor of working with American main forces because with the U.S. troops came all kinds of support, particularly air support, logistics support, artillery, transportation, and so forth, and all of the communications that were involved with the above. And yet there was a dependency that was developing. I'm not saying I could see this at the time I was in Quang Tri, but I can't separate it all because I spent so much time focused on this. But a dependency was being built up and also a fear on the part of the South Vietnamese nationalists that the Americans were at some point going to walk away from the war, which we did. That becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. I could see that even back when I was in province, that many South Vietnamese who would have a natural inclination to be friendly were very leery of being seen too close to the Americans because of the potential consequences if what eventually did happen happened. So, you would get a cold shoulder or some withdrawal if you crossed somebody's threshold. They wanted to make it clear that you were there at your choice and not at their choice.

Then an American civilian in the provinces couldn't help but have very close contact with the U.S. military advisors, who worked hand in glove with their district chiefs. You would hear the advisors' stories and frustrations and how they'd think they would be making progress and all of a sudden they'd have a setback. They thought the South Vietnamese guy they were working for was clean and then they'd discover that he had his hand in the till, or that he was being professional when the Americans were around, but he was being a tyrant and not taking care of his own troops when their backs were turned.

I saw cases where there was torture going on and the U.S. military would let their opposition to torture be known and then would sort of withdraw from the scene, but where could they go? They couldn't travel alone. They had to travel with the military unit they were with. One day I remember flying into a rough area with the province chief. It was a South Vietnamese operation in which they had just caught the Viet Cong district counterpart and the Viet Cong guy was being worked over by his captors, but the American captain and his assistant or first lieutenant were standing over in the corner. They made it clear to me that they had professed to their

counterparts their objection to torture, but what could they do? They had to walk out with the South Vietnamese troops later on. Even an ARVN general came in and really lost face because he got so provoked by the obstinacy of this prisoner that he took his general's baton, took a swipe at this guy and broke his stick over his head. There was total frustration. There we were, in a circumstance which encapsulated the whole structure. It was extremely vivid... It was all hanging out.

Just to carry that scene further in order to give you an example of some of the things that we would run into: At the end of the morning which included this torture incident, the province chief and I caught a helicopter back to the province headquarters because the general from Hué was officially visiting us. There was a lunch that the province chief put on for the general and I was there.

Q: We're talking about a Vietnamese general.

LEDOGAR: Yes, the one who had cracked his stick over the captured Viet Cong leader's head. About the time that the dessert came, the general and the province chief were talking about how useless it was to try to extract information from a hard-core Viet Cong, so right there the general ordered the captor's assassination. That was the sort of thing that happened. What can you do? He said, "I want that guy killed." Now, all this was in Vietnamese and I couldn't understand everything, but clearly they were arguing about the pros and cons of continuing torture. The general said, "He'll never talk. We're never going to get anything sensible out of him."

And yet on another day, we would confront atrocities on the other side. This one day we got a call early in the morning to go into a remote friendly town that had been hit by the Viet Cong in the night. We had to go overland because of the probability that the road was mined, and with a military escort. All of the local popular forces, the good guys, that were unfortunate enough to have been captured had been assassinated. This wild grieving was going on. The Vietnamese have professional grievors that are employed by families to really do the heartwrenching wailing. Just as though we might have singers at a funeral, they have grievors. The bodies were laid out there and... There was one case where the Viet Cong had come into the hooch of a woman who was blind and she had two or three children. But she happened to be the wife of a South Vietnamese policeman. The Viet Cong just sprayed the whole room with machine gun fire, killing the children, because she was married to somebody on the other side. She was wounded, but she was going around blind trying to find out what had happened to her kids. She couldn't see. This was not every day, but there were so many of these heartwrenching experiences that you could not help but be caught up in it all. One impression cascading in on another one.

The local representative of the CIA's overt program, which was called the "Revolutionary Development Cadre Program," a predecessor to CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support), had ways of getting bags of Vietnamese money to support his programs so that he was able to meet the cash payroll for his folks. I had one particularly bad circumstance. Saigon's payrolls were late for the South Vietnamese local military forces. We would have serious defections if we couldn't get some sort of payroll through to some regional forces. This CIA guy loaned me sufficient Vietnamese money to give to the district chief to pay his troops for whatever the pay period was. All I had to give him was a hand receipt. That's the kind of stuff

that was going on there. He later was reimbursed. He had “walk-around” money enough to advance the pay of a full company of local forces.

Of course, we were dependent on the CIA’s Air America for our air transport because that was the only way to go back and forth from Quang Tri to Danang or to Saigon. That was exciting. You’d get shot at every now and then.

You had sort of a rich life as a field operator. It was not your typical Foreign Service post. I had a good friend, an FSO and former language school classmate who was assigned at that time to a more peaceful province in the South. He came up to Quang Tri and visited me and my deputy and spent a day with us. That happened to be a day where all hell broke loose. AID managed to get me an airplane for the day so that my team and I could visit an outlying district. We ran into a roadblock on the way to the airport. Then we got into an airplane that flew into bad weather and nearly crashed into a mountain. We landed in Khe Sanh, did our business, started back, and then got lost because of the bad weather. We had to divert to Danang. But we had with us everybody in the Quang Tri U.S. province team. We even had our doctors with us. It was not very often we had a plane to get up to Khe Sanh. So, I had to get them all back to Quang Tri province from Danang, and that meant borrowing the regional bus and driving back, which was a sporting course, especially since it was toward the end of the day. From Danang, we went up over the Pass of the Clouds on Route 1, across the mountains. We actually had an automobile accident on the way, so everything was thrown in. This was the road from Danang up to Hué. We got shot at south of Hué, but no one was hurt. We got into Hué, and by this time it was too late to go all the way to Quang Tri, so we had to spend the night in the city. My visitor and I were invited to the residence of the U.S. consul in Hué. I remember being served a martini there by a white gloved waiter. Here was this absurd thing. We were being shot at and nearly crashing into a mountain and all sorts of difficulties during the course of the day but by cocktail time, we were back with good old Mother State Department in a decent residence. My friend from further on South got the impression that we in Quang Tri lived that way every day.

Q: Who was that?

LEDOGAR: Desaix Anderson.

Q: Who was the consul in Hué at the time?

LEDOGAR: I think it was Sam Thomsen.

Q: After you finished this study of about four months, what happened to it? What were you all pushing towards?

LEDOGAR: I was pushing to get back to my province, where the reports were very bad, because by that time major contact had developed between the U.S. Marines and the North Vietnamese, who were coming straight across the border. This was important, heavy main force combat and not guerilla warfare in any way. But the U.S. authorities started a move, of which our study was one of the first steps, to unify all of the U.S. civilian operations that had to do with field operations. In the meantime, the U.S. military command in Vietnam, like any big headquarters

operation was divided into departments - the J-1, J-2, J-3, etc. J-33 (the field support and sub-section of J-3) - was renamed Revolutionary Development Support [RDS]. That was the then current euphemism for pacification. On the civilian side, we were working towards the unification of civilian operations, so that the overt CIA cadre operation, the USIA field operation, the AID operation, and a couple of others would be brought together - even the psychological warfare units of the U.S. Army or the U.S. military would be spun off to USIA and all would be brought together into what was to be termed the Office of Civil Operations (OCO). I was offered a good job in OCO as part of a package that would have had me sign on for another two years in Vietnam. The answer to the question is that I was not released to go back to Quang Tri province and my former assignment. In fact, they started to look for my replacement there. I did go out, pack up, and said goodbye, but by this time I had become one of the guys in a large residence in Saigon working towards the establishment of OCO. But before the OCO really got established, the authorities decided to take integration one step further: to unify all U.S. pacification efforts in Vietnam.

The CO of OCO and the RDS of the military side were merged and became CORDS, which is bringing together all the civilian and military programs that had to do with the pacification program. This was all under Robert Komer, who was brought from the White House out into the field. Later, it was Colby, later director of the CIA, who was the head of the CORDS program. The advisors in the field were to be unified and instead of having an AID advisor and a MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) advisor, there would be a CORDS advisor that could be either a military or civilian officer. Staff would be integrated. So, I was working on that and some other issues in Saigon at our headquarters and then I was sent to CINCPAC (Commander in Chief, Pacific Command) headquarters in Hawaii for a week-long RDS conference. By this time, it was December 1966. At that time, two things happened. One was a young lady whom I had known and gotten very serious about came out to Honolulu from New York and we met and hit it off again. Then I had a little bit of annual leave coming and we flew back to New York together. I arrived a few hours after my father had died suddenly. That was a bit of a jolt. Since he was in the private practice of law and I was, at least on paper, a lawyer, I thought I could be of use in settling his affairs. The combination of these two events led me to answer the offer of a promotion in Saigon that, thanks very much, but I was just not inclined to re-up. So, I went back out to Saigon and finished up my regular tour there and collected my stuff. I took advantage of a USIA invitation to go the rest of the way around the world and stopped in Milan, Italy, where I had been posted before and could speak to the Vietnam situation in Italian. That and a couple of other public affairs assignments enabled me to go back to New York westward out of Saigon.

Q: What was the reaction you were getting in Milan and elsewhere where you were talking about this? Had it reached the point where people were anti what we were doing or was there still a question?

LEDOGAR: Mostly still questioning at that time. But our allies were beginning to become quite alarmed. I really left Vietnam quite early in '67. Of my original twenty month assignment, I spent only a little more than a year operational as an AID province representative in peace. Then about three or four months was in this "how to win the war" special commission. And then I had a bunch of odd jobs around Saigon and headquarters. By February or March of 1967 I was back in Washington.

After my posting with AID in Vietnam I was assigned by the Department to be a State Department representative in the Pentagon's National Military Command Center [NMCC]. At that time, the Department kept manned, 24 hours a day, a desk for a mid-level State Department representative in the NMCC, always ready to give political advice if called upon. This was a rotational watch. It was a curious job. The Department of Defense in reciprocation had a field-grade military officer on 24 hour watch at that time in the State Department command center, always ready to give military advice. But with a war raging, the State Department needed more military advice than the Pentagon needed political advice. What we State reps at NMCC wound up doing was really supporting the military guy in the State Department. He needed to have someone to gather potentially politically sensitive military information and material and we would pouch it over to him every couple of hours; he was the one who would interpret regularly, or on demand, the military developments of the war for the Secretary of State. So, we were not doing an awful lot to directly support the military authorities but rather helping the State Department through the military rep. I learned quite a bit about how the U.S. military operates, but it was not a terribly challenging or satisfying assignment.

Q: Did you get any feel for the military attitude from the Pentagon towards the Vietnam War?

LEDOGAR: Oh, yes. That became quite clear. What everybody has sensed and written about was the frustration with the hobbles and the restrictions that were imposed by the Congress, the White House, and other civilian authorities on the conduct of the war. You could just feel the frustration and resentment that the problem was not being turned over to professionals who could use their own judgement as to how to prevail. That was especially clear in the selection of bombing targets and was exacerbated by the fact that we were losing aircraft and pilots in powder puff, militarily ineffective attacks on insignificant targets, and yet were not permitted to hit strategically important targets or ones close to centers of power lest there be a possibility of hitting many civilians or a Russian or a Chinese ship in Haiphong Harbor. That was quite clear. At the same time, I witnessed the Pentagon's frustration with the fact that the U.S. military authorities in country did not seem to succeed in locating and closing with enemy main forces in a decisive fashion. There was a Pentagon frustration at the inability to come to grips with the problem. Of course, that's where the North Vietnamese leadership was brilliant. They would strike and melt away. They would cause significant U.S. casualties and there was no significant outcome otherwise.

Q: You were doing this from '67 to when?

LEDOGAR: I only did NMCC for about six months in '67, from roughly March to October. I was married while I was in this job. I can't remember exactly how much longer after that, but I was then suddenly yanked out, which seemed to be my fate at the time, to help in a special new unit that was being created in the Department's Bureau of East Asian Affairs. It was called the Office of Vietnam Information. We were a group of Foreign Service officers who had the responsibility of essentially following the U.S. congressional debate on Vietnam. We looked for misinformation and knowledge gaps, and tried to identify Congressmen we thought ought to know more about the subject than they apparently did. We would then offer information to them in the form of briefings or in some cases draft whole speeches. Also, we would support friendly

Senators and Congressmen who were well disposed to U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia with information and articulation. That included knocking down arguments that we regarded as fallacious or ill-founded, or not well-reasoned, and so forth. A very touchy operation!

Q: In a way, government departments aren't supposed to lobby Congress.

LEDOGAR: Right, but we were doing it. Our product was not often transmitted directly. It was sent to the White House where the White House congressional liaison folks would flog it to the legislators involved. It was quite clear that at times there were quids pro quo in terms of things that were of interest to the particular Congressman; so much so that after a number of months of this activity, the office of Vietnam information was probably the only group in the history of U.S. bureaucracy that ever recommended its own demise. My colleagues and I could see the handwriting on the wall and the beginning of Congressional resentment. People were starting to say, "Hey, wait a minute. What's going on here? We were just informing ourselves about the legislation!" Then we got counterpressure through the White House from the Senate to say "Get out of here." We were disbanded. There were only about five of us. But that curious activity took up the rest of '67, and into January of 1968.

In '68, I was assigned to the Vietnam Desk. At that time, it was headed by John Burke. Phil Habib was the Deputy Assistant Secretary to whom we reported. Bill Bundy was the Assistant Secretary. The desk was called the Vietnam Working Group then.

Q: You did this in early '68.

LEDOGAR: In fact, almost all of '68.

Q: '68 was an interesting time. You got in on it just in time, didn't you?

LEDOGAR: I got in on it just in time for a politically pivotal year, mind you. I was then still fairly recent with experience in-country. Less than a year after a wide-ranging 20 month tour in Vietnam, I was assigned in the Vietnam Working Group to the pacification desk. When the Tet offensive occurred in late January or early February '68, General Wheeler, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was assigned by the president to go out and assess what happened. Two places on his aircraft were given to the State Department. I was identified by Phil Habib as his spear carrier. I went out on what became an historical mission. We flew out on February 23rd after the Tet offensive, which we had watched, as the rest of the world did, on television, including the Viet Cong attack on the U.S. Embassy. Since I was in the Working Group, I was on the task force that was set up in the Operations Center all during that night as the Tet experience was developing, so we were fairly close to what was going on.

Habib took me along on the Wheeler trip, I believe, because I had recent experience in-country and it was a broad experience. It was not just one province. I had traveled the entire country in this roving roles and missions study.

So, we went out to Vietnam on this VIP plane, on which the general had 12 military staff plus a doctor. Phil and I were the only two civilians on the plane. I didn't have very much to do on the

way out. But Phil had said to me that as soon as we landed - and we were on a high priority mission - he wanted me to get out of Saigon, go out to the field, and go see as many of my old buddies all around the country so that I could and find out from them what happened. He would take Saigon, where he had been political counselor, and work with the leadership. I had a helicopter at my disposal. That's what I did. I choppered around, two days up north and one down south in the delta. Actually, each night, we came back to overnight in Saigon, but I went to perhaps fifteen different provinces. I couldn't get into Hué because the battle was still going on there. But I had a lot of buddies who were still in the Delta. I went to Ben Tre, where it had been claimed "we had to destroy the city in order to save it," and all of that stuff. Of course that turned out to be a reporter's phrase, not that of a U.S. army major. I really learned what I could through the observations of people whose judgement I respected. They were for the most part Foreign Service officers who were still in-country. Most of the U.S. military I had known had rotated out.

The situation around Saigon was still so tenuous that after our chores in the country we all had to make our way out of Saigon by small aircraft to Bangkok, and that's where the big plane waited for General Wheeler and the rest of us to gather. We went back to Washington via Hawaii. We had another civilian on the way home, Bob Komer, the U.S. pacification czar, who was pretty exhausted and dismayed at the really unexpected blow that had been inflicted on the U.S. and South Vietnamese by the Tet offensive.

Curiously, official U.S. military judgement about the Tet offensive was not too far wrong: in military terms, the Tet offensive was a success for South Vietnam. An enormous number of Viet Cong cadre were killed. They surfaced and came running out saying, "You're liberated" and they would get stoned or clubbed to death by the citizenry. They were not as popular as they thought they were. They sacrificed a huge number of South Vietnamese indigenous Communist cadre and guerrillas in this effort to strike everywhere at the same time. But unfortunately the damage had been done by some very low level Viet Cong actions with very high visibility. U.S. television network cameras were focusing from the outside watching the U.S. Embassy being attacked over the shoulders of the attackers. The impression was that these guys were in the ascendancy everywhere.

Q: As it turned out, they didn't even get in to the Embassy. I have an interview with Allen Wendt, who was inside.

LEDOGAR: As a matter of fact, Phil Habib came into the State Department Operations Center the night of the Tet offensive and said, "Has anybody telephoned the Embassy?" We were standing around and saying, "Good heavens, we never thought of that." "Well, get them on the line." We got the duty officer Allen Wendt, who incidentally had been the officer on assignment in 1964 to the State Department Office of Personnel, who had been put in charge of selecting the original State Department guys who were sent to AID. I just met Allen yesterday and some of these memories flooded back. I can remember Phil on the phone that night saying, "What's going on? Get down! Keep your head down! Put your head under the desk! What's going on? Look around! Get your head down!"

Q: As a matter of fact, Wendt was saying that he had very good communication with Washington but he couldn't get anybody from Tan Sanh Hut to come out. They were all busy, except the

military police who were able to keep the Vietnamese sapper unit - they killed the leader - and they were rather ineffective.

LEDOGAR: Well, the guy who was in charge of that Roles and Mission study group I had participated in, George Jacobson, shot the last Viet Cong sapper. Jake lived in a residence that was right next to the embassy compound. There was the famous picture of one of the MPs (military police) lofting a-

Q: 45.

LEDOGAR: Yes, that's right, a 45 Caliber automatic pistol from the Embassy lawn up to Jake on a balcony. It was dawn. The MPs had driven the last Viet Cong into the ground floor of Jake's residence and were using tear gas to flush him out. When we were traveling around the country, Jake, for his personal security, carried only one thing and that was a hand grenade. That was in his attaché case. The rest of us all had sidearms, some kind of weapon. But Jake, a retired army colonel, thought a hand grenade was all he'd have a chance to use. So he was caught in his own bedroom with only his hand grenade and by this time it's dawn. The last of the sappers came over the fence and into his residence and was downstairs. The MPs threw tear gas in. They were flushing the Viet Cong upstairs, so Jake quickly ran to the balcony and he got one of the U.S. MPs to loft up a 45 pistol. Jake got it, went into the corner of the bedroom, and sat there. The guy came in with teargas in his eyes and squeezed off a couple of rounds that went in the wrong direction and Jake shot him. That's his account.

Q: I remember seeing on TV the pistol being tossed up to him.

LEDOGAR: Yes. That was a minor squad-size Viet Cong action and yet it shocked the world. A couple of weeks later here we are in the airplane coming back to Washington and two things are happening. The more colorful way I can tell it is that I was busy with the colonels and the doctor in the front of the VIP cabin, and the bigshots were in the back talking among themselves or playing poker on this long flight back to Hawaii. I wrote out a handwritten report to Phil. Then I didn't have much more to do. I could only give him so much that would be of use at that time at that high level. I told him what I had heard and what I had concluded about what went on in the countryside. I didn't have a chance to talk to him because he was involved with the generals and Bob Komer the whole way back. When we got to Pearl Harbor, the FSO who was the political advisor there met us and drove Phil and me to the BOQ. Phil said to me, "What are you hearing up front there?" I said, "I don't know. They haven't shown me any papers, but I gather that they're asking for a substantial influx of additional U.S. troops." "What do you mean by substantial?" I said, "I gather they're talking about two and a half divisions." "How many do you think that is?" I said, "Well, if they're heavy divisions, that probably could be as many as 60,000." Then he turned to me and said, "206,000 troops because they're not divisions. They're division slices. The U.S. Army is created in a pyramid like this. You've got so many divisions down on the bottom and when you take a division, you take a slice of all the support that goes with it. So, that's 206,000 and that's going to be the headline in the *New York Times* 24 hours after we get back. "Mark my word." I said, "Phil, that's impossible. There are 16 of us on this airplane. It seems to me that the cover of anybody who leaked that would be blown immediately."

Of course, Phil was absolutely right. We got back to Washington on February 28th. It was the headline in the *New York Times* a day after: "Westmoreland asks for 206,000 more troops to put this victory over the top." That's what occurred. It was one of the things in my judgement that caused an additional loss of support and credibility for the U.S. war effort. Even though Tet was technically a military victory, that was not the time to ask for... We had 545,500 authorized U.S. forces in Vietnam at the time. The requested increment would have been in effect an increase by 40%. It would have meant calling out the reserves and going to Congress for supplemental funds.

Q: Yes. What were you getting from your colleagues that you were visiting?

LEDOGAR: It varied in each case, but it was a substantiation of the fact that the Viet Cong came out of the woods and to a large extent got mowed down. But they did a hell of a lot of damage. In many cases, there was a lot of damage caused by the friendly forces who were trying to deal with them. Now, incidentally, in the province where it was alleged that an American major had said "We had to destroy the town to save it," senior U.S. military said hey had interviewed every single American major who had been anywhere near that province. U.S. authorities convinced themselves that no one had said that. Later on in a book it was revealed that the journalist who had first reported that slogan confessed: "Well, the alleged major didn't actually say that, but that's the kind of thing the U.S. military was saying." There were an awful lot of those sorts of media developments that helped to expand the gulf between the U.S. officials and the public.

At any rate, we got back to Washington and within a matter of hours, it was all over the public domain exactly what Westmoreland was asking for. The reaction to that was explosive.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? We'll pick this up the next time. You're back from the Wheeler mission.

Today is March 2, 2000. Steve, you wanted to give me the dates of the Wheeler mission.

LEDOGAR: Yes. I have a note here saying that it was February 23 outbound and returning on the 28th of February. This was 1968 immediately following the Tet offensive.

Q: You mentioned how Habib had told you that they were talking about additional Division Slices. Did this make any sense for you? What was the plan?

LEDOGAR: To the extent that I understood it, the plan was to try to conventionalize the war. If, as seemed to be the indication, the Viet Cong - the indigenous southern Communist military structure - had been largely defeated, then it was felt that the Communist side would pursue the war with conventional North Vietnamese forces. Also, there was a considerable urgency to get on with things and not allow the conflict to drag out. But there is a rich and revealing story of the next five weeks, one in which I was not a first-party participant, but I know quite well from being on the fringes and reading a lot of books about that period: how the decision was made not to add additional forces, which incidentally would have required additional appropriations from

Congress, the calling out of reserves, and doing a number of other difficult things in an economically strained time. We all know that Johnson was criticized for not putting the country on a war footing to begin with, and for the heavy inflation that followed. Instead, there was a series of deep draft reconsiderations of the U.S. war policy.

For the purpose of this interview, in my understanding it began with the President assembling a group of senior advisors who were called the “Wise Old Men,” statesmen-

Q: Acheson, Lidle, Clifford, and so forth.

LEDOGAR: Yes. There were three briefings that were given to this group, one on politics by Phil Habib, one on the military situation by General De Puy, and one on the intelligence situation by a man named George Carver. These were very sobering, very straightforward and honest, classified assessments. There were a lot of details I didn't know or couldn't repeat. Some of this I later became aware of when I was helping to write the Southeast Asia foreign policy portion of the history of the Johnson Administration. In the end, the calculation was made that even if the president gave the Pentagon or the military establishment all that they asked for, all 206,000 troops and other additional resources, there simply was not sufficient time remaining to bring those forces to bear and to seek out and destroy the enemy before the United States would fall apart politically. The briefings, which were very highly classified, were on the internal U.S. social circumstances: on the rate at which support for the war effort was eroding, on how civil disobedience and actual street violence were increasing, and on how the financial curve lines for inflation and social disaffection, and everything else were such that the judgement was that these various trend lines intersected too soon. In other words, the country falls apart in the near term and you hit a crisis before there could conceivably be a military victory.

Q: All I know is that from most of '68 through '70, the country was pretty stable.

LEDOGAR: Yes, because one month after the Wheeler Trip on March 31, 1968, President Johnson got up and made a speech on Vietnam in which he called for partial cessation of the bombing of the North, peace talks, and incidentally in a final paragraph that was closely guarded until delivered, said “I'm not going to run again for a second term” He was taking himself out. As I said, this was March 31, 1968. Shortly after that first phase, the ‘preliminary conversations’ phase, of the Paris Peace Talks between just North Vietnam and the United States opened. That was in May of that year.

Q: What were you getting from the people you talked to in Vietnam and were telling Habib? The South Vietnamese army had held up against this attack.

LEDOGAR: First of all, it was evident that there was a lot of destruction. It was also evident that the performance of the South Vietnamese military was spotty. It seemed quite clear that the indigenous Communist cadre, the Viet Cong, had surfaced and suffered substantially, but the North Vietnamese were also running around and there didn't seem to be an awful lot of intestinal fortitude on the part of the South Vietnamese forces, the ARVN, to stand up and fight the northerners, who by this time had come into the country in substantial numbers.

I'm getting ahead of my story and should go back and review 1967. We've gotten into '68 too soon. In 1967, I came back from my tour in Vietnam and went to the National Military Command Center and did the watch officer business. Then I went to the Department's Office of Vietnam Information. We were lobbying Congress and that got to be quite dicey. It was right on the edge of government employees lobbying the Congress. So, I was assigned to the Vietnam Working Group. Then I found myself touring all over the U.S., participating in debates about Vietnam and U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. It was a question of being assigned to do so, but I welcomed it. I was anxious to improve my public speaking and public affairs capabilities. There was a great demand for government defenders of U.S. policy. Everybody was holding a symposium on Vietnam and they wanted to have a spectrum of opinion. Universities, citizen groups, and other sponsors were most anxious to have someone who would come and defend the government's point of view. These programs were financially supported by the organizers. If the State Department sent a speaker, the State Department was reimbursed for transportation and lodging. No honoraria or anything like that was allowed. I did an enormous amount of traveling all over, including Washington State and Florida and almost everywhere in between. I was constantly on the road and very much engaged in debates about the Vietnam War. In many of the forums, I would find that the format was stacked up so that the government position was sort of like the right hand side of the spectrum, and all the critics, the other three speakers, would be various levels more to the left of what was going on, including some people who were calling outright for a Communist victory. It was very heated. I had a firsthand immersion in the debate and an opportunity to sense how whatever support there was for the Vietnam War was crumbling. It was not just reading the inside-the-beltway newspapers that gave me an impression of where the country stood on Vietnam, but being out in the sticks. You recall that protests did reach the point where we had the so-called "Resurrection City" on the Capitol Mall, and had marches across Memorial Bridge, and hundreds of thousands of folks marching on the Pentagon. One thing that was noticeable was that the composition of these demonstrations became more and more centrist as responsible mainstream citizen groups began to support what was in the beginning mostly radicals and extremists. You had all sorts of organizations and political leaders whom one would consider to be main-stream responsible critics throwing their lot in with the anti-war movement. There was a lot to the judgement that the country was coming apart.

Q: How about you? Were you undergoing any change as you went through this?

LEDOGAR: Well, I would think of it more in terms of sophistication. I always did believe - and still do to the extent I think about it, which isn't very often - that the objective of our Vietnam war policy was an honorable one, and that the essence of the conflict was not an internal struggle between competing factions for the upper hand within one nation, but rather an attempt by North Vietnam to impose its views on South Vietnam through force. That gets into the whole essence of the Vietnam conflict. Later, we'll talk about the argument over the shape of the table in Paris. That's all part of the same thing. Was the conflict essentially a civil war in which outsiders, the United States and others, were helping one side? Or was the essence of the conflict an attempt by North Vietnam to reacquire by force what it had signed away in the 1954 agreement with the French, the Geneva Accords? If it was the latter, then there was quite a legitimate set of reasons for us to try to assist the Republican side and to resist the Marxist side. If you accepted what was pretty well accepted at that time, that there could be consequences in surrounding countries all falling to communism if this one was let go - the domino theory - then you tended to believe the

cause was just.

When it comes around to the execution, then I have some very strong criticisms about things we did and did not do. My criticisms were not simply of the sort that “if we knew then what we know now,” but also that we should have known better back then. We made a bunch of stupid mistakes militarily, politically, and in public affairs. Exactly where and how we might have corrected the course of action is subject to a whole lot of judgements, and many of them were more sophisticated than those that said “We have no business there. Get out” or worse yet, “I don’t give a damn about our forces. We have no business there. Let the other side win.” We had all kinds of critics of that sort. So I did not personally go through a transition where I was a supporter of the war and wound up after all of this an opponent. To this day, I remain a supporter of the objective but a critic of the execution, and of how we made some pretty stupid mistakes.

Q: My personal view is on your side, except I wonder whether South Vietnamese society was such - and particularly the political society - that maybe it just was not strong enough to hold no matter what.

LEDOGAR: I think that that probably proved to be the case. In the end, after we signed the peace accords and we continued to give support, the object stated many times by President Johnson and later by President Nixon in particular, was to threaten the North with the Vietnamization program: we would get out but we would get out so slowly and turn over so effectively the responsibilities and the wherewithal to an increasingly competent South Vietnamese regime, including the armed forces, that they would be able to handle the thing themselves. In other words, the North Vietnamese would not be able to gain their objective through the United States in Paris unless they made compromises. But it didn’t work out that way because the structure was not strong enough. Once they saw the rate at which the U.S. was getting out - and Congress made us get out a lot faster than we would have on our own - and saw that we were constrained by Congress to give less aid than would have been necessary, the South Vietnamese felt abandoned and they crumbled. They crumbled big time and rapidly.

Q: Now back to 1968 when you came back from the Wheeler Mission. You had been around the country beforehand. Did you and perhaps Phil Habib know that sending 206,000 people wasn’t going to fly in the United States?

LEDOGAR: In the months that followed the return from the Wheeler trip, I think almost everyone in the administration came to that conclusion. That was the conclusion the Wise Men came to. That certainly was the conclusion of the briefings that were given to them, including the one by Phil Habib. That was eventually the President’s conclusion, that reinforcement and escalation was not the right direction to go. In fact, the right direction was to begin what was codified by President Nixon within a year, to begin to make a plan for an orderly withdrawal. The rest of 1968, after Johnson dropped his political bombshell and Humphrey became the Democratic candidate and Nixon became the Republican candidate, looking towards November of that year, we still had the debate going on. The Paris Peace Talks were coming together and the negotiation there started, but remember it was at first limited to only two parties - in our view, the two *external* parties. None of the contending South Vietnamese forces were represented.

Q: You came back from the Wheeler trip in late February of '68. What did you do?

LEDOGAR: I went back to my job in the Vietnam Working Group. I also continued spending a lot of time on the road.

Q: Now it's after the Tet offensive. Did you find a change?

LEDOGAR: Yes. The Tet offensive had an enormous emotional and psychological impact in the United States even though the small part the public saw of it was militarily insignificant - a squad of sappers trying to jump over the fence and attack the U.S. Embassy, which was a suicide mission. There were a lot of problems about slanted press reporting, but for many other reasons there was a fundamental lack of public commitment that made any U.S. casualties increasingly regarded as an unreasonable price - "It wasn't our responsibility; we shouldn't be there." Of course for the longest time in the U.S., I think until 1967, we had conscription and were drafting American fellows to go over there and fight in Vietnam. The South Vietnamese did not have a draft. They had an all volunteer force. That was one of the basic mistakes we made, taking over the fighting the way we did.

But, yes, by late 1968 I did continue in my responsibilities, but also I started to look towards my next assignment. I was very anxious at the time to try to repair what I regarded as a hole in my own background, about never having really studied economics and trade. So, I signed up for the FSI economic training course.

Q: This was the six month course that gave you the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in economics.

LEDOGAR: Exactly, provided you already had at least a Bachelor's degree in something else. I was to have gone in the middle of '68, but I was extended at the Vietnam Desk. Then I finally got my orders to go in January of '69. Indeed, down the hall here (at FSI, Foreign Service Institute) somewhere is a picture of the January 1969 economic training class. I'm in that picture because we had our picture taken on the first day. Before the first week ended, however, I got another one of those foreign service draft notices. I was assigned to quit FSI and immediately go to Paris to the Vietnam Peace Talks Delegation on very short notice.

The so-called Paris Preliminary Conversations took place between May and November of 1968 between the United States and North Vietnam. Ambassadors Harriman and Vance headed the U.S. Delegation. On the North Vietnamese side, Xuan Thuy was in charge. Remember that Nixon was elected in November. The Preliminary Conversations ended just before the election. In effect, the agreement was that in exchange for a total cessation of U.S. bombing of the north, the wider talks would be organized. They would include two additional parties, the Viet Cong on the Communist side and the government of the Republic of Vietnam on the "good guys" side. But of course Nixon was not going to be inaugurated until January. In that period between November and January, the Paris talks were in a hiatus. We devoted ourselves to working out the procedures for those wider talks before the substantive exchanges began.

Q: Were you involved in that?

LEDOGAR: From the Washington end, but by the end January, I was over there in Paris.

Q: While you were in Washington during the late '68 period, you got involved in the preparation for the talks?

LEDOGAR: Yes. For our original U.S. delegation in Paris members were all pulled from their Washington jobs temporarily. Nobody knew how long the wider Peace Talks were going to take. One of the guys from my office in the State Department had been pulled out and sent over there. Everyone was on loan from his Washington job without families until I went over. By January of 1969 Washington realized that this was not going to be a quick negotiation. It was a real hardship for someone who leaves his family and Washington responsibilities behind to concentrate and stick it out. It was also politically not very wise to have our people shuttling back and forth, rotating. But yes, I was in the State Department office that was backstopping the Peace Talks. I went to Honolulu for another conference on how to win the war and came back and started in the economic training course. Two or three days into it, I got a phone call saying that I was to go to Paris. The purpose was to go over there on a full-time basis to replace the guy, Jim Rosenthal, who was the first choice, but he was too important and was needed back on the Vietnam Desk. The Vietnam working group used the old bureaucratic trick that when you have a levy and you're required to contribute a person to a particular effort, the one person that you want to volunteer is the one who was transferred out and for whom you've already gotten a replacement. In other words, it was a slot out of the hide of the Foreign Service Institute at that time, not out of the Office of Vietnam Affairs. I went to Paris and was there for almost four years.

LINDSEY GRANT
Political Officer, Vietnamese Affairs
New Delhi, India (1965-1968)

National Security Council
Washington, DC (1968-1970)

Lindsey Grant was born in North Carolina in 1926. He joined the Foreign Service in 1950 and served in Hong Kong, Taipei, India, and Cyprus. He dealt with Vietnamese affairs in New Delhi (1965-1968) and the National Security Council (1968-1970). He was interviewed in 1990 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

GRANT: [In New Delhi 1965-1968] Also, the fact that they [the Chinese] did not move overtly in Vietnam. Over this there was a tremendous debate. I was very much a dove on Vietnam, but not because of China. It was because I didn't think we could win. I had to take the responsibility for North Vietnam when we created the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, and North Vietnam, North Korea, and Outer Mongolia became part of my watching area. I then began to inquire about what we knew about the table of organization, the basic facts of life in Hanoi, and discovered we knew nothing. I thought this was catastrophic, and I was convinced by other friends that, in fact, we were in a very bad situation.

But I did not think that the Chinese were going to come in overtly. As a matter of fact, there was a very good intelligence estimate, or war game. It had a Greek letter -- I think it was Omega -- run out of the Pentagon, but with State, CIA, a lot of other participation. They played the game through sometime in the mid-1960s, and the way they played it, the Russians and Chinese kept putting in enough to counter our efforts, but just enough, and not moving beyond that, and we kept bogging down. If we had paid attention to that war game, we'd have gotten a very good steer as to how we should have behaved in Vietnam. It would have saved us a lot of heartache later on, because that's exactly what they did. So on external policy, I think we did better.

GRANT: I came back very briefly to INR, to Intelligence and Research. That lasted a couple of months, and then I went over as a staffer in the NSC with the incoming administration, with [Henry] Kissinger.

Q: Could you describe the spirit, the feeling, the atmosphere? It was one of the most important times of power for the National Security Council.

GRANT: It was a heady time, believe me.

Q: What were you doing?

GRANT: Everything! [Laughter] It was wild. There was a tremendous sense of power, and it was not unjustified. Henry was a master politician. It was informal, extremely busy. Henry ran it, I would say, in a pretty effective way. He put his stamp on it, but by no means tried to second-guess everything. He couldn't. We were so busy producing things. For instance, the regular briefing reports to the President went through and Henry never even reviewed them. They were done by the staff, the daily briefings. You had to delegate a lot.

There was a lot done which I perceived at the time to be wrong. We were instructed we couldn't tell State about this or that, a lot of things. The degree to which the decisions were centralized was extraordinary. We sought -- I think I did, and I suspect that the other staffers did -- to bring people in informally, so we could get their knowledge, their background information, and so on, but we would prepare the briefing materials by ourselves for Presidential meetings, for the press conferences and so on. We prepared the materials that Henry saw. The briefing books from State would come over and be attached, then pulled off at the last minute, I'm sure.

We were writing for the President, and there was an extraordinary process when he had a press conference. We would all invent questions and then invent answers to them and sort of play them against each other and check them out. Henry would certainly look at it. He was, by the way, called Henry. It was very informal. Everybody was first name, except Al Haig; he always called him Dr. Kissinger. Thereby lies a lesson on being too informal.

We'd go home and turn on our radios or our television, or if we couldn't get home, we'd turn one on in the situation room, and have the President, who had a remarkable memory -- still does --

answer the questions the way we suggested. If you don't think that's a trip, you don't understand.
[Laughter]

I perceived at the time that it was terribly dangerous to be so narrowly focused -- tunnel vision -- when you had that much to do and were driving projects that you knew Henry and the President wanted, or that you were selling. The vetting to take a look at the lateral implications of what you were doing drops away very fast. As a matter of fact, since I retired, I have been writing about this issue. The word of art is "foresight."

After I left there, I wrote some memoranda to the Secretary of State about how one might make the NSC connection and the foresight process work better without derogating from the President's final authority. We needed to organize the process, because it was much too narrow. On the NSC Staff we were not clearing whole concepts with State; just floating them on our own.

One example in my area was the Nixon Doctrine, which we started by calling the Guam Doctrine. This was for the first Far Eastern trip the President took. We were doing briefing papers, and I was the one charged with doing the first run of briefing papers. I thought, "He needs a theme, an overall unifying theme." And I developed this thing which came partly from having been listening to what the President had been saying and writing before, and partly out of my own head, which he then discussed with the reporters in Guam. And he started calling it the Nixon Doctrine. This later appeared in the President's first annual Foreign Policy Report. That idea, that paper, I put in the briefing book. Kissinger took it out, said, "We don't need this." The book went up for the President's approval. The next day, Kissinger said, "Where was that general paper?" And I never knew why, but he took it and had it put back in the book. He changed one sentence, as I recall.

Nobody ever checked this with State. Nobody said, "What will happen if we make a major departure, describing our relationships with a lot of other countries in the world?" And it was major. It said, in effect, "We can't protect you from yourselves. If you can't run a good government and you lose the affection of your people, we can't help you. You've got to be able to do it. We'll help protect you from the outside, but it's your initiative first." As I say, this was enshrined in that first foreign policy paper that he did, the annual report. It got considerable attention when it came out.

Q: One that strikes immediately home is the Philippines, a place you never served. What did this mean there?

GRANT: I don't recall. I just don't recall. We undoubtedly got some reporting about this, but I do not remember it anymore. I'm sure it did lead to questioning. I'm sure there was an exchange on this.

Q: What about your relations with the State Department? Here you were, a Foreign Service officer. You say you were under instructions not to consult?

GRANT: Yes. That was very difficult, very bad.

Q: What did you do?

GRANT: I used to get over -- one of us would -- to the staff meetings, so we'd keep in touch with what they were talking about, but it was unfair, because we would sometimes know some things that were happening that we simply were under instructions not to talk about. I know that Marshall Green used to get a little bit nettled. I'm very fond of Marshall. He told me one time, "That's all right. You're going to have to come back to State some day. We'll get you then." [Laughter] But it was not the way to run a railroad, and I thought it then and I think it now.

Incidentally, there were funny things. I can remember Henry would pick up some staffer to go with him to an Under Secretary's meeting, and I can remember he'd get bored or decide he'd like to leave early, just to throw his weight around, and wave whatever flunkey he had brought to his chair. So I found myself sitting for the White House at an Under Secretary's meeting or a JCS meeting. As I say, it was exciting, and there was an enormous amount of responsibility.

I can remember -- for instance, talking about the Philippines -- a very minor thing, but it's just a little example. The Department -- the desk officer -- and the Department of Agriculture had a difference of opinion as to how much PL 480 --

Q: PL 480 being surplus money generated by agriculture.

GRANT: In this case, it was actually the grain shipments of PL 480. How much we should give the Philippines the next year. So he called up and said, "What should we do?"

I said, "Tell me what your position is, then tell the Agriculture guy to call me and tell me what his position is." They both did. Then I called them both and said, "Okay, why don't you go with such and such a number." And they did. All they needed was one of those magic cubes that come out heads or tails. We provided that function. I don't think I even bothered to report that. I don't think I told anybody about that. It was just in the course of the day. So there's a tremendous amount of authority that centers there, and it does need a more systematic vetting process.

Q: How did you feel about Henry Kissinger at the time? Did you feel he was keeping you well informed, or did you feel there was always another agenda? Did you have the feeling he was being almost puckish, playing games, or did you feel there was an agenda?

GRANT: I guess all of the above. I definitely knew there was a lot that he knew that he wasn't telling me about my area. As a matter of fact, it's very interesting. On China, John Holdridge, who I hope you've interviewed or will interview --

Q: Marshall Green has interviewed Holdridge for us.

GRANT: Good. Marshall told me that he and John had been in touch. John was the only NSC staffer, as far as I know, presumably Al Haig, because Al was handling the papers, who actually knew the details of the whole opening towards China. I was the China guy there, among other things. I handled everything in the Far East but Vietnam. But I was not in it. I knew that I was

out of something, because there was enough movement. So you knew this. But Henry also gave you -- for one thing, he was unquestionably brilliant. His ability to absorb information constantly surprised me. His willingness to use his people, in the good sense, was very gratifying. We were given a lot of room to do what we thought we had to do, without even asking or checking, as long as we thought it was our judgment. So I had very considerable respect.

I always thought, thought it at the time, that Henry was more at home in the Congress of Vienna than he is in this end of this century. He had no sense, as far as I could tell, of tectonic movements, the kind of thing that I was becoming even then worried about, the whole environment, population, resources range of issues. All this kind of thing meant nothing to him. He's a balance-of-power man.

I think, in retrospect -- I couldn't judge at the time -- Henry really didn't advance Nixon's agenda very much, and I think he'll be seen as a wonderful tactician, but not a strategist, which is sort of an interesting inversion for an academic.

Q: In these interviews, one comes across a lot of places where the best thing they felt Henry Kissinger could do was stay out of it, because he saw everything in Soviet-American terms and balance and power.

GRANT: Yes. Of course, Marshall had lots of problems with Henry. [Laughter]

Q: But you catch this in other places. The people in Africa say, "The best thing he ever did was not to know where it was."

GRANT: Yes, yes. And one of the worst things he did was when I was later in Cyprus and he thought he knew how to handle that Cyprus problem. That's very true. Henry changed. He got a little confident as he stayed on. When I got back to State after a period in the War College, he was no longer Henry; he was Mr. Kissinger. I used to call him Henry, which obviously nettled him. He changed and became over-confident. But the first couple of years there, it was brilliant.

Q: You were there from when to when?

GRANT: Basically it was about a year and a half to two years. I guess it was the end of January, right at the beginning, a week into the new administration, until July a year later, at which time I had been working about 70-hour weeks, then went to the War College.

Q: How did he use Larry Eagleburger, who has always been considered his right-hand man?

GRANT: Larry was going to be his right-hand man and had a heart attack or a stroke and had to be gotten out of there, and left within days. Larry was a good guy. I can just remember his trying to help getting us set up, just the physical process. You walk into the NSC, you walk into that space after a change of administration, and there's nothing. No files, no nothing. Literally, you create things anew. I think it's improved. I'm not sure. Larry was right in there trying to figure out, arguing about space and things like that. But he was gone almost instantly, and that was when Al Haig was pressed into service.

Q: I want to ask you about Haig. On the last tape, we were talking about the NSC. You were working with General Haig at the time. He was a colonel then?

GRANT: That's right.

Q: Could you describe his method of operation and how you saw him?

GRANT: You see, at the beginning of the Nixon Administration, Nixon selected Kissinger to be his National Security Advisor and assistant. He had -- oh, hell, I can't think of his name -- who had been his campaign advisor on foreign affairs, who arrived on the scene and was sort of attached to the NSC staff. The result of this, I'm sure that's why it happened, is that very ostentatiously, nobody was made deputy, because it would have been very hard not to make -- I can't think of his name.

Q: You can add that later.

GRANT: Right. It would be very hard to appoint a deputy who was not him. So what you had was Henry at the top and a whole series of the senior most guys, all of whom had so-called equal ranking. But Al Haig was pulled in to sit at that desk outside Henry's office and to run the flow after Larry left. This obviously put him on the inside track. I can recall Henry said, "We're going to have to have staff meetings. We've got to keep informed." Well, he tried to organize one, and after about half an hour of waiting for him -- when we had thousands of things to do -- Al was called away. Then he came back, with some embarrassment, actually giggling with embarrassment, because it was sort of a delicate situation, and said that Henry had asked him to go ahead and run the meeting. As I said, there was much giggling on his part and much obvious annoyance on the part of some of the other people sitting there.

The second staff meeting, Henry called but then canceled. That was the last of the scheduled staff meetings. From that time on, Al just acted as amanuensis to Henry. The stuff did pass through Henry's hands. Henry would turn to him and say, "Get this, this, and this. I need such and such. Has somebody gotten the papers ready for such and such?" I can remember Henry shaving and getting dressed in his black tie to go out, in the men's room, Al by his side, taking notes. Henry said, "I'll be back about 11:00." This was probably about 7:30 in the evening. "I'll be back about 11:00. If you'd have these ready for me, I'd appreciate it."

So basically, the way Al operated was to hang in there, treat him with respect, and never sleep. I remember Al, when we were talking one time, his wife called up on the phone and they had to get a car. [Chuckles] His end of the conversation was, "Yeah, well, you think we really need it?" Obviously, the other end of the line said, "Yes, we've just got to." Then he said, "Well, if you like it, buy it." [Laughter] He was just wedded to that office.

Q: Did he know anything about foreign affairs?

GRANT: Al was a good, bright study. I mean, he was no clown. For one thing, he was a political colonel who had spent his life in that part of the system, just getting over to Vietnam long

enough to get his ticket punched, as they say in the Army. His mind was subtle and he was familiar with foreign issues. There were times when I disagreed and got rather annoyed sometimes when I thought he was being too cavalier, but I never remember a time when I thought, "This is a dumb son of a bitch." No, he was bright.

Q: But did he understand? So often the military can be very bright, people coming out of that environment, but there is a tendency to want to get things done. Again, this is where your tunnel vision comes back at you in spades. The Oliver North case is a prime example.

GRANT: There's a lot of difference between a Marine lieutenant colonel and an Army colonel, particularly a political one. Yes, the "Can-do, gung-ho, charge!" Marine thing, I agree, and that's, I think, terribly dangerous. People who have been aides-de-camp to generals before and have played the Byzantine struggles are pretty well schooled in subtlety, and getting things done is not necessarily nearly as important as seeing that your private agenda is taken care of. No, I would not accuse Al of lack of subtlety. I think his problem later on was, regrettably -- of course with a lot of very bitter Army generals passed over -- he moved up so fast, and to be in his position, particularly in the NATO command job, can be, as it was with Henry, dangerous for one's balance. I think that Al lost his, and I think that to a degree Henry became much too confident later on.

Q: You were seeing both these people at a time when you were really working pretty much as a team.

GRANT: Right, and we were all new to the job.

Q: And also with a President who, by all accounts, knew foreign policy, was interested in it, and had a remarkable mind for it.

Q: As I say, I would fault Henry just on that point, that when all is said and done, and people learn to sort out the Jekyll-Hyde problem with Nixon, they're going to find that what Henry succeeded with was what the President had set him on to, like China.

I really think that Henry went along with a number of people who got over-confident on the Vietnam issue. I had a very definite feeling that the President was willing, in those first months -- well, actually, most of the first year -- to say, "We will cut our losses with honor." In other words, we will try to give the GVN -- the government of Vietnam, the South Vietnamese -- the material support, so that they can do it if they can hack it, but we are not in forever to fight the war for them." I think that he was in a frame of mind that would welcome this.

About that time, people began to realize that the Viet Cong -- the North Vietnamese -- had lost so much in the Tet Offensive of 1968. At first, everybody thought the Tet Offensive showed how much strength they had. Later on, it became pretty clear how many of their assets they wasted. There was a tremendous surge of over-confidence, and our people thought, "Well, we've got them on the ropes now." And as Governor Harriman used to say, "Don't escalate your goals in mid-stream." I think we did just that. I think Henry, when all is said and done, will be found to have pushed the President the wrong way on that one.

Q: You left the NSC after about a year and a half. Where did you go?

WILLIAM LLOYD STEARMAN
Psychological and Propaganda Operations, JUSPAO
Saigon (1965-1967)

Vietnam Task Force, East Asia Bureau, INR
Washington, DC (1967-1971)

Dr. William Lloyd Stearman was born in Wichita, Kansas. He attended high school in Burlingame, California. He entered the V-12 program of the Navy Air Corps after dropping out of the Colorado School of Mines. Later, he finished his education at the University of California in Berkeley and graduated with a math degree in 1943. He attended graduate school at Columbia University. He became interested in international affairs while in graduate school in Geneva, taking international studies. He has served in Austria and Germany. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 15, October 5, 1992 and February 15, June 17, 1994.

Q: Today is February 15, 1994 and this is a continuing interview with William Stearman. Bill, we got you out of Soviet Affairs and going to 1965-67 when you were in Saigon. How did you get that assignment?

STEARMAN: I got assigned to Saigon because somebody knew that I had good French and was a Soviet specialist. They wanted somebody to work on North Vietnamese affairs and to direct psychological operations against North Vietnam. I was rather chagrined when I got this assignment because I was already assigned to Hamburg as deputy principal officer, and Hamburg was bigger than most of our embassies. Coburn Kidd, the Consul General, was going to retire and I thought I might be able to replace him. I was on my way and then this came up, so I went out there. At the time, I considered it a derailment of my career.

Q: What was the situation? Did one stand up and salute when one was ordered to Vietnam?

STEARMAN: Well, you had a simple option. If you were assigned to Vietnam and didn't take it, you resigned your commission and left the Service. It was as simple as that. David Bruce, who happened to be in town when this assignment broke, weighed in personally with everyone he knew on my behalf, and he had a fair amount of clout. He knew how well I knew the Hamburg scene, because I had interpreted for him every time he went to Hamburg and he knew that I knew a lot of people there. So he thought it was insane to break the Hamburg assignment. But he couldn't budge it. So I just saluted and went. As it turned out, it almost cost me my life, but it was a very interesting assignment.

Q: In a way, many of us got to see the elephant there.

STEARMAN: That is right.

Q: What was the situation in Vietnam when you arrived in 1965?

STEARMAN: It was late in 1965 and the situation was quite bad. Our side had some severe military setbacks. The embassy had been bombed a couple of months before I got out there. A number of our people were seriously injured and I believe some embassy people were actually killed. The VC were in Saigon and all around it. You couldn't go a kilometer out of town without the chance of getting shot at. And you heard battle sounds around the clock....artillery fire, machine gun fire, etc. It looked pretty grim at the time because the other side seemed to be everywhere and winning.

Q: Where did you stay when you got there?

STEARMAN: I stayed in Saigon, in an old house that the embassy had had for a long time, with Tom Corcoran, who was the deputy head of the political section there. A wonderful person who is still around. He is very active here in DACOR and had an encyclopedic knowledge of Southeast Asia and was an extremely good officer. (Tom died several months after this interview.)

Q: He closed our consulate in Hanoi.

STEARMAN: You have a good memory, he did exactly that. He was up in Hue in 1966 at the time of the Buddhists riots and showed an enormous amount of cool and courage in a very difficult situation. He was a very impressive person who had always hid his light under a bushel. He had a couple of embassies in Africa, but I always thought he should have had an embassy in Southeast Asia. But we have all seen it happen with mediocre people getting to the top and the good people not.

Q: What was your job when you went out there?

STEARMAN: I was the head of the North Vietnamese division of what they called JUSPAO, which had people from all parts of the Foreign Service and the military service engaged in psychological and propaganda operations. I was charged with psychological operations against North Vietnam and the North Vietnamese army wherever it might be in Indochina.

Q: To get inside the psyche of the North Vietnamese soldier you are not going to get it coming from Soviet affairs, or was the feeling that somehow these were just little Soviets or something like that?

STEARMAN: Well, as it turned out, and I hate to admit this, my assignment made sense because knowledge of Soviet affairs was fairly transferable to this situation; although there were obvious cultural differences. I found that our people who were Southeast Asia experts, really didn't understand anything at all about the other side. They were seriously deficient in almost every respect. Whereas I certainly had deficiencies, I felt quite comfortable in my new role and fairly

well understood what motivated the North Vietnamese and how they organized. Their whole political system was patterned after the Soviet Union. Ho Chi Minh, was, after all, trained by the Soviets, he was a Soviet agent for many years. The official North Vietnamese communist history admitted that he was a Comintern agent. A Hanoi publication listed about a dozen aliases that Ho used, and we have identified about twenty.

I didn't have Vietnamese, which would have been a great help, but I had an excellent Vietnamese assistant. Most of my Vietnamese counterparts in the government and elsewhere spoke French so I could converse easily. So it really worked out pretty well. When I got there I found our psychological warfare operations against the other side woefully inadequate because we had little understanding of the target audience. We were dropping leaflets and broadcasting messages that sometimes were counterproductive and often of little use. For example, we had been emphasizing the animosity the North Vietnamese supposedly felt against the Chinese, a theme mostly inspired by North Vietnamese who fled to South Vietnam in the mid-fifties.

Q: Many Catholics.

STEARMAN: Yes, there were a large number of them, close to a million, and there would have been two or three million if the Hanoi regime hadn't cut off the flow. These refugees all thought that they knew the North, but their knowledge was dated since they hadn't lived very long under the communists who were just taking over when they left. Since they had grown up being anti-Chinese, China being Vietnam's historical enemy for centuries, they thought the anti-Chinese theme would be a good one. But most of the young Vietnamese were looking upon China as a friend and ally because China, among other things, was instrumental in helping them defeat the French at Dien Bien Phu. They couldn't have done it without massive Chinese assistance. And China was providing a large part of their consumer goods and a large part of their weaponry. Also, they were indoctrinated to believe that China was a friend and ally, as was the Soviet Union. So the anti-Chinese theme was going nowhere.

Our people never tried the obvious which was to actually interrogate some defectors and deserters and to see how they reacted to our proposed messages. So we started that process. I tried to get to the prisoners as soon as I could, which is why I spent a good bit of time in the field, to size up enemy vulnerabilities and ascertain what was bothering them. I believe we came up with a better target information and better themes and messages, however, I am sure you have heard, they were not very vulnerable to this kind of thing, particularly the regular North Vietnamese.

The best thing that I found we could do was to give them instructions as to how to surrender. We dropped a lot of safe conduct passes.

Q: Had the Chieu Hoi program been started?

STEARMAN: The Chieu Hoi program had been started and was enormously successful, more successful than most people realize. About a quarter of a million people on the other side came over to our side mostly as a result of the Chieu Hoi program. Most of the people from the regular forces who came over had been born in the South. We didn't get very many regular army

defectors. We did, however, get an extremely interesting defector from the North Vietnamese army, Colonel Tuyuan, who was a regimental commander and had also been a head of training for COSVN which was the communist headquarters in South Vietnam, actually located most of the time over in Cambodia. He defected because he had been passed over for promotion to division commander, which he felt he deserved. And secondly, he had made the mistake of getting a local girl pregnant which was a big no-no. So he was in, what we used to say, deep kimchi. He decided to come over to us and was a fascinating person. He was very intelligent and spoke good French. We used to sit up hour upon hour over cigars and good French brandy talking about all the things we were doing wrong.

He gave me an idea how we could have won the war, had we so chosen. He said the communist forces were extremely vulnerable to ambush and to ground raids on their own facilities, which we never carried out. He said he couldn't understand why we never set any ambushes, ever. The only time their lines of communications were ever threatened was by accident when we were running the search and destroy missions which happened to go through them and block them. But, he said, their side set ambushes all the time and were constantly attacking our installations, but we didn't do that to them. He thought that some of the people who had defected to our side, including some of the people he had trained as guerrillas and sappers, could be very effective in being turned back against the other side. Well, I thought this was a great idea. We had tried it on a limited scale. We had the armed propaganda teams (of defectors) which were used to some extent by the Vietnamese army; although they were seldom used the way they should have been, they worked out reasonably well. The Marines have what they call the Kit Carson Scouts, there are about 5,000 of them. They were better employed, mostly for scouting and setting occasional ambushes, but they were not used to the extent that I think they should have been.

When I finally got into the NSC and I had some clout and influence, in that I could communicate directly with generals, I tried to get both the Vietnamese generals and our own generals interested in forming teams of former guerrillas and sappers to be used against the enemy. They would be inserted into enemy territory so that they could ambush and attack the enemy troops and installations. I was sure defectors would be willing to do this, because when they were used defectors did a splendid job, they were very dedicated. The concept reminded me of our use of Indian scouts during the Indian wars. Those Indian scouts were very effective. I felt we could have done the same thing in Vietnam.

But I could never get the Vietnamese interested. I talked to their chief of staff and others and they, in effect, said, "Well, they were communists and how can you trust them?" I said, "You don't have to trust them, you are not having them guard anything, you are inserting them into enemy territory. If they redefect which, in fact, never happened, what have you lost? You have lost captured weapons, a radio that we gave them, two weeks rations, all of which adds up to nothing." But they were too limited in their vision. Our own people weren't interested in it because...I had to sound cynical about this, but I am inclined to believe part of it was that the whole program could have been run by a colonel and would have cost next to nothing. But we were spending about \$2 billion a month when I was out there and we are talking 1965-66-67 dollars. This kind of operation would have cost nothing and I am convinced would have been highly effective and would have tied up enemy forces to such an extent that they would have difficulties to mounting offensive operations. As Colonel Tuyuan said, who was very savvy, "We

are vulnerable as hell."

Well, that was one of my great frustrations in the whole Vietnam experience. I thought when I got to the White House that I would be able to convince somebody that this was the way to go. And I am still convinced to this day that it would have turned the tide dramatically. But there was no high tech involved and no careers could have been made out of this. We were oriented to high tech, wedded to high tech solutions, which to some extent weren't the answer in that environment. My greatest regret is that I did not press my case harder. I guess I was too much the disciplined Foreign Service officer to do so.

Another low tech system that we should have had over there was a couple of battleships on station off North Vietnam. Had we done so, we would have lost just a tiny fraction of the planes we lost. Eighty percent of all targets we struck by air in North Vietnam, at great cost to us, could have been taken out with 16 inch guns. The notorious Thanh-hoa bridge on Route 1 could have been taken out with one salvo from a 16 inch gun. Instead we lost God knows how many aircraft and air crews in the attempt. Also, we would have had far fewer prisoners of war if we had had a couple of battleships there. We did have one battleship, the New Jersey, over there for a relatively short time which did a fantastic job and everybody raved about it. The North Vietnamese were terrified of it. I suspect the aircraft carrier boys agitated against it. In any case, it was withdrawn after a short time..

Also, I read that the North Vietnamese considered this such a threat that they insisted it jeopardized negotiations. This may well have been the main reason we withdrew the New Jersey. This was a factor which I hadn't considered at the time.

So those were two fundamental mistakes that we made. One thing I learned from this experience, I think this is an original Stearmanism, if you have too many resources, you are no longer resourceful. We had seemingly limitless resources and poured an enormous amount of everything in there. We had over half a million men there but never had more than 80,000 in maneuver battalions actually fighting. So we had a Pizza Hut in Cam Ranh Bay. We had PXs in Saigon, the electronics section would have made Radio Shack look like a dime store. It was grotesque the way we were going about this war. Our whole emphasis should have been on training the Vietnamese. Instead there was a universal attitude of "stand aside you little slopes," as we called them, "and let us Americans do the job." Another was short tours. One year was ridiculous. The civilian tours were a year and a half, also ridiculous. They should have been at least two. So you had a limited amount of time in which to do your job and rather than muck around with training the Vietnamese, which complicated things, you just went out and did it yourself. This was wrong!

Most people do not realize that in the end the South Vietnamese themselves, despite the emphasis that we had placed on our own efforts and on high tech, damn near won it on the ground. In fact, by mid-September, 1972, the South Vietnamese, with our air, naval and logistics support, were winning the war hands down on the ground. I was interested that Bill Colby, retired Director of CIA, who has since become very dovish on almost any national security issue, wrote a book a few years ago called "Lost Victory," in which he said exactly what I am telling you now. That we, in effect, snatched defeat from the jaws of victory back in 1972 because the

North Vietnamese were on the ropes. They had just about had it, and had run out of steam. The offensive they launched at the beginning of April, 1972 cost them about 100,000 men killed in action, and they had to scrape the bottom of their manpower barrel to launch it in the first place.

Q: Was that the Easter offensive?

STEARMAN: Yes. In fact, I predicted that offensive in November, 1971 simply from reading Hanoi press accounts of how they were starting to induct people that they had never inducted before, people who had always been excepted from induction. So I knew they were getting ready for a big offensive that would probably start in the spring.

This is a bit of a digression, but it is also germane. I think I talked about the problems within the intelligence community or have I?

Q: I am not sure.

STEARMAN: Well, anyway when I came back from Vietnam I wound up in INR as sort of their Hanoiologist and became part of the "intelligence community." At times I went up to Langley to work on NIEs, National Intelligence Estimates. I became quite disillusioned with the process. I found that the Defense Intelligence Agency often skewed intelligence to put a conservative twist, if you will, on it. Whereas the CIA analysts tended to put a liberal twist on things. So finally when I went over to the NSC, I formed my own intelligence group. (I discuss this in detail at the end of this interview.)

Q: Let's go back to Saigon. Did you have any contact with the CIA there?

STEARMAN: Well, I didn't think they knew that much about my area. I think there were people in the political section who did know a lot; therefore, I had to start being my own expert. One of the very best sources of intelligence, I have always maintained, is FBIS, the CIA's Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which puts out translations of broadcasts and articles (which are available to anyone for a fee). I got a lot of good intelligence out of that. And then the British had a consulate in Hanoi and every time the British Consul General came down to Saigon, he or she, one of the best ones was a woman, I would spend several hours with them debriefing them. They would also bring down the latest Hanoi newspapers that we hadn't been able to get through any other source.

We also captured an enormous number of documents from the other side, millions of pages of documents. We had countless interrogation reports from people who surrendered, were captured or defected, etc. To give you an idea of how much we had, Stuart, at the end of the war, DIA in an installation over in Arlington had 8 miles of microfilmed captured documents and interrogations. Can you imagine? You know how many pages you can get on an inch. I don't think there has ever been a war in history where one side had as much raw intelligence on the other side as we did and had made so little use of it. We were simply overwhelmed with it.

So I used an awful lot of this intelligence. I felt that to be any good at this job, I had to really know the other side. Much was close to what I had been working on for years. The terminology

was certainly familiar; so I understood what they were saying, whereas the average person who hadn't spent a long time going through communist publications, would not. I found it fairly easy, and this is how I got into the whole business (of North Vietnamese affairs).

Q: Who was running JUSPAO?

STEARMAN: Barry Zorthian was.

Q: From your perspective, how did he operate?

STEARMAN: I was critical of the way that whole operation was run. In the first place, there was much more emphasis on how you do something than why you do it. At JUSPAO staff meetings almost the entire time would be spent on discussing technicalities or administrative problems. For example, they bought an enlarger that would blow a photo up to about 20 by 20 feet, and that sort of thing. They had the best printing plant in Southeast Asia, etc. This was one of our weaknesses. We were big on the technical side, but there was little discussion of why we were doing anything. What are the vulnerabilities? Or, is this program working? If not, why isn't it working? It was all how to do and the administrative problems related to it.

There were, however, some good people in JUSPAO. Take a chap by the name of Don Rochlen, for example. He would have been out of place in most normal organizations, but he had a real genius for psychological operations, somewhat eccentric, but extremely effective. There were some characters like that who were very good, but most of them, I am afraid, took more of a bureaucratic view of things. It wasn't the program it could have and should have been.

Q: On your side I would have thought there would have been fairly close liaison with the military? Was there or not?

STEARMAN: They had to do all of the delivery for me. I couldn't have done anything without them. Most of the messages I was trying to get across were on drop leaflets. They were dropped on the enemy forces in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Then we dropped millions of leaflets on North Vietnam. Initially, before I got there, the leaflets that were dropped warned civilians to stay away from military targets. That was a good and necessary program, but beyond, the target audience was a tougher nut to crack; therefore, I had to find out what was going on in North Vietnam, to see what vulnerabilities they had. One of the most effective leaflets was so inadvertent. In order to induce people to pick up these leaflets and read them, I had them printed with about 3/4ths of each side taken up with a very, very good copy of the one dong note, their unit of currency. The people were clipping off the message and passing these leaflets as currency. It was driving the other side crazy. Their media complained that we were trying to foul up their currency by dropping all this counterfeit money. Then I got to thinking: why don't we really drop counterfeit money. I was going to print up some very good higher denomination notes and drop them all over North Vietnam to screw up their economy. Treasury hit the ceiling when they heard about this. They went absolutely ballistic. They said no way is the United States Government going to get involved in any kind of counterfeiting, even if that is what it takes to win the war. So that was the end of that maneuver; however, everybody thought it was a great idea.

Q: Well, the Germans got into this. That was how Cicero got paid off and all that. I think it was all dumped into a lake in Switzerland, or something like that, but you had these beautiful pound notes.

STEARMAN: I think that was when the British started putting a silver thread in the pound, wasn't it?

Q: Yes, I think so.

STEARMAN: Leaflets generally have an effect only when tied into military operations. If they are not followed by military action, their effect is marginal. So, some of the things that we did were effective, and some were marginal. Some of the leaflets when we tried them out on enemies were even counterproductive.

Sometime in 1966, I went up to visit one of the squadrons which dropped the leaflets on the Ho Chi Minh Trail from these old C-47s to give a pep talk to the pilots who were dropping these things. The day before, one of their C-47s was shot down on a leaflet mission and only one person was rescued. We never knew what happened to the others. They were missing in action. So after I had given my pep talk about what a great program this was, one of the pilots stepped up to me and said, "You really believe in this program don't you?" "Indeed I do, you are doing a great job," I replied. He then said, "How about flying a mission with us tomorrow?" What could I do? It was 2:00 in the afternoon and I was all ready to go back to Saigon, but felt obliged to say, "Okay." So I spent the rest of the day being instructed in escape and evasion tactics in case we were shot down. The next morning before dawn they start suiting me up. First I put on a flak jacket, then a survival kit, a parachute, the biggest damn revolver I have ever seen, and like the knights of old, I had to be practically hoisted into the plane. I got into the old C-47 and walked up to the cockpit to introduce myself. On the way I saw a spec plate on the bulkhead which said, "US Army Air Corps," which didn't do my morale much good. This meant it was built about 1940 or 1941. It became US Air Force in about 1942!.

Q: No in 1948, US Air Force.

STEARMAN: But, I mean US Army Air Force that was in 1942, but this was US Army Air Corps. Well, that was bad enough but then I started talking to the pilot. I found out he had been a pilot in World War II and was still just a captain! This was not a good sign. Also, I expected we would fly way up high out of anti-aircraft range and drop these things, but no, we were flying low. You could look straight out both sides and see mountains, and people were shooting at us. You could see these little flashes. We were shoveling the leaflets out the chutes and I started reading some of them and said, "My God, I had these withdrawn a month ago." They weren't worth a damn and here we were all risking our lives dropping things which should have been withdrawn. The cargo doors were left open because there was a loud speaker mounted in their place. In order to go to the head you had to hold on sort of to the ribbing with your fingers, edging along with your butt hanging out over the space because the head door opened out, and when you are nervous, as I was, you have to go to the head more often. Each time was a hair raising experience. Anyway, we dropped all the leaflets and made it back. The first thing the

pilot did was to get out and see where, if at all, we had been hit. We hadn't been.

This was the sort of situation you can get yourself into. I believe Foreign Service officers, on the whole, probably saw more action than most troops over there. Many of them were out in the "boonies" with the Vietnamese. As you know, since World War II, more ambassadors have been killed in action than admirals and generals. I had an FSO working for me at the NSC who led a group of militia, the popular forces, in holding off a very sizeable North Vietnamese attack all night long. He was in command of the troops. He got a medal for it. This was Al (Alvin) Adams, who was our last Ambassador in Haiti, and now is going down to Peru as Ambassador. When you join the Foreign Service, you don't count on getting into combat.

Q: No you don't at all.

STEARMAN: My ears are still ringing from having been on the receiving end of a lot of heavy Soviet ordnance during the 1972 spring offensive. Part of the time I was with my old friend, Chris Squire, who was an FSO and the senior province rep (for Pleiku Province) at the time. He was a P-40 pilot in World War II. We were heavily shelled the whole time I was up there (in II Corps), and my ears have been ringing ever since from the concussions. Here again was an FSO who was not only in the front line, but was way in front of the front line. Chris, alas, recently died of cancer.

Q: What was your impression of the embassy and how it was going about its business?

STEARMAN: There were some good people there, some very good people, particularly on the political side, for example, Martin Herz, who was the great intellectual of the Foreign Service. He wrote one of the very best things on Vietnam, a monograph entitled "The Vietnam War in Retrospect," which he produced when he was dying. It is 80 pages long and if you read that, you will have a better understanding of the Vietnam War than anything else you could read. It is brilliant. He was, I think, either the head or deputy chief of the political section. Maybe Phil Habib was the head of the political section at the time. I am trying to remember.

Q: When I was there, 1969-70, Herz was the head of the political section, but he may have been the deputy prior to that.

STEARMAN: Tom Corcoran was extremely good. Most of the officers I knew there were first rate. There were some very good junior officers who went on to become very successful, for example, John Negroponce, who just came back as our Ambassador to Mexico, as well as Frank Wisner and Dick Holbrooke who now is our Ambassador to Germany. So we had an extremely good bunch of young officers at that time. I was much impressed.

Q: Was Cabot Lodge the Ambassador?

STEARMAN: Cabot Lodge was there. I was somewhat less impressed by Cabot Lodge, than I was by Ellsworth Bunker who came towards the end of my stay. Bunker was impressive. Cabot Lodge was okay, and was reasonably knowledgeable. I wasn't negatively impressed by him, just sort of unimpressed, I suppose.

Q: What emanations were you getting from the people who knew about the Vietnamese government? Was Thieu in?

STEARMAN: No, it was Ky initially.

Q: There had been a whole series of leaders since 1963 and the killing of Diem. What was the feeling about the Vietnamese government when you were there?

STEARMAN: I think there was always the feeling that it might be overthrown by another coup. Most people felt that it was not all that stable. There was a fair amount of incompetence and corruption that everybody knew and talked about. As it turned out, most people didn't realize that there was far more corruption and incompetence in North Vietnam, but that was never published. It was more obvious and visible in the open South than in the closed North.

I blame us for that instability. Whether or not you liked Ngo Dinh Diem, he was succeeding fairly well. He might not have been the Thomas Jefferson of Southeast Asia, but he had done remarkably well in pulling the country together and leading it. When we publicly pulled the rug out from under him -- I am convinced, however, that we did not order his assassination, and did not know it was coming -- we destabilized the government (and the country), and it stayed destabilized until Thieu took over. It was pretty stable after that.

After Diem was killed, the whole thing landed on our shoulders. All the generals who made the coup then turned to us and said, "What do we do now, coach?" From then on it became our responsibility. This was the first fundamental mistake we made. That emboldened Hanoi to start launching major attacks and to begin inserting regular forces into the South. Hanoi knew the situation was shaky. Diem had built a pretty good structure in the countryside which became unraveled after the coup. So we were still feeling the reverberations of that when I got out there in 1965. In 1966 it got better and the government became somewhat more accepted by the people. You, Stu, were out there in the salad days (1969-1970).

Q: Yes, things seemed to be coming along rather nicely, thank you, at that time.

STEARMAN: When you were out there they had a bicycle race all the way from Hue down to Ca-Mau, the whole length of the country.

I was dating a young French woman who taught at the French Lycee in Dalat, and she would drive down to see me on Fridays. She had to go through two or three VC roadblocks before she got to Saigon. She spoke French, so they let her through. I sweated out every Friday night to see if she was going to make it. The last roadblock wouldn't have been too far outside of Saigon.

The whole situation, by this time, had gone to hell in a hand basket. I think initially we had to send in troops to stabilize the situation. That was essential. After that, our mission should have been to train the Vietnamese to take it from there. The Vietnamese are very impressive people. We could train a Vietnamese, who spoke English, to fly as quickly as we could train an American. The modern French nuclear-armed air force was once commanded by a Vietnamese.

And in France, some of the leading engineers, scientists and physicians are Vietnamese. They are an extremely gifted people. They had the gray matter and many of them had the guts. They mainly needed the right kind of leadership and training. As I pointed out earlier, in 1972 they were waxing the North Vietnamese. They drove them out of Quang Tri where they were only 20 miles from North Vietnam, with Route 1 the best LOC (line of communication) they could have possibly had, and with their strongest and best equipped forces. They couldn't even hold that position. That no doubt convinced them that they couldn't hold anything else. They were losing. This was later confirmed by a North Vietnamese general (Tran Van Tra) who wrote that they were on the ropes and losing. That is the tragedy of the whole war: our side literally snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

Q: Well, you left there in 1967. What did you do?

STEARMAN: I went back to the Department and was working with the Vietnam Task group. I filled in part time to help the Voice of America broadcast to Vietnam, mostly using my knowledge of the North Vietnamese. Then I became INR's "Hanoiologist" in the Asia section of INR, replacing Dick Smyser who went to the NSC. Then I had a falling out with the head of the Asian section, Bill Gleysteen, who didn't see eye-to-eye with me. He was generally negative about my judgments and was somewhat dovish on Vietnam, which I was not. He finally gave me the sack, and I wound up, to his surprise and chagrin, in The White House on the NSC staff.

Q: While you were with INR and later with the NSC, did you find anybody of knowledge that had been focusing for a long time within the United States on Hanoi? I am talking about the academic community or anywhere else. Was there anything?

STEARMAN: Not much. That was one of our problems. I felt that those people who were, lacked objectivity. They tended to skew things one way or the other, either conservative or liberal.

But, I will tell you what most shocked me, Stu. When I finally realized that I was going out there to work on North Vietnam -- I was then in SOV in the Department -- I chased around the Department trying to get myself briefed on my new area...this was the beginning of November, 1965. We had been de facto at war with North Vietnam since February of that year, but still we did not have one person in the Department working full time on North Vietnam. We had one very competent woman who worked on North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and part of the China account. That was it. We had Uganda almost covered better than we had the country with which we were at war. It was grotesque. That I think was one of our main problems. The people we had covering the enemy side were Asia area specialists. It has been my experience that when it comes to understanding indigenous communist movements, area specialists are usually woefully inadequate. I, myself, might well be woefully inadequate in assessing the non-communist side of developments in certain areas. I have seen it in ARA and AF and certainly in East Asia. The people in EA had little understanding of what was going on. There were a number of people in EA, for example, who actually thought the Viet Cong were an independent group, that they had a good deal of autonomy and were only allied with Hanoi, not completely under Hanoi's control. That was subsequently disproved beyond a shadow of a doubt, principally by Hanoi, itself. Even during the war if you read carefully what the other side was putting out, it was clear that the VC

had no independence. Of all the millions of pages of documents that we captured, we never captured one single NLF document which contained anything that was not essentially just propaganda. Not one contained military directives, orders or anything of substance.

Q: NLF being what we call the Viet Cong.

STEARMAN: And anyone who has worked a long time on communist affairs knows how these front organizations work. They have been doing it ever since the Comintern decided at its 7th Congress in 1935 that this was the route they were going to take, "popular front" movements. The communists in Vietnam used about four different fronts, and the NLF (or VC) was the only most recent front of those they had created. I simply could not understand how serious people could believe that these were anything but the fronts, but many did. That is just one example of where we were going wrong. It is just like those in ARA who thought the Sandinistas were not really communists, until they finally came out and said they were. The regional problem is widespread.

That, I'm afraid, was a roundabout answer to your original question. I would say that the short answer is that we had inadequate knowledge of the enemy, particularly in the government. I also didn't find that many academics who impressed me much either, one way or the other. Those people were generally too subjective. I have always thought that one of the advantages that I had over many of my colleagues is that I trained to be a geophysics engineer and my theory is that anyone with that kind of a background uses inductive reasoning as opposed to deducting reasoning in problem solving. I just say; give me the facts. I try as best I can to base my opinions on facts. I think that makes a difference. I found that most people, including many colleagues, were using a deductive approach, that is, making up their minds then trying to find the facts to support their view. This was true of both conservatives and liberals.

JAMES G. LOWENSTEIN
Staff of Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Washington, DC (1965-1974)

Staff of Senate Foreign Relations Committee
City Unspecified, Vietnam (1967-1974)

Ambassador James G. Lowenstein was born in New Jersey in 1927. He entered the Foreign Service in 1950. His career included posts in Paris, Ceylon, and Yugoslavia. Ambassador Lowenstein was ambassador to Luxembourg from 1977 to 1981. He was interviewed by Dennis Kux in 1994.

LOWENSTEIN: Now in those days members of the Committee staff were assigned to deal with both sides of an issue. The staff member was supposed to become an expert and be able to counsel both the opponents and proponents. And that is indeed what I did on the Consular Convention. I wrote both the majority and minority reports. The majority report for Fulbright and the minority report for Carl Mundt. I received, what I thought at that time, since I was in favor of

ratifying the Consular Convention, a high complement from Mundt who felt that the minority report was a sounder document than the majority report. Not only did I have to prepare the two reports, I had to go down to the floor of the Senate and sit with the leaders of the two factions during the debate and support the arguments that they wanted to make and act as their counsel during this procedure. That is an example of how a non-partisan staff used to work in the old days.

There is an incident involving Senator Wayne Morse that I think is interesting in describing the difference between working in a structured bureaucracy, like the State Department, and Capitol Hill. The State Department issued a legal white paper justifying involvement in Vietnam. I can't remember whether it was in 1965 or 1966. At any rate, Wayne Morse wanted to attack this document which he felt was flawed and which he felt was incorrect in many respects and did not in fact justify involvement in Vietnam. Carl asked me to go over and talk to a member of his staff and find out what he wanted and do it. So I went over and talked to a very nice lady named Phyllis Rock, who was one of his legislative assistants. She said, "Well, this is what he wants you to do. He wants to attack this thing which he considers to be total nonsense. He wants to make a statement on the floor of the Senate." So I went back. I hadn't met Wayne Morse. I started going over the document and it seemed to me to be full of holes and specious reasoning. At least it could be attacked on these grounds. So I wrote a long dissertation about what was wrong...

Q: Did you contact the State Department?

LOWENSTEIN: No, absolutely not. ...a long dissertation on what I thought was wrong with this legal justification, checking a few points with the Congressional Research Service and the General Counsel of the Office of the Senate, etc. I sent it over and waited to have a meeting to discuss it. I waited two days and nothing happened. I got sort of nervous and called Phyllis Rock and said, "When are we meeting to discuss my draft on the State Department White Paper?" She said, "Well, if you will go over to the floor of the Senate right now, he started reading it 5 minutes ago, you can hear it." Which I did. Afterwards I went up to her and asked why we had not had a meeting on this. Did he consider it? Did he discuss it? After all Wayne Morse had been a dean of a law school and had been in the Senate a long time and presumably would want to check something that somebody he had never met had written. "Not at all," she said. "He went over it, made a few minor changes, thought it was fine, went over to the Senate, got up on his feet and read it." The next morning it was in the world press and in the public domain.

The lesson to be drawn here is that when you are working in a place like Capitol Hill, and indeed in a lot of other places, once you put something in the hands of someone who is going to make it public, you have no control over it. And all the fire breaks that you have and protections you have in the State Department don't exist in lots of other places, especially Capitol Hill. So, if you are going to make a mistake, you are going to make it. On the other hand, if you produce something that is very wishy-washy and that never takes a position, nobody is ever going to use it because that is not what they need. It is a very good lesson in learning how to live in the real world. At least that is how I interpret it.

Now, on the subject of mistakes, let me just give you the other side of the picture. One day

Fulbright called me down to his office and said, "I am sick and tired of these other countries supporting the war in Vietnam when politically they don't believe in it. They are supporting it because they are making a lot of money out of it. So, get the facts and give me a speech that I can deliver on the floor." So I prepared a lot of correspondence that went to the Defense Department, the State Department, asking all sorts of questions and figures on exports and all the rest of it. I called the Congressional Research Service and they did their usual superb job of a research document. I got all the facts together and wrote a speech. Fulbright went on the floor and delivered this steaming indictment of Allied behavior in Vietnam.

The next morning I got a call from the Counselor of the New Zealand embassy who asked me where I had gotten the figure that Fulbright had given for the profit that the New Zealanders had made in Vietnam. I described the complicated procedure by which I had arrived at this figure by taking various figures from various attachments and adding and subtracting and multiplying, etc. and assured him that is where the figure had come from. He said that that was what they had assumed since Fulbright had outlined the procedure in his speech and they had done the same thing. However, their figure was 20 percent of my figure. I assured him that he was wrong and said I would check.

I checked my figures and called him back and said, "Well, I am awfully sorry. You are right and I am wrong. So what do we do about this?" He said, "Well, it may interest you to know that the Prime Minister made a statement in parliament about two hours ago. The ambassador, in fact, is in the State Department right now delivering a formal protest to the Secretary of State. The only thing that my government wants is a formal apology from Fulbright on the floor of the Senate."

So I went crawling down to Fulbright's office and opened the door and said, "I am sorry, I quit, I am leaving, etc." He said, "Well, what's the matter with you?" And I said, "Well, the matter is that this happened and it is embarrassing you and I will be out of my office by 3:00 this afternoon. All I can say is I'm very sorry." And he said, "Ah, come on, don't be so silly. All right, so they are not making what you said they are making, they are still making a lot. What difference does it make?" I said, "Well, the difference it makes is that the Prime Minister has made a statement in parliament and the ambassador is protesting to the Secretary of State and they want a formal apology from you on the floor." And he said, "So, they want a formal apology. Do they really want a formal apology?" "That's what they said." "All right, I will give them a formal apology," he said.

So the next day he got on the floor and said, "We made a mistake, they didn't make "x" they made 20 percent of that and we are sorry we made that mistake. But they did make 20 percent of "x" which just proves my point that here they are. Now it is true they didn't make "x" but as I said they did make 20 percent of "x".

I thought to myself at the time that if this had happened to me in the State Department I undoubtedly would have been fired, transferred, gotten a bad efficiency report, etc., but there it was just another mistake made in the course of a day's work. This shows that contrary to his reputation, Fulbright was a tolerant, understanding person to work for.

LOWENSTEIN: We went to Vietnam and spent about ten days there. It was my first trip to Vietnam. I had asked before we left whether I could go off on my own for four or five days during the time that Senator Hart was doing the usual senatorial things in Vietnam...visiting the troops from Michigan, etc. I went off with an old friend of mine, Charles Flood, who was a journalist, to the Delta, to some contested villages. In one of them we spent two nights and we found when we woke up the second morning that three people in the house of the deputy village chief had been assassinated during the course of the evening. This had been a so-called safe village. We were dropped by helicopter and picked up 48 hours later. So I began to wonder that if this was a safe village, what was it like in the rest of the villages that weren't considered safe. In going to all the briefings with General Westmoreland and all the others, it began to look to me as though somebody wasn't telling the truth somewhere along the line. On the way out to Vietnam in the plane, Senator Hart had...

Q: This was 1967?

LOWENSTEIN: This was '66 or '67, I will have to look it up. I think it was January, 1967. ...Senator Hart had told me that he was a strong supporter of the Vietnam War. He, himself, was a combat veteran of World War II, in fact I think he had been quite badly wounded in World War II. He was a moderate to centrist hawk. After he had been in Vietnam for ten days, he was a dove. The conversion was quite dramatic. I remember one incident. We were being briefed by a general about the great military successes of the forces under his command and what their body count was and how well they had fought and what they had done, etc., and exactly how they had conducted their military operations. Senator Hart turned to me and with a wry smile said, "Makes you wonder whose sons they are?" At any rate, that was when I first began to think that...my own view was that the military was not telling the truth and were presenting a factually distorted picture of the war giving one side and not the other. And for every fact they cited as a positive accomplishment or a sign that they were winning the war, there was another fact that could be cited that proved exactly the opposite. The least that should have been done for the American decision makers and the American public was to give both sides of the issue. But both sides were not being presented.

So when I got back I wrote a long report on Vietnam. At that point Senator Hart did not want to go public with his reservations. He wanted to pick his own time and wanted to get into it gradually. So, instead of releasing the report he sent it as a confidential report to the majority leader, Senator Mansfield. That led to Senator Mansfield inviting me to come along subsequently on his trips to the Far East. I don't think it was because of what the report said, but because, I suppose, he was looking for somebody who could write reports in the way that he liked them written which was factual, understated, unemotional and without value judgments. So I began my travels with Mansfield.

....There were always people who would help us. And even people, in a lot of cases, who agreed with the policy would help us because they believed that we were entitled to get true facts and not a lot of garbage. So we always found mid-grade and junior officers very helpful. And, in fact, junior officers in the military were helpful. Journalists were very helpful and some academics were helpful. So you had a large range of people that you could turn to and that is why I think

you get some perspective. You are not only dealing with the Foreign Service officer or with the particular government officials to whom his job relates

Q: That is quite a range.

LOWENSTEIN: A very wide range. And more, because we had all the security clearances that were possible so that we were getting classified briefings from everyone. So we had a much wider range than journalists, in fact.

This is how you find out what is going on if a branch of government doesn't want you to know. And why I think that senatorial investigating missions are totally ineffective. Let me just take the case of dealing with the military. The military, when they decide that they don't want someone to find something out, has a very easy technique for dealing with this and it is to keep the people in briefings and in motion. For example, in Vietnam they loved taking visitors, Senators or alleged investigators all over the country, because by the time you get from your hotel to the airport, take a helicopter ride that lasts two hours and go into the local military headquarters, have a wonderful briefing that lasts for an hour and a half, have lunch with the general that lasts another hour, get back to the airport, get back on the helicopter, go back into Saigon, get back from the airport to your hotel, a day has gone. And if you repeat that exercise with its variations, you can tie any visitor up indefinitely. Point one.

Point two. The only way that you can find out what is going on, obviously, is to use as many sources as you possibly can, and I will get back to that in a minute. Point three is that whether an investigator is a detective, a journalist, a congressman, or Foreign Service officer, trying to find out what the local government is doing to pull the wool over his eyes, the thing that always breaks open cases is happenstance. And happenstance only occurs if you have a lot of time because if you have a lot of time, accidents will happen. If you are rushed and programmed all the time, nothing happens.

Let me give you an example on the third point. The way we discovered that the United States had illegally trained some Cambodians who were alleged to be native soldiers was that we were walking along a street and ran into one of these guys. I can't remember whether it was Dick or whether it was me, but one of us said to this fellow in French something like, "Where is the hotel?" Instead of answering in French, the guy said, "Say again, sir?" Well, it didn't take a genius to know where he had learned that phrase and it wasn't in the Cambodian army because we weren't training the Cambodian army at that point. So that is an example. And then we discovered that these were the Khmer Krom, who had been in Vietnam, who had been shipped over. These were Khmers who were basically Vietnamese who were part of the South Vietnamese army who had been trained by the Americans. So that is the way you find out that kind of thing.

Q: You tell in an earlier session how you found in Phnom Penh through somebody's girlfriend who was listening to a radio...

LOWENSTEIN: Well, she wasn't somebody's girl friend, she was a well known correspondent, Sylvana Foa, who today, incidentally, as we speak is the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

spokesperson. She was then a UPI correspondent. I went through that incident before.

Q: Yes, but that was by chance.

LOWENSTEIN: That's by chance. Let's take the using as many sources as possible part of it. When we were trying to find out exactly how many sorties we were flying over Laos and Cambodia, and who was flying them, the information was not given to us. I can't remember whether this was on security grounds or they didn't know, or the records aren't kept here, or it is none of your business, or we need authority from Washington, or whatever it was. But we didn't get it. When we stopped in CINCPAC, we were around there for two or three days and at some point somebody said to us, "You know, we have this fantastic computer and it logs in every single sortie in Indochina. It has an account of exactly when the pilot takes off, where he is going, what he has done and when he gets back." We said, "Well, that is interesting, we would like to see that." So they said, "Sure, sure, it is marvelous, you will be impressed." They took us into a big room and there was the computer. We said, "Well, just as a test case, what if we asked you what sorties had been flown in Laos last month." The guy said, "No problem." He punched a sheet and out came a map of Laos with every sortie listed. As I recall we went through all of the sorties in Laos and probably Cambodia as well. That is where the figures come from in the report that we did on the subject. They came from the CINCPAC computer. Now those guys who were sitting off in a room far removed from the theater of operation, knew more than anyone else in the world, except the Pentagon to which they sent their reports back. They knew much more than anybody in the theater in Vietnam or Okinawa.

Q: They didn't know that the Pentagon didn't want you to know?

LOWENSTEIN: And they didn't know that. There was another interesting incident in CINCPAC where we were trying to find out military assistance figures. We were trying to find them out without much success. We were at dinner one night with someone and he brought along a friend of his. This fellow said, "Meet Frank so-and-so from the comptroller's office in the Pentagon. Frank plays the computer the way Paderewski plays the piano." We said, "Oh, that's interesting. Since you can play the computer, can you pull up the figures on exactly how this military program works, what the funding is, the commitments were, where it came from, etc.?" Again we got the whole story. Now this fellow did know what we were supposed to be told and what we weren't to be told and that, of course, was something that we were supposed to be told because that was a congressional authorization. The fact is, nobody else knew how to do it. He also explained how this stuff was presented in order to meet various legislative restrictions on amounts, conditions, etc. So, indeed, he did know how to play the computer like Paderewski plays the piano. And the point is, that was where you get the information. It wasn't as available as easily anyplace else.

Q: One thing that puzzled me in your congressional discussions is the fact that you were later hired by Kissinger. It was my recollection that this was regarded, although you said it wasn't partisan, as a highly anti-administration effort trying to undermine the effort in Vietnam, etc. And you guys were very effective because of the things that you turned up, concrete incidences in which the administration was caught out, not telling the whole story. How come you got hired?

LOWENSTEIN: I really can't answer that question. All I know is that when I went in to see Fulbright and said that I was going to leave and that I thought I would go to a business school or something, he said, "Well, I am seeing Kissinger tomorrow, do you want me to ask him whether he would like to have you back in the Foreign Service?" I said, "Well, sure ask him, see what he thinks." And I was told that the reaction was very favorable. At that point Eagleburger was working for Kissinger and made the same check and said that Kissinger would be delighted to have me back. In fact he wanted me to work on speeches.

Q: It still surprises me.

LOWENSTEIN: Well, I like to think it's because he thought the reports were really very good and some of them weren't criticizing the administration. The first Cambodian report in fact said that we thought the Cambodians really were worth supporting and we never in any report implied that the invasion had made inevitable a Khmer Rouge victory. What we did say was that it had driven the Khmer Rouge further into Cambodia because they had to get out of where they were as the US forces went across the border. So they were geographically in a deeper penetration than they had been in some ways. They were always along the Thai border and the Vietnamese border, but there was some movement into places they hadn't been before. Our argument on the Cambodian invasion was that there hadn't been any true consultation with the Congress, which there was supposed to have been and that militarily it seemed to us that it would prolong the war in Vietnam. If you go back and look at that first Cambodian report and the press reports on that first Cambodian report, you will see that in fact the administration used it as an argument that even we had agreed with them on certain things that they were saying about it.

I was sort of surprised too, that I was welcomed back. Dick had a different relationship with Kissinger and he didn't want to go back anyway. But I don't think Kissinger liked Dick very much, so...

LOWENSTEIN: There then arose another issue during this negotiating period which was that Peter Flanagan who was in the White House and a member of Nixon's inner circle and very partisan...I had known him a long time because his wife and my then wife were roommates at boarding school together, and, as I recall, they had been at our wedding. Anyway, he got wind of this and started saying that this was politically unacceptable. At that point, as I recall, Eagleburger said to Kissinger, "If we are going to get this thing done at all, it has to be done right away." So, he said, "Okay, go ahead and do it." So, it was done very quickly. And, by the time Flanagan really got up in arms, I was already there.

MARY CHAMBLISS
Economic Research Service, Junior Economist, Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC (1965-c1977)

Mary Chambliss was born and raised in Virginia and educated at Mary Washington College, Roanoke College and the George Washington University. In 1965 she joined the United States Department of Agriculture, where she dealt

primarily with commodities in the Foreign Agricultural Service of the Department. During her career Mrs. Chambliss also served briefly in the Department of State, working in the International Cooperation and Development section of the Department. Mrs. Chambliss was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.

Q: Well on the Vietnam side, this was when you switched over - ?

CHAMBLISS: Yeah and began to work on food aid.

Q: How did that affect you?

CHAMBLISS: Well, there were a group of junior professionals in USDA in fact we had – we sponsored a seminar where we had the people who opposed the war, that got our names on a list we were told in the Department, it didn't seem to make any difference, so there was a lot of tension back and forth. Now I had people that I worked with of course that went to Vietnam that did a lot of the work, I mentioned my division director, no my branch chief, was Ed Farnstead. I remember State and AID had him go to Vietnam, I worked with the Vietnam Bureau, I remember of course the building over here in Rosslyn that the Vietnam Bureau had - their own building and then when Vietnam fell apart as best I could tell they all went to work on Egypt – but I remember the Vietnam Bureau– So I remember a lot of people including some from my high school who died there. . Of course I did my job, my boss and I developed many food aid agreements with Vietnam, Cambodia – I remember when we you know, used Cambodia and got them in that whole morass, so –

Q: Did you feel particularly engaged in Vietnam; for or against it?

CHAMBLISS: I guess I felt torn. I remember we used to have an inter-agency meeting, I wanted the war over, I thought the war should never have taken place, I thought it was a mistake and that people died and suffered terrible consequences for something that was never going to happen and that we created this nightmare ourselves. And I remember walking into an inter-agency meeting that we used to have at State, AID, OMB, USDA and Treasury; it must have been the day after Saigon fell and I think I walked in young and foolish and said something like well thank goodness that's over, I thought they were going to kill me because there were a lot of different feelings. Well, no there was a lot of feeling I had back and forth but just never – most of the people I interacted with, although Jim Bullion now that I think about it, Jim was a colonel from the Army who had been in Lebanon or something but he had done I forget what you call it in the army, it's like the civilian civics what's the Army call that?

Q: Well there's civil military affairs.

CHAMBLISS: Yeah, right, well he had done that kind of thing, but now that I think about it Jim never talked one way or another about Vietnam. I mean I didn't in the office either I mean, we were there you know, we were supposed to do the agreements and I thought that food aid probably was – I objected to the war, I didn't object to the fact that we were providing food aid, maybe you know later in life I would have.

Q: In the Department of Agriculture, not necessary connected with Vietnam but it could be too, but this was still at a time sort of from the 1960s where if you were under 30 years old you had God's blessing, if you were over 30 you couldn't be trusted you know, this whole sort of youth thing. Was there any sort of gathering together of under 30's who were going to change the world?

CHAMBLISS: I don't think so. Like I was saying, there were a group of us, myself and the others, but no it wasn't that conscious or at least I wasn't because you know by then I was married, my son was born in 1969 so I working full time and taking care of a new baby. Like I said there were a group of us that got together and sponsored this one conference session whatever we called it, seminar, on the war and had people come down and speak against the war, but other than that I don't remember. And I don't particularly remember a lot of hostility although they all said that you know the Department's administration office had all our names but I think it was probably just a rumor.

ROBERT B. PETERSEN
Assistant Public Affairs Officer, USIA
Saigon (1966-1967)

Mr. Petersen was born and raised in Ohio and educated at Oberlin College. He entered the USIA Foreign Service in 1965 and served as Public and Cultural Affairs Office in Embassies or Consulates in Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Mauritius, Israel, Morocco and Cote d'Ivoire. He also served in several senior USIA positions in Washington, DC. Mr. Peterson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You arrived there when?

PETERSEN: In early '66. Probably the beginning of March.

Q: How did it work out? What did they have you doing?

PETERSEN: I was just describing Barry Zorthian to you. I think there were some interesting things about my arrival there, but let me move ahead for a couple days. At some point early in my first week there, like all new arrivals at JUSPAO, I was scheduled to have lunch with Barry Zorthian at his residence. I gather it was a routine, maybe a daily thing. I was notified that I would have lunch at Barry's residence. I showed up and there was an Army colonel there. He was the other new arrival that day having lunch with Barry. Just the three of us at the table, sitting outside, Barry sitting at the head of the table. I can't recall much about the lunch, but it struck me as elegant and very attractively set, very nice. Barry turned first to the colonel, "Well, tell me about yourself." This guy went on and on. He had a lot to tell. This man had a career. I remember sitting there listening and thinking, "Gee, wow, that's really impressive." Then Barry turned to me and said, "Tell me about yourself."

I'll never forget that Barry threw his fork down. It clattered on the table. A combination of dribbles of food and expletives came forth from his mouth about those "idiots back in Washington. Didn't they know there was an absolute rule prohibiting first tour officers." It seemed like an awful long time he was in a tirade about "those idiots back there." At some point, I was able to intervene and say, "Mr. Zorthian, sir, you approved it." Then that set him off again. He wanted to know when and how. I reminded him of that hallway meeting. He then said, "Well, what the hell was I thinking?"

Q: What was your impression when you hit Tan Sanh Hut Air Base?

PETERSEN: I got to Vietnam in the evening on a flight from Hong Kong. There was an incident taking place because there was a blackout. It couldn't have been that significant an incident because I was on a commercial flight and it landed. But nevertheless, it was significant enough that there was a blackout. I was hustled through whatever the formalities of arrival were and taken to downtown Saigon to the Aster Hotel. There were a number of people being housed there and I was put in a room that I shared with someone else newly arrived. I don't recall what agency he was with. But he was a civilian. It was a short walk from the hotel to JUSPAO. I don't recall how I got there the next day.

In reporting for duty, I reported to the executive officer. Unlike in the military, he wasn't the second in command. He simply was the chief administrator of JUSPAO. His name was Harold Wright, an experienced administrative person. He outlined for me what the training program would be. He was determined that I would indeed have a training program at JUSPAO and wouldn't simply be assigned or "misused" by being thrown in somewhere where a body was needed. He actually had a formal training program laid out. I took a look at it before coming here today and read the very precise "two weeks here, two weeks there, etc." It didn't turn out that way, but it was a good starting point, a good negotiating point for what I needed to cover and where I should go. I had a real positive impression of those people I met. I remember Betty Paidian was the personnel officer at JUSPAO. Wilmer Wilkie was one of the assistant administrators there; he handled finance. I met that group the first morning and was excited and pleased.

Q: What was the situation in '66 on the ground in Vietnam?

PETERSEN: Anything I say I'm reporting through the somewhat dim recollections of a newly arrived JOT. A lot of confusion about who was who, what was what, what was going on, what was underway in the countryside, outside the city. But in saying that, I realize that almost all of that confusion must have been my own. Everything I saw and heard, every acronym, organization, person I met, job title was all so fresh and new and trying to sort that out rapidly was probably what gives me the idea that there was confusion. I remember some early conversations with people about terrorism, bombings in the city. There had been an event at the chancery. In our neighborhood where JUSPAO was located and where I lived just a block or two further down the street on the river where there were floating restaurants, there was an anti-personnel mine, a bomb, that went off at one of the restaurants. All of this was happening and it just made me think, "Geez, where is the center of gravity of all this? How do you define our

goals and our opponents here? Just how are we going to get out and win this thing?" not quite knowing what "win" meant or what the "thing" was. All through the time I was there, I was meeting people who had served in a number of countries in Southeast Asia and was just absorbing their experiences, their outlooks, their attitudes. I remember a lot of discussion about the Chu Hoi program, whether it was effective, and how to make it work.

Q: Chu Hoi were the Viet Cong who were welcomed back into South Vietnamese society.

PETERSEN: They gave up their allegiance to the communist goals of taking over in South Vietnam and were rehabilitated. Later in '66 for a brief period in the field, I was at Chu Hoi Center and even interviewed a few people there. Being in JUSPAO, I either showed a movie or set up an exhibit or did something there. I had some contact with the Chu Hoi effort that way and by designing leaflets and posters in connection with that. One time in '66, I was in the television studio where we were filming an interview with a returnee for broadcast. There was a lot of effort and commitment by JUSPAO to the Chu Hoi program.

But your question was, what was the outlook? What I recall is a sense of confusion but a sense of excitement, not discouragement. To a large extent, that reflects my own personality. I found a lot of job satisfaction in being there, a lot of professional satisfaction. I was excited about what I was doing, what I saw, where I went.

Q: What were you doing?

PETERSEN: My first few weeks were, frankly, quite mundane. I had some tasks in that executive office working under Harold Wright's tutelage, or under the tutelage of those he assigned me to work with. I had tasks such as, I remember being pleased that I had worked out a system to increase the speed of APO mail delivery by a full day by looking at some logjams were and where bags were picked up and delivered and making some recommendations. We got our mail a day earlier. I studied distribution systems within JUSPAO and in all the grandeur of a brand new JOT wrote my first official memo: do this, do that, I recommend this and that. Looking back on it, I enjoyed that. It's sort of like the traditional story of the guy who rises up through the ranks of some great corporation but he started in the mailroom. Maybe that was me. But the time I was spending outside of JUSPAO, my breakfasts, lunches, dinners, any free time, everything from visiting the zoo to going to performances, just talking and listening to people, sampling food on the street, looking at the architecture, I was just drinking everything in and enjoying it immensely. I found Vietnamese society fascinating. I had a rather mundane initiation in terms of the work but felt that there was great excitement outside the walls of JUSPAO. I took immediately to the tastes of Vietnam, loved Vietnamese food, enjoyed the sounds. For some reason, I saw some traditional Vietnamese operas, which I think are basically similar to Cantonese operas, and enjoyed the colors, the costumes, and the pageants.

But after the executive office, I went into the exchanges office of JUSPAO. The young Vietnamese high school students meant to go to the U.S. were interviewed in the JUSPAO exchanges office. In the time I was there, I remember interviewing about 30 of the 60 and enjoying that and making the first real use on the job of the very limited Vietnamese that I had at that stage. I worked on some Fulbright programs. I remember in the exchanges office dealing

with some Vietnamese who were looking for opportunities for graduate studies in the U.S. It was a chance for me to visit some campuses and start to learn about the educational system.

One of the things that struck me was an anomaly. In a great Confucian sense, a scholar would be highly revered and held in rather high esteem and rewarded. That wasn't the case in Vietnam in 1966, where the monetary rewards were going to Vietnamese who were doing other things than being scholars and thinkers and teachers in the society. I started to see the impact that war and a massive U.S. presence had, the disjointedness that was occurring in society. It was one of the things I took note of.

In the exchanges office, the experienced officer I was working for, Bill Sayler, and his boss, Art Bardos, were facilitating appearances outside of Vietnam by some Vietnamese performing and visual artists. This was part of our effort to help portray Vietnam as a full and complete and interesting society, not simply an armed society engaged in constant warfare, but to humanize for the world the Vietnamese nation, our ally. I found that interesting. This was just a small little part of that effort, but I remember giving some thought to that.

I mentioned Art Bardos, Bill Saylor's boss. One day, I had to write a cable that was to go to Washington. I typed it up on the old green form with multi-copied yellow and pink forms. Then it would go down to the code room for transmission. I took it in to Mr. Bardos for his initialing, his approval, so that it could go out. I remember him reading it over carefully and looking up at me and saying, "You can't send it in this form. You have a mistake." I said, "Oh, Mr. Bardos, sir, what's the mistake?" He said, "Here" and he pointed out that I had split an infinitive in a cable. I'll never forget blurting out to Art, "Mr. Bardos, my God, there's a war on!" He said something about, "Well, nevertheless, correct this thing before it goes." That made a real impression on me, the fact that in the midst of all this hurly burly, rush and heavy workload and all, here was a man who, by golly, gave 100 percent and insisted that you do so. If we have a chance later on, I'll tell you of another meeting with Art where many years later, I recounted this incident to him one time at the Smithsonian. That was the exchanges office. I enjoyed that.

I went from there to the Joint Economic Section to work as part of my rotational JOT series of assignments. The Joint Economic Section was a State-USAID (United States Agency for International Development) section. I was assigned to the Civilian Manpower Committee Staff. The Civilian Manpower Committee [CMC] had been created by Ambassador Lodge that January. The members of the CMC included representatives of State, JUSPAO, USAID, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and some of the larger construction companies working in Vietnam. The Labor attaché chaired the committee. I was on the staff and the other members of the staff were two State Department economic officers, a Department of Labor person who was in Vietnam on an extended TDY (temporary duty) just to work on this committee, an Army major, and myself. We put together a report, a six-month forecast, on personnel needs in the Republic of Vietnam. I remember telling you a few minutes ago about taking note in the exchanges office of some of the anomalies in society that were occurring because of the high monetary rewards going to somebody who could operate heavy construction equipment, a bulldozer, whereas a professor of Vietnamese poetry, who in the past would have been at higher levels of society, was now just eking out a meager existence and there was a topsy turvy economic situation in the country where different skills, different training, were valued

differently because of this massive war effort. I really got a look at how this was affecting the country while putting that report together, determining what wages would be necessary to fill vacancies in different sectors of the economy. One of the issues was, well, should more Koreans or Filipinos be brought in?

Q: These were called “third country nationals [TCNs].”

PETERSEN: Yes. Or could find the necessary personnel within South Vietnam? We had needs for labor among men of a certain age who would presumably also be needed in the military and what effect would recruiting such people to work in construction and other security projects have on military recruitment? Those were some of the things that we worked on there. I also, with the other staff members worked on developing a new way of coming up with weekly job listings, surveying all the major employers in the country and then making known, advertising, in different areas of the country and different sectors of the economy what the major job openings were week by week so that work planning could be done. As part of that, I worked with this fellow from the Department of Labor. We spent some time researching and putting together something that may sound very mundane, but it was an essential tool: A list of different jobs by job title that were internationally recognized so if recruitment were done outside of Vietnam to fill some of these vacant positions, apples would compare to apples and oranges would compare to oranges.

Then I worked on a project on the Civilian Manpower Committee alone, without the other staff, and one that I enjoyed because it allowed me to spend my time outside the office. I put together a security form so people could move from job location to job location. We were finding that when people were needed to be transferred from one location to another, they often couldn't get security clearance from the security authorities in the new location even though they had been cleared by the Vietnamese security authorities in the other jurisdiction. Working through MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam), which set me up with some initial contacts, I went out and liaised with the Vietnamese military security services in the different jurisdictions. Then I designed a two-page form. I must have gotten my Vietnamese language tutor to help me with it because it was a bilingual Vietnamese-English two page form. It was a security form. Then I went back out to all these different Vietnamese military security service jurisdictions and got each one of them to approve the form so that we'd then have a single form that could be used anywhere and people could go from one job location to another. If they had their clearance in one area, they would be recognized in another area. It facilitated movement by needed labor. I enjoyed that. I found that exhilarating. But a lot of the fun was not being tied down but being out there meeting and traveling and working with a variety of people all around the country. On that assignment is where I first heard that revered name of Brown and Root, Morrison-Knudsen and learned of the significance of it.

Q: That is a major construction firm.

PETERSEN: For somebody who had joined USIA to be a cultural and information “type,” this and other similar assignments I found ideal. I enjoyed them immensely and felt I was learning a lot about how the country worked, certainly how our government, way beyond the Foreign Service, was working in this particular country and how the war effort was being waged.

Then I went from there into something very traditional. I went to the consular section. I imagine you have not interviewed a single person who has not paid his dues in the consular section. Looking back on it, I enjoyed that tremendously and probably could have seen myself spending a career very happily as a consular officer. In the first period in the consular section, while being undoubtedly kept on a short rein and watched closely by the consular officers and the experienced FSNs, I participated in immigrant and non-immigrant visa interviews, and did some processing of adoptions and marriages. But after doing that for a brief time, I really had an opportunity. One of the consuls had to leave. He was going off somewhere. Maybe it was just an extended R&R (rest & recreation). I don't remember. But I was told that I could step in and take over his area. He had seaman's affairs and deaths and estates.

Q: Was that in a separate office?

PETERSEN: Yes. I had my own office. It was his staff, but I had my own support staff while I substituted for him. In doing that, I had 15 different cases that I worked on, not from start to finish, but some of them were in the initial stages, some were near the end stages. I finished up a couple of them. But 15 separate cases of repatriating remains or taking charge of estates, evaluating estates, and contacting next of kin. I enjoyed that. That involved some rather somber and very sad duties, such as going to a mortuary. I remember being involved in an effort to try to identify some remains and determine whether these were the remains of someone, an American civilian, who had gone missing. I also went down to the prison and visited incarcerated people. I met a guy there. I was there to provide the full service and appropriate protection for American citizens, but, gosh, some of the people I met. One guy I visited was in prison on a murder charge. There was another guy in there for smuggling. If you have been to a prison, it's pretty spartan. Probably the aspect of that work that I enjoyed most, seaman's affairs and deaths and estates, was handling the seaman's affairs. Every American carrier that came in, the master would come in and present his papers. I would inspect them. I did a quick study on what I was supposed to be looking for. I came to respect the Foreign Affairs Manual [FAM]. I would inspect the papers and if they were in order, I would attach the consular stamps and sign. But quite frequently, it seemed like every ship (but it wasn't every ship) had problems. The master either had discipline problems and he'd bring a seaman to appear. I'd listen to the presentation and make a judgement. I had seamen who had charges against other seamen. I had masters who tried to discharge people. Some of them were bad cases and you could see why they shouldn't be on the ship. In other cases, I remember one particular seaman told me his master was giving him an unfair deal. I remember finding for the seaman that he shouldn't be put off in that port. It wasn't until then I realized that on a merchant vessel you could still be put in chains. In one case, there was a seaman who had been put in irons for trying to knife a shipmate. He was brought into port that way and brought into the consulate. I found all that rather interesting.

Q: Did you have Coast Guard officers working with you on that?

PETERSEN: I don't recall any Coast Guard officers at all.

Q: Later, they assigned a Coast Guard officer and a petty officer. It made it a lot easier. Also, later, they had a member of the Masters, Mates, and Pilots Union. So, when the Coast Guard

officer and a union representative would appear on a ship, there wasn't an awful lot of crap because the whole triumvirate was right there looking down their throat. Who was the chief of the consular section?

PETERSEN: I wish I could remember his name. I vaguely remember his stature as being somewhat heavysset.

Q: I was thinking of Bob Bishton.

PETERSEN: I just can't remember the name.

Q: I was consul general there for 18 months, '69-'70. I know exactly what you're talking about. The work there was fascinating because you had everything.

PETERSEN: Yes. As I say, I remember thinking at the time that this would be a very, very rewarding way to spend a Foreign Service career, perhaps not just doing immigrant and non-immigrant visa interviews for a career, but I really liked the detective work, especially the deaths and estates and being involved so deeply in people's lives in such a significant way.

Q: It's the equivalent to being a death sergeant and a social worker.

PETERSEN: And at times being a father, professor, friend, and priest. I remember some of the tales that I was told when people would come in. Sometimes they were in real destitute situations. I could regale you with several dozen stories of individual cases, but I think that gives you enough of a flavor.

Q: Were you making any contact with young Vietnamese ladies or others there?

PETERSEN: The answer is yes -- Vietnamese men and women who were not directly related to the work I was doing. Some of them were artists. I had the opportunity, having served in the exchanges section, to find out about cultural events going on through the university and whatnot. I was aware of art exhibits and music performances. I was very fortunate. After initially staying in the Aster Hotel, a fellow asked me if I wanted to share an apartment with him. He was working at JUSPAO. He had formerly been in Thailand with Air America. Then he had worked in similar assignments in the Philippines. He was middle-aged. He had spent much of his life in East Asia and he really knew his way around in terms of how the Foreign Service bureaucracy worked. He approached me and said, "AID has just completed a new apartment building. I can get us an apartment. Would you like to share an apartment?" I said, "Yeah, that would be great." Before long, through him -- and he seemed to know a lot of people working in Saigon -- my circle of acquaintances expanded rapidly. I took advantage of the Vietnamese I was meeting to practice my Vietnamese as much as possible. I had left formal training at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) with an abysmal record in that artificial classroom setting, but in the real world, it was quite different. I was very motivated. I remember a technique I would use at a gathering or going from place to place in the course of a day or evening. Whatever my first conversation of the day or the event or the evening -- it could have been someone telling me about his family or someone explaining that she had traveled to Paris and come back -- whatever the vocabulary, the issue, the

circumstances were of that first conversation, I would use that as my framework. If I had six more conversations with six different people, I would do everything I could to steer our conversation along the same pathway so that I'd hear that vocabulary over and over. I remember someone telling me about his family – his older brother, his younger brother, older sister, younger sister. Undoubtedly at FSI we had gone through the names of the different family members. An older brother or sister is not the same as a younger brother or sister. Different name. But it hadn't stuck. But in those real-life situations, I would push hard at that. It worked. Another thing I did, I went to a bookstore and got a copy of Kim van Kieu, a great epic poem that's a Vietnamese classic. It seemed to go on for a hundred and some pages with some illustrations. In reality, it's a Chinese story that was adopted by the Vietnamese and made into their own classic. But in any event, I got this and studied it and studied it. I memorized passages. I would rip off these passages from Kim van Kieu in the midst of a conversation. If I hit it right, I could tell by body language that "this person really knows our country or our language." Sometimes when I hit it wrong with not quite the right passage to quote in connection with what we were discussing, people would look at me like "Who is this fool here?" But I used that and similar techniques to really grease the wheels, to keep things moving. I probably didn't memorize more than a few dozen lines and images and references, but by throwing out a line or a word or two from the poem that someone would recognize, you could leap forward in terms of confidence in one another. If I were in the midst of interviewing someone and in response I would throw out a line of a poem instead of struggling to come up with something myself, you could just see the barriers going down. I enjoyed that. Frankly, I look back on it now and it seems significant, but it was only because it was the first time I was dealing with a foreign language. We all do that with every foreign language we study. We learn what we can in terms of the classics and the poetry and try to work that in and make use of it and learn from it.

Q: Did you get outside Saigon much?

PETERSEN: I did. In July of '66 for a week, I was assigned as an embassy control officer to Congressman Prentiss Walker, a Republican from the state of Mississippi. I saw this as a great opportunity to move around the country. I had already been going out on my own finding excuses to accompany people who were traveling in the Delta or up in the Highlands and had gone out practically every weekend or during the week if I could connect it to the work I was doing. I spent a week accompanying the Congressman. That was one example of many opportunities I had. I spent quite a bit of time in Dalat over a multi-week period working with the BTAO (Bureau of Technical Assistance Operations) in Dalat. That came near the end of my being a JOT, but the very first week I was in Vietnam, on a weekend, I found out through the fellow that I later shared an apartment with, that one of the JUSPAO airplanes was flying up to Dalat that weekend to deliver some material. I arranged to hop aboard and fly up there and start looking around Dalat. I did a lot of that, participating in whatever opportunity I could find to get out and get around.

Q: Do you have any other comments on the Prentiss Walker visit? What was his experience?

PETERSEN: One, I was either asked or told that I would be the control officer. I remember thinking, "Wow, what an honor" and someone straightened me out very quickly and said, "No, it isn't an honor. Nobody else wants to do it." It reminded me again of my status. I was an FSO-8. I

was the only FSO-8 there. There were no FSO-7s. The next rank up was FSO-6. That's how low I was on the totem pole. But I enjoyed it immensely. I did a little field work, went out and checked areas that we thought that Walker should see. I took note of the fact, one, that he was Republican, and that was significant; and two, that he was planning to run for the Senate seat out of Mississippi that year and that he was on the Agriculture Committee. In reading about him, I learned he had been a poultry farmer while in Congress. He was an expert on that. He arrived and the embassy put him up at the Aster. I remember taking him around, getting him a cultural orientation to Saigon, and taking him to a restaurant and different places and introducing him to people that first day. The second day, I had arranged for him to go to the Highlands. We visited the First Air Cavalry and we went and visited the 101st Airborne Brigade, which was involved in Operation Hastings at the time. The commanding general there took us with him in his chopper and we flew around looking at some of the efforts underway. At one point, because we had the headsets on so we could hear the comms with the chopper pilot, and we had to swoop down low because we were coming into what would have been the path of some artillery rounds. We had to go below it. But it was interesting to see the Congressman in action posing with the troops for photo ops. This was my early USIA training, making sure that we had at every conceivable photo op the photographers ready. Of course, we were accompanied by a photographer throughout his visit. On the third day he was with us, a Wednesday, the whole day was dedicated to AID projects, self-help projects. And I remember the Congressman, who was a poultry farmer, in one village going into a building where there were Dalat bags filled with chicken feed. I remember him sticking his hand in a very knowledgeable way into that feed and sifting it and taking it up to his nose and whatnot and looking at it and going out and looking at those chickens in the village. I made sure there was a lot about what we were doing in Vietnamese agriculture. That was part of his visit. We saw a lot of chickens out there in the field.

The next day, we had some briefings. It was the Congressman, General Westmoreland and I sitting together as the General briefed him on the situation. I remember General Westmoreland talking about how good the American boys were who were there and how important it was that we support them properly and that Congress provide the support that DOD (Department of Defense) needed and so forth. I wasn't supposed to be in that meeting. At least that was MACV's point of view. They were a little upset. I could tell by the body language and the shocked looks on their faces when I did not respond to the nudge to get out of what was to be a one on one meeting. I wasn't going to miss that opportunity though, so I sat through it. General Westmoreland's looks at me during the meeting were quizzical. I won't say they were scolding. But it was an opportunity and I wasn't going to let it pass. It was the only time I ever saw General Westmoreland the whole time I was there.

Then we went over and met with the AID director. I remember the AID director talking about dislocated populations and the agricultural support projects and self-help projects and the importance of poultry projects. I got a real insight into something there. The Congressman said, "Well, you're doing it wrong." The AID director said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You just told me that in this one village, egg production is so important. Well, I was there and you brought in broilers. You didn't bring in layers." That congressman knew his chickens and told AID they had brought in the wrong shipment of chickens to accomplish the objectives of that particular project. I got a kick out of it because he wasn't chewing me out; he was chewing out the AID director. In a way, that's an indication of success of that visit. It wasn't just all photo

ops.

Later, we met with the assistant director of JUSPAO. For whatever reason, I don't know why, Barry Zorthian wasn't around to meet the Congressman, so he met the assistant director, briefed him about all the outreach efforts at JUSPAO. And then we went over to the ambassador's residence for lunch. Ambassador Lodge greeted Congressman Walker and said, "Well, if you think a Republican congressman from Mississippi meeting with a Lodge from Massachusetts is going to really help you, we'll have our lunch together, Congressman." I thought, "Oh, okay, it's going to be a political discussion." I was unceremoniously told by Lodge's assistant that I wasn't part of the luncheon, so I cooled my heels outside with a growling stomach while the Congressman had lunch with Ambassador Lodge. But unlike the meeting with General Westmoreland, where I made sure that I was a participant – of course, I made notes that I shared later with people, but they were rather innocuous; it was an innocuous conversation – Ambassador Lodge wasn't about to have a JOT at his table for lunch.

The next day, Friday, the only significant meeting I recall, we met with Phil Habib, who was head of the political section. What stands out there was perhaps in contrast to some of the meetings and conversations the Congressman had been having all week, Phil Habib described some of the real problems along with the successes and the hopes and the goals. He described some of the threats, shortcomings. I was very impressed by seeing that head of the political section talk to the Congressman that way.

You'd asked about getting out in the field. Later on that year, I worked in the field representative's division of JUSPAO. JUSPAO had a number of divisions. To give you an idea of what was involved there, there was a JUSPAO provincial representative in every province in the country responsible for what today we call "public diplomacy," in those days "public affairs," winning the hearts and minds. That division had some real resources. I mentioned the Twin Otter (aircraft) that we had. That wasn't the only airplane. There were other aircraft that were flown. I think the Otter was flown by the Army. But Field Division had a lot of military people assigned to it. I don't know that any of the JUSPAO province representatives were military officers. Maybe some were, but I have the impression they were all Foreign Service personnel. I went to one province and spent an extended period with one province representative going around with him. It was an extra body for him. It was a great learning experience for me, traveling around. That was the only time the whole time I was in Vietnam where I ever had bullets fired in my direction. He and I were in a jeep going down a road that we thought had been cleared. We found out later that it hadn't been. We had seen a truckload of Republic of Korea [ROK] troops on that road and he was under the impression that it was all right. He knew it had been a disputed road and one that you wouldn't use except during daylight hours, but he was under the impression it had been cleared earlier. We went down the road and somebody fired. The impression I got when I heard that "pow" from the side, I didn't realize that my head and my neck could descend down below my shoulder blades. I had a sore neck for a week just from that involuntary scrunching down. We had sandbags on the floorboard to provide some protection from hostile mines. There was nothing on the sides. It was just a jeep, sort of a military vehicle.

I traveled around to a number of provinces and interviewed province representatives. I was probably as unwelcome as one could be. Here I was, coming down from Saigon and taking time

out of their busy days to interview them about their work in order to put together two documents. One of them was a guide to province facilities. I took great pride in that. I was pleased as punch with my results. It ended up being a manual in JUSPAO. We had great printing facilities, so I had a fancy cover put on it, designed to fit into a regular three ring binder. I don't remember how many pages it was, maybe 100. I typed fast after every interview. I put together a description of what each of these province representatives had available to him through the Vietnamese information service, through local liaison with U.S. or Vietnamese military, what was available commercially in terms of if you wanted to mount exhibits or get leaflets designed -- everything to do with a province representative's job. I summarized it for each of the provinces. I did not get to every province. I relied on some written questions and got written answers for those I didn't visit. But I got around to a fair number of people and saw the country. I recall thinking that I would much prefer to work up in the mountainous area, the Highlands, rather than in the Delta, which I didn't find all that attractive, a great expanse of flat land. Topographically, it wasn't as interesting as the area to the north.

Then I did another document that ended up being a nine-page document that was a guide based on interviews of what every new province rep should be aware of as they stepped off the airplane. It was set up as a guide for each new fellow, how he ought to do his job and what he ought to be aware of and what some of the pitfalls could be and how to leverage opportunities to get things done. One of the things I put in there was, "Don't go hat in hand to State or to AID or to MACV. If you can't borrow it, go out and buy it, but be careful of your stature because you are a part of the province council. Don't be the whining guy with your hand out all the time." That was in the advice column. A lot of it had to do with very practical things of how to put up a display and advice about languages and so forth. I enjoyed that. Again, the key was getting out, getting around the country.

I did have other jobs as a JOT. I was assigned to the press section. When I was in the press section, I spent almost every single day over in the political section. They had me digging through the bio files and putting together a sanitized description of either all or as many as I could do of the candidates who were candidates for the constituent assembly. On September 11, 1966, there was an election. I put together this guide to all the candidates, or as many as I could find out about. I also spent a lot of time going out and talking to some people and reading a lot of newspapers. That was my first effort to translate material from Vietnamese into English for these files. It was for use in the press section for the journalists so they would have a guide as to what was going on. That's why I say it was a sanitized version. I was allowed access to the classified bio files, but just to unclassified material for the newsmen.

Q: Did you get involved with the five o'clock follies, the daily briefing which the correspondents became very dubious about?

PETERSEN: I observed the five o'clock follies a few times. I don't recall ever having an assignment to prepare any of the material while I was in the press section that was used by the follies. I do remember one time, when I was out in the field, buttonholing a correspondent and telling him of a great project that was underway in that province and that he ought to come and look at it. It was some development project. I remember him saying, "If it doesn't have blood on it, I don't want to see it." I did not deal directly with the newsmen.

Q: You're the new boy on the block. What were you getting from the senior officers who dealt with the press? What was their feeling about the correspondents at that time?

PETERSEN: You have to remember that a lot of the people in USIA first and then in JUSPAO second and in the press section third were people who had come to their work from backgrounds in journalism. They understood it. They felt good about it. They thought it was important, significant work. But because so many of them were former journalists, they also knew what journalism was about – it was about meeting deadlines, about if you could get the scoop. They knew how to do a favor for a journalist, give him some information that others wouldn't have. They also understood very clearly the tension between the official version and what the journalists were getting. They understood perhaps in ways that others elsewhere in our embassy didn't appreciate that the journalists weren't there to be on our team. There was a real appreciation for what the journalists were there for. JUSPAO was very aggressive in getting our side of the story out. I'm starting to talk about things I really don't have firsthand knowledge about. I don't think we ever tampered with facts as we knew them. But that didn't mean that we wouldn't be very aggressive in our interpretation of the statistics. A lot of the facts were questioned – things like body counts. I never saw disdain for the journalists or animosity. There was personal and professional respect for the journalists who were there. They clearly understood what the journalists were there for and it wasn't what we were there for.

DAVID G. BROWN
Political Officer
Saigon (1966-1968)

David G. Brown was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1940. He graduated from Princeton University in 1964 entered the Foreign Service. His assignments include Taipei, Saigon, Yokohama, Tokyo, Vienna, Beijing, Oslo, and Hong Kong. Before retirement in 1996, he served as Director of the Office of Korean Affairs. Mr. Brown was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 28, 2003.

Q: Well, you went to Vietnam; you were there from when to when?

BROWN: It was a direct transfer sometime in the summer of 1966 for an 18-month assignment. I extended it for a couple of months and left in August of 1968. I think it was June, maybe July, because I had to get start Japanese language training.

Q: When you arrived there in '66, what was the situation in South Vietnam?

BROWN: The war was not going well, and the Americans were getting more and more heavily involved in it, not just in a military sense, but in every aspect of Vietnamese life. I got assigned to the provincial reporting unit. I came with Chinese and there was a Chinese affairs officer position in the embassy, but that slot was filled. As I did not know Vietnamese, I was assigned to cover the II Corps highlands area where you could do more with French than elsewhere. As I had

studied French in Canada years earlier, the Embassy arranged brush-up classes to bring my language up to the 2+ level. The II Corps highlands was where the Montagnards lived.

Q: Was that where you spent your time?

BROWN: I lived in Saigon and traveled every week to the highlands. We traveled by plane, small one or two engine planes. You would take off, fly over the jungle, crossing yourself all the time that the engine would keep going until you get where you're going.

Q: Let's talk about. Who were the Montagnards and what was the situation there?

BROWN: The Montagnards are aboriginal people. The name Montagnards was given to them by the French because they lived in the highlands along the western border with Laos and Cambodia. No one knew exactly how many there were, perhaps one million, divided into any number of tribes. The Vietnamese traditionally despised them. The French had had a policy of keeping the ethnic Vietnamese out of the highlands. This was not a magnanimous policy but one designed to reserve the area for coffee and tea plantations run by French planters. Since the French government was gone by then, there was a Vietnamese administrative structure in the towns and some Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese merchants. But the bulk of the population in this highland area was Montagnards. In the war, they were caught between the Republic of Vietnam with the U.S. on one side and the Viet Cong on the other side. Both sides were trying to recruit Montagnards because they were tough fighters who knew the terrain. The Montagnard economy and way of life were of course being disrupted by the war. Their economy was slash and burn agriculture.

While we're on Montagnards, let me mention one highlight of my work with them. In 1967 National Geographic did an article on the Montagnards. I helped the reporter and was surprised to find myself quoted in the lead paragraph of the piece. Nothing profound, just a quote about the Montagnards being caught between the government and the Viet Cong with their way of life in jeopardy.

The U.S. government goal was to persuade the Vietnamese government to abandon their cultural prejudices and adopt an enlightened policy that would attract the Montagnards to support the South Vietnamese government. That was a large part of what the embassy was trying to do in the highlands. There was a political movement among the Montagnards called by the French acronym, FULRO, for the United Front for the Liberation of the Oppressed Races. These were Montagnards who were trying to preserve their own culture and achieve autonomy from both the Viet Cong and the government. So, much of what we tried to do in that period was to convince the Vietnamese to be sensible enough that you could then encourage this FULRO movement to cooperate with the government against the North Vietnamese. It was a lot of fun for a young guy.

Q: How did you operate?

BROWN: I would take advantage of people who had some knowledge of and contact with the Montagnards. These were sometimes anthropologists, or AID officers working in AID's program of assistance to the Montagnards or sometimes Montagnards who were working in local

administrations in the highlands. The Vietnamese had a Montagnard Commissariat, something like our Indian affairs bureaus. One of the anthropologists was Gerry Hickey who had the respect of these people because of his real interest in understanding their lifestyle. Speaking in practical terms, I would arrive by plane in a provincial town, borrow a vehicle from the local USAID office or the military and drive around to see local figures. I'd listen to what the military said about where it was safe to go. I would talk to French planters, to local officials, local businessmen and religious leaders. Occasionally, I would drive to a Montagnard village to meet tribal leaders who were known to be influential in the Montagnard community or have contacts with FULRO. I'd drink fermented rice wine through a long straw from a communal wine jug, being careful to stay sober so I could get back when the meeting was over. We then used some of these contacts to send messages to FULRO which was operating secretly out in the bush.

I worked with Ted Heavner who was the Deputy in the Political Section responsible for our dealings with the Montagnards. I can very much remember one time when we had set up a negotiation with the head of FULRO. Ted and I went by helicopter to a designated clearing in the jungle where we were met by a group of Montagnards. Ted went off with them into the bush for several hours while I was told to wait with the helicopter. I never got to do anything quite as dramatic as that myself. Now, apart from what we were doing, the U.S. Special Forces had a string of bases along the Vietnamese border and they hired a lot of the Montagnards.

Q: Well, back at the embassy, in the first place you were part of the political section?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Who was the head of the political section?

BROWN: At the beginning it was Phil Habib, then later Arch Calhoun.

Q: Yes. How did you find the political section? Were they, was it a diverse group?

BROWN: Yes, it was a diverse group. Were our attitudes diverse?

Q: Yes.

BROWN: I think the lower you got in the embassy the more you encountered a belief that our policy wasn't working. Our mandate in the Provincial Reporting Unit, ten officers at that time, came from Phil Habib, who told us to get out around the country and tell the ambassador what was really happening. I think certainly my perception at the time was that the U.S. government was so deeply involved that there was no longer a sense of responsibility on the part of many Vietnamese for what was happening to their own country. I arrived as we were building up toward the peak of the American military presence there. Over time I developed a conviction that the U.S had to reduce its role and return more of the effort to the Vietnamese and make them responsible for their own future. I recall this view was widely shared. I remember Vice President Humphrey coming through and other people. Occasionally, such delegations would have an hour and a half discussion with the people in the Provincial Reporting Unit. A pretty standard message on our part was that more American troops wasn't what was going to win the war.

Q: How about the situation of the highlanders or the Montagnards? Did you find that this was a sort of a minor thing that you were reporting on or was this of concern at least from your perspective within the political section?

BROWN: Oh, yes, it was a serious concern because this was a strategically important part of Vietnam. It was not that the population was large but that the geography was strategically important. Therefore, getting the cooperation of the Montagnards was a pretty consistent goal. It wasn't just the Vietnamese who had to be persuaded to cooperate with the Montagnards. I remember at one point a new American general arrived, I can't remember his name, but he was moving his division into the highlands and wanted to burn down a section of the highlands to deny cover to the enemy. My colleagues in AID and I geared up a major effort to persuade the Embassy to persuade him not to do that.

Q: Well, I mean, as a practical matter, geographically, this is where the collapse of South Vietnam started up there in '75 I believe.

BROWN: You have a very good memory. That's exactly where it started. There was a big battle around Pleiku and the South Vietnamese were defeated. And in a matter of weeks, the north moved down the highways to the coast and from the coast all the way down into Saigon and that was the end.

Q: Yes. Did you get any feel about, granted you were pretty low on the feeding system, but about Elsworth Bunker, the ambassador?

BROWN: Well, I certainly have a sense of respect for him. How much influence did he have back in Washington? Again, my memory fails me as to what he thought. When I first arrived Henry Cabot Lodge was ambassador.

Q: Cabot Lodge. Did the sort of the changes in government in South Vietnam on the Vietnamese side have much effect in the highlands?

BROWN: I cannot remember specifics, but yes, President Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky were in power throughout my time in Vietnam. However, there was a mix of types on the Vietnamese side in the highlands. Some officials were more enlightened and realized Vietnam had to work with these people. Then there were others who you might describe as Neanderthal hardliners whose view of the highlanders was these are primitive people, they have no future. The future is for us Vietnamese to develop the highlands and if we have any trouble with the montagnards we're just going to shoot them and burn their villages.

Q: How about the Special Forces, they'd been there, did you find them a good source, I mean what was your impression of the Special Forces?

BROWN: Are they a source, did we use them as conduits? My recollection is that there were some Montagnards working for Special Forces who we knew had connections into the FULRO organization and could be used to send messages. However, the Special Forces were not really

integrated into the embassy's political approach to this. What kind of respect did I have for these guys? A lot. They worked in very tough circumstances and very exposed and were doing their best. I wasn't a military guy. I didn't try and second guess their tactics of how to interdict Viet Cong operations along the border. I did listen very carefully to their advice about where to travel.

Q: How about the regular army units? Did you find this a different breed of cat or something?

BROWN: Well, I didn't have much to do with the GIs. My contacts tended to be with the Intel people and occasionally with the senior officers. We had different jobs. The intel people were focused on the Viet Cong units. My attention was on what's going on amongst the populations in these areas and what were their attitudes. What were their attitudes about the prospects for the war? What were their attitudes about the South Vietnamese government? Despite the general I mentioned before, generally, I found what I thought were very intelligent men leading our military. There was a General Lee, I can't remember what position he was in, but I remember him wanting to talk to me about the Cultural Revolution China and what this would mean for the prosecution of the war. In fact at one point, he sent word he wanted me to come and brief him. I was flattered.

Q: Well, then were you there for Tet?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me your experiences during Tet?

BROWN: Okay. There are two sides of this story. The first is just anecdotal. Before Tet 1968, within the Provincial Reporting Unit, we decided that one person in each corps area would be out in the field and one other would be back in Saigon. My II corps colleague, Jim Mack chose to spend Tet in Nhatrang, so I stayed in Saigon. If he had wanted to come to Saigon and I had chosen to go to someplace else, I would have gone to Ban Me Thuot. As it happened Ban Me Thuot was overrun by the Viet Cong, and local AID officers with whom I probably would have been staying were captured. Luck was with me. In Saigon, I and another officer, I think it was Allen Wendt, drew straws as to who would do duty in the embassy that night. Allen drew the duty, so I wasn't in the embassy building when it was attacked. I was living in an apartment building across the street from the embassy. It was a surreal experience. There were three of us, including Steve Johnson, Ulysses Johnson's son; living together in this apartment. Between the three of us, we had one weapon, which was my Montagnard crossbow. So, we were not inclined to go out and try to win whatever was going on outside. We called the embassy and the lines were dead. We couldn't get through to them or to Arch Calhoun or other people. We turned on the radio, Armed Forces Radio, which was running baseball games. Every now and then it got quiet, we'd poke our head out to try to see what was happening. All of a sudden there would be more staccato gunfire. Eventually it quieted down the next morning. What had happened was that about 30 Viet Cong had shot their way into the embassy compound and were in the garden area around the building having killed a couple of marines in the process. Fortunately, they did not get into the embassy building. Allen and the others inside survived. In the morning, a U.S. ranger battalion was brought into reoccupy the American Embassy. When we eventually went to work the next morning we were literally walking over dead Viet Cong bodies to get into the

embassy.

The other side of the story is how to interpret Tet. Honestly, I can't remember what a report I would have written shortly after this would have said. My recollection is that I was focusing on what was going on in Vietnam. I didn't have a good understanding of what the impact of this event was back in the United States. There was sort of a division of opinion in my recollection between the people who were emphasizing what a shock this attack had represented and how close it came to succeeding and that therefore this was a harbinger for real trouble for the government and U.S. Then there were others, and I put myself in this category I will admit, were more impressed that this massive attack had been repulsed and that in large part by U.S. efforts we were able to recapture all the main cities that had been lost in about six weeks.

Q: What happened up in the highlands at Ban Me Thuot and other places?

BROWN: Not a great deal, but in Ban Me Thuot a number of people were captured, Americans because the Viet cong attacked the provincial headquarters and the AID offices and they captured some Americans, including Mike Bengue who was an AID employee and who had been with AID in the highlands for five or six years and was about as close to the Montagnard community as any AID employee. He was a prisoner until '75, broken by the experience.

Q: Did you go back to the highlands after Tet, didn't you?

BROWN: Oh, yes.

Q: Was there much effect there?

BROWN: No. You did not see this. The highlands had not been the focus of their attack. I mean they were attacking Saigon and Hue and Nhatrang and all the main cities. Tet was going to be a coup de grace, a knock out blow, and so the highlands was not a major focus.

Q: Well, you left relatively shortly thereafter, well in August, so I mean it was about six months?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: When you left Vietnam in 1968 what was your feeling, whither South Vietnam?

BROWN: Well, I will be honest, I thought a policy of gradually reducing the American presence and turning things over to the Vietnamese had a good chance of success. That proved to be wrong.

GERARD M. GERT
Psychological Operations
Saigon (1966-1968)

Gerry M. Gert was born in Danzig in 1920. He joined USIA in 1952 and served Germany, Yugoslavia, Laos, and Vietnam. He was interviewed in 1988 by Lewis Schmidt.

GERT: I had the good luck of being sent to the National War College. I was in the class of 1965-66. I did the War College African tour, which had some bearing on a later assignment. I volunteered for Vietnam which I did not have to do, having served in Laos. Since I was a reserve officer in psychological operations, I thought I could make some kind of contribution in this struggle. So I volunteered for that particular job in PsyOps, and got the job.

There was only one complaint I had against Barry Zorthian and I might as well get rid of it. Barry insisted that I get to Saigon right after I got through with the War College. If he had granted me six weeks' leave, I would have gotten a master's in international relations, because at the War College --

Q: *At G.W. [George Washington University]*

GERT: At G.W., right. I would have loved that. But Barry insisted he needed me right away, which was nonsense, because he had Bob Delaney on the job, and Bob wasn't leaving yet. We had a hell of a long overlap.

Q: *Maybe he was just afraid you wouldn't get there at all.*

GERT: You know Barry. (Laughs) I did arrive in Vietnam and moved in with Bob Delaney. We had Art Bardos and Leo LeClair living in the same house with us. But Delaney was the big guy and a delightful person. Where is Delaney?

Q: *He's the only guy that I know of who ever became a rear admiral in the Naval reserve. He was up at New Jersey, but I think he's gone to Florida.*

GERT: He was in Rhode Island, and he's gone to Florida. I tried to track him down just two months ago in Newport.

As you know, JUSPAO had been in business and was in full swing. Barry was the boss. I had visited Vietnam twice or three times when I was in Laos, and got there before JUSPAO existed. Under JUSPAO, you had, of course, this large organization. I'll let others describe it. Half of USIS served in that place.

I'd like to stay with the psychological operations side, where I was assigned. The top man in the PsyOps side was a general. The guy who was still there when I arrived was General Freund, with whom Barry had a sort of ambivalent relationship.

By the time I got there, Freund was about to leave, and a new man from the Pentagon, Colonel Brownfield was assigned. I had looked him up in the Pentagon. He got his star and came out to Vietnam, and I was his deputy. We had this large organization called Psychological Operations Division.

Q: Were you operating out of Saigon? You weren't up country.

GERT: No, we were in Saigon. We had a joint organization, Joint Public Affairs Office, with Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines, AID and State and USIS personnel. In psychological operations, we had around 25 officers who were on the level of lieutenant colonel or commander, O5, as we call them in the military. We had some 60 enlisted men.

What were we doing? We had people in every province. The PsyOps advisor was on the staff of the Provincial Representative, who was usually a colonel, quite often a State Department officer, in some instances USIS officers, and they were the top Americans in the province. There were 42 provinces. The PsyOps advisor, was one of our people, and we provided supervision and support. We had a division in our organization called field operations, headed by, I believe, Maynard Ford, a very good guy. Field operations, of course, was the outfit looking at needs from food to staff to paper to leaflets, everything, and Ford was running a big shipping organization. We had our own fleet, the Otter fleet, that flew all this material and personnel to location.

Q: Did you know a man named Lou Ross over there?

GERT: Yes. Lou Ross. I do. (Laughs) Everybody chuckles at Lou Ross. A lot of weird characters. Lou was one of them. Carl Gebuhr was one of my deputies. Carl was running the production division. These were the guys who were producing leaf-lets and posters and other materials.

We're talking about the breakdown of the psychological operation division. It was in JUSPAO, and we had three divisions just within the PsyOps setup. There was the production division which I mentioned, field operations which looked after the guys' needs in the field, and there was a research shop, which came up with concepts and ideas for the production division and for anybody else. I think Doug Pike was associated with that; I'm not quite sure. He may have had a separate division. I'm a little fuzzy now. There was the North Vietnam division; that might have been Pike. He was a great expert on the Viet Cong and the Vietnamese Army and all that. I think they were part of that.

Vietnam, of course, was a great experience. Barry Zorthian being PAO was also an experience in itself. I have had a very good relationship with Barry throughout, I've had no complaints. Barry was a difficult guy, lots of people complain about him. I never had any problems. We did a lot of travel together. Barry had the habit of going out in the field every weekend. I'd pick him up and we'd have some flight laid on, a helicopter or what- ever, a small plane. I think together we must have been in every province at least once. So there was a lot of travel, lots of time in the air, and I would always admire Barry's ability to get on the damn plane. I was always nervous and afraid. Barry would get on the plane and either do his "in" box or he'd fall asleep. He was most relaxed when we got out. Of course, he was great fun and asked wonderful questions. A lot of travel, a lot of briefings, a lot of projects.

One thing comes to mind. We were talking about the leaflet division, the shop that produced the leaflets and distribution, which was done mostly by the Air Force. We think, in retrospect, and

maybe others will comment on this, too, that some 85,000 Viet Cong, Viet Minh, or North Vietnamese, turned themselves in under what we called the Chieu Hoi program. "Come back to our side with just cause," and all that. If you express it in money, that's much cheaper than shooting and killing and exposing our own forces to combat. We sometimes have a tendency to brag that these were the results of psychological operations. But in fairness, we must say that if an army is winning and they're doing well, they don't believe what they're fighting for, they're starving, they have no ammunition and the morale is very, very low -- then that leaflet might be the last straw that breaks the camel's back. But otherwise, the leaflet itself will never really bring in enemy soldiers, no matter what. That's something that needs to be said, because so often psychological warriors, like myself, exaggerate their ability to bring in the enemy. That's often nonsense.

Q: I've forgotten whether it was Bob Franklin or Pat Nieburg who talked about one leaflet drop when there was a particularly tough assault by the North Vietnamese on one of the American installations. They had the whole periphery barb-wired, several layers of it, and they dropped these leaflets giving them an opportunity to come in. He said a lot of them started coming in, while waving their hands with the leaflet, then they got hung up on the barbed wire and the Vietnamese behind the wire, the South Vietnamese, mowed them all down. That just simply destroyed the effectiveness of the operation, of course.

GERT: Sure. In years to come, people will get into the jungle of Vietnam and discover millions of leaflets lying there and rotting away. I think we papered that country over many times with leaflets. We also have to appreciate the fact that our own Air Force quite often did not deliver the leaflets -- I am convinced that many a run was not performed, because you had to get down to low levels where you draw enemy fire. Some of our guys just dropped a load in the ocean. (Laughs) They never got close to the target area. Lots of strange things happened in that war.

A word about organization. The PsyOps division was taken out of JUSPAO in a later phase, before the Tet Offensive. We became part of an organization called CORDS, which was headed by Robert Komer and then by Bill Colby.

Q: Later CIA director.

GERT: Right. Bill Colby. The general left, and I was chief of PsyOps, in CORDS. I just want to recount one incident of something that stayed with me. The CORDS deputy, I believe under Colby, was a three-star general. He called me in one day and wanted to know if we had lots of television sets placed throughout the country. Television was used, by the way, as one of the media to get our messages across. We had village sets that were placed under lock and key in a village. Fascinating operation.

How did you get a TV signal out? You may remember this. We had Navy planes that were circling over Vietnam, putting out a signal for about two or three hours until they ran out of fuel. They put out the TV signal. So we had the facilities, we could put film on television, we could put it out by Navy plane. We'd get a message out and it could be received on TV sets throughout areas which we controlled.

The general wanted to know if we were making optimum use of this medium, which cost a lot of money. He said to me, "Are you putting out subliminal messages?" I had to admit to this general that I didn't even know what a subliminal message was. Like so many, he must have attended some course and he had read about Skinner and psychology and the word "subliminal," and he thought that we could develop a subliminal message which would say, "The Viet Cong are no good. Turn yourself in to our side." Since I didn't know how to handle this one, he thought we were just wasting money and wasting time, and he didn't think much of it. Everybody who had taken a course in psychology thought they could make an offering to us.

I experienced the Tet Offensive in 1968. That was quite a show, because across the street from where we lived, in a house which I shared with Leo LeClair and Bill Ayers, who was a Chinese speaker, a very nice guy who is retired and lives up in New England somewhere, was Vietnamese naval headquarters, and that was one of the targets of the Viet Cong. They attacked early on that morning of the Tet Offensive. They got very close, and fired rocket grenades into that building. It shook up our building, and we felt we were under attack all morning long. We crawled under our beds and spent a lot of time there, hugging machine pistols. Then, as you know, the attack on the Embassy in Saigon and the heroic effort by Colonel Jacobson and the MPs, who beat the Viet Cong out of there. It was quite a time.

About a month after that, I left. As I think I mentioned before, the Agency offered me Deputy PAO, with a promise of PAO, and I had a choice either in Nigeria or Zaire. Because I'd been to Africa on the War College trip, I could make a semi-intelligent choice, and I opted for Zaire over Nigeria. I'd seen Lagos and Kinshasa, and I preferred Kinshasa.

Q: I'd like to go back just briefly to your Vietnamese experience. I'm not sure I ever heard anybody on the JUSPAO staff talk extensively about whether they had any information or any feeling as to exactly how well they were doing or whether they were getting any of their objectives across. Under the conditions that existed, I suppose that was exceedingly difficult to obtain anyway. But did you have any kind of a line or feeling as to whether you were getting your messages across or what it was doing, what the reaction was of the people who were your audience?

GERT: Very hard to say, Lew. I would say, overall, as I think back, very little. We had very little feedback. We had our problems in helping to run the Vietnamese Information Service. There was, parallel to our organization the Vietnamese Information Service. They had to run the information in their own country. We tended to do too much for them. I think that goes for the military, too, but in the final analysis, it was their country. Their service wasn't very strong. We worked with them on all levels -- Saigon and the provincial level, local Vietnamese service, and they often were pretty bad. They did not have the very best personnel, they were not very ambitious, and they didn't have many resources. Whenever possible, we helped with equipment. We helped on all levels. But it was a weak effort, and we sometimes went on combined operations with American equipment, American people helping out, or local employees of ours, who were generally better than the Vietnamese staff. It was an uphill battle. I don't know how much we really accomplished.

Q: Some of the people I have interviewed have made the point that because we were doing

practically the whole thing ourselves...

GERT: Too much so.

Q: Yes, too much so, we never had any idea whether the Vietnamese themselves would do it or be able to do it, if we let them do it their way. I suppose you can argue in either direction, but what is your observation from what you know?

GERT: I'd have to say that what made me so sad is I found that our guys were not as motivated as the communists were. Those damn communists were motivated. Our friends, our South Vietnamese friends and allies, didn't go at it with that motivation. Often they were on the job more for the money or position although the pay was very poor, too, I must admit. I really don't remember any outstanding people in the Vietnamese Information Service. Maybe I'm doing them an injustice, but I can only talk about memories from many years past, and nobody comes to mind that I can think of as an outstanding information specialist.

Q: I'm interested in that because as PAO in Thailand, I felt that on a much lower scale, of course, although we were in a big country program, that we had the same kind of a problem and we were constantly under pressure from Washington to turn this and that part of the program over to the Thais, none of whom wanted it.

GERT: Yes, yes.

Q: I felt that one of the things that caused [Frank] Shakespeare to decide I was not worth very much was the fact that I simply told him, "If the Thais take this over, it's going to go to pot." He kept asking me, "How long, Lew, do you think it will take the Thais to take over the motion picture program and so forth?" I guess I was a little facetious, and I said, "Frank, I think it's going to take about six or seven years." What I should have said is, "I don't think they'll ever do it." He thought I was trying to drag out the turnover to the Thais, and it didn't do me any good to have made that joke.

GERT: I would say, Lew, it would have taken the Vietnamese even longer.

Q: Well, I think the Thais never would have done it, really.

GERT: It's hard to generalize. The Vietnamese can be very effective and very efficient. I suspect they can be even sharper than the Thais, if I may generalize.

Q: I think so.

GERT: When you look back into Southeast Asia in the days of colonialism, it was the Vietnamese who were the top people working for the French, who were running Laos and Cambodia. I'm sure they were sharper than even the Thais, and I have a great opinion of the Thais. But it's different. This struggle wasn't that clear cut. There was this crosscurrent of motivation. They didn't know what side they were on. Some of them didn't like the government in power, and some had sympathies, not necessarily with the communists, but with something

else of a different nature. There was all this confusion. There was no real identification with what they really stood for. It was all part of the battle.

Q: Now a more cynical approach. What did you think was the motivation of the Americans, given, as it must be, that they had to observe a good deal of this attitude on the part of the Vietnamese? Were they really dedicated, or were there some who were and some who were not?

GERT: Of course.

Q: Did they really believe in what they were doing?

GERT: I would think, like in any organization, you'll find all kinds, and we had quite a few who didn't give a damn. Some didn't like to come to Vietnam, some volunteered. I would say that by and large, among the Americans, the vast majority were motivated and believed in it. Many of us believed, rightly or wrongly -- I admit I was wrong, but I believed it at the time -- the business about the monolithic communist menace -- all the slogans, the domino effect, if you don't stop it here it will cross the rest of Asia and other nations will fall, and so on and so on. So I think that Americans, by and large, were motivated, were serious, dedicated, devoted, much more so than the Vietnamese, I'm afraid.

Q: One final question about this. You remember that fairly early on in the American intervention in Vietnam, there came the communist attempt to take over Indonesia. Of course, the Indonesians reacted very violently in the massacres of the communists, particularly the Chinese communist members of the population. A lot of people have argued that if it had not been for the show of force that the Americans were making with reference to Vietnam, the Indonesians might never have withstood that attempt to take over the government, but they felt motivated and supported to rise against that attempt largely on the strength of what the U.S. was doing in Vietnam. Do you have any feeling on that, or did any of the people with whom you associated make any remarks about it?

GERT: No. I must say this is the first I've heard of this, Lew. It seems to me from where I sat, of course, I was never in Indonesia, so I'm speaking more as an observer from far away. It seems to me that what happened in Indonesia is that the military in Indonesia, coming back to what you said about Yugoslavia, had had very good and close relations with our own military. We have had civic action programs in the Indonesian military, largely indoctrinated by Americans. I met some of these guys who served in Indonesia at the War College. I think that a lot of indoctrination took place, the military was anti-communist, and when this situation arose in Indonesia, these guys jumped in and, as you know, the blood bath ensued.

One other factor, I think, though, is also an ethnic racial struggle there. I think there were so many ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, who, rightly or wrongly, were identified with the communists. So this also became a blood bath of Indonesians killing Chinese, indiscriminately. Many of them were communists, maybe the majority, I don't really know.

So you had these two factors, the military having been indoctrinated in anti-communist matters, you had Sukarno's problems, that's something else, but you also had this ethnic struggle between

the Indonesian and the Chinese. The last factor that you mentioned is news to me, but I believe that the atmosphere, most likely the military presence aided in the stance or the position that the military could take in the internal battle stance. That's quite possible, although I had not heard of this before.

L. WADE LATHRAM
Deputy Director, USAID
Saigon (1966-1968)

L. Wade Lathram received his call for duty to Vietnam while in the Senior Seminar. He has also served as economic counselor in Turkey. He was interviewed by William Knight on June 2, 1993.

LATHRAM: I was in the eighth seminar, and in May and early June we were wondering, "what's going to be our assignment?" One day I received a call from Ray Hare, who was Assistant Secretary for NEA. And he said, "At the end of your assignment in the senior seminar, how would you like to be Deputy Assistant Secretary in NEA?" And I said, "Great, fine." A week later I was asked to go see U. Alexis Johnson, who was then Under Secretary for Political Affairs. I went with much trepidation because I had a suspicion as to what the call was about. The first thing he said was, "Dave Bell [who was then administrator of AID] has been to the Secretary, and asked for you for Vietnam." Secretary Dean Rusk said he could have anybody he wanted. I said, "What does he want me for?" "Deputy Director of the AID mission in Vietnam." And I said, "But I don't want that. I've a perfectly good assignment in NEA with Ray Hare." And he said, "No you haven't, I called the Assignment Board this morning and canceled that one. You have a choice Vietnam or resigning from the Foreign Service."

Q: Really. That's hardball.

LATHRAM: That was hardball, especially for an FSO-1. The old FSO-1 before 1980. My previous assignment of Director of Personnel for AID, came about the same way. I was Economic Counselor in the Embassy in Turkey in 1963. When Bill Crockett, then Under Secretary for Administration; John Macy, head of the Civil Service Commission; and Bill Hall, Foreign Service officer on loan as Deputy Administrator for Administration, for AID, got their heads together and decided I'd make a good AID personnel director. I was at that time given the choice of resigning from the Foreign Service.

What was most annoying to me later, Bill, quite honestly, was the number of times that the public in general, and even those that should have known better, criticized those that went to Vietnam. Most of us went to Vietnam because we were ordered. In the Foreign Service, of course, we accept a global assignment as a responsibility. Certainly that's true with all those in the military.

But to digress for just a second, to show my bitterness on that subject, after I retired in '74 I decided I might like to have a brief tour with the United Nations just to see what it was like. So I

contacted the Personnel Administrator for United Nations, whom I knew, and they were very interested in me and my background. I was given an application form to fill out, which you would have to do for any job. But, my friend said, "By the way, don't mention your service in Vietnam." I said, "What?" He said, "It doesn't go well to have served in Vietnam regardless of what you do for the United Nations." I tore up the application, and handed it back to him, and told him on that basis I was not interested.

I didn't want to go to Vietnam. I wasn't convinced then, I wasn't convinced later that it was a winnable war. But I'm proud of what I did there, and I wasn't interested in employment in an organization that says I should be ashamed of service there. Anyway, that's the way I went to Vietnam, as Deputy Director for the AID mission. I asked Dave why he had picked me and made it clear I was angry. He said, "We want you to go to Vietnam to save Charlie Mann who is the Director. He's under fire from the military, particularly from McNamara. We think he's a good Director." And I said, "Dave, you know there's no way I can go as Deputy Director, and save him. I'll do my best, but that's an impossible task. I don't want to go, but you fixed it so I don't have a choice.

Q: Do you know why he was in such difficulty with McNamara?

LATHRAM: That gets into a little broader area. First, Charlie's own personality was kind of abrasive. I don't know whether you know Charlie Mann or not?

Q: No.

LATHRAM: ...or knew him. He had a rather abrasive personality, he had a Germanic accent much, much stronger than Henry Kissinger's. His French was Germanic French which many in South Asia resented, but AID wanted him there because of his French. McNamara wanted him gotten rid of because he wasn't getting along with General Westmoreland very well on a personal basis. He was also in charge of the pacification program and Westmoreland felt AID was not doing a good job. This is a good point to explain what pacification meant then, and meant later.

Pacification dealt with the villages and hamlets throughout Vietnam in 44 provinces. In short, pacification was concerned with keeping the Viet Cong out of the villages, with keeping the villagers safe, prosperous and on the side of the Vietnamese government. The province chief commanding Vietnamese forces for that province was responsible for helping the villagers and the hamlets with their social development, their economic development, their political participation, and doing its best to get them to be on the government's side. Mao had said the communist revolution would be won by "little fishes swimming in the sea". The Viet Cong were those little fishes, ever since the early '50s and Dien Ben Phu and were then known as Viet Minh.

Frankly, the villagers in Vietnam, right from the beginning, wanted to be let alone. They didn't like the government. The government meant taxation, and control to the villager. But he didn't like the Viet Cong trying to persuade him to go to a different form of government, a communist regime, an authoritarian regime. And the persuasive technique used by the Viet Cong was brutal. My maid in Saigon left the Delta. Her father owned a fine farm, she said, in the Delta, but in the early days with the Viet Minh, the French government had come to him for taxes. The Viet Minh

had come to him for taxes. He said, "I can't pay you both, not and live. So I won't pay any." He was taken out by the Viet Minh one night, and shot, and that left her and her mother with no hope of making a living. The Viet Minh men took over their farm, and she came to Saigon. I said the villagers wanted to be let alone. But, if he wasn't, the villagers wanted anything, if he was given a preference, it was with the government. That was demonstrated in spades in '67 with the first real general election, and with the ongoing refugee program.

But the job of pacification meant the Vietnamese had to do it, with our advice, and guidance, and help. And the prime instruments for that purpose were the AID mission, USIA at the field level, and CIA with its own activities at the field level. They were all putting pressure on helping the Vietnamese, but the Vietnamese had to do it themselves. This the American military, quite frankly, had trouble understanding. We had the main military force U.S. activities there from Westmoreland on down. In effect the latter said, "We're here to help the Vietnamese win the war, yes, but we can win it for them." You couldn't do that with a pacification program. McNamara and the Westmoreland command mutually felt that pacification was not succeeding. The villagers were not being pacified, the Viet Cong were all over the country. And why weren't they being pacified? Because the American civilians weren't doing the job.

Q: This is what they felt, what the Americans felt.

LATHRAM: This is what the U.S. military, the Pentagon and the White House felt, and therefore Charlie Mann, heading the pacification program through AID, was failing. That's the reason they wanted to get rid of Charlie.

Q: This might be a good time to describe the organization structure of the effort in regions and provinces, etc.

LATHRAM: When I laid the groundwork from what I just said, for the fact that then, and later, organization structure for the pacification program became all important. It was the thing on which the White House, the Pentagon, Westmoreland, the embassy and the Ambassador, all focused. How are we going to organize the American pacification effort? At the time I went to Vietnam it was organized in separate agencies, extending from the headquarters of each agency down through the provinces to the villages and hamlets. AID had its own staffs, with a province senior advisor in each province carrying out the AID program.

Q: And he would have a staff?

LATHRAM: He would have a staff.

Q: How big might that staff be?

LATHRAM: Oh, that might usually be fifteen or twenty civilians, sometimes more.

Q: Including secretarial.

LATHRAM: No. At the province level there were very few secretaries. It was pretty hairy, you

know. Let me back up, and point out one thing. Even in '64 and '65, it was impossible for Americans to drive the highways from one spot to another. You went by air. When you were in the province the American personnel had to be very careful...everybody had his jeep...and personnel had to be very careful about what villages and hamlets they visited, because they might be ambushed on the way. You know, it's awfully easy to destroy, and very hard to build.

Let me digress to emphasize that point. The Vietnamese had what they called a revolutionary development training center at Vungtao. I think it was about 50 miles from Saigon on the coast. [looking at map] Here is Saigon, here is Vungtao. As I recall there were about twelve bridges on the highway. They were all out of operation, destroyed. When I arrived in Vietnam the only way we could get to Vungtao was by helicopter. There, with CIA's support and help, they trained revolutionary development workers, Vietnamese workers, to work in the villages and help them with their problems, and try to get them to be with the government.

At that time the Vietnamese had two battalions of ARVN troops (ARVN stands for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam), that's about a thousand men guarding that highway. But they couldn't keep it open. Every time they'd build a bridge it would get blown up. Vietnam intelligence finally caught one Viet Cong sapper. A sapper is a guy who plants explosives. They caught one sapper. ARVN rebuilt those bridges and for about three months one could drive to Vungtao. At the end of that time the Viet Cong were able to insert another sapper. A thousand armed men could not keep that road open in the face of one sapper. It's easy to destroy, and it's very hard to build. That's just an example of what the problem was all about.

Essentially, the organization structure for each of these civilian agencies, CIA, AID, USIA, was the same. They worked from their headquarters organization in Saigon to the provinces, and there were 44 of them all over. In addition, MAVC, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, which was General Westmoreland's U.S. military organization, had military advisers in each province, and district, advising the village and hamlet protective forces, the Popular Forces and the Regional Forces.

Q: There was a regional structure also, wasn't there Wade?

LATHRAM: Yes, thank you for reminding me of that. There were four Corps areas, established by the Vietnamese, patterned after the U.S. idea of military organization. I Corps in the north, II Corps in the middle, III Corps both sides of Saigon, and IV Corps which was the Delta. And within each Corps were a number of provinces.

Q: So the provinces had to report through the regions to headquarters.

LATHRAM: Right, and that was true with the civilian organization. It was also true with the military. But the military was more cohesive. The Marines had the I Corps, and all of the Marines were in I Corps. The U.S. Army was in the other three Corps areas. The Navy had personnel relating to III Corps and IV Corps, but they were in and out. Some of them, as I recall...I'm not sure about this, because I didn't pay too much attention to the military part of it...as I recall it, they did have Navy personnel assigned to some of the Army units, but by and large they were separate too. But they were still fighting the Viet Cong and the North

Vietnamese military directly, and so were the ARVN fighting directly. The U.S. military also had advisory services working with the Regional Forces and Popular Forces as I said before. They provided local security against the Viet Cong. The Popular Forces were recruited from the villages and hamlets which they were protecting. The same thing was true with the Regional Forces of the province.

When I went there as Deputy Director of the AID mission that's the structure I found.

Q: And who was the Ambassador at that moment?

LATHRAM: The Ambassador was Henry Cabot Lodge. He was succeeded by Ellsworth Bunker in '67.

Q: He had Fritz Nolting in effect bounced because he wanted the job, as I recall.

LATHRAM: Yes, that's right.

Q: It was a political power play.

LATHRAM: And it was related, of course, to the elimination of the man who was the Ambassador at Diem's assassination and the CIA chief, Jock Richardson -- who, by the way, is a great guy. He's now retired and living in Mexico. I keep in touch with him. He was later station chief in Korea when I was first there. I had tremendous respect for Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. He succeeded Lodge while I was still there. I cannot say I had the same respect for Henry Cabot Lodge. Should I tell an anecdote?

Q: By all means.

LATHRAM: When I was in the AID mission early on, Charlie Mann for some reason was called to Washington for consultation, and I was Acting Director. We had a problem then, a physical problem in Saigon with the AID mission. We were scattered in many buildings. There came an opportunity to have one office building in which we'd put all the AID personnel. Whatever happened to that, I don't know, because I went on to other things later. But anyway, there was a contractor willing to build a building if we would provide the money to be subtracted by rentals. Then after we left he would become the owner. We could get our building, and get organized, and get together. But we needed a recommendation to Washington. Washington had to approve it, of course. We needed a recommendation from the Ambassador. Normally Bill Porter, who was Deputy Ambassador, would have been the man we would go to. But he was out of town. I felt it was urgent, so I asked Ambassador Lodge for an appointment, and he said yes. I took a briefing team, you know in Vietnam everybody liked a dog and pony show with charts and graphs. So I took a team and explained the problem to the Ambassador. When we finished the Ambassador said, "I'll think it over." I said, "Fine, Mr. Ambassador, I would like to send a telegram this afternoon if it's at all possible." As I headed the crew out the door, the Ambassador said, "Wade, can you wait a minute?" So I said, "Certainly," I closed the door and turned around and the Ambassador was standing behind his desk, fists down, his face red, and he said, "Wade, why do you bring problems like this to me? You know I don't like to make decisions." I said to

myself, "my, my, my." This man aspires to be president of the United States? Well, he wasn't quite reflecting his total attitude because I had seen him make decisions but generally when there was full support already existing.

Q: Not the doubtful cases.

LATHRAM: So I went back to the office and I thought about it, and sent the telegram anyway. I said in the telegram, as I recall it, "The Ambassador does not disagree." And I let it go at that.

Q: Did he call you in? Did he disagree with your telegram?

LATHRAM: No, I never heard another word about it. A little bit later on I was at a reception one night...this was in '66 when we were still having receptions, when the war started getting a little hotter there were no longer any receptions. This one was a military reception by the Vietnamese government, lots of U.S. military, and lots of U.S. civilians there. Later it became a little dangerous. There was quite a bit of bombing in Saigon, and every night, of course, mortaring. Anyway, one reception I went to, I happened to overhear two American generals, one talking to the other one saying, "Aren't we fortunate that we have an Ambassador for whom the military can do no wrong."

Well, as a matter of fact, in his book General Westmoreland does point out that there were a couple of issues, and a couple fairly important issues, where he and Ambassador Lodge disagreed, and he was finally able to persuade Ambassador Lodge to his point of view. So maybe I'm not being entirely fair.

Q: We've just had a bit of an interruption. We're starting again. Wade, go ahead.

LATHRAM: To return to the real problem for the Americans, civilian and military, it then, as it always was later, when should the Americans do the job for the Vietnamese? And when should we expect the Vietnamese to do the job? We would advise them, provide the money and material, help them as much as we could. In the pacification program we always felt that there was only one way that the Vietnamese villages all over the country, hundreds and hundreds of villages, could be protected, could be secure, only one way in which the peasants could live a peaceful life, and that was if the Vietnamese did it themselves. We could not put Americans in every village, in the first place, and again we couldn't distinguish between a Viet Cong and a non-Viet Cong in a village. They both wore black pajamas. Only the villager could tell who was a Viet Cong.

Q: In fact, could they tell? Or were some of the Viet Cong under such deep cover that...

LATHRAM: Oh, it's possible -- the latter is possible -- but after all when you've lived in a village for four generations you've got a pretty good idea of whose who.

Q: They would be a stranger, they would not be villagers.

LATHRAM: Not unless they had been converted. And if they had been converted, you would

know that too. No, only the villagers could tell which in the villages were Viet Cong and which were not. But the villagers wouldn't tell the government, because armed Viet Cong would come in at night, and isolate a family, and tell the parents, "We're going to take your son tonight. And if you don't cooperate in the future, we'll kill him." They'd tell the son, "You become a good Viet Cong, and we protect your parents and help them. And if you don't, we'll hurt them." This was one of the recruiting techniques for getting a village, and the young fellows from the village to become Viet Cong. And the parents feared for their kids.

Q: Doesn't this raise a question of whether even the Vietnamese themselves could never win that way because of this kind of pressure? Even if you left it all to them to do.

LATHRAM: Well, take it the other way. I'm not sure I can answer that question. They would have to want independence, and believe the government wanted independence for them, strong enough to resist as eventually they did in South Korea. If they really were convinced by the Viet Cong that their future would be more secure, safer, and more prosperous with the Viet Cong, the Communist regime, that's the way they'd go. They'd have to be convinced that the Viet Cong government was better. The only thing I can tell you though as a measure is that long after I was there it was still true, that anytime a village was evacuated, a valley was evacuated, for whatever reason, whether they were chased down by the North Vietnamese army, or they were chased out by the Viet Cong, or they were chased out by the Americans, or the ARVN, or whether they could no longer stand the shelling and the fighting, whenever the villager left his village he went to the government camp as a refugee. There were no refugee camps by the Viet Cong, or the North Vietnamese. There were only refugee camps by the Vietnamese government with American support. And for a refugee camp we provided reinforcing bars, ten sheets of corrugated roofing, ten sacks of rice, two sacks of cement, to each family. They could build their own hut then in a refugee camp -- cut down some poles, make a structure, put a roof on it, pour concrete slabs for a floor, have rice, and start over again. At any point throughout the countryside we might have as many as several hundred thousand refugees in camps. The villagers always found succor when they went to the government. They weren't too sure about the other side.

Now, let's get back to organization structure. I arrived there in June of '66. By I'd say, September-October things had heated up in terms of the argument of how we should be organized on the pacification side. Secretary McNamara and the White House were pushing very hard on the mission. The first step that was taken was to designate Deputy Ambassador Porter as the man in charge of the pacification effort. He was supposed to coordinate and pull together these disparate civilian agencies. Let's back up for just a second. I've explained the AID structure.

The USIA presence in Saigon was through JUSPAO, a Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office. There was an early agreement that there was no point in having several spokesmen on the U.S. side. So it was agreed that all public pronouncements and news reporter briefings would be by JUSPAO, the Joint Public Affairs Office, to which military personnel were assigned. All public statements that involved the military, or military action, were cleared by the military, but there was a daily briefing by the head of JUSPAO of all U.S. and foreign reporters. "The 5:00 follies" they called them, and Barry Zorthian was the head of JUSPAO as long as I was there. He turned out to be a pretty good friend in the long run, although he and I fought a lot. JUSPAO, for USIA, had public

affairs officers in each province who were also responsible for "psychological warfare" or PsyWar. This consisted mainly of preparing leaflet drops to persuade Viet Cong to defect.

Defense Secretary McNamara visited and asked for a briefing on the pacification effort. The pacification effort involved the activities that I've mentioned earlier. It also included the Central Intelligence Agency, not only gathering intelligence but helping the Vietnamese identify the Viet Cong in the villages and helping to support the training program of the Revolutionary Development Support Cadre. Ambassador Porter was coordinating all these programs. But based on Secretary McNamara's report of his briefing, Washington still wasn't convinced that pacification was improving.

So in November 1966 a major effort to reorganize was done under Ambassador Porter. He selected two young Foreign Service officers, Frank Wisner and Paul Hare who were very, very good and have since gone on to become Ambassadors in their own right. They came up with an idea of how to amalgamate these various organizations, and proposed an organization called Office of Civil Operations, OCO, in which all activities of a civilian nature outside of Saigon itself, would be organized in one organization structure.

Personnel and funds from State, CIA, AID, USIA, were all to be put into the organization if the activity was outside of Saigon. And the same thing would be true at each province, and district level. I was asked to head OCO, reporting to Deputy Ambassador Porter. This was an unusual public administration experiment, and it worked from a management viewpoint of directing American efforts.

Q: We've just finished side 1, and this is side 2 of the oral history with Wade Lathram, and Wade you have just become the head of OCO.

LATHRAM: I think I was just mentioning that one of the advisors in a province in I Corps wrote a song book -- songs about OCO. Frankly, we were rather proud of our structure.

I'd like to back up for just a second. I had many arguments with the heads of these various organizations, JUSPAO, AID, CIA, because what we were doing in OCO and later in CORDS was taking their people, and their money, and running an organization over which we had the control, while they had the backstop responsibility. So, of course, there were lots of arguments. At one point Don MacDonald, who was Director of the AID mission, in a moment of exasperation, said to me, "I'm spending 20 million dollars a year on Air America and I have to get your permission to fly." Yes, there was that.

Also, some of us had a lot of questions that we just really couldn't answer. Years later, Barry Zorthian (JUSPAO Director during my tour), wrote a letter to me. In it he says, "Our task was to take the assignment we'd been given as Foreign Service officers and convert a mandarin, intrigue filled society, into a functioning, responsive government, pushing economic and political development for a largely rural population that was honeycombed with a very effective anti-government guerrilla force...All of us from that period have gone our separate ways, keeping within us the unforgettable memories of the days we served together. Enjoy them Mary and Wade for another 50 years. And dust off so very often for private remembrance those days in

Vietnam when we paid our dues in what turned out to be an impossible task."

For almost 20 years I had trouble talking about Vietnam to anybody that hadn't been there at the same time I was. I just couldn't talk about it. We were all working 14 to 16 hour days, 6 and 7 days a week -- both in Saigon and the provinces. And these weren't just another day at the office. We were civilians, but we were in a war. No place was safe. Many were killed, shot, mined, mortared. We had to be careful. We weren't like the front-line U.S. troops, but life was stressful. As Barry says, we bottled up remembrances within ourselves about a period in which we paid our dues trying to do an impossible task. OCO was one of those tasks, and we tried our best during that period that OCO was in existence to make it function, and I think we did a very good job. We had a headquarters staff put together in the structure that had been devised by Frank Wisner and Paul Hare, and approved by Ambassador Porter. I was head of the organization, reported to Bill Porter, and we worked alongside the American military structure.

This kept on from November 23rd 1966 when it was announced by the Ambassador, until almost summer of the following year, until May of 1967. However, there was considerable unhappiness still in the defense establishment, and in the White House, with what we were doing in OCO because they could see that security was not improving for the villages, that the Viet Cong were still active all over the country, in addition to the North Vietnamese forces, the main force war was being fought by American troops, as well as the Vietnamese troops. Pacification was not working. In short, I have to say, the country was not being pacified. Yes, that was true. The villages and hamlets were involved in the big war where thousands of people were killed, but many Americans were killed in trying to go among the villages. You never knew when booby traps were going to be set along the dike that you were walking on, and we had incidents of frustrated American troops shooting at water buffalo of the villagers. They couldn't tell who was a Viet Cong, and who wasn't. A friendly villager might have just planted a "bouncing Betty" mine to blow off a soldier's legs. The U.S. military talked about "winning the hearts and minds" of the people, but the U.S. soldier was there for a year, the villager for a lifetime. Yes, pacification was not working.

Q: Let me interject a question here. To what extent were the projects that you would build under the pacification program, to what extent did they survive into the later peacetime era? Or were they almost always destroyed by the Viet Cong, bridges and things?

LATHRAM: We rarely built anything. We advised the Vietnamese on how to build. Yes, they were destroyed if they were bridges and things like that. We helped village chiefs, for example. We showed them how to organize for an election. In the old days they didn't need to be shown. Each village has its own council, which was an organization developed by the village to run the village, but they lost much of the political will to organize themselves in the turmoil and chaos. We were advising them through our people in their local villages on how to organize for political strength. We were teaching them how to organize for economic development. We were providing through our agriculture people better seed, better techniques, etc. But yes, the whole purpose of the Viet Cong was to disrupt anything that the Vietnamese government was doing to help the people. And our job was to help the Vietnamese officials help the people. Sometimes we helped the people directly, but it was still advisory. That was one of the problems, of course. That was the name of the game, it always has been the name of the game that you can't do things

for people, they have to do it for themselves if they're going to be permanent. But, as I said, General Westmoreland, the Pentagon and McNamara, the White House, felt that somehow, the American civilian pacification program was failing (even though village security was by Vietnamese forces being advised by U.S. military).

A conference was planned for March in Guam for the President and his staff -- the U.S. President Lyndon Johnson -- to review the situation. What was happening in Vietnam? Actually, as Westmoreland points out in his book, one of the main purposes of the conference was to review the pacification program, and its organization and structure because McNamara for some time had been proposing that the American military take over the pacification program. What that was supposed to mean was simply that the military could do a better job than the civilians had been doing on pacification, without recognizing that the problem with the pacification program was lack of security. That it wasn't a job that the Americans could do for the Vietnamese.

Anyway, I went to the Guam conference.

Q: This is '67.

LATHRAM: This was '67, March of '67. The President was there, and outside the hearing of the President, we had a meeting. Secretary McNamara, Ambassador Lodge, General Westmoreland, Bob Komer representing the White House, General Knowlton and others, including staff were there. Bob Komer, incidentally, had initially come out of CIA but was the right-hand man in the White House for Lyndon Johnson on the pacification program in Vietnam. Among other developments, he was keeping up on such things as the terrorism and atrocities that the Viet Cong were engaged in. For example, it was nothing to see a busload of children destroyed by a Viet Cong rocket, that sort of thing. Any effort to persuade the villagers that they were going to have to go with the Viet Cong was legitimate for them.

Secretary McNamara led the session, and we discussed the organization of the pacification effort.

I had come prepared, by the way, to brief Secretary McNamara on what OCO was doing with the usual graphs and charts. I told him when he got off the plane that I was prepared to give a briefing on the subject and he said he'd like to have it. After the conference, he took me aside and apologized because he had never had time to go over the briefing that I had prepared for him. Of course, I wasn't fooled. That wasn't what he wanted. He wanted to change the organization; he didn't want to be convinced that OCO was a good organization.

But to return to the pre-Presidential meeting, I was cautioned by Lodge and Komer not to upset the apple cart by arguing against any change in the structure. However, as a matter of fact, in the discussion, I did speak my piece.

Q: Was Bill Porter there too?

LATHRAM: No, Bill Porter was not there at the Guam session. He was left in charge of the mission so Ambassador Lodge could go. When the President said he was ready to receive us, we

joined him. Secretary McNamara explained the problem of organization for pacification. (Actually I'd seen Secretary McNamara and President Johnson off in the corridor discussing something before then.) The President turned to me, and said, "Do you have any comment?" At that point I realized that there wasn't any purpose in fighting and arguing about a made decision, so I said, "No, I have nothing further to say." So then he turned to the rest of the group, and said, "I've got to make a decision, and I haven't made it yet. I'll let you know." Well, I was pretty sure that the decision was already made, but he wasn't ready to announce it. As a matter of fact, it turned out that he wanted to announce it with the change in ambassadors when he was ready to send Ellsworth Bunker out to replace Lodge. So the decision to put the civilian pacification effort in MACV was announced at that time.

On the plane on the way back to Saigon from Guam, General Westmoreland came and sat down with me, and we talked a little bit. And then he said, "If the President decides to give me the job of pacification, will you take it on on my staff? If you will, I'll give you a general as your deputy."

I have to digress for just a second. Sometime before that he had been concerned about how to organize the military advisory effort for pacification, and assigned General Knowlton to work on the subject. General Knowlton set up the Revolutionary Development Support Command in MACV for that purpose. MACV was the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. All through the war, even when we had 500,000 combat troops, they were still organized under an "Assistance" Command, Vietnam. General Knowlton had the job of organizing and directing the Regional Forces and Popular Forces advisors, in Revolutionary Development Support. Westmoreland proposed that we combine OCO and the organization for which General Knowlton was responsible into one of the staff organizations of MACV, with me as its chief, and Knowlton as my deputy. He asked if I would resign from the Foreign Service, or would I stay and do that? I said I was ordered to Vietnam in the first place, I didn't come in the Service to duck responsibility, and yes, I would if that was the President's decision. I would take it over.

Q: It could have been an out of Service assignment. You would have always been able to get back into the Service when it was over, wouldn't you?

LATHRAM: No, it had to be a Foreign Service assignment, on detail. The issue was whether to leave Vietnam. I would have had to resign from the Service to do that. I was to continue to be a Foreign Service officer working in MACV, and that's the way it turned out. One of my sons asked me, "Just exactly what was your title, Dad?" I said, "Do you want my full title? It was Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam."

What was involved was a typical staff and line military organization. The CORDS staff (Civil Operation Revolutionary Development Support), along with G-1, G-2, G-3, and G-4 staffs under the chief of staff of MACV, who reported then to the Deputy Commander, and the Commander MACV, General Westmoreland. While I was there General Abrams came as deputy Commander, MACV, and he eventually took over from Westmoreland.

Then at the Corps level, I, II, III, and IV Corps, there would be a CORDS Assistant Chief of

Staff under the U.S. military Corps commander, and each province would be in charge of an American senior advisor. There was a complete amalgamation of four U.S. military and four civilian organizations. It would have been very difficult to organize that if OCO had not been established in the first place, because we had already amalgamated, outside of Saigon, all the civilian organizations. And General Knowlton had amalgamated the military advisory forces at the province and district levels.

Q: Did all of the OCO components flow into this new organization?

LATHRAM: Yes. Now, at the announcement of this new setup, Bob Komer came out from Washington because, as he told me, "President Johnson said, okay you've been advising me on pacification, now you get out there and do it." As you'll note from the Westmoreland memoirs, he'd already acquired the nickname of "blowtorch". He insisted on being a deputy to Westmoreland with the rank of ambassador. At first he wanted to have a general officer rank -- four stars. Well, they wouldn't give that to him because he wasn't in the military, so he designed his own logo with the help of the Chief of Staff, of four stars in a circle. But he carried the rank of Ambassador as Deputy Commander, MACV for CORDS. I was assistant chief of staff for CORDS under the chief of staff with all the Saigon organization under me. Actually, it was much more an operational organization than a staff organization, and at one point 50% of all the communication, all the mail, all the paperwork of MACV headquarters was CORDS because we had a direct relation to the Corps and province structures, which included the refugee, defector, development, public safety, psychological and Regional and Popular Force advisory programs. And, of course, CORDS had a separate Air America program for passengers and freight. The total staff of CORDS at the time I left was roughly 2400 American civilians, 1000 U.S. military, and 4000 third country nationals -- Vietnamese, Philippines, and Koreans.

After CORDS was formed Komer sponsored the development of the Hamlet Evaluation System. This was computerization of every village and hamlet in Vietnam to show whether or not it was secure, or insecure, or partly secure, what its status was. The HES staff of CORDS received a weekly report from all the district advisors as to the status of each village and hamlet. They got their information by visiting the villages and hamlets, or from Vietnamese officers, usually the latter. A lot of faith was put in that hamlet evaluation system. But, of course, as with any system of this character, the information is only as good as the basic data that's given to be put in the system. I went out to test it to a couple of places. I remember when I went to one CORDS district adviser, and I said, "Let's take a jeep and drive out to this hamlet." "No, not me." I said, "But you reported that hamlet green." He said, "That's what the ARVN commander told me. He said it was secure. But as far as I'm concerned it's not, I'm not going to drive out there." I said, "How do you know it's not secure?" He said, "The hamlet chief isn't there. He certainly doesn't sleep there." This was one of our major criteria...any village or hamlet where the chief, and they were elected by the villagers, didn't sleep there at night, was not secure. But, what was reported in the Hamlet Evaluation System was the information given to the district advisor to report to Saigon, and that's what he reported.

Q: I suppose they were under pressure to pretend that things were going well, generally speaking.

LATHRAM: We had great big maps, color maps of all the villages and hamlets, and lots and lots of green, but all that green was misleading.

Q: This was Komer's idea?

LATHRAM: I don't know whose idea it was. Komer sponsored its use, but certainly not its inaccuracy. But it was endorsed from the White House on down as a system for trying to determine...everybody was grasping for some measure, and this would be a measure of how pacification was succeeding, or not succeeding. And it was that basis that General Westmoreland had to use when he appeared before the joint session of Congress in December of 1967, to say there was light at the end of the tunnel. Of course, a month later was the Tet campaign.

At any rate, back to one of the major problems I had was Bob Komer's pride in being a blowtorch. He was a brilliant man, terrific brain, but a huge ego, and his idea of effective management was to demand, scream, and yell at the nearest subordinate. He figured the only way to get action was to burn the Americans, and tremendous pressure was put on the Americans any place where there wasn't sufficient progress (and that was everywhere). What we were supposed to achieve by putting pressure on the Americans I was never quite clear, and neither were they. But we were always constantly being chewed out by Komer. I felt one of my jobs was to try to be a buffer between him and my staff. I didn't always succeed, but it was still stressful.

Tet was a real, real surprise. For the month of January there was a lot of euphoria, a lot of good feeling among the Vietnamese leadership, and among the headquarters of MACV, which many of us felt in the CORDS program was not fully justified. There were intelligence reports coming in through the Vietnamese to the effect that something was stirring. Something was going to happen. But these reports were few and not verified. Tet was coming along, and historically all firing stopped, all fighting stopped at this Chinese/Vietnamese New Year. It was a gentlemen's agreement that nobody attack anybody during this religious celebration.

Q: Peace of God.

LATHRAM: Yes, right. But there were indications that something might happen. And so many of our province senior advisors were concerned.

Oh, I want to back up on this, our province senior advisors. There were 44 provinces, and at the time General Westmoreland was talking to me on the way back from Guam about possible organization, he said, "I've General Knowlton and he would be your Deputy." General Westmoreland had talked to him about whether or not he would be willing to be my deputy. Well, he hadn't known me but he said yes, of course, and we became very close, and very good friends. Incidentally, he went on to become Commandant at West Point, and then retired as Commandant of our U.S. forces in Europe.

General Westmoreland went on to say that, of course, the Corps Commanders would select the province senior adviser, either military or OCO civilian. He would expect 3 or 4 to be civilians. In fact, most of the selected seniors were civilians. But importantly, all the province U.S. military and civilians worked well together.

Back to Tet, 1968. There had been a couple of attacks on the 29th of January 1968, but nothing like the real thing! I was living in an apartment in town. I'd declined to have the house that was designated for the deputy director of the AID mission because we had four men living in it, and I didn't see any point in taking over that house. So I had an apartment, and across the street from the apartment building was the residence of the AID director, Donald McDonald, and next to me was the residence of the administrative officer, and his Deputy Director of the AID mission. At any rate, I was on top of the roof with everybody else in the apartment building watching the city on January 30th at midnight when the fireworks went off. And if you've never seen a Tet celebration, it's incredible. At the stroke of midnight, fireworks went off all over town. It seemed as though all of Saigon lifted a foot in the air. We enjoyed the celebration, went down and went to bed. And along about 2:30 I guess it was, I heard firing, and explosions. Fortunately I had all kinds of communication gear in my apartment and they started sounding off. My first thought, I don't know why, I thought that darn Nguyen Cao Ky, the vice president, was trying to stage a military coup and take over the government. Why that thought would enter my mind, I don't know. Very shortly came the news that the Palace was under attack and so was the Embassy. This was the night that they blew in the Embassy doors, and the Marines defended it very successfully. About 4:00 a.m. I called my good friend Colonel Jacobson, Special Assistant to the Ambassador, who was living in a house on the Embassy compound, and he said, "You wouldn't believe I'm a retired Army colonel, and I don't have a weapon in sight." Well, eventually a couple of the Marines ran across the yard, one of them threw him a .45 -- he was on the second floor -- and he got the .45 just as a Viet Cong was coming up the stairs, and he killed him. It was a rough night. At the same time the back door of McDonald's house was blown in, and there was firing all around my apartment.

That was the night that 38 of the 44 province capitals were attacked. Believe it or not, throughout the entire country it was a coordinated attack, with massive weaponry. No wonder the Vietnamese military intelligence was getting rumors that something was going to happen. Good Lord, imagine that! The Viet Cong placement of ammo, and weaponry in those 38 capitals sufficient to mount an integrated attack was quite an achievement.

Q: Well, an amazing thing is that the intelligence wouldn't have known about it.

LATHRAM: That's right. We could not understand the euphoria, and of course, our budget didn't call for that kind of support for the pacification program. Actually, we ended up supporting nearly a million refugees. Incidentally, the third day General Westmoreland called me on the phone and said, "Don't you need some air support, some help?" I said, "No, frankly General we have stockpiled rice, cement, roofing, and I have a million piasters in the hands of every province senior advisor to help with any such emergency as this. No, we're in pretty good shape."

Q: How much money in dollars?

LATHRAM: Something like \$50,000. I don't remember the exchange rate right now. Lou Wisner, as head of the refugees, was disaster coordinator, and had done a terrific job in anticipating what emergency requirements might be, and all over the country had stockpiled both money, and resources. Of course, that night things were pretty tight around my apartment. I was

not attacked, but the Vietnamese had found a claymore mine stuck on the side of my apartment building just shortly before Christmas. And right at Christmas time, as one of the servants was going home, she noticed a Christmas package that apparently had bounced off a bicycle, but actually was leaning against the apartment building. So she called the attention of the police outpost that was right across the street to it; they called the bomb squad, and sure enough it was explosives. My apartment building was surrounded by barbed wire.

Back to Tet evening, as I've said, the AID director's house was attacked. He called me frantically on the telephone about 4:00 in the morning. I was on the radio and the telephone all night long with my staff, and he said, "What do I do now? I want to come over to your place." I said, "Why?" And he said, "They've just blown in the back door with a rocket. I'm afraid they're going to attack." He was there by himself, and I said, "No, don't come over here Don because you would have to negotiate barb wire, and there's a police post in front. You might get shot, they don't know who you are. Call Bill Wild, right across the street from you, and run over there and get with them. They're armed, there's four or five men in the house." So that's what he did. And, of course, my driver didn't show up for a month. He was Vietnamese.

Two days later I decided to drive out to my office in MACV headquarters at Ton Son Nhut airport. But I called my Exec, Colonel Fitzpatrick to tell him I was on the way. Of course I had the windows closed, in those days we were supposed to keep the windows up and the air conditioning on because a favorite pastime was a motor bike or bicycle with two guys, one riding behind with grenades, he'd throw them through open windows. So we had to keep our windows closed and couldn't hear noise. About half way there the radio came on frantically, it was Fitzpatrick, and he said, "Where are you?" And I told him I was on the main highway, he said, "You're driving right in the middle of a firefight. Between you and MACV there's the ARVN on one side, and North Vietnamese on the other side. There's a firefight across the highway." So I turned around and went back.

The next day General Westmoreland sent two jeep loads of GIs armed to pick me up, and take me out there. Anyway that's the way I got out to MACV, and my office. I spent the month of February sleeping on a cot in my office, always fully dressed, always fully armed, and every time there was an attack getting outside to the bunker. We were all doing that, we all lived on "C" rations, and all the general officers were there. I was technically a major general at that point because that was the rank of an "Assistant Chief of Staff".

My wife and I had agreed that February 20th we would celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary in Hawaii. On the 20th of February I was at my desk dictating a tape to my wife, with my helmet, my AK-40 and my F-16 on my side. I was in fatigues, ready to hit the bunker outside if a mortar attack came. Sure enough, an attack came, and rocket shrapnel was sprayed across my ceiling and I hit the bunker outside. None of us were injured. Strangely enough General Knowlton and I counted 120 holes surrounding MACV headquarters the next morning. Not one of them hit the building. Crazy!

Of course, the American personnel, civilian and military in the provinces had a much more difficult time. Many were shot and several, especially in Hue, were captured and became POWs. I was proud of the many heroic actions performed by CORDS staff officers.

One other point I should make on CORDS organization structure. The military tour was one year, and the military assigned to CORDS were anxious to get out. We had few re-ups or returns for a second tour.

Q: Was this because they thought it wasn't useful to their career record?

LATHRAM: That's right.

Q: They wanted to be combat.

LATHRAM: That's right. If they're going to be in Vietnam, they wanted credit for being in Vietnam, and here they were in CORDS in a staff organization so one year was enough. I had to go back to Washington on consultation, and I asked my staff, "What can I do?" The Chief of Evaluation Section was a colonel. The deputy director of the program staff was a Colonel. They both said, "Try to get the military in Washington, the Pentagon, to agree that service in CORDS is command experience."

So when I was back there in Washington, I had consultations at the Executive Office building, of course, but I also made it a point to go over to the Pentagon, and I saw General Johnson who was then Chief of Staff of the Army. He said, "What can I do to help you?" I said, "There's one thing you can do. If there's any way possible to decree that military personnel assigned to CORDS will have it shown on their efficiency reports as 'command experience' it would help us." After all I said, they are exercising initiative, making decisions, commanding actions. He called in his G-1, and that order was issued. That was appreciated and the second tour request rate went up from zilch to nearly 100% overnight. The military assigned to CORDS loved the work they were doing, but it was not furthering their careers. But getting credit for command experience won. That made it possible for us to keep the best military on the job, and that was an achievement. You talk about management, this is the kind of thing you have to do.

Q: And they were checking off the right boxes.

LATHRAM: On their efficiency reports, yes. We were organized the best we could possibly be organized to do the advisory job that had to be done, but there was no way the Americans could pacify the country for the Vietnamese. That was our basic problem, and it continued to be the problem.

Q: We are just about at the end of this side. Are you going to continue on with other matters?

LATHRAM: I think this is probably enough, don't you?

Q: Well, it makes a nice unit. So you left when?

LATHRAM: To finish it up, I left the first of April of 1968. I was succeeded as Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS by Bill Colby. He was called out by Komer to succeed me, and fortunately I had written to Bill that it would be nice if he could come. Later he moved up to replace Komer

when the latter was made Ambassador to Turkey. I don't remember when Colby left to return to Washington.

Q: Later head of CIA.

LATHRAM: ...later head of CIA. Before he came to Vietnam he had unfortunately broken his ankle skiing on the canal in Washington, so he was delayed. But he was able to come out a month early, and we mutually agreed that rather than sit at my desk and break in by sitting alongside me for a month, he should take the opportunity to visit each province, meet and come to know the CORDS staff and Vietnam first hand. Thus ended my role in Vietnam.

DAVID RYBAK
Refugee Officer, USAID
Saigon (1966-1968)

Mr. Rybak was born and raised in New York and educated at LeMoyne College. He joined the Peace Corps in 1963 and was assigned to El Salvador. In 1966 he joined AID in Vietnam, serving first in Public Administration and subsequently in the Refugee Program. He returned to Washington in 1973 working in the Disaster Relief Office of AID, later being transferred to Jamaica. Mr. Rybak had a number of senior level assignments in AID headquarters in Washington, including assisting in the creation of the Center for Trade and Investment. Mr. Rybak was interviewed by Frank Pavich in 1998.

RYBAK: I happened to look in the local Syracuse newspaper and saw an AID advertisement recruiting people for Vietnam and I responded to that advertisement. I was invited to Washington and interviewed by a battery of people. I was accepted for AID's program in South Vietnam.

Q: What were they looking for in the interview?

RYBAK: AID was looking for people who had development experience or had educational background in International Relations or Community Development. I feel the two years in the Peace Corps qualified me for the job in Vietnam.

Q: How did AID prepare you for your job in Vietnam?

RYBAK: We had a three month preparatory training which included everything from living in the country to security measures. It didn't seem that we concentrated a lot on development. They were more concerned about security issues which were necessary because of the war in Vietnam. Whatever we received in development training was basically lectures from people who had experiences with development in Third World countries.

Q: Were you exposed to any new development theory at this time?

RYBAK: At that time because Vietnam was building up its programs and AID was building its mission in Vietnam, AID was anxious to get anybody that had any experience in working overseas particularly in international development. That is why the Peace Corps volunteers were picked up quickly by AID. Ex-Volunteers had toughed it out in Third World countries and most Volunteers were interested in working and traveling abroad. Also, ex-Peace Corps Volunteers were more likely to adjust quickly to the conditions in South Vietnam even with an on-going war.

Q: When did you actually arrive in Vietnam?

RYBAK: I arrived in Vietnam in June 1966.

Q: What were your major duties in Vietnam?

RYBAK: Before I left Washington I knew I was going to be working somewhere in the refugee program. Thousands of displaced persons had been created as a result of the bombing in the countryside villages and wartime conditions. I ended up being assigned to refugee headquarters in Saigon. I was working with the Vietnamese people who were displaced and migrated into the city but were living on the streets of Saigon.

Q: How was the program structured? Did you have a particular series of tasks that you had to perform?

RYBAK: It wasn't very structured at all. It was more or less finding out what needed to be done, talking to your supervisors about doing something about it. Getting out and looking at the situation, coming back with recommendations and then trying to get some real help to those people. The war did not make it easy to do too much advance planning since one never knew when the next wave of migrations to the urban areas would occur.

Q: Were there sufficient resources for the work that had to be done?

RYBAK: That was one of the things that we never hungered for in Vietnam. There were so many resources available to get community development projects going in Saigon. There was one particular area-District 8-that was a haven for refugee resettlement. AID was instrumental in getting a huge development project going to house the refugees...much better housing than they had on the streets of Saigon and Cholon.

Q: Were you exclusively working on refugees? Did you have any other assignment?

RYBAK: Basically it was with the refugee population displaced by the war. But you couldn't exclude the rest of the poor either. And that was just the first year or so because I did make some changes while I was there in terms of getting an assignment where I could focus on the poor. And I found that it wasn't through the refugee program. I transferred from the AID Refugee Program to the Office of Public Administration which at that time (1963-1966) had a huge number of AID supported programs and projects. I was assigned to the Municipal Government area and thereby started working with Vietnamese urban officers on projects to assist the poorer

segments of Saigon society. These projects involved the local district officials and families living in those districts. We were building a true self-help development program.

Q: What do you feel your major successes were in working with the refugees?

RYBAK: I think the major success in working with the refugees was giving them hope there was a better life than what they had at the time. We were there to help. We were there to make their conditions better and it was demonstrated to them with new development projects being developed such as potable drinking water, housing development, and improved sanitation.

Q: What were the major problems in implementation?

RYBAK: Major problems in implementation included (1) getting people to participate in the program because sometimes they would not show up for the projects and (2) bureaucracy from headquarters by setting other priorities and giving them precedence over what you were working on. However, things pretty much came together and we had some very viable projects.

Q: And after refugees, what was your...?

RYBAK: As I mentioned, I switched out of refugees and into a program where they could focus on these displaced people because refugees was not a term that the Vietnamese government officials recognized. These were truly displaced people; the Government refused to recognize them as refugees. As a result, many of these people were not getting the attention they should have received simply because of an interpretation by the Vietnamese government that these people wandering from villages outside Saigon and fleeing to the city for protection were not considered refugees. In addition to migrants from the south moving to Saigon, the metropolitan area absorbed large numbers of refugees from the north. At least 100,000 North Vietnamese became part of the exodus to Saigon. The real term for these migrant Vietnamese was “war victims” since they fled their towns and villages because of terrorism or the dangers of war.

I went into public administration and I worked with a gentleman who was working in municipal development in Saigon. I assisted him in developing activities and projects we could feasibly support through the public administration office rather than the refugee office of AID.

Q: How long did you continue in that line?

RYBAK: I continued in that particular job for about three years. One of the noteworthy things that I remember is going into some of the urban poor areas, if you will, the ghetto areas, and listening to the people. I think that was one of the more important things that we had to do was find out the problems. The way to find out what those problems were was to go to the phuong chief. Phuongs comprise districts and there were five to six divisions within each district. We went to the local officials, to the people themselves. We looked to see where the water levels during the flooding had made marks on the walls of the dwellings. What did they want? They wanted closer sources of drinking water. They wanted better sewage. Their walkways would flood and the water would come in their houses during the rainy season. Therefore, they wanted better drainage. These were the things upon which we focused and we developed a neat little

program which was truly self-help like we learned to do in the Peace Corps. The important thing was to get something started and not just talk about it. Talk must be translated into action.

Q: What were some of the political imperatives that affected your work and program?

RYBAK: In that particular program?

Q: Well, in any of your experience up to now in Vietnam.

RYBAK: The fact was if you arranged for the cement or whatever else might be needed to do the project some of it was bound to disappear. And it would disappear into the hands of the officials. You accepted it on the basis there was still enough product left to do the project. You knew they were going to skim off a few bags of cement or some rebar or whatever. Taking that into account, there was always enough product for the project. In other words, a few bags of cement or a couple rebar missing would not prevent the projects from going forward.

Q: Did you have any other activities going in Vietnam?

RYBAK: Because I stayed in municipal administration three years, I then moved on to a job at CORDS (Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support organization). I was working in the social welfare section and particularly in child adoption. I also worked with private voluntary organizations in Vietnam. What we were trying to do was coordinate their programs and focus their assistance so that it wasn't so much a scattered shotgun approach. Actual direction and control of CORDS was directed by Robert Komer, a rather flamboyant bureaucrat who made public statements in South Vietnam by his outlandish uniforms.

Q: Anything else interesting about your experience in Vietnam that you'd like to talk about?

RYBAK: Vietnam was really a special situation because you had so many resources, you had so many people, you had so much cement-so much of everything that you could literally try and do anything you wouldn't have the opportunity to do in other countries. It was a testing ground almost, because there was so much money and physical resources available. You could literally do almost anything you wanted to do that was a decent idea. Quite a different approach than the philosophy behind the Peace Corps in which little was provided but much accomplished by using innovation and ingenuity.

Q: What about the AID bureaucracy? How did it function?

RYBAK: The AID bureaucracy in Vietnam was like the bureaucracy in Washington. The structure was set up very similar. You had your supervisors and you had to report through them and to them. Sometimes they listened to you, sometimes they didn't. But it was just like any other bureaucracy, you lived with it. And you found and learned ways to get around the bureaucracy. But you had to have the experience in dealing with some of these people to do that.

CHARLES H. TWINING
Area Development Officer, USAID
Dalat (1966-1968)

Charles H. Twining was born in Maryland in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Virginia in 1962 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1964. After entering the Foreign Service in 1964 his assignments included Tananarive, Dalat, Abidjan, Bangkok, Cotonou, Douala, Ouagadougou, and Honolulu with ambassadorships to Cambodia and Cameroon. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Ambassador Charles H. Twining in 2004.

Q: What sort of training were you getting?

TWINING: The U.S. build-up in Vietnam – both civilian and military – was well underway during the four weeks I spent in training at the Foreign Service Institute in October – November 1966. This was not the Vietnam Training Center, which supported the more intensive, longer term training. This was purely FSI, where I was in a group of 20 or so State and AID people, many in the same “less than voluntary” category as myself. We were the only group going through this “fast track” training at the time.

The State training was an abbreviated area studies program focused solely on Vietnam, its history, culture, and present situation. Most notable among the speakers was the legendary, and somber, Bernard Fall who, having written extensively about the difficult, pre-1954 French involvement there, left us with a sense of déjà vu. Another speaker, a longtime State Department Asia hand, was also hardly encouraging. I recall him saying in particular, that “If you think the Vietnamese like us, you have another thing coming. They hate us, and you are going to find that out as soon as you get there, so remember that.” Not terribly encouraging, it was still preferable to receive these kinds of doses of reality than to see 1966 Vietnam through rose-tinted glasses. USIA officer Frank Scotten, known to have done a good job of reaching out to Vietnamese during his own assignment to that country, also came to our class to give his perspective that we were going into work where results were possible. We were encouraged at FSI to do considerable reading about insurgency, especially the recent one in Malaysia as presented by Sir Robert Thompson, and I benefited greatly from that opportunity to read. The AID training consisted of lectures regarding AID operations and procedures, particularly as tailored to Vietnam, but also about development in Asia. Note that I had specifically requested Vietnamese language training prior to leaving for Vietnam but was told there was no time. Through language, one learns about culture, the people. I often felt that my lack of opportunity for language training because there was “no time” was symptomatic of one of our major mistakes in Vietnam: we – and I include myself in that group – did not know the country and, thus, could not be especially effective, or if we were, it was only after a long time of learning things the hard way and making mistakes en route.

I left for Saigon in mid-November 1966, arriving in a grim looking city already marked by the military build-up and in the midst of seemingly non-stop rains. On the civilian side, we seemed to be building up faster than our institutional capacity could support. I was assigned to AID as an area development officer. (Soon after my arrival, AID changed its name to the

Office of Civil Operations or OCO, and the following year to CORDS, as civilian and military advisory efforts were combined together). As was typical at the time, AID scheduled new arrivals to tour several provinces to get a feel for both the country and the work. Traveling with fellow FSO Robert Myers, the trip was a good experience. Both of us were particularly taken with the highlands and were subsequently assigned to that region, Bob to BanMeThuot and I to Dalat, the capital of then Tuyen Duc province, now Lam Dong. I chuckle over the recollection of Col. Jake Jacobsen, one of the well known officials at Embassy Saigon at the time, telling me when he sent me to Dalat, “we want to take care of our FSO’s.”

And, indeed, Dalat was a lovely place to be posted. Tantamount to a large village, it had been a French hill station in colonial days. At 1500 meters altitude, one was far from the climate of hot, muggy Saigon. Instead, the climate was cool and healthy. You ate wonderful strawberries and all kinds of other fruits and vegetables. I would get up in morning, go out into the brisk air and look to the north at the beautiful twin peaks of Lang Bian Mountain (which I eventually climbed and one of which became the location for a U.S. radar site to guide B-52 bombers on their raids into the North). The scene was lovely. On Sundays I would sometimes go to the old French hotel, the Dalat Palace, and order good French coffee and French bread and jelly, a very pleasant pastime.

Q: In the old Swiss village.

TWINING: Dalat was like a beautiful little Swiss village.

Q: Yes.

TWINING: It was idyllic, in many ways, had there been no insurgency there. That’s where I spent the next two years.

Q: You were there from late 1966 until?

TWINING: Until the end of 1968. I spent two full years there. I have to confess, when I got there, my attitude wasn’t the greatest. They said there was no time to learn Vietnamese. “Just get out there and win the hearts and minds.” I had heard that the Vietnamese were all corrupt and that they hated us. I had to make up my mind about where I would fit in Vietnam, as well as improve my negative attitude. So, I decided that as the province was predominately Montagnard, I would learn the Montagnard language, Koho. This is a language of the Mon-Khmer principal family of languages. I thought I would work especially with the Montagnard, not those “bad” Vietnamese. After a while, I realized I was in Vietnam, and the Montagnards were just one of its elements, with ethnic Vietnamese deserving my similar interaction, that it was important to make sure one balanced one’s efforts. If I was to do my part in winning hearts and minds, I had to work with all the people of Vietnam, and not just in my program work. Thus, once I felt I had Koho under my belt (thinks to lessons given me at night by a USAID employee named Cil Dinh using a local Christian and Missionary Alliance textbook), I attended night class to study Vietnamese, up until the Tet attacks of early 1968.

Q: What was your work situation?

TWINING: I was assigned in late 1966 to a small provincial team of AID officers as a deputy provincial advisor. The senior provincial representative through the end of 1967 had been in Vietnam since 1963. First with International Voluntary Services (a private group similar to our Peace Corps) as an agricultural worker, then with AID in the same area, Donald Wadley was a farm boy from Utah. He spoke excellent Vietnamese and did not mind getting his hands dirty working with local farmers. The second American officer was an AID employee, former PCV Bernard Salvo, who ran the self-help program. I was the third, replacing FSO Fred Ashley, with responsibility for Montagnard affairs (e.g., development), health, and refugees, as well as assisting with self-help. Our jobs were to work with our Government of Vietnam counterparts to promote development as an alternative to what the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had to offer. AID also posted in Dalat while I was there an agricultural advisor, Ike Hatchimonji, and for shorter periods rural electrification, nursing, logistics, and public administration personnel. The unheralded ones in our AID office, those with particular courage, were the eight or so local personnel without whose knowledge and language skills we would have been helpless. What was vital for us all, was to be out and about the province with local officials, watching over projects, giving advice and support, and keeping an eye on the situation. In addition, we had to keep the regional AID headquarters in Nha Trang informed about developments. Travel was generally by road, though we received both USAID and U.S. military helicopter support in order to visit remote areas and dispatch supplies to them.

We also had in Dalat a one-man USIS operation represented by Don Soergel, then by John Keller, as well as an Agency representative who concentrated on internal security matters. There was a small U.S. military unit in Dalat to work with Vietnamese military personnel, and even smaller detachments in each of the three districts. One of their tasks was to complete with their counterparts the monthly Hamlet Evaluation Surveys, which we then reviewed in the provinces, an exercise aimed at quantifying the situation and one that few of us believed was useful.

Q: In the first place, what was the situation in Dalat between 1966 and 1968?

TWINING: Tuyen Duc province had been largely spared the war, when I got there. Indeed, there was evidence that started accumulating that Dalat was a bit of an R&R center for some of the Viet Cong. When they got tired of being out in the jungle, they would come in and relax in Dalat. With only scattered, local Viet Cong and no NVA, the province was relatively safe when I arrived. It was also somewhat special in that Don Wadley took a very firm stance that we would not spray Agent Orange on any of the forests in the province. He simply felt there was no need to do so.

In the first year I was there, the situation was good. One could easily sleep out in hamlets without fear. It was only at the end of 1967, the beginning of 1968, that something changed. In December 1967, a North Vietnamese battalion came through an isolated Montagnard area in the southern part of the province and massacred a number of innocent people. It was a bad

scene. In response, the province first sent in a small team of South Vietnamese and American military personnel to investigate. As the only American official who knew the area, and spoke the language, I offered to go along, but an American Colonel Michaels (deputy CORDS provincial advisor) thought the situation too uncertain. The team was wiped out, including him. People hadn't known anything like that before. We wondered what this incident meant. In early January 1968, another North Vietnamese battalion came through. This time, they were making their way down to the coast. Again, what did it mean? Then at the end of January and beginning of February 1968, we had the famous Tet attacks throughout South Vietnam. The fighting went on longer in Dalat, than anywhere else in Vietnam, except in Hue.

During the fighting in our area, we radioed out reports, but we never heard anything back from the American Embassy, which had its hands full as well. We never heard outside news broadcasts mention the heavy fighting in our area. What we only learned months afterward, was that our reports that we sent out by radio were never received in Saigon. We were basically cut off for several weeks in Dalat. With a major reinforcement ARVN troops and considerable bombing by American planes in Dalat city itself and outside the city, order was finally restored. We would see bodies on the streets. After the Tet attacks of 1968, the province never went back to being that nice, peaceful province that we had known before.

Q: What sort of troops did you have on your side, up in Dalat?

TWINING: There weren't very many. The Vietnamese had some companies of soldiers. The Americans had only the military advisors in the province headquarters, and in the three district capitals. Only with the Tet attacks were we reinforced with Vietnamese battalions.

Q: What was happening on the fighting?

TWINING: In what way?

Q: In other words, if the North Vietnamese, or actually in this case, the Viet Cong (I don't know which were fighting)... What was the fighting over and how did it take place?

TWINING: To the best of my knowledge, the fighting was done by main force NVA units, supported and guided by local Viet Cong who came out of the woodwork, as they also did in Saigon. Why the lengthy attack on Dalat, plus the attempts to control main areas of the rest of Tuyen Duc province? I suspect the communists wanted to demonstrate that they had no problem taking control of anyplace in the country, including one that the war had basically not touched until January 31, 1968. Dalat was particularly important because of its resort status, a place that high ranking South Vietnamese officials visited for rest and relaxation, and also the location of the Vietnam Military Academy. Dalat represented a symbol of what the communist side resented most; its taking would have had a tremendous psychological impact on the country.

Q: How were you touched yourself in Dalat by the Tet attacks?

TWINING: I was invited to a Vietnamese home the evening of January 31 to celebrate the onset of the Vietnamese New Year. My host warned that there was something in the air and agreed that it would be better for me to return to my home early that evening and stay put. I did so. My house over on the western edge of town was empty; the several Montagnard students who lived in the outbuildings on my compound while they went to school had returned to their home hamlets for the holiday. I was awakened early the next morning by gunfire which seemed to be occurring all around me. I could not get out, so I decided to relax and see what happened next (though I had spotted blood coming up to my front door, from the night before, obviously a bit disconcerting). Later that day my AID colleague Bernard Salvo let a combined Vietnamese and American military unit from the eastern part of town to come and get me out.

At that point he and I and several others relocated to the home of the province senior advisor, FSO Frank Wisner, who had just recently replaced Don Wadley in the senior American position. We stayed there for the rest of the period of fighting of several weeks, taking turns standing guard on the front porch at night, for whatever that was worth.

One night we heard the sound of shovels hitting rock. We couldn't figure out what it was. At daylight, even though we stayed on the porch with our guns, we could see that Viet Cong had dug in all across the street from us. This was in early February 1968. They kept looking at us, and we looked at them. They looked at us some more. Then, a military jeep would go by, and they would start firing at it. After that, they would start looking at us again, and we would look at them. This was similar to a couple of other encounters I had with Viet Cong where I realized they weren't after me; they were after the Vietnamese soldier, who might be nearby. On this day in February, these men were local Viet Cong, as far as we could determine. An artillery strike was called in just afterward ending the situation. But, it was interesting. Either they knew who we were or they couldn't figure out who we were, or because we had been doing all of these small self-help hearts and minds projects, all over the province, all the time, perhaps we were known, and perhaps they said, "These guys are not our enemies, these guys are doing some good things." We couldn't figure it out. It was very strange.

It was just one of those interesting incidents that made you wonder about the whole business of the war.

Q: Were you involved in projects there?

TWINING: Yes, absolutely. But, our job with AID was first to push Vietnamese provincial officials to get out of their offices and go and see the people's needs, and get them to try to meet the people's needs with some of the budgetary resources we were providing them through Saigon. Secondly, we also had our own funds, as we did in Africa, to do projects, to build schools or health facilities, or undertake road improvement, or build small bridges.

Thus, it was important to go out, take a local official with you, and make decisions regarding project support, inspect projects underway, and verify their satisfactory completion. Needless to say, one tried one's best during the process to make certain that payoffs were not made to officials higher up or that local village or hamlet authorities did not rake off part of the funds

or materials destined for the project. In many ways, this was a very different kind of Foreign Service experience. You were there DOING things, not just writing reports, things you thought could make a difference in people's lives and would come into play when they had to decide which side they were on. We who were doing such provincial work were convinced that development and full stomachs had much more to do with the outcome of the situation in our particular area than military offensives, though these were of course necessary, as well. While a State employee, I was also an employee of AID and expected to do what any other AID person would do. Besides project work, though, we always kept in mind the need to relate to, build up, and hopefully take our lead from, the Vietnamese official, support him when he was doing the right thing and make known our views privately when it was otherwise. If an official proved recalcitrant or incompetent, the American in charge (Wadley/Wisner) would take the problem up the ladder to the province chief or mayor, hopefully for resolution. Needless to say, in the conduct of our work we picked up information about what was happening, information we conveyed to the regional office in Nha Trang and to personnel of Embassy Saigon.

There was a particular aspect of my own duties worth noting. Because Tuyen Duc province had a majority Montagnard population (Lat, Cil, Sre, Chru, and Maa ethnic groups), it was important in a Vietnamese administration to reach out to them. This is just like one would do with ethnic Vietnamese, but there was a special angle to the Montagnards. During French days the Montagnards received special attention and sympathy from the French, leading to Montagnard belief that they could become independent or autonomous, despite the fact they were located physically in the midst of a far larger Vietnamese population. This was unrealistic. It went nowhere with the French, and it made no sense to us. If we did not give the Montagnards the attention and aid needed, incorporating them into the overall activity of the province, we would only add fuel to the incipient fire of their independence movement. Fortunately, I had several good Montagnard and Vietnamese counterparts who saw things the same way and proved to be excellent working partners, and I was well supported by my other American colleagues in Dalat and by our small but interested and active Office of Montagnard Affairs at AID/OCO/CORDS in Saigon, FSOs Robert P. Meyers and James McNaughton. Unlike some other parts of the Vietnamese highlands, I was pleased that we never had a separatist problem in Tuyen Duc province.

Q: How did you find the representatives of the Vietnamese government in Dalat?

TWINING: They were a mixed bag. Some of them just wanted money in their pockets; others just wanted to survive with as little risk to themselves as humanly possible. Others were very conscientious and took risks that would often astonish me. So, it was a mixed bag. I can't say they were all one type or another type. But, some of those who really did take chances, and slept out in hamlets, at risk to themselves, which I often did with them, too, were great. I frequently wonder what happened to them when the communists did take over in 1975.

Q: Well, you were there for two years. Did you get out and around? What did you do for social life?

TWINING: Well, that's a good question. In a small provincial town anywhere in the world, there often is not a lot of social life. But like a Peace Corps volunteer finds in a village, there are things to do, and you make the most of your situation. You interacted with people. You studied language in the evening, or read. International Voluntary Services had several people there who were good people, including a current State Department official, Richard Beaird. There were missionaries of various nationalities present in the province. I never felt that my life was lacking something. I tried in principle to sleep in a hamlet one night a week, just to get a feel for the hamlet, and the people's attitudes and the like. Often, you ended up in a bed with several other people, which didn't make for a great night's sleep. But it was a way of getting a better feel for the country and strengthening your language and diplomatic skills.

Q: Well, going out and sleeping in a hamlet, were you finding it dangerous?

TWINING: I think in our business, whether you are assigned to Saudi Arabia or Iraq or Vietnam, or Cambodia, you learn to judge what the risks are. If you're going along a small highway, and you don't see a soul, then you have to think twice about whether there is some problem up ahead. You do this on the basis of your own information. It's true, once in a while, that there would be firing nearby, so you get under the bed, or down on the floor. Those are just the realities of things. You'll also find that if you are in a village, you're putting your trust in villagers. They try to protect you. If they feel they can't protect you, or feel at too much risk themselves, they will tell you honestly that it is probably too dangerous for you to stay here. That's fine. So, that's the way it works.

Q: Did you feel the hand of our American military, at all?

TWINING: You only felt it from time to time. Again, the American military presence in the province was small. It was not oppressive. We did have to try to make sure we communicated, interacted between the two of us, to avoid frictions, or differences of perspective. That was okay. There were a couple of times where there were American military actions that you felt the hand of, and which had ramifications. Most American military personnel, just like everybody else, were well behaved. They were trying to do their job.

One negative situation involved a little zoo south of town, when some American soldiers from outside the province were driving up the road and shot the zoo's elephant. The zoo's elephant had been put there by Madame Ngu back in the early 1960s. I still have a foot from that elephant in my household effects. They thought it was funny to shoot the elephant. Well, it wasn't funny. It really made for a lot of ill feeling. We were the ones who had to try to explain it away. Another thing happened that gave me insight into the future. This was in 1968, when the province had become much more insecure. A big American military unit came up the main highway from Saigon. It was a hot day. There was a beautiful river there. The personnel stopped, took their clothes off, and jumped in the river and went swimming. This is all well and good if they're in an isolated area, but they were right next to the highway, right next to the big market. I still remember hearing all these Vietnamese women exclaiming in disgust, "Look at these people." Frankly, it was the kind of thing that did us no good. I had the feeling that when enough of these incidents built up because of actions of a

few, due to cultural ignorance, one of these days we were going to get thrown out of Vietnam. Yet, it's hard to control everybody, every minute. We, of course, are finding that in Iraq.

Q: Well, then, how much French? Was your French useful?

TWINING: Yes, my French was useful with the older officials, both Vietnamese and Montagnard. As I noted, the French had a special affinity for the Montagnards, when they were in colonial power, to the point where the Montagnards were hoping the French would give them autonomy in the country, which didn't happen. It was the older Montagnards, and some of the professional Vietnamese doctors and dentists, for example, who had lovely French. Their French was useful. I used my Koho far more. The more Vietnamese I learned, the better off I was, as well.

Q: Did you develop any lasting friendships from your time in Vietnam?

TWINING: Obviously when you leave a post, you continue for a while to exchange greetings and the like with those with whom you had close ties. At this point almost 40 years later, besides Americans who were with me in Dalat there are still several lasting friendships. Two of the Montagnard students who lived in my outbuildings and helped me improve my Kohl and understanding of the cultures, Teh Krajan and Liang Krai, came later to the U.S. as refugees, and we stay in contact. Teh is now head of the accounting department at Millersville University in Pennsylvania. Two Vietnamese whom I had know in Dalat, one a teacher at the time and the other a student at the French lycee there, both found me recently in the U.S. Finally, as I have mentioned elsewhere, the first Vietnamese who courageously had me in his home when I arrived in Dalat in 1966, a professor at Dalat University, Pho Ba Long, later came to the U.S. He found me when I was office director for Indochina in the late 1980s and he was employed at Georgetown University. Our friendship continued when I was envoy to Cambodia, and he headed a business administration education program AID supported there. I will always remain an admirer of Professor Long and his wife, both of whom I saw recently at the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington. One final anecdote: a freelance journalist passed through Phnom Penh in about 1993. She told me she had been traveling just beforehand north of Dalat when an unknown Montagnard who had been a locally elected official in my day approached her out of the blue to ask her to pass along his greetings if she ever encountered me. Happening 25 years after I left Vietnam, that was touching, I confess.

Being in a war situation anywhere also binds you very much to your colleagues with whom you had worked or fought. You had common experiences that unite you. This is true for the Foreign Service personnel who did Vietnam, of course, and almost 40 years later I, like others, have kept those friendships. They include those with whom I was assigned to Dalat as well as others I knew elsewhere in the former South Vietnam, people like David G. Brown, Richard Matheron, Robert P. Myers and James McNaughton. Indeed, when one encounters someone who had the Vietnam experience but not necessarily during your timeframe, e.g., Frederick Z. Brown, John Negroponte, Robert Miller, James Rosenthal, Richard Holbrooke, there, too, the relationship is easy and generally lasting.

Q: Any lessons learned from your Vietnam experience?

TWINING: I think it is very difficult to win hearts and minds at the same time that we are waging a war. It is vital to do so if you want to have any measure of popular support, but we should not have any illusions that it will product the success for which we hope, particularly when incidents such as a mistaken bombing which kills innocent civilians undoes so much of the good that your civilian programs have accomplished. Secondly, my apprehensions before I even arrived in country about our involvement in the Vietnamese insurgency were borne out as I tried to understand during my time whether we were involved in a struggle against international communism or a civil war. History has shown that it was the latter, of course, and to my way of thinking our involvement was a mistake and a terrible, terrible waste on all sides. When I was at the Vietnamese Embassy function described above in 2004, I was standing with other old retired Vietnam hands from State as the Vietnamese Chargé d’Affaires – who would have been barely born when we were in his country – spoke of the friendship between our two countries today and the desire to enhance it. We old hands agreed that it was a shame that we had been unwilling fifty years ago to reach out and try to create a similar atmosphere then; history could have been so different. The lesson is to be very careful before we get so entrapped in the internal affairs of a country that we can extract ourselves again only with great difficulty, expense, and something less than honor. We should avoid military involvement if at all possible; diplomacy and patience should always be our principal tool.

THEODORE J. C. HEAVNER
Supervising Political Officer
Saigon (1966-1969)

Theodore Heavner was born in Canton, Ohio in 1929 and was educated at Case Western Reserve College, the State University of Iowa and Harvard. He entered the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included posts in Hue, Saigon, Medan and Georgetown, Guyana. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: You went back to Vietnam and were there how long?

HEAVNER: January, 1966 to March, 1969.

Q: By the way were you married at this point and did you have a family with you?

HEAVNER: Well, I had my family with me in Medan. I had a daughter and my first wife there. They, along with all diplomatic families, were evacuated after the coup and the families didn’t return until after I had been plucked out of Medan and sent back to Saigon. That first marriage was kind of a casualty of the Vietnam War, I think it is fair to say. So, yes, I was married but that marriage ended while I was in Vietnam.

Q: I think one of the casualties of the Foreign Service is caused by these crises which call on people to spend an inordinate amount of time in a place where the families are either under great hardship or can't be with them.

HEAVNER: I think that is so true. I think that in general we just didn't take enough into account the tensions, the stresses on family members and the cost the Foreign Service does impose on the family unit. It is really tough for children and spouses to be abroad in a hostile environment. Of course, I didn't have family with me in Vietnam during the war there, though before I left some of the senior officers had brought their spouses in, were allowed to do so. All of us who were there, however, were separated from our families for extended periods and many of them had their families in Bangkok in what I think were very unsatisfactory housing arrangements, certainly not the kind of thing to cement a relationship, to stabilize a marriage and a family unit even though those who had their families in Bangkok could get over there much more readily than those who had their families in the States.

No, I think you can't emphasize enough the kind of stresses the Foreign Service puts on families. It is a really tough profession for spouses and children. This periodic uprooting is a hazard for kids that was never acknowledged when I was in the Foreign Service. Children need stability and they don't have it in the Foreign Service. The family has to be really well put together. The wife and husband have to be very dedicated to one another and to their children to overcome that kind of periodic uprooting. I think it is a great handicap for kids who come out of that background and I am saying that not just as a Foreign Service officer but also with my other hat as a clinical psychologist. You may recall that after I left the Foreign Service I became a doctoral level licensed clinical psychologist and I had a much better appreciation in that role of the kind of penalties that are involved in the uprootings and the absences of the Foreign Service spouse who is posted without a family. So, yes, my marriage to Jean, who I don't think you ever met, was in many ways a casualty of the Vietnam war. I think that marriage might have survived otherwise.

Q: You arrived in January 1966 in Vietnam. As you saw the situation in 1966 was there a difference from when you served there in 1963?

HEAVNER: Oh, yes. There certainly was. The American presence was very big in Saigon in those days because the military was increasing by leaps and bounds and we had not as yet moved the major part of them out of Saigon. They were still bivouacking in hotels and other arrangements to a great extent in the city itself. When I arrived I did not go immediately to my housing but was in the Rex hotel. I have this memory of watching the aircraft crews leaving in the morning for their raids draped with machine gun bandoliers and elephant hide boots. It was a real wild west kind of scene in many ways.

The Tu Do, which in 1963 was ostensibly off limits to American military personnel, was a nightclub on the main street there in Saigon and had become something to see to be believed. If it was off limits there was no evidence of that.

Another big change in the physical scenery was the unbelievable number of motorbikes that jammed the streets. There were torrents of motorbikes that would jam the streets during rush

hour. It was worth life and limb to try to navigate, certainly not on foot. Even in a car I remember being hit midship by one of those guys whose motorbike stopped when it hit my car but he went right on over and landed on the far curb.

Q: What about the political/military situation as you saw it when you arrived in 1966?

HEAVNER: Let me explain my own situation there first because my optic was probably distorted to some degree by my situation. I had been called back because, as I said earlier, General Ed Lansdale, of Philippine fame primarily then although he had also been in Vietnam during the early Diem years and was not stranger to that country, was back in Vietnam I think mostly under the aegis of Hubert Humphrey who was a great fan of his. Lansdale needed or thought he needed a Vietnamese language officer. Dan Ellsberg, by the way, was one of his group. The guy who subsequently leaked the Pentagon Papers. He was very hawkish in that time period, totally different from what he was later. The former French Foreign Legion officer who had been the contact with the Vietnamese military at the time of Diem's overthrow and assassination, Lou Conein, was a member of the Lansdale group. There was a guy from USIA, a very tall man who looked bizarre among the Vietnamese, and a couple of other people that Lansdale had assembled for this mission which was sometimes phrased, "To win the hearts and minds of the people." They had, as far as I could make out, absolutely no plan and no notion of what it was they were there to do. The embassy, as far as I could make out, and particularly Phil Habib, regarded them as an unattractive nuisance.

Q: This was basically a force that was put in there at the behest of a political figure in the United States, Hubert Humphrey?

HEAVNER: I think so. I was never very clear about that, but that is my impression.

Anyhow, I was detailed to that group and spent the first several months of my time back in Saigon trying to figure out what in the world it was that I was supposed to be doing. In fact, the whole group spent a lot of time talking to one another about what it was that they might be doing that would be useful.

I decided at one point that I would go back to my old stamping ground in Hue and talk to my old contacts there and see what they had to say about the situation. In the interval of having left Vietnam in 1961 and coming back there, of course, had been the whole Buddhist uproar under Diem with the "Buddhist barbecues," as Madam Nhu called the immolations, and all the subsequent Buddhist pressures which gave great impetus to our desire to get rid of Diem, as you may remember. One of the leading figures, if not the leading figure in all that was a man named Thich Tri Quang, a Buddhist monk, who nobody had ever heard of in 1961 but who was certainly there. When I went back up to Hue, the doctor in charge of the hospital, who was an old contact of mine, had become very much oriented towards the Buddhist political stance, very anti-government, and he wanted me to meet with Tri Quang. I thought that was a good idea so I said, "Sure." I did meet with Tri Quang, had a long conversation with him which I wrote up in a memo, and Phil Habib was livid. I did not know, no one had told me, that Tri Quang was off limits. We weren't having anything to do with him. We weren't talking to him and weren't going to be talking to him except that Ted Heavner went to Hue and did talk to him. Phil Habib didn't

know me then. That was the first contact he had had with me. Thank God Tom Corcoran was his deputy and I had known Tom for many years. Tom was able, I think, to calm Phil down and explain to him that I had no inkling, as usual the Lansdale group was off on a tangent, and it wasn't Ted but the Lansdale group. Well, Phil didn't send me out of country although I think he had that in mind to begin with.

At that point I made a big pitch to Tom that I wanted to get the hell out of the Lansdale group and go to work for the political section which was what I was really meant for anyhow. Tom somehow persuaded Phil that that was a good idea. I think Ed Lansdale also concurred because it was pretty clear that I was not his kind of guy. So, after four or five months back in Saigon, I was put back into harness, so to speak, in something that made sense to me, i.e. the political section in Saigon.

Q: Ed Lansdale gained renown early on by a book by Bill Lederer and Usher Burdick called "The Ugly American," as sort of being the answer, a grassroots real American who can get down and solve problems, etc. And, he made a name for himself in the Philippines, particularly Magsaysay. What was your impression at this point of Lansdale, his outlook, how he operated and how clued in he was to the Vietnamese scene?

HEAVNER: Lansdale had been in Vietnam before and he had been reportedly quite close to Diem, although I am kind of skeptical about that. So, it wasn't that he was a stranger to the country, but certainly Vietnam is not the Philippines and the Philippine people, I believe, are very different. What may have been effective in the Philippines was certainly not effective in Vietnam. Part of the difficulty may have been that the mission generally was hostile. I know that the political section was not entranced by Lansdale and what they perceived as his methods. I suspect that nobody else was either. Although Lansdale had a background in CIA, I don't know how well plugged in he was with the CIA mission at that time. I never saw any evidence of it one way or the other even though I was a member of the group. That in itself may tell the story, maybe there was very little contact or virtually none. As far as I could make out Lansdale was almost completely ineffective there. I didn't see anything accomplished during my time that was of any value.

Q: Did he come in with any preconceived ideas or was he trying to push anything?

HEAVNER: I don't know, I wasn't there when he arrived, so what he came with is quite unclear to me. At the time I arrived it seemed to me the group was in complete confusion. They spent a great deal of time talking about what they should do that would be useful, what their mission ought to be and it never gelled, at least not while I was there. I don't recall when Lansdale left, although I not sure he was there much longer after I switched over to the political section. Anyhow, that was a bad beginning but a good ending in terms of my own experience.

Q: You were in the political section essentially from 1966 to 1969. When did you leave in 1969?

HEAVNER: March.

Q: What was your area of responsibility?

HEAVNER: Opposition political movements and in particular, later on, the Buddhists were my responsibility. I remained in contact with a number of Buddhist leaders and also with the major then opposition leader who subsequently became prime minister and vice president of Vietnam, Tran Van Huong. Opposition parties were never more than cliques in South Vietnam. My job was to keep tabs on the major opposition leaders and talk to them regularly. I never saw Tri Quang again, incidentally, but I certainly saw a lot of Tam Chau and Mai Tho Tien, who were important Buddhist leaders. Those people were always quite willing to talk, by the way, unlike some Vietnamese. Maintaining contact with them was not difficult. They always saw the Americans as a potential route to power so it wasn't hard to maintain contact with opposition political figures and Buddhists in South Vietnam in those days.

Q: The Buddhists were sort of well known to have a pretty good understanding of public relations, particularly with the Americans and how to play the press and all.

HEAVNER: They did up until the time of the military takeover. After that, the military was very firm with them and as far as I could make out they lost a lot of their cachet with the populace generally. Certainly they were not able to get the kind of popular support they seemed to have during the Diem regime. I am not sure what the reason for that may be but they were never an important threat to the stability of the government after the military took over or at least not when I got there in 1966. We were afraid of them. We thought they could be an important threat and that was one of the reasons that the embassy was so anxious for me to talk to them and keep tabs on them and in particular to hold hands with Tam Chau, who prospered mainly by playing a sort of cooperative game with the government. He was a northerner who had ties to Ky by the way.

Q: What was your impression of embassy reporting?

HEAVNER: Well, I did a lot of it so I guess I thought it was okay. I did a lot of reporting on my contacts with Huong. I remember vividly Ellsworth Bunker sending me to somewhere on the coast because Huong and all the opposition figures who were going to run for president in the election on which we had pegged such great hopes as at least an image of democracy, had pulled out saying it wasn't going to be a fair election and they weren't going to run. Bunker told me to go up to Huong and see if we could persuade him to get back into the race because all the others would follow suit if he did. I did talk to him and I evoked Bunker's name, which I think was a powerful incentive, and he did get back into the race and the others did follow suit. Huong, I think got something like 19 percent of the vote, a very respectable showing and subsequently, as I said earlier, he became prime minister and then the last vice president of South Vietnam before the North came in and took over.

The embassy was doing a lot of reporting, not just what was happening with the military and Nguyen Cao Ky, but also what was happening with the Buddhists and opposition figures. We had good connections with them. I guess that we were pretty well aware of what was happening in South Vietnam aside from the communists. We had intelligence on what the VC were up to. That wasn't my bailiwick, but we did have intelligence. Obviously it was less than perfect and in the case of the Tet attacks a monumental failure. I think we had pretty good information on what

was happening on our side.

Q: How about out in the provinces?

HEAVNER: We had people all over in the provinces, including Foreign Service officers. In fact the provincial reporters, which we had in almost every province, reported regularly. I think we had a pretty good notion, again, of what was happening from the optics of our side.

I wanted to mention something that I did in the way of reporting. I did some of the central stuff because I drafted, initially it was every week, a report which Lodge sent directly to Johnson and then Bunker subsequently sent to Johnson. In drafting that I incorporated not just the provincial reporting and my own knowledge of the political situation, but also reports that we got from the military on the military situation and from CIA, and tried to make a picture of it. That was my central function in many ways.

Q: Did you feel you were to present a picture, were people sort of leaning on you from up above?

HEAVNER: They didn't have to. I was a hawk. I thought we were going to win that war. No, nobody leaned on me and as I say they didn't have to because I was at that point very much in support of what we were trying to do. I thought our policy was right. I was also very encouraged and exhilarated by the fact that what I was doing seemed to be so central to our foreign policy. There are a lot of LBJ stories and maybe this one was apocryphal, but I believed it then. The story was that when LBJ got this weekly report he would go around with a pair of scissors and cut out parts of it and hand it to various of his subordinates and cabinet members for action. It is said that he informed his staff that whenever that report came in he didn't care where he was, if he was in the can, he wanted it shoved under the door as he wanted to see it right away. So, it seemed to me that I was doing something that was very rewarding, and that has its own hazards. I don't think if I had been able to step back and see the picture whole, I might have had the foresight to predict the disaster that ultimately overtook us there, but certainly I might have been a little more restrained in my enthusiasm.

Q: What was making you particularly optimistic?

HEAVNER: Well, things were going quite well. As I said earlier I think we won the war several times and our opponent raised the ante on us each time. The strategic hamlet program worked pretty well for a while and then the Viet Cong started attacking in bigger units and it collapsed because the hamlet militia was no match for an organized unit with good weapons and discipline. Subsequently, in 1967, as I said, the indications were that militarily and certainly politically things were going quite well. The Tet attacks reversed all that and not just in Vietnam. Actually the Tet attacks from a military point of view were not successful, they lost a lot of their infrastructure throughout the South, lost a lot of people and while they took and held Hue for 25 days they were not able to hold anything else of consequence for any length of time. In every case they were ejected and the government remained in place, etc. It was a massive effort on their part with 75,000 troops attacking simultaneously. What they got out of it, of course, was the conviction in the U.S. that this war was never going to be won. The American public thought

those people are going to go on forever. It was that, I think that turned the tide. I see the Tet attacks as a critical, pivotal point. It was at that juncture that it became evident that we were not going to be able to stay the course and at that point the whole thing started to go down hill.

But in 1967, we were thinking about a negotiated settlement in which the South Vietnamese would compete politically with the communists and in which the communists would be at a considerable disadvantage because while their preferred instruments, which were essentially military, and terror would be used to some extent, we thought it could be arranged so that that kind of political power could be minimized. Going head to head in a peaceful political confrontation, balloting, they would be at a great disadvantage because it seemed to us, and I think this was true, that in a free election the people of South Vietnam were not going to opt for a communist regime. I don't think that would have happened. We said then it wouldn't happen and I still believe that it wouldn't have happened. We thought that was where it was coming out. We were going to negotiate a settlement in which there would be a political conflict continuing but not an armed conflict.

When they had the big meeting in Honolulu in 1967 that Johnson went to, I helped Phil Habib get ready for it. We were talking about positioning ourselves for the upcoming political conflict. We were quite sanguine about how the outcome of that would be. Now, you may be right if you were to say that we were hoodwinked by our own military and their very favorable reports of the military situation. Maybe so to some extent, but I am not really persuaded that the military was lying like the press said frequently and often. I am not really persuaded that that was the case. They may have put a rosy gloss on a lot of things, but I do not believe they were consciously misleading the press, or themselves or us in the embassy.

Q: What was your impression of the reports you were getting from the CIA?

HEAVNER: To be truthful it is hard for me to remember and subtract those reports out from the reporting we got from our own people. I certainly don't remember being critical of it. I also don't remember any really crucial insights from it. But, my job was to paint a picture using everything available and I am not sure that I can in retrospect sort that out at all. I knew many of the CIA people there. I had great respect for them. Many of them were in the provinces, as you may recall, doing some very tough jobs. I knew Colby personally and had great respect for him. I think he is a very honest man. I can't believe that he, for one, would ever have sent in reports which were in anyway biased to his knowledge.

Q: Can you describe where you were and what happened during the Tet business?

HEAVNER: Oh, yes. I do remember that. My first inkling that anything was going on was very early that morning. As it happened, that was the morning when I was in the habit of going into the embassy around 4:35 a.m. to draft the weekly (by then it was biweekly) report for the President. So, I was up very early anyhow. I heard gun fire before I got up and thought that something might be amiss. I called the embassy and couldn't get any response, so I called Colonel Jacobson, whose house was right next to the embassy. He was mission coordinator and was a retired colonel. Unbeknownst to me, of course, he was in the middle of it by that time. I remember this telephone conversation and it was really bizarre, thinking back on it, because I am

in my house about half a mile away and hearing a lot of gun fire and some heavy explosions and Jake picks up the phone and suddenly the gun fire is much louder. I said something to the effect, "My god, Jake, what is going on?" I don't recall what Jake said but I said, "Well, it sounds as though you don't need me to interrupt you, I think you are pretty busy." Well, he didn't want me to hang up, he wanted to talk. I told him that I was planning to come into the embassy to do my weekly report and was that all right. Jake said, "No, Ted, the report has been changed." I guess he then told me the embassy was under attack, although I don't have a clear memory of that. I was struck by how nonchalant and how unhurried he was in talking to me. We did hang up and I sat there and turned on the radio which gave no information. There was martial music if I recall correctly.

At dawn I decided I was going to find out what was going on so I got into my car. During my tour there I had acquired one of these little Triumph two seaters, which was a lovely little car, but more a toy than a car. I must have gone across Saigon pretty fast that morning because I didn't draw any attention from anybody, neither government troops nor Viet Cong. Actually it was probably a pretty risky thing to do, but I didn't know that. When I got to the embassy things were finished, but only just finished. The bodies were still in the courtyard. Our people had driven out or destroyed the few VC who were there. It was a pretty small operation as we found out subsequently. Things were still smoking. Jacobson had finished off the VC in his house. He told me, because he was still there, that they had tossed a 45 up to him on the second floor where he was ensconced and the last of the VC came up the stairs and Jake shot him two or three times before he stopped the man. That was the end of it as far as Jake was concerned and he was going on as to how this was not part of his military specialty because he was retired, now a cookie pusher, and he went to cocktail parties and was no longer in this shooting business. He was all very calm and humorous. There we are in the courtyard there with the embassy's doors blasted and three or four VC bodies. All of that and Jake is telling me how this is no longer what he should be doing, that he is supposed to go to cocktail parties and be a cookie pusher.

About 10:00 that day I was back in my office. Subsequently, whether it was the same day or a day later, my office was distinguished by being the site of the detonators for claymore mines which were put around the perimeter of the embassy in case of another attack, which never came. The wires came in at my office level and the detonators were there. They weren't activated during day hours when I was there.

Q: What was the reaction at the embassy to all this? What type of reports were you sending?

HEAVNER: Our information was pretty spotty at first. Most of what was reported initially, I think was reported by phone. We were in phone contact with Washington, of course. In fact, I think the duty officer, who was in the code room throughout the attack, was on the phone to Washington the entire time.

Q: Actually, he was. I have interviewed him, but have forgotten his name at the moment.

HEAVNER: He was a junior officer who had a terrible experience at his first post.

Q: Yes. He was an economic officer and later was ambassador to Slovenia. He said he was able

to get through to Washington beautifully but when he kept calling the military, they said they were too busy. Finally the special troops arrived landing atop the embassy. The only way you could get into the embassy itself was through doors which only opened from the inside. They wanted to blast each door, but he went down with them and opened up the doors for them.

How was the embassy, particularly the political reporting, acting?

HEAVNER: I think it was the next day before we really realized the full dimensions of that attack. How literally a hundred, maybe several hundred, cities and towns and district centers had been attacked simultaneously. Hue had been taken over lock, stock and barrel. The military and our top people were pretty busy that day in making sure that we were intact there in Saigon. I can remember Bunker being furious with the military because they used aircraft in the outskirts of the town in Cholon and at one point they brought in some close air support. Bunker was very upset about that. He didn't want any bombing of the city.

My recollection of the report of what was happening? I would guess, and I haven't seen the reporting, although working in the freedom of information office these days one probably could, that it was pretty fragmented. I imagine Bunker was on the phone directly to Johnson. He used to be on the phone, God knows, to Johnson in the middle of the night because Johnson would call when it was daylight in Washington and, of course, it was the middle of the night in Saigon. Bunker having been locked in talks with Thieu and Ky trying to bend their arms to get them into the peace talks in Paris would then have to deal with LBJ on the telephone in the middle of the night. I don't know how he did it. And, I expect that was what was happening in those days immediately after Tet. Bunker would be on the phone half the night, and probably Westmoreland as well. That is how I would guess a lot of the reporting was being done. I don't know when we got back to doing our regular biweekly reports, we did. Probably it was a month or so later.

Q: As you were dealing with this, was there the feeling that this was a victory or a defeat? What was the feeling within the embassy about what was the meaning of this Tet offensive?

HEAVNER: Initially it was very unclear what it meant. I guess the first impression was "Wow! We have really been taken. There was a lot more to them than we thought and we have had a terrible intelligence failure." An almost immediately second thought was "But, hey, they have given us their Sunday punch and we are still very much in charge, plus we have knocked out a lot of their infrastructure." We spent a lot of time subsequently convincing ourselves and trying to convince the press that, in fact, Tet was a military failure for the other side, which it was. That it was a tremendous public relations political success was not lost on us. I think from the beginning, Ambassador Bunker ... well, I mentioned how angry he was at the implications of our having to bomb Saigon. That it was a political concern, a public relations concern as much as anything else. I think that part was pretty clear to him and probably to Phil Habib as well, because Phil was a very, very astute man and he would have seen clearly what that might entail. I don't remember exactly when we first came aware of that terrible picture of the police chief, Loan, executing the VC with his pistol. It was probably pretty quickly after it happened. I remember that our leaders were enormously exercised about that. For that matter, I remember subsequently, when Huong became prime minister of him saying that Loan had to go, and indeed he did.

Q: Last I heard he was running a restaurant out in Arlington. In fact I ate there one time. As a Hue person, did you get involved in what had happened in Hue and take a look?

HEAVNER: I was certainly interested and concerned by their reports and in particular by the reports of the massacres that the communists inflicted after they took over the cities. There were thousands of bodies found subsequently and that got almost no play in the U.S. press. It was totally overlooked as far as I can make out. But that black list the VC had and which they used to execute any number of people was very real. We didn't become aware of that, however, for some time. They held the city for something like 20 days and it was quite a while after the city was retaken that the dimensions of the atrocities there became clear to us. So, yes, I was very concerned and very interested. Frankly, I never went back to Hue because I didn't want to see what had happened to the old city which was very beautiful. I gather that it was essentially destroyed because that was the only way our people could get back in and they did what they had to. They had to blast the VC out of there apparently. So, I haven't seen Hue since I left in 1966.

Q: In the sort of 1966-69 period was there a change in attitude in the reporting?

HEAVNER: Oh, yes. Increasingly we were having echos of what was going on in the States and feeling the force of public opinion there. Indeed, some of the new officers coming in were of the mind that we needed to get the hell out. One of the things that I did towards the end of my time there was to informally get the political section together and talk about what kind of peace could be negotiated at that moment under the then prevailing situation where it was evident that we were not going to be able to continue that level of military support. I must say we were not able to come up with plausible scenarios and we were right. When I left Saigon I went home via Paris and Phil Habib was there by then talking to the North Vietnamese. I said to Phil that without American air support I didn't think there was any chance the Vietnamese could hack it. Maybe their ground troops could manage it if they continued to have very forceful American air support, but not without it. I don't know if this came as a surprise to Phil or not. It was always difficult to be sure what Phil was really thinking. But he acted as though he was surprised and asked why the embassy hadn't told him that. It turned out to be very true as you know.

Yes, the handwriting was on the wall. I didn't like to read it and for a good part of the time I succeeded in not letting myself read it. But, the fact that the war was lost was becoming evident by the time I left at the beginning of 1969. In fact, I had said repeatedly that the VC were never going to win politically, the only way they were going to come into power was with tanks rolling into Saigon. I said that long before it happened just that way.

Q: What about the relationship with the press before and after Tet for you and other members of the political section? Was there any change?

HEAVNER: Well, I avoided the press as much as I could. I didn't like to argue with them and I didn't like to agree with them. The press, by the time I left, was almost unanimous in its view that we were losing and what we had to do was to cut our loses in some fashion, to get out and end the bloodshed. So, I had minimal contact with press, especially the last year or so. I think that was not true of the political section in general. I remember John Negroponte had continuing

friendships with some of the reporters. He was a friend of Stanley Karnow and they used to spend a lot of bull sessions talking about the situation. I am sure that John did not entirely agree with Karnow, or vice versa, but they did have a relationship. I did not have a relationship like that with anybody in the American press.

JOHN M. STEEVES
Director General of the Foreign Service
Washington, DC (1966-1969)

John M. Steeves was born in 1905 in North Dakota. He received a B.A. in 1927 from Walla Walla College and an M.A. in 1936 from the University of Washington, entering the Foreign Service in 1945. Mr. Steeves, over the course of his career, served in India, Japan, and Indonesia. In 1966 he became the Director General of the Foreign Service and served at this post until 1969. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy and Thomas Stern in 1991.

Q: We were talking about your time as Director General and there is just one thing that I would like to ask. You were there from '66 to '69, what about Vietnam? Can you tell us how this hit the Foreign Service as far as you were concerned? This was the very height of the war.

STEEVES: Let's cover the Vietnam matter both from my view of it from the Office of he Director General and also from the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. Of course the influence on our DG's Office was great-the responsibilities my job as Director General of the Foreign Service in a very specific way. In addition to the Senior officers we had to find for leadership post, we kept two hundred beginner FSOs going through Vietnam on rotation which was a real strain.

Q: The Far Eastern Bureau. You were there from '59 to 1962.

STEEVES: Yes. Now we move back to the period of my first deep involvement in that Southeast Asian fracas right from the very beginning when it was confined to Laos. That is where I really was introduced to John Kennedy.

Q: Why don't we start right there. We are going to talk now going back a bit when you were in the Far Eastern Bureau.

STEEVES: When we started having our problems with Southeast Asia it was confined to Laos and involved the Pathet Lao , the communist crowd. I went up their two or three times to confer with people on the ground.

Q: You were Deputy Assistant Secretary. What was your field?

STEEVES: My particular field was political/military affairs or Asian affairs that got me very much involved in all of that business. The insurgency had gotten very bad about the time that Kennedy came in.

Q: That would have been January, 1961.

STEEVES: Yes. The year before I had worked with President Eisenhower about it too. I went over to see him one day to brief him on what the problem was. To do it I had to give him the background of some of the chief operatives that were giving us the most trouble. Obviously I couldn't do it without giving him a pretty careful rundown on the prince that was the head of the country -- Prince Souvanna Phouma. Souvanna Phouma turned out to be a real deadbeat. He was the Prince that had played off the communist against us. He was using the Communist Pathet Lao which his brother headed, against us and trying to make us believe all the time that he was staunchly anti-communist. One of the schemes he had floated for which he had solicited AID money profiting a million or more dollars profit which he used in buying the planes and setting up the operation of Air Laos. That all came from what we paid off Souvanna Phouma for. I say that in order to give you a little idea of how much money this guy really had.

When I got through that laborious hour with President Eisenhower telling him the whole background of this, to show how much he had really understood of what I was talking , he said, "This guy has fleeced us of millions. Why don't you give the guy six thousand dollars and tell him to go away and get lost." Imagine giving Souvanna Phouma six thousand dollars and telling him to get lost! I was so discouraged that I found some convenient way to fold up my file and leave.

Kennedy became very, very interested in the Laos debacle and from that to the whole region, that I think from my long contact with him on the subject that I know more accurately what Kennedy thought about the whole Southeast Asian Issue than a lot of people who are fond of saying what Kennedy would have or would not have done about this fateful chapter in our history!

During his Presidency he certainly he was very, very worried and very willing to put in whatever it was that had to go into Southeast Asia in order to deny that area to the communists getting a foothold in that part of Asia. Kennedy said, "Tell me in very short words just how you feel about it." I said, "Mr. President, you know there is just one simple question that you have to answer in your own mind before you decide what we do and before we start thinking about how we do it. Does the communists getting a hold in this part of the world pose a danger to the United States' interests or transgress our treaty promises to that area, or doesn't it? If it does and if it is in our interests then we can center our attention on what we ought to be doing, but it if doesn't lets get out now before we put another soldier, another plane or anything in there." And he said, "That's easy. We just cannot allow them to get away with what they are attempting to do because of our treaty arrangement under SEATO, etc." That was Kennedy's orders and the reason we did all the things we did that eventually led down the trail that ended up in Vietnam. At another point I remember using the expression "you stop placating these people and you do what you got to do while you can do it, or further down the peninsula you will have something on your hands in Vietnam that will make what is happening in Laos look like a Sunday school picnic." So that was that.

Q: While we are talking about Laos, how did you find dealing with your boss, Averell Harriman?

STEEVES: Before I answer that you must remember that my dealing with Governor Harriman was a long time after the contact I had with Kennedy referred to above. I cannot say how accurately Harriman reflected Kennedy's opinion or the party by the time we got to the Conference on Laos in Geneva. That is where the Governor comes in. Harriman was interested chiefly in two things-his political stature in the United States and his personal stature built on the reputation of having dealt with Stalin. A difficult guy to deal with. When we got into the Laos conference he and I came to a parting of the ways when I simply would not knuckle under to his wishes.

Q: *What was the issue?*

STEEVES: Let me state the issue succinctly before I get involved in the failure. We had reached an impasse on how to achieve peace between the Communist North and the Free South in the Peninsula. The conflict between the surrogates was raging in Laos particularly. It was agreed that a conference of ALL parties concerned should meet and after observing a CEASE FIRE, terms would be agreed by all sides by which PEACE could replace conflict.

So, the conference was called; we had the fourteen nations agree to come and abide by the conditions: if no verified cease-fire NO CONFERENCE. The name: The Fourteen Nation Conference on Laos meeting in Geneva. It was to be kicked off with a great deal of fanfare. The crucial part of it came when they decided that we would go ahead and join with thirteen others, in this conference in Geneva with the parties concerned. Those of the great powers, meaning: ourselves, Canadians, British, French, Russians, Chinese. So the fourteen nations all together were represented around that table. We were on our way to a NATO conference in Oslo, Norway, which I attended with Secretary Rusk. He was going to Oslo and there the agreement was, we to were wait there until we got the verification from the United Nations observation crew made up of the Poles, Canadians and Indians, that they had arranged a cease fire on the ground the British, French and we had said we would not even go to the conference unless they could assure us that they had a cease fire. So all of the foreign ministers of all the countries involved started off for Geneva. In Oslo Rusk would get on the line with Washington every morning and would ask what the situation was on the ground, which meant what had been heard about the truce. They would say they didn't know. The Secretary said he was not going down to Geneva until they did know..

The NATO conference came to an end which eventually meant that the French, Canadians, British and ourselves, finally made the first concession and all got in their planes and went to Geneva even though they had not been given the assurance. There we sat, those high powered fellows sat in Geneva for two weeks while Rusk would not move until he thought they had the assurance that the ground was safe and could go ahead with the meeting. He never did get it. But, as it always happens in the end, we caved in. Finally they said they would go ahead with the conference anyway and try to outlast them there -- wear them down. Rusk said to me, "You know, if we have to put staff over here that we can spare, some high powered name to spare, someone we can do with out -- Averell Harriman is the best one I can think of." I said, "Thanks a lot." He said, "You can stay here and look after the meeting, be the executive officer and take care of it while Averell makes political hay."

He started, from the very moment he came over, hobnobbing with the Russians to find out what they wanted in order to make an agreement. From then on his song was, "all the Russians want is an agreement." I used to say, "Governor, sure, all they want is an agreement on their terms. If they can have that they will agree within the next hour. It all depends on what they want to agree to."

That was the sorry beginning(and the end) of the so-called Laos Agreements that were never worth the paper they were written on because they didn't pay one bit of attention to the Terms of The Agreement. It ended up in the whole Vietnam fiasco-Kissinger Negotiation where we finally were snookered out of the whole situation. We had in the over a half million troops over there before we were through with it. We lost 58,000 people.

Now come the after thoughts as to what you would have done, especially in lieu of what we have done in a campaign after learning our lesson in Vietnam. You will note that General Powell and George Schwarzkopf said over and over again that when we got into this business in the Near East we will never repeat the troubles we got into in Vietnam. To put it in terms of what we all remember, the person who came the closest to saying what should have been done in Vietnam was old Senator Goldwater. He went at it the wrong way and probably too sternly. It would have had to have been tailored a little bit differently because I am not sure we had quite the force. We certainly didn't have the consolidated authority arranged behind us like Bush did it in The Gulf, but we did have the targets and with the timing and things that were there, if we had kept the management of that out of the White House and out of the politicians' hands and if they had been taught one really good lesson the first three weeks of that campaign, that would have been the end of it. The lesson would have been to take Hanoi off the map.

Q: We are talking now about a very successful, possibly month's, campaign against Iraq. In three weeks Iraq was basically devastated by our air force and then we went in. It was a very quick thing and in a way a direct result of deciding after Vietnam to never again fight aggression by a gradual approach.

STEEVES: The one thing, in addition to everything else, that this last campaign has done is to lay to rest forever the Vietnam syndrome -- and I hope forever.

RICHARD W. DUEMLING
Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary for East Asia
Washington, DC (1966-1970)

Ambassador Richard W. Duemling was born in Michigan in 1929. He joined the Foreign Service in 1957 and served in Italy, Malaysia, Japan, Canada, Sinai Peninsula, and as ambassador to Suriname. He served as an assistant to William Bundy in the East Asian Bureau during the Vietnam War. Ambassador Duemling was interviewed by Michael Krenn in 1995.

DUEMLING: Fortunately, Bill Bundy, the Assistant Secretary, needed a new special assistant to

run his office. He had spied me and knew that I was underemployed. He therefore asked if I would be willing to fill the job and I readily agreed.

This was a little bit of a curse, having been in the Secretariat at the start of my career, being a special assistant to an Ambassador soon thereafter and now returning to a special assistant to an Assistant Secretary. It tags you as a "staff guy".

Q: But it all tagged you as a "comer". It put you on a fast track for moving up.

DUEMPLING: Correct. And that was the advantage of it. After one week on the job with Bill, I went to him and pointed out that he was primarily occupied with Vietnam, although his area of responsibility covered all of East Asia. I added that he needed someone who could keep track of what else was happening in the area. It was a role that I could play. I would help somewhat on Vietnam, but essentially I would be his eyes and ears on all other matters in the area to alert him to when he should get involved in issues. Of course, much that was happening in the area was related to Vietnam, but still, there were a lot of things happening in Japan, Australia, Indonesia and China that required attention. I told him that I would focus on that and not get involved deeply in Vietnam. Bill Bundy agreed and that is the way it worked out. I worked for Bill and subsequently for Marshall Green -- a change prompted by a political change in the White House. I started working for Bill beginning in 1968 until early 1970 over a period of about two and half years.

What was interesting about it was that in those days, more importantly than now, there were inter-agency groups -- called Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) and Regional Interdepartmental Group (RIG) -- at differing organizational levels. They drew together the key players from the various agencies interested in foreign affairs. The chair was always the State Department's regional Assistant Secretary. In my case, Bill Bundy chaired the inter-agency group on East Asia. Ranking officers from the National Security Council (NSC), CIA, International Security Affairs (ISA-Defense), the Joint Chiefs, USIA, and AID. This was a policy coordinating group. I was the Executive Secretary of the group. I organized the meetings, the agenda and so forth.

Another thing I did when I worked for Bill was to get the academic community together about twice per year. Bundy had a scholarly bent and wanted to meet with academic experts on the Far East. It was an advisory group. We had two panels: one on China and the other on all the other parts of the Far East. They overlapped somewhat with three or four persons of a total of about twelve for each panel, sitting on both serving as a kind of hinge. These were very distinguished scholars from around the country -- people like Ed Reischauer, Lucien Pye, Bob Scalopino, Fairbanks from Harvard. Very distinguished political science experts, some historians, some economists. We would bring them together every six months for a three day period. I would produce a selection of reading materials, mostly classified -- think pieces, key telegrams, etc. I would put them into a packet, ready for the participants to read when they arrived in Washington usually one day before the conference started. We would have policy discussions, chaired by Bill, with these people. That was fascinating. We would have the inputs of these people from all over the U.S. academic world.

Q: Did the panels take an entirely different view from that of the government, particularly on Vietnam?

DUEMLING: No. As a matter of fact, what one would see were some people with great reservations about what was happening in Vietnam; others essentially supported the government's Vietnam policy. One thing which the academics agreed upon, after Bill thanked them effusively for coming and taking time out of their busy schedules, was that it was a tremendous opportunity for them. They had an opportunity to learn from the readings and the discussions which they could not obtain in their academic environment, where they were not involved in operational policy problems. They obtained an insight into some of the gritty realities which would not have come to their attention otherwise. For the most part, they were rather diffident in their criticism of the government's policies. They were certainly some reservations expressed about the wisdom of the government's policy and about being dragged deeper and deeper into something from which we were not getting the desired results in the desired time frame.

Q: Did you have the feeling that things were being left undone in the other parts of East Asia outside of Vietnam? Or that we were being driven into doing things because of Vietnam which might have been counter-productive?

DUEMLING: First of all, I thought that an awful lot of the Vietnam policy was "wish-think". I thought that in listening to some of the presentations -- I used to have this discussion with my friend and college classmate George Carver, who was in CIA in an extremely responsible position both on the operational and intelligence sides -- they were much rosier and optimistic than they should have been. I thought that there were an awful lot of people putting the best construction on the data. In terms of Vietnam crowding out legitimate concerns from other parts of the region, there is no question that this was the case. I can't give any specific example, but I felt that sometimes our relationships with the Japanese got somewhat skewed -- we weren't paying enough attention to how the Japanese economy was evolving through this period. We leaned pretty hard on some of our allies -- for example Johnson's efforts with Harold Holt of Australia. That was distorting our relationships with some of the Southeast Asia countries, which had their own agendas and concerns -- economic development. To see these resources being siphoned off into the military activities in Southeast Asia, specifically Vietnam, one had to ask how constructive this policy really was. In terms of paying attention, I think that Bill Bundy never lost sight of what was happening elsewhere in the region. He couldn't perhaps give it as much time as he might have wished, but Bundy was extremely able and intellectually superior and could keep an awful lot of balls in the air, even though, he was preoccupied with Vietnam.

Q: Was there a change when Marshall Green came in?

DUEMLING: Yes, there was, because Green's arrival coincided with the Nixon Administration's and Kissinger's advent. This Administration decided to go for a negotiated settlement. The whole policy changed and Green was part of that. I am not sure to what extent Marshall was one of the architects of the policy. I think he was. He was extensively consulted by Henry Kissinger who was essentially the architect of the policy. You recall all the negotiations with the Vietnamese in

Paris. So there was a change. Marshall, also, as Vietnam began to spin down a little, was able to devote a little more attention to other sides of what was happening in Asia.

JAMES F. MACK
CORD Program: Provincial Reporting Officer
Vietnam (1966-1969)

Intelligence Analyst
Washington, DC (1969-1971)

Paris Peace Accords Monitor
South Vietnam (1972-1973)

Mr. Mack was born in Connecticut and raised in New York State. After graduating from Cornell University, he joined the Peace Corps and served in Honduras. In 1966 he joined the State Department and was sent to Vietnam in the CORDS program. Mr. Mack's other overseas service was primarily in Latin American where he served as Political Officer and Deputy Chief of Mission at a number of posts before being named US Ambassador to Guyana. Ambassador Mack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy March 20th, 2004.

Q: Anyway you got assigned to Saigon. How did you feel about that?

MACK: Well, I guess I would say somewhere between stunned and thrilled. I certainly trembled a little bit when I heard I was going to Vietnam. But! I had said I was willing to go. I never thought they would send me. I figured, they would say "hey! MACK is an excellent Spanish speaker. Why not send him to some place in Latin America". But, they sent me to Vietnam. I was a excited and facing the assignment with some trepidation but I certainly was willing to do it. I went to Vietnamese language training at the same Arlington Towers for 5 months. In those days when you were a Junior Officer, the system would not send you to the full eleven-month hard language language course. So I only got five or six months, which for Vietnamese is not enough. So I arrived in Saigon not speaking very good Vietnamese. I became a very good speaker because I was there for a total of three and a half years and I worked on it all the time. But since I did not take the full course, I think I tested only at a 2/2 when I had finished the course, which is not saying much if you are a political officer. Which is what I was. So it was pretty tough at first.

Q: Did your deafness hurt. I think you tone the language?

MACK: My deafness obviously hurt but I do happen to have a fairly good musical ear even though I don't play any instrument. Mother and my sister are both musical, so I inherited that. I inherited a good ear to learn languages, even though I just can't hear very well. Hearing tones Vietnamese "tones" was not a big problem, as long as I listened hard. Some people have excellent hearing but can't "hear" the tones of a tonal language like Vietnamese. So I tested out

fairly decent in my MLAT aptitude test which is why they were willing to teach me Vietnamese I guess. Whatever my score was, it was sufficient to teach me a hard language. I don't mean to say I was a genius but I like to learn languages and I like to work hard on them. I was certainly enthusiastic about learning Vietnamese. And one of the best teachers I ever had for any subject was Mr. Quang, one of our Vietnamese teachers. He lived and breathed what he did and we were all very excited about learning.

John Negroponte by the way, preceded me to Vietnam, I guess a year or two. He was still there when I arrived. John spoke French rather than Vietnamese. But there were some superb Vietnamese speakers in the political section who had gone through full the course.

One of them ended up being a translator during the Paris Peace talks. So we newcomers really looked up to these guys, the same way I looked up to the first generation of Peace Corps volunteers.

Q: When did you get there, was it '67?

MACK: I think it was December of 1966.

Q: What was the situation like there.?

MACK: The war was all over the place. I was assigned as a Provincial Reporting Officer, working out of the Embassy in Saigon but traveling frequently to the Mekong Delta where the war was very, very close at hand. And I remember deep in the Delta near the U Minh forest flying on a mission with a newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel who was a FAC, a forward air controller, a pilot who guides in air strikes. He had offered to take me up in his plane, a little single prop one, like a little Cessna, when I was on a visit. He sat in the front seat, and I sat in the back. And watching him mark the Viet Cong positions with smoke rockets was pretty exciting. Each time he fired one, the little plane jumped. I also have to admit I was very scared, In fact, the VC fired up at us too. We even took a round in the wing. But I felt it was something I ought to do since it was part of what was going on in the provinces I was covering. I did it only once, but this guy did it every day.

After two months working the Delta, a position opened up in II Corps in Central Vietnam and I was sent to live in Nha Trang, a coastal city, and cover the surrounding provinces from there. Nha Trang had been a French resort town. Nicely laid out; very beautiful scenery. The beaches, islands and mountains looked like Rio de Janeiro without the skyline. And there I worked as a political advisor to the senior US official in the region, the head of what was called "CORDS", I recall one's last name was Madison. My job was to travel regularly among the five coastal provinces of II Corps writing reports about what was really going on in the war, and meeting with local religious (Catholic and Buddhist), political, and military leaders (both US and Vietnamese) and learning and writing about their *attitudes towards the war*. I would write what we called "air-grams", really dispatches prepared on a manual typewriter and physically sent to the embassy. Air-Grams and things like no longer exist in the Foreign Service.

Henry Cabot Lodge was the US ambassador when I first got there, but Ambassador Bunker

replaced him shortly thereafter and was there for the rest of my time. That is what I did and then.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the Delta. Where were you located in the Delta?

MACK: When I worked the Delta, I was based of the US Embassy in Saigon. I did not live in the Delta. I traveled there, would spend a few days in a province, and then write a report on what I found. However, when I was transferred to II Corps, I actually lived in Nha Trang. In fact, all told, I lived in four cities during my 3 ½ years in Vietnam (Saigon, Nha Trang, Danang and Qui Nhon), and I think visited all 43 or so provinces. So I got to know Vietnam quite well.

Q: Did you go up in the Central Highlands too?

MACK: Yes I did go up into the Central Highlands. But, I was not the primary reporting officer there. Another officer handled that region.

Q: Who was that?

MACK: His name was David G. Brown, not to be confused with David E. Brown. who also served in Vietnam at the same time and also worked as a provincial reporting officer for the political section and covering the provinces in III Corps, the area around Saigon. In fact, for a time the two David Browns shared a house in Saigon. Both are now long retired.

Q: The South Koreans were in Vietnam too weren't they?

MACK: Yes, the Koreans were assigned to both parts of central Vietnam that I operated in, in fact to the two provinces I lived in. One division was assigned to Binh Dinh Province north of Qui Nhon city, and the other to a province just south Danang.

Q: How were they doing there?

MACK: Well, they were very, very tough guys. Very effective in Binh Dinh. They were feared by the Vietcong, and managed to clear out the area where they operated. They were quite ruthless. Very effective tactics. They would send out people who could basically dig themselves into foxholes at night all over the place. When the Vietcong would come though, these guys would pop out and blow away the Vietcong. They did this over a large area. They were fully quite successful, cutting down infiltration by the Vietcong.

Another South Korean Division was deployed was in the province that surrounded the city of Danang. By the time I was assigned to Danang to head up the branch consular office and also serve as political advisor to the US Commander of I Corps, a Marine 3 star named Lt Gen. Cushman who later become number # 2 at the CIA, the Koreans had become much less aggressive. Apparently, the Korean government was under pressure to cut casualties so the Koreans had barricaded themselves behind huge Maginot line of sandbags.

While the Vietcong did not go through their area, the Koreans did awful things to the people of the area.

Q: What was that?

MACK: It was basically a Korean My Lai where they executed a whole lot of people in a village. At the time it was not politically correct to cast aspersions on our allies. But I decided to do a little work on it. I happened to come in possession of a whole lot of photographs and interviewed people who were witnesses and wrote a report.

Q: What happened as a result of your report?

MACK: I can't tell you what happened. I know the US Embassy got my report, including the photographs. It was really up to the South Koreans. I don't recall anything happening.

Q: How was the war going? You were basically in II Corps and then I Corps?

MACK: It was both in that order. I spent 18 months in II Corps working out of Nha Trang, and a year in I Corps working out of Danang. Then I spent my last six months in Saigon.

Q: How was the war going when you were there?

MACK: Well, I was there during the huge build up of the American Forces from a relatively modest number to 500,000. Then in 1969 Nixon came into office and started the "Vietnamization" program. In February 1968, during the Tet offensive, I was living in Nha Trang when the city was overrun by two battalions of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops.

By then, the war had become less a guerilla war and more of an old fashion large unit type of war. A war of mobile battalions. A lot of people today believe the Tet offensive was the greatest defeat ever suffered by the U.S. It is true that Tet was a great political success for the Communists which led to the decision to start to withdraw US troops. However, it was, in fact, a huge military defeat for the Viet Cong. To carry out the attack, the Viet Cong ordered their undercover VC agents to surface and join their troops as they converged on provincial capitals all over the country. But they in fact lost over 50,000 men in a matter of weeks, including much of their "infrastructure", their secret cadre.

The security situation actually improved rather dramatically after Tet 1968 because there were not as many Vietcong running around. What North Vietnam did to compensate for the huge losses sustained by the Viet Cong was to increase the pace in which they were moving regular North Vietnamese troops to the south. They had been coming South as early as '1965, but the pace quickened. However, they did not have as many local folks to guide them around as they had before. So in one sense, things were more secure. That is not to say they were secure. I mean I still had to travel between provinces mostly by air, although within the provinces I could move by road. I also traveled by military helicopter dozens of times as well. I left Vietnam at the end of 1969.

At that point I was assigned back to the Department of State to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research as an analyst on South Vietnam. A junior officer would never be assigned to that job

today after having spent 3 years in the same country. Believe me. I didn't want it, tried to fight it, but then had no choice but to take it.

But you asked about security in Vietnam. In early 1973 when I was back in Qui Nhon on 6 months TDY to report on the implementation of the Paris Peace Accords, my wife and I drove literally all over the country alone in our sometimes not so trusty International Scout. From Binh Dinh all the way up to Quang Tri on the border with North Vietnam, all through the Central Highlands, and all the way south to Saigon and Can Tho in the heart of the My Cong delta. I never would have done this during the war. That is how things had changed. But it was the lull before the storm. By that time the US Congress had pulled the plug on support. US air and logistical support had dried up. When the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive 2 years later in 1975, the South just collapsed.

Q: The first time when you were there what was your impression of the situation in villages and the central government?

MACK: Well first of all there was a speckled pattern of government control. By that I mean some villages firmly in the government camp, some were contested, and some were under Viet Cong control. Often where the Vietcong were active, a lot people left and moved into the cities. Huge numbers of refugees built their little houses along the road. The government was not particularly popular on one hand. On the other hand, I don't think the communists were popular at all. I say that as a person who traveled around unarmed, alone and very frequently.

In Nha Trang I had a Vespa motor scooter for a while and later a white jeep. I didn't drive my jeep outside of town, but I did drive my motor scooter into the countryside. And I often met people who would invite me into their homes. They would talk to me. I was a young guy, unarmed and in civilian clothes and I guess not considered hostile or threatening. I got to meet people in virtually every walk of life. It was amazing how the Vietnamese would pick you up on the street. I would be going to the Buddhist Temple or something and walking around and they would say, "Oh you speak Vietnamese." All of a sudden, I would have an invitation to dinner, it was absolutely amazing. I never, I won't say never, I almost never felt a security threat. I can remember going to some, somewhat dicey areas in the countryside and have people come up to my little motor scooter and motion with their hands with a finger like this; basically what they were saying was don't go that way and I turned around. That did happen. I felt nearly zero hostility. I had a wonderful experience with the Vietnamese people at every level of society.

There were some things that outraged me, for example, the corruption in some parts of the government. Some province chiefs were very, very corrupt. Occasionally the government would send in someone who was really clean and I would write a dispatch about him or about someone who was dirty. People were skeptical about the government but those who supported the Vietcong or Communists were definitely in a small minority.

I really traveled everywhere, to every province in the country. I have been in numerous numbers of the districts but I did not go into areas that were red on the map. I did not go there.

Q: What happen to you during the Tet Offensive in '68?

MACK: Well, I was living in Nha Trang and sharing a regular Vietnamese house with another young American civilian. It was not in an American Compound. I did not live in a compound. I didn't want to live in a compound. The night before Tet (The Chinese New Year) I went to sleep late at night because it very noisy, like the 4th of July in the US, or New Year's eve in Latin America. Both sides had agreed on a cease fire for Tet, as they had done for years. So people stayed up late having a good time and drinking, eating, shooting off fire works, shooting their weapons in the air, and generally making merry. And along about one o'clock I went to bed with my air-conditioner on. In the early morning hours I was awakened to the sound of low flying helicopters. My first reaction was to think that insensitive Americans were buzzing the town when people were trying to sober up from the previous night. "Gee, what the hell are they flying the helicopters low over town for?" That was my first reaction. So I rolled out of bed, went out my door and looked down the end of the street which is two houses away, sixty feet away, and saw a jeep, a Vietnamese police jeep with water leaking out of holes in the radiator. Standing with his foot on the fender was an American Public Safety Advisor, German born, a real character, a cop from New Jersey. I went out and asked him what the heck was going on, I said to him. He answered "what the "deleted" is going on here?". "There are two battalions of North Vietnamese troops in town and they shot out my jeep."

What happened was that when the North Vietnamese troops came into town under cover of the truce, fireworks and general merrymaking, some units became disoriented by the layout of the city and never found their targets. It so happens that Nha Trang is laid out in a checkerboard pattern except that at one point the streets of one part of the checkerboard intersect each other on an angle. So while one section of town was logically, north, south, east, west, the other section was at a slightly different orientation. And so where the roads of each section intersected the North Vietnamese got totally and hopelessly lost. So while one North Vietnamese unit was able to take over the lightly defended provincial headquarters, dig in, others were left wandering around looking for their objectives.

And they were facing limited opposition because most troops were on leave for Tet. One North Vietnamese unit, probably without realizing what they were facing, attacked a serious of houses which formed a Korean army compound that sat right next to the CORDS compound. In taking on the Koreans they made a big mistake and paid for it with their lives. Other North Vietnamese soldiers entered private houses and hunkered down. Then the local people started pointing out their locations to the Vietnamese, Korean and US special forces troops in the area. The North Vietnamese, reduced to operating in small groups, were picked off one by one, their bodies scarfed up and dumped in a central part of town. Over a period of several days, they had lost six or seven hundred people. I don't know how many got out of town alive. But, most did not. It was a disaster for them.

Later on that first day, I drove around and saw all the damage and all the blown up buildings, bodies of the North Vietnamese, and things. That evening, the CORDS leadership instructed all the Americans associated with the CORDS program, civilian and military, to come to the CORDS compound to spend the night for their own protection. Since many of these folks, including military, had not been in combat much, I really had no desire to spend the night with

this them. I thought I would be better off somewhere else. So I went to spend the night at a top floor apartment in another part of town. And late that evening when I was there, I remember looking at the CORDS compound in the distance seeing what appeared to be a huge fire going on.

The next morning when I went back to the compound I learned that many of the bullets (all outgoing) had impacted half way up a tree across from the compound where someone had thought he had seen somebody. We thereafter referred the purported intruder as “the ten foot tall Vietcong.” Unfortunately, the tree sat immediately next to the Office of the Bishop of the Nha Trang Diocese. The Bishop’s personal bedroom was pierced by numerous bullets. He was not hurt, fortunately. But guess who was deputized to go over to apologize to him. Me. There was no Vietcong. Our people were nervous because after all there had been plenty of action the previous night, including right next door. But the night after Tet there were no North Vietnamese around so it fell to me to go over and apologize to the Bishop of the Diocese of Nha Trang.

But I just did not want to be a part of all these armed and nervous people. I asked myself what I could contribute to protecting the compound if I spent the night there. The answer was not much. If there had been a real threat, believe me I would have been in that compound. I thought there wasn’t. That was my sense as a political officer. I thought I had a pretty good sense of what was going on. So, I wanted to be somewhere else. There were just too many guns.

I must tell you I did not carry a weapon in my travels. Someone did give me a very nice souvenir folding stock Kalashnikov automatic rifle and several ammo clips. But I never took it out of my house, except once to test fire it. My view was this. Before I went somewhere, I ought to get an intel brief and generally try to figure out what was going on there. I did not worry about being assassinated by some guy running up to me and shooting me in the head because basically the Vietcong did not operate that way with the small fish that I was. I basically operated alone. My concern was that I might run into a Vietcong patrol crossing a road or something. On the other hand, how was I going to defend myself against and get away from twenty guys or a company of one hundred guys with just a pistol or rifle. I was going to be dead for sure. So I just made a decision not to carry a weapon. I was given one once when we were in a convoy in the Delta where we learned a Viet Cong unit had just passed. But that was about it. If I had been really accomplished with weapons, maybe I would have carried one regularly. Also I worried about losing it. A weapon is heavy. I was going to be meeting and talking with people, and I felt I couldn’t do that if I packed heat. I have nothing against weapons. I believe Americans who are properly trained and tested should be able to own weapons, but in my case, I just didn’t think that was a smart way to go.

Q: Well tell me, I thought we would finish up this Vietnam thing, tell me how did you find your dealings with the political section, your bosses in Saigon?

MACK: I had excellent bosses. Really great team of people, mentors. Officers who were far more talented in drafting than I was when I got there, and who worked with me and encouraged me. Dick Teare was one of them, Henry Dunlap was another. It was a very positive and demanding experience. I must say I had never had to write so much and so fast as I did in Vietnam. There was an insatiable appetite for information. This was particularly true my last six

months in Vietnam (in 1969) when I was brought back to Saigon from Danang to work in the political section. Galen Stone was with the DCM, and the political section had 20 some odd people. It was huge. Like an Embassy. There was an external unit affairs, internal affairs unit, and a provincial reporting unit.

When I was brought back to the political section, one of my jobs was to draft what was called the “war and peace-a-gram”. It went out every week, every Monday and covered Vietnamese attitudes toward the war and the internal political situation. And it had to be huge. Remember this was before the era of the word-processor which was maybe the greatest invention since sliced bread. Particularly for someone who was a sloppy typist like me.

Q: And also a bad speller, thank god for spell-check.

MACK: In those days you would type little pieces on your typewriter and then you would literally cut and paste and that sort of thing. I had to put this thing together every week. It was due in the early afternoon each Monday. Now I knew there was no way I could produce a twenty-five page cable in six hours. So what I had to do was to come in every Sunday right after lunch start the cable. This way I had 24 hours instead of 6 to produce this report. So for six months the only time I had off was Sunday mornings. That was the only time I had off. I would work on this thing Sundays and then other people would give me more material. It'd put it all together and then pass it on to Harry Dunlap. Remember Harry! A really good guy who was head of our Internal Reporting Unit.

Q: Harry and I took Surfing lessons together.

MACK: Really! Okay. So Dick Teare was the head of the Provincial Reporting Unit for the first year and half or so that I was there. I can't recall if he was there in my last year. But Harry Dunlap would edit it and we would get the sucker out. And then I would report on the status of the constitution the Vietnamese were drafting. This was '69. My beat was the National Assembly so I would have a lot of contact with people who had been elected to the National Assembly. And, of course, the caring and feeding of US congressional visitors like Houston Congressman George Herbert Walker Bush. We would brief them. But, I was really fully occupied. We just worked all through dinners and lunches. Richard Nixon came to that was a story in itself. May I tell you?

Q: Yes!

MACK: Richard Nixon paid a surprise visit to Saigon. I can't tell you exactly when it was. It would have been in the Fall of '69. Early in the morning, I received a call at home before I left for the Embassy. It was Martin Hertz, the Political Counselor. He said the President of the United States is arriving in three hours and you can't tell anybody. And we have selected you to do the consecutive interpreting for his address to the Vietnamese Press.

Think about this. I was a quite a good Vietnamese speaker at the time. But what happened was Nixon was a superb *extemporaneous* speaker. At the end of Nixon's meeting with President Thieu, I was sitting in the side room of the national palace waiting for Nixon to address the huge

assembled press corps, both foreign and Vietnamese. I was nervous as hell! You can imagine. There were bleachers set up for the press, the Vietnamese and Foreign Press. I was suppose to do a consecutive translation from English to Vietnamese. In theory that mean President Nixon would speak a sentence or two, and I would translate.

Well, finally the bilateral meeting with President Thieu ended and he and Nixon emerged and began to speak. Unlike President Thieu who spoke first from a written text which I had been able to read in advance, Nixon spoke extemporaneously without stopping for at least ten or fifteen minutes. Now think about this. I am not a professional interpreter. I am not a consecutive interpreter. I twenty-seven years old and I am nervous as hell. The President of the United States is there and hundreds of people are waiting. And the President doesn't stop. So I am feverishly taking notes and after about ten minutes of this was desperate. I happened to be standing next to the very professional, very experienced, very smooth Chief Press Officer for the Vietnamese Government, who spoke fluent English. At one point I turned to him and said "I can not do this." "There is no way I can make sense out my garbled notes on Nixon's fifteen minute uninterrupted extemporaneous speech and translate it into Vietnamese. I just can't do it." I was wringing my hands. To my immense relief, he said "I will take care of it". He went out there and spoke about two minutes, supposedly summarizing what the President had said. So I never did interpret for Nixon. Thank God! It was a task that I was not equipped to do.

I gained enormous respect for people who work in the interpreting business. And I learned that interpreting is a skill, not to be confused with being able to speak a foreign language well. Not to be confused in any way. And, of course, I was being set up in a sense. It was not like interpreting in a small meeting for visiting US Congressmen, which I did frequently. I could always stop a congressman who went on too long and say, "excuse me, let me translate what you just said since I can't remember a whole paragraph.". I could control the conversation. But I had absolutely no control over Nixon's monologue. I was way out of my depth. I was never more relieved in my life when this elderly Vietnamese gentleman (who was what my age is now said) said he would do it for me. He was in charge of Press Relations for the Vietnamese Presidency. He was very accomplished at it. He basically made it up. Ha! Ha! But he was speaking his own language, so he was able to wing it.

Q: When did you leave Saigon?

MACK: I left in early December of 1969. I had been there years. I arrived in December of '66 and I left in December '69.

Q: By the time you left, did you, what were you getting from your contacts. Was there a feeling of confidence or a feeling of unease? What I am talking about is the Vietnamese.

MACK: Well! There were some war worries obviously. I think there was a feeling among the Vietnamese that as long as the Americans were they were going to be able to keep going. There was always a question of whether the "Vietnamization" policy would work. But things were getting better. The things in the My Cong Delta were definitely improving. The Vietnamese Government had begun its land reform program, with US money paying for the land that was redistributed. And the land there was extremely rich. Electrification was going on there.

Particularly when I went back in '73. Things were really going well. There weren't any Vietcong running around in the Delta in '73. They really weren't. Most had been exposed during the 1968 Tet offensive and over time they had "attrited" was the word they use to use (or weeded out) and there were not many left. The Delta was quite secure in 1973. But when I left Vietnam for the first time in 1969, there were still huge numbers of American troops there. So, as long as the Americans were there, the situation would be manageable. When I returned in early 1973, the ceasefire had been in place for little over a month, and by then the US military had already drawn down most of its troops. In fact, shortly after I arrived, I personally saw off the last GIs off from II Corps out of Qui Nhon harbor. They were the last 3 US divisions in Vietnam.

So by February of '73 the Vietnamese were feeling very much alone, although the countryside was quite secure. I told you I traveled by vehicle, unarmed with my wife (my bride) through a large portion of the country. This is something I never would have thought of doing when I was there between '66 and '69. But you could see the North Vietnamese in some places building roads in the mountains. And the South Vietnamese military were short on everything. They were short on ammunition. They were short on gasoline and replacement parts. And it was a big problem. They could not fire their artillery as much as they wanted. They could not move their vehicles around as much as they could before. So they were getting worried.

We really were pulling out and they were very much alone 1973, in my last six months there. They had no US military advisors to lean on. There were only a few American civilians involved developmental type activities. I did get out into the countryside a fair amount. I remember spending the night in a fortified hamlet with my wife, being entertained by the local people. An unbelievable experience. I had been well treated the first time I was in Vietnam, but even better the second time. People obviously looked at an American with his wife differently than a single male.

But the South Vietnamese were worried at the time. They were very frank about it. The military officers that I knew were very happy to see me around. They welcomed me with opened arms. I would show up in a district mostly unannounced, driving my International Scout. But I did always check the Intelligence Reports before I would go anywhere to be sure the roads were open and there were no problems. Folks were very happy to see us. The North Vietnamese Army had not yet brought its full power to bear in most parts of the country. There was kind of a Kabuki' Theatre show. In Binh Dinh Province where I lived, the South Vietnamese military sometimes would take back some populated areas controlled by the Vietcong and the VC would react. But it was basically a waiting period. Both sides kept the fighting within bounds and limited. Clearly, the North Vietnamese were waiting, building and rebuilding roads, resupplying, waiting for the big moment. In hindsight that was what was happening. But at the time in early 1973 the environment was amazingly secure in comparison to the Vietnam that I experienced between 1966-1969.

Q: Well, when you were in Saigon up to December of '69 did you feel there was pressure from the White House to put out favorable reports?

MACK: I did not feel it at all. I understand things may have changed by the end of 1974 and early 1975, under Ambassador Martin?

Q: That was Graham Martin.

MACK: Yes, He was there and I understand some people felt that. I never did. I never, ever felt that. I felt I could say anything that I wanted. And I did. If I detected abuse, I reported it. I told you about the case of abuse by the Koreans that I reported in 1969. If I learned about corruption involving the Americans, like I did in 1968 at the US military huge supply base at Cam Ranh Bay, where a small group of American NCOs in a supply unit were selling lighter flints, batteries and other equipment to Vietcong agents, I reported it. This stuff was used by the VC to manufacture explosive devices. People concerned about these things, both Vietnamese and Americans, came to see me as someone who would get the word up to the right places but outside the chain of command when, for what ever reason, they could not. I remember an Army CID (Criminal Investigative Division) guy from Cam Ranh telling showing me photographs of what was going on. Apparently there was a Commanding General there who didn't want to accept that this was going on in his command. So the CID guy felt stonewalled. When I met with him he said, "look at this". So I asked to give me the photographs. He said, "yes, yes, I will give you the photographs." He gave them to me and I wrote a pretty graphic report like the other one with photographs to prove it. Photographs showing the sergeants handing the stuff over the barbwire, rather remarkable. Something was done about it and action was taken. I think the General may have been removed. Now we are talking almost 40 years after the event, but my recollection is that I did not feel as if I were writing under a great big censor. My biggest challenge was to write to the very high standard set by some very, very able Foreign Service Officers.

Q: Well Martin Hertz was a scary guy. He could take dictation and without changing a word.

MACK: Yes, he could take dictation and without changing a word. But that requires a extraordinary high level of intelligence and focus. So it was really inhibiting to work with somebody that good. And when you got a little complementary note from him, with his signature that looked like a tiny flower, you would put it up on the wall. Ha! Ha!

Q: Okay Jim, this is a good place to stop and we will pick this up in 1970 I guess when you are off to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

MACK: We will talk about the worst job I ever had *and did* in the Foreign Service. And how important good management is? Ha! Ha!

Q: Okay we will talk about that.

Today is the 24th of January 2005, Jim 1970 you are off to INR (Intelligence and Research) and you were there for how long?

MACK: Well I was there for almost two years.

Q: Talk about it, is this the worst job you ever had?

MACK: Yes. This was the worst job I ever had and did. After three years in Vietnam, I returned to Washington to take a job that probably would have been an illegal assignment today for a junior officer. That is to assign a Junior Officer, an untenured Junior Officer, to work on the same country on which he had been working in the field for the three previous years. I was assigned to INR to be an intelligence analyst for South Vietnam. This involved among other things preparing a daily morning brief for the Assistant Secretary of East Asia Affairs, it was Ambassador Sullivan. And also to write intelligence reports on how I saw the internal political situation in South Vietnam at the time.

Q: I am interviewing Terry Tull now.

MACK: Terry Tull is an esteemed colleague and served at the same time that I did as a matter of fact, in Vietnam. She worked in the Embassy political section. Keep in mind what I was coming from. I had been in the field. I was a Provincial Reporting Officer in Vietnam, one of the best jobs I ever had or did. So any way I come back to the Department of State after three years in Vietnam to a suffocating bureaucracy and without the freedom I had to move around and write reports and interact with people there. In the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) there were six or seven layers between me and getting a paper out.

Q: Was this particularly because Vietnam was obviously hot. Was the subject a tendency to put more people on to it. As I mentioned, Iraq probably today has the same thing. I mean you throw people at the job which usually doesn't make for a better product.

MACK: Well, there is probably something to that. There were certainly quite a few people. There must have been, I don't know, four or five people working on South Vietnam at the time. Well, they were all good folks. My boss was a good guy.

Q: What was his name?

MACK: His name was Lou Sarris. But just getting something through Lou was very difficult and it was quite a culture shock coming back to Washington, frankly. I mean this in a personal sense and in a professional sense. In INR there was much more time to get reports "out", but we'd have to go through ten drafts, as opposed to Vietnam where we had to get reports out very, very, quickly. I also hungered for the contact with the local people that I had in Vietnam every day. That was the excitement of it. In INR worked in my little windowless cubical with no contact with the people whose country I was supposed to analyze.

Q: I know the feelings.

MACK: It was socially difficult and professionally not very inspiring.

Q: Well, do you recall how things were going in 70 and 71? What was happening in South Vietnam?

MACK: Well yes. In 1971 there was a major North Vietnamese Offensive into South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese Army came straight down the highway number one, right on down the

coastal highway in a traditional WW II type tank attack. There was nothing “guerrilla” about it at all. And they managed to push the South Vietnamese Army totally out of Quang Tri Province, which the northern most province in South Vietnam. So the Vietnamese were quite battered. It was a difficult time for them since we had already pulled all the US troops out of that part of the country. So the Vietnamese had to do it themselves. And they did finally did halt the North Vietnamese offensive with the help of with the help of U.S. B-52’s. But it was a very, very, difficult time for the Vietnamese.

Q: Was this kind of discouraging to you that the South Vietnamese were unable to push back the North Vietnamese?

MACK: Well yes, It was discouraging and I will talk to you about that a little later about what happened because I did go back to Vietnam. But it was not an encouraging time. Obviously, Nixon clearly had realized that he had to get us out. So US military peaked out in personnel strength there somewhere in '69.

Q: I think it was.

MACK: By 1972, US force levels had wound down considerably and the North Vietnamese felt bold enough to undertake a major attack, a frontal attack on the South. The North Vietnamese were never really guerrillas anyway. The South Vietnamese Communists, the Viet Cong) were the guerillas. The North Vietnamese were a conventional army. They fought very much like most soldiers do in the world with artillery, rockets, tanks, etc.

Q: How you were working. Were you finding the material that you came up and evaluating it or was it more a cosmetic of changing of the verbiage?

MACK: Obviously some of both. There also was a lot of war gaming and devils advocating going on. Keep in mind, my reporting, my analysis, was not on the war. It was on the internal South Vietnam Political Situation. I was not a military expert. There were other people who did that.

Q: It has been said that South Vietnamese corruption and political maneuvering played a major role in the collapse of South Vietnam. At the time do you feel that this was part of the problem?

MACK: Corruption definitely was an issue. I never believed that the South Vietnamese people supported communism. My personal experience showed me otherwise. And I believed very much that the communists could not have won a free election in South Vietnam. They absolutely could not have an election. People were frustrated with the corruption and getting tired of the war. Once our military presence, along with our logistical support, wound down, we began to see a sapping of the morale of the Vietnamese. But I really have to come back to that in a later chapter. Because, there is an interlude here.

Q: Okay.

MACK: The interlude is that in late '71, I was offered an assignment as Political/Labor Officer

in San Jose, Costa Rica. Since I wanted to get back to Latin-America, I welcomed that assignment. I got married just before I left. My wife Sheila and I drove from Washington to San Jose, a wonderful trip which, including stops and a visit to my old Peace Corps town in Honduras, took about 3 weeks. Costa Rica was an open, democratic country, a delightful place, and it was easy to work there as a political/labor officer. I had been a post about a year when, at the end of 1972, I think around Christmas, when the Paris Peace Accords were signed.

Just a few days later, I was called to the ambassador's office. Viron Vaky was Ambassador at the time. He said, "Jim, I just received a cable. You have been selected as part of a group of Foreign Services Officers with Vietnam experience to return to South Vietnam within a month to start a 6 month *unaccompanied* tour to report on the progress of implementation of the Paris Peace Accords, including the cease fire." The spouses of returning officers were supposed to remain in place at whatever post they were current at during this period, which in Sheila's case, meant San Jose, Costa Rica. According to the Peace Accords, the agreement was to be monitored by a four party International Control Commission consisting of two communist states (Poland and Hungary) and two non-communist states (Canada and I think Indonesia).

I was ready to do my duty, and frankly rather excited about the chance to go back to South Vietnam. However, as I mentioned before, my wife Sheila and I were newly married. When I broke the news to her that evening, she was not happy at all about my going without her. She told me flatly that she would be going too and was not about to be deterred by a decision by the State Department that my TDY tour was to be unaccompanied. She found my arguments that it might be dangerous unconvincing. She also very quickly persuaded me to try to obtain a waiver from Director General of the Foreign Service. So with the support of Ambassador Vaky, I sent in an appeal. As the days ticked by with no response, I decided I would try to take her no matter what. My idea was to just show up in Saigon with her.

With only a couple of days until departure, we finally got a cable from the Director General who said I could take Sheila, but would have to pay her travel costs, which were \$2,500, about ¼ of my yearly pay. Furthermore, I was told that since my wife would be accompanying me, I would be required to live in a secure area. We accepted that. We also left without visas since there was no South Vietnamese Embassy in Costa Rica.

We left San Jose at the end of January for Los Angeles, and hop scotched across the Pacific -- Hawaii, where we spent a couple of days, Guam, Wake Island.

In Honolulu, the Pan Am Ground Chief did not want to let Sheila board the plane because he thought the Vietnamese would fine his company if she arrived in Saigon without a proper visa. Always persuasive, Sheila prevailed upon him to let her board. She had to convince the Pan Am representatives in Guam and Wake Island as well. When we finally arrived in Vietnam, Lo and Behold I was able to bring her into the country. Ha! Ha! We were initially going to be assigned to Can Tho to work at the Consulate General.

Q: Yes, down in the Delta region.

MACK: Right, and, this is really off the record. I met the guy who was going to be heading up

the Consulate General and realized very quickly that we were not going to get along. Plus the Delta was the area with which I was least familiar. I did know the Delta somewhat, but I had really operated in Central Vietnam and not in the Delta. So I asked to be transferred to a Consulate General in Nha Trang. My wish was granted because there happened to be another fellow officer who had gone back with me who had been assigned to Nha Trang, but in fact wanted to go back to Can Tho where he had once served. So it was a perfect switch. Everybody was happy. However, when I got to Nha Trang, I quickly came to the conclusion that I did not want to be part of the huge bureaucracy there. I also knew they wanted to fill positions in the surrounding provinces and not just the Consulate General. It turned out that the Political Officer in charge of the Consulate General in Nha Trang, who also had been sent back for a 6 month TDY was an old friend of mine.

Q: Who was that?

MACK: Dick Teare, who during my first tour, had been in charge of the provincial reporting unit, and my first boss. Dick helped me get assigned to Qui Nhon city in Binh Dinh province farther up the coast. I knew the town well and was quite happy to be assigned there. I was assigned to a CORDS Office there. The provincial senior advisor, a retired US Army Major, whose name I will not mention, was clearly not happy to have new guy bringing his wife, and instead of been given space in the little prefab homes where most personnel were housed, we were given an old French Army Trailer equipped with a very narrow single bed, and a closet full of hand grenades left over from who knows when. This senior advisor was a very arbitrary person, with an explosive temper and often threatened his local Vietnamese staff, who feared him. It was clear we were not going to get along very well. However, my wife was a really good trooper. She had been a VISTA volunteer in northern Arizona on the Navajo Reservation, and determined not to complain. She also did not complain that her orders from the moment we arrived in Vietnam had been that for security reasons, she was never to travel by land out of town. It turned out we both did many times.

But returning to the provincial senior advisor, his abuse of his staff was really terrible. He was an alcoholic. It was a pretty serious situation. I called back to Dick Teare at the Consulate General in Nha Trang and said the CG really needed to take a look at the situation. Very shortly thereafter the Binh Dinh provincial senior advisor was removed. I really think I had done a good deed, but my real job was to report on the war which continued at a more restricted level during the cease-fire, and on the political situation and the morale of the people.

Q: You were at Qui Nhon?

MACK: Yes, I was at Qui Nhon which was the capital of Binh Dinh Province, a large province in Central Vietnam. And within a month or two of my arrival, I literally put the last GI on the last boat to leave.

Q: Is Qui Nhon a port?

MACK: Yes Qui Nhon is a big port. It serves as the port for the highland city of Pleiku, for example. So within a month or two all U.S. Forces, all, were gone. And the Vietnamese were

very lonely with no Americans around. So since I was there with my wife, all the doors were open to us. There were only a handful of American civilians left, carrying out civilian functions.

Since, in those days, I was a Vietnamese speaker and knew the area, I was considered an old hand at the ripe old age of 30. I couldn't have had more access than I did. And Sheila and I took advantage of that access and traveled around a lot. The cease-fire had funny rules. The war took place in certain areas but not in other areas. It was fairly predictable. The result was we could get out and around. When we had a day or two off, my wife and I would drive to different place around the country. For example, we drove in our International Scout all the way from Qui Nhon the North Vietnamese border in Quang Tri Province; also from Qui Nhon up to Pleiku and Kon Tum. From Qui Nhon through the mountain vacation town of Da Lat down to Saigon and on to My Tho on the Me Cong River. I would never have attempted this during the war.

I would get intelligence reports before we would go. I never carried a weapon. My view was for what? What good would that do. And just tried to play it smart when we were on the road. We never had an incident.

Anyway for my reports on the ceasefire, politics, and attitudes, I would type out my dispatches in my messy style. We did not have word-processor in those days. My wife, who was my unpaid assistant, would then retype them nicely. A plane would come by every afternoon to pick up my "dispatch" and take it to the Consulate General in Nha Trang and the Embassy in Saigon. Just like in the old Foreign Service days, except instead of a ship it was a plane.

I reported on what I had heard and seen. Whatever skirmish had taken place. How the International Control Commission, which was set up under the Paris Peace Accords to monitor its implementation, was getting along since they had an office in the town. If the North Vietnamese were building roads in the mountains in eyesight of where I was, I could report on that. If there was a prisoner of war exchange, I could report on that. In fact, Sheila and I went to a South Vietnamese/Viet Cong prisoner of war exchange. We probably shouldn't have but did. This is how it happened. At a party, a South Vietnamese Air Force Base commander, at Sheila's prompting, offered to fly us in his Huey helo up to the headquarters of the northernmost district in Binh Dinh. We took him up on his offered and he came through. He flew us up to that town, where he commandeered a jeep, ripped off his name tags so he couldn't be identified by the VC, and drove us to the exchange site in the middle of nowhere. To get there we had to drive way west of the last outpost of the South Vietnamese Army. It was a very exciting time, probably my best ever six months in the Foreign Service.

Q: What was happening because the area where you assigned. Were the highlands part of your area?

MACK: No! I just covered Qui Nhon, I mean Binh Dinh which was a lowland province. It did contain some mountains, but I just covered the lowland areas. I did drive to other areas, including the highlands, to visit colleagues who had been assigned back to provincial teams on TDY just as I had been.

Q: Were you getting any feeling of buildup of the North Vietnamese side?

MACK: Absolutely!

Q: Was II Corps where the final North Vietnamese attack began in 1975?

MACK: Yes. Yes, the final offensive began against the highland provinces. Even in 1973 when I was in Binh Dinh the impression was that the North Vietnamese were logistically building up to do something. You could see the roads they were carving out on the mountainside, literally. And in addition, we were cutting back on our logistical support to the South Vietnamese Army. That meant, for example, that a Vietnamese Unit would have a limited amount of gasoline to use in their vehicles. So they were restricted how often they could drive. They were running short on ammunition. They couldn't fire H&I (Harassment and) Interdiction fire as they always had before. They were much more careful about how much ammo they expended. They knew their source of supply was severely reduced. While I was there in 1973, we knew the North Vietnamese were building up, but the South Vietnamese were not expending resources to counter it. It was a very strange situation. Yet in this limbo period, we could move around to many areas freely. These were areas that in my first tour I never would have gone into on the ground or without being accompanied by armed military force. It was kind of a shadow war or a phony war, a kind of a surreal situation.

Q: What were your Vietnamese contacts in your area saying? Were they all saying that when something happens will you get me out or that sort of thing?

MACK: No! No! They were not really saying that. But the Vietnamese military was plainly worried about the drop in US logistical support. When the Americans pulled out, they left their air bases and all the equipment and all the buildings, but clearly the Vietnamese did not have the resources to maintain them. They were restricted in the weapons and the munitions they had available as they were in fuel and parts for vehicles and that sort of thing. They could feel the pinch and I just have to believe that they were feeling lonely and probably wondering if the Americans would come back if the North attacked.

At the same time, they were extremely warm toward me and to my wife who was teaching English in a normal school in Qui Nhon. They were very, very happy to see Americans. I think they took some comfort in that and the fact that I would be there with my spouse.

Q: There was an major North Vietnamese offensive against the South at one point, wasn't there?

MACK: Maybe you are thinking about the 1972 North Vietnamese frontal assault, the so called "Easter Offensive" down Highway I into the South. I can tell you that Quang Tri City, the first provincial capital they came to, was reduced to rubble. My wife and I visited it in 1973. There were no buildings standing above my height. Literally the whole town was wiped out.

Q: Were American reconnaissance planes going over looking at things?

MACK: During my time, they were not flying out of South Vietnam. They may have been flying out of Thailand. Frankly, I just don't recall.

Q: What were you getting from your colleagues? I mean was this a feeling well this is fine, but?

MACK: My colleagues in the highlands were a little more nervous, I remember, and rightly so. I remember driving up to Kon Tum via Pleiku with my wife unescorted in our not so trusty International Harvester Scout. The first leg of the trip, from Qui Nhon to Pleiku, was uneventful. That stretch was at one time known as the "the highway of death". It had been made famous in Bernard Fall's book "Street without Joy" about destruction of the French Army's "Force Mobile" by the Communists during the French Indochina war in the early 50s.

Q: Street Without Joy, yeah!

MACK: But in any event, while we were on the highway from Pleiku to Kon Tum we witnessed a series of air strikes about three miles away. We just stopped the car and stood on our own hood and watched. And then that night in Kon Tum the local forces were constantly shelling with artillery North Vietnamese Army targets about ten or fifteen miles from town.. According to my colleague Richard Mueller who was there, that was not an unusual occurrence.

Q: What were these? Where these to keep people from?

MACK: They were North Vietnamese units in the jungles around Kon Tum. The area was not heavily populated.

Q. Was South Vietnamese Government corruption a big issue where you were here?

MACK: Of course. Not in every province, not all the time. Because from time to time you did have honest people who really wanted to clean house and attempted to. But you did have a tradition of corruption and you also had by virtue of the huge U.S. presence a big potential target for local corruption. Qui Nhon City in Binh Dinh Province in II Corps was a major logistical hub. Three divisions -- two U.S. and one South Korean -- were supported out of the port of Qui Nhon. The opportunity for diversion, whether of fuel, other logistical material or other things like commissary items, was huge. And, therefore, the temptation was enormous. I suppose there was a lot of the same in Europe during World War II..

Q: When I was in Vietnam I ran across someone who had files that went back to World War II that showed there was diversion of gasoline that came through France for our armies.

MACK: Right. And it was huge in Vietnam too. But while I was there in 1973, the allied forces withdrew and opportunities for graft declined. For example, the gasoline pipeline was not full anymore.

Q: But also I was wondering whether you got involved in consular activities? Because when I was Consul General in Saigon we had some problems up in Danang with American civilians.

MACK: Oh Gee! I was the head of the Branch Consulate in Da Nang in 1969 but another junior officer handled those issues, and I don't recall any specific incidents.

Q: What was the background of your wife?

MACK: Well, she comes from a small town called Pleasantville, which is near my hometown of Rye, New York in Westchester County. I didn't know her growing up. I met her in Washington actually when I was going through Foreign Service A-100 course for junior officers in 1966. She was then a Geography teacher at Langley High School in McLean, Virginia. We didn't get married until five years later in 1971. From Langley High School, Sheila had gone off to be a VISTA Volunteer on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. I shipped out to South Vietnam. We got back together 5 years later when I heard she still wasn't married. She was the kind of gal that's good in any kind of situation, obviously.

Q: What a wonderful introduction to the Foreign Service.

MACK: Well she probably enjoyed Vietnam as much as any place we have ever been since. Never complained at all.

Q: Well you were there six months, how did you feel about the Peace Accords when you left?

MACK: You are asking me thirty-four years after the event and after all sorts of things have happened which will cloud my memory of what happened and when. I was never convinced that the Paris Peace Accords agreement would lead to elections under conditions acceptable to the North. Real free elections in the North would have been impossible in any event. In the south, the Communists would have lost. But clearly the communists never planned on getting to that point. They were simply waiting for the Americans to leave so that could take South Vietnam by military force. Which, of course they did.

Q: You left there when?

MACK: People get confused. I left there in August of 1973. South Vietnam fell in April or May of '75. There were almost two years between my departure and the fall. So, I'm not one of the guys who were plucked from the roof of the Embassy in that dramatic photograph.

Q: The end came rather quickly.

MACK: It came rather quickly but it came in context of the continued reduction of U.S. logistical support and, contrary to the North Vietnamese offensive in 1971, no US air support either. To my knowledge, we provided no air support in final battles in 1975. And by then the South Vietnamese military had been bled down and knew that the Americans were not going to help them this time around. So I think it sapped their will to fight. Some units actually fought very, very well but were simply overwhelmed. But others, particularly in Central Vietnam, crumbled. The fall of the provincial capitals in the highlands turned into rout in the coastal cities as well. People just panicked. Once it started, things collapsed like a house of cards.

THOMAS P. H. DUNLOP
Political Officer
Saigon (1966-1969)

Political Officer
Saigon (1972-1974)

Thomas P. H. Dunlop was born in Washington, DC in 1934. He graduated from Yale University in 1956 and served in the U.S. Air Force overseas from 1957 to 1960. He served in many overseas posts including Yugoslavia, Vietnam, and Korea. He also served in the State Department in Washington, DC. He was interviewed on July 12, 1996 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Tell me how and where this training was conducted at that time, and so forth.

DUNLOP: At that time the Department was still teaching Vietnamese at the Foreign Service Institute in the small group format that developed after World War II in the 1950's. I had already experienced this kind of language training with you in the Serbo-Croatian language class. The Vietnamese language training took place in the "old" FSI building, which now has returned to its former status as a garage in an apartment complex in downtown Rosslyn, VA [Arlington Towers].

The vast expansion in Vietnamese language and area training, which took place later on, had not yet occurred when I studied Vietnamese. I can't remember if we had two or three groups studying Vietnamese at that time. There were four students in a class. There were at least two such classes, there may have been three of them. It was the traditional, audio-visual method of teaching, using the FSI methodology, with much "one on one" memorization, repetition, and the use of tapes.

The primary teacher, who was superb, was named Mr. Quang. We had a linguist who worked on the Chinese language, named Charles Sheehan. He was a legendary, happy, party guy. He left the instruction pretty much to Mr. Quang, which was probably a good thing, because Mr. Quang knew what he was doing.

Q: Could you describe some of the other officers who were going through this training at that time?

DUNLOP: You know, it's a terrible thing to admit this, but I have drawn a "blank" on that subject. I can remember every one of us in the Serbo-Croatian class, who sat around a table with you for a full year. I may remember the members of the Vietnamese class later on.

Q: What did you think that you were going to be assigned to?

DUNLOP: That is a very good question. I think that I had the good sense to know that I didn't have a clue about it. [Laughter] At least, I think that's what I told myself at the time. I remember telling myself that and I hope that I told myself that. For me the Vietnamese language class was

going to be a totally new experience. A lot of things that I had done had been new experiences, but not quite so different as in this case. Asia was a totally unknown part of the world to me. I had done little study and reading about Asia. I knew only what the "Reader's Digest" and the "National Geographic," as well as what the news media were saying about the Vietnam War. I had the view that we had gone to fight in Vietnam for a good cause. I would have been hard put to define the cause in other than the broadest of terms, such as "containing communism." I thought that communism was bad. To contain it was not only a good but also a necessary thing to do. I felt that this was being done in a difficult and perhaps dangerous environment. I don't remember thinking of myself as any kind of "noble crusader," like Shane, riding into town to fix some problem. I hope I didn't think that way.

Q: From the professional side, did you feel that this was regarded as a good move by our colleagues in the Foreign Service?

DUNLOP: I think that the young Foreign Service Officers in my class who were studying the Vietnamese language, and I may remember their names soon, had very few reservations about whether this was the right thing to do for our country. Some of us may have had some reservations about whether it was a good thing for us to do, personally. However, we were all "volunteers" at this time. Any such thoughts were probably overlaid by other motives. I am sure that most of us were unmarried, at that time. That was not true with later Vietnamese language students.

So family concerns would have been minimal, although my mother didn't want me to study Vietnamese. However, this was not something that I would lay awake at night worrying about, although she probably did. I think that we all had come into the Foreign Service during the administration of President Kennedy. I believe that I mentioned earlier how motivated I was by the idealism of that time. I think that there was a strong element of that idealism in us. I think that there was also a feeling of "adventure." I remember thinking of that a little bit. This kind of assignment was going to be a very new thing for me to do. There would be challenges, and I might find out something about myself that I would hope I would like when I found out about it.

Q: How did you study Vietnamese? I took a couple of weeks of Vietnamese language training. I was horrified with the tonal aspect of the language. I couldn't tell a word with one tone from a word pronounced in the same way but with a different tone. Both words mean different things.

DUNLOP: That was certainly a problem for me, too. I had a real concern about the tonal aspect of Vietnamese, while not understanding what that actually was. I am a very "unmusical" person. I mean, I enjoy music enormously. Last night I was at a seminar on Brahms and Schoenberg and so forth, because I love to listen to them. However, playing an instrument or singing is a disaster for me. Speaking Vietnamese is really a "performance" for me. You have to get up there and do it.

After I had been in South Vietnam for a little while, I don't think that concern remained. In your case you only studied Vietnamese for a few weeks, and it's not fair to you or anybody to study it for such a short time. However, I think that, once you've studied Vietnamese for a little while, remembering the tones becomes more a matter of memorization than anything else. You have to

remember what tone to use. The reproduction of the tone ceases to be a problem. The same sound means different things with different tones. The single syllable sound, "Ma," is a classic example. It means "ghost," "horse," or "mountain," depending on the tone. Does the high, rising tone mean "mountain"? No, it's probably the level tone.

We had excellent teachers. They knew how to "ease" us into Vietnamese as best we could be eased into it. There were some Foreign Service Officers who became superb Vietnamese language officers. But they would have been superb language officers in any language. I certainly was not one of them.

Q: When did you go out to Vietnam?

DUNLOP: I went out in June, 1966.

Q: You were there from June, 1966, to when?

DUNLOP: I was there from 1966 to 1969. The tours for unmarried officers were 18 months long. You had the option to ask for a second tour. Some of us did and some didn't. I did, so I served two tours, back to back, unaccompanied, 18 month tours in Vietnam. In other words, 36 months in all.

Q: So you went there in...

DUNLOP: In June, 1966, and left there in June, 1969.

Q: What job did you have when you went out to the Embassy in Saigon?

DUNLOP: I was assigned, and I've always been grateful for this, to the Provincial Reporting Unit in the Political Section. There is an interesting story about that, and I think that it would be told in pretty much the same way by others. Henry Cabot Lodge was Ambassador to South Vietnam twice. He was still Ambassador when I arrived in Saigon in June, 1966. Whatever else Henry Cabot Lodge was, I think that he had some very strong qualities as Ambassador. He was certainly a man who could be fooled once, but not twice. If he was caught by surprise three times, he really didn't want to do that again. He had been in South Vietnam through coups d'etat and times when he had been briefed by the intelligence community and particularly by the military about things which were going to happen. Then he found out that they weren't going that way. He wanted a group of Vietnamese language officers who would be responsive to his direction who could report from the field, directly to him. He felt a need for such a direct channel because he did not trust the reporting from MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam], which had advisors all over the country. They reported through military channels to MACV Headquarters in Saigon. Then MACV Headquarters shared with the Embassy what it felt the Embassy needed to know.

CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] reporting, at that time, I believe, was also mainly focused on what was going on in the "big picture politics" of Saigon. However, Buddhist monks had burned themselves on the streets, the Consulate in Hue was sacked [by a Buddhist mob], and coups

d'etat were springing up from nowhere in the woodwork, as it were. So Ambassador Lodge insisted on having a Provincial Reporting Unit established of Vietnamese language speaking Foreign Service Officers.

Q: Harry, who was the chief of the Provincial Reporting Unit?

DUNLOP: The Provincial Reporting Unit was headed by a wonderfully effective Foreign Service Officer, a good supervisor, and substantively very strong person named Dick Teare, Richard W. Teare. I learned an enormous amount about political reporting from Dick Teare. During my previous assignments, although I may have been in a Political Section in Belgrade, I really hadn't done so much traditional political reporting work. In Belgrade there were too many able Political Officers doing it in too confined a sphere of activity. So I really hadn't had much of an opportunity to do much political reporting. Now I had the opportunity and had a wonderful teacher.

Each officer assigned to the Provincial Reporting Unit was given a group of provinces to follow. South Vietnam was divided into 44 provinces and six of what they called "autonomous cities," like Saigon, Dalat, Da Nang, and others. Each of these provinces and cities were administered either by a Province Chief or a Mayor, under the Vietnamese system. The provincial borders were clearly marked on a map, and lines of authority usually didn't cross those provincial borders. Later on, these divisions became blurred but, at the time I arrived in South Vietnam, this was still very much a "vertical system." The Province Chief reported to the Corps Commander, and we'll talk about that in a second. And so the line went, right straight up to Saigon.

Each Provincial Reporter was usually assigned a group of seven or eight, contiguous provinces. In my case it was the provinces of the "Upper Mekong Delta" area South of Saigon. That is the upper part of the Mekong Delta, where it bulges out into a sort of circular area. I had eight provinces to follow, starting just South of Saigon, going down to the Mekong River, then stretched out along the Mekong River on both sides of it. I was supposed to get to know this "Upper Mekong Delta" area as well as I possibly could. I was expected to spend at least 40 percent of my time out in those eight provinces, getting to know people, including Province Chiefs and other Vietnamese officials and American advisors in that area. My job was to establish a friendly and, hopefully, productive relationship with these people, though this was not always easy.

Here I was, an officer coming out of Saigon, asking questions, and then going away. I suppose that, at times, I must have looked like a "spy."

Q: You were the "son of a bitch" from out of town.

DUNLOP: Well, you could be. Even though you take a couple of bottles of Scotch whisky along with you to "present" to people, it didn't overcome all of that suspicion. So that called for one side of the political reporting skills which you had to bring to bear. It wasn't just being buddy buddy with these people. It involved psyching out what approach would establish the kind of confidence that you weren't going to do him in. On the other hand, in some cases what you said was going to get back to senior officers back in Saigon, and maybe even in Washington, about

the situation, which may have been different from what these senior officers were reporting. That's why we were supposed to be out there. So this was the "circle" that you had to "square."

It was not always easy, but usually there were ways to get around it. If you couldn't find one person to talk to, you would find somebody else. Later on, when the political situation evolved to the point where there were elections, both for a Constituent Assembly and then for a National Assembly, little political parties, and sometimes not so little ones, would spring up. Keeping in touch with them was one of the traditional tasks of a Political Officer. The job was to go out and find out who was doing what on the political scene. The other side of it, and perhaps it was more important, always involved your impression of the security situation as a political reporting officer. Remember, you had spent six weeks out of the last six months, in Kien Hoa Province, for example. We wanted to know how well we were doing in that area. Although this was very "intuitive" reporting, it was always thought of as very useful back in Saigon.

Q: For one thing, I think that the American military officers assigned to these provinces was sort of "graded" on his particular area as "safer" or not, or "doing better" or not. There was a tendency to "fudge" the reporting. You were going out there without any program responsibility. If things were going badly, OKAY, that's what you reported that you had seen.

DUNLOP: Well, I think that what you said about the military officers assigned in the provinces was also true of civilian "program officers" out there. For example, AID [Agency for International Development] had a program officer in these provinces. Let's take a big program, which was always important and a subject of controversy because of the corruption which inherent in the activity. Let's talk about "refugee relief." This AID officer was providing refugees with rice and housing materials to build or rebuild their homes. There was always going to be an opportunity for local officials to rip this material off and sell it on the black market. The AID program officer's job was to get the houses up and the people fed, with the cooperation of authorities who may have been taking a cut. How he reported that and what he did with that, human nature being what it was, he might not have been quite as frank in reporting how much was being ripped off than others might do who didn't have this program responsibility.

Q: When did you arrive in South Vietnam in 1966?

DUNLOP: On a hot day in June. [Laughter] I remember the heat, as you said.

Q: Well, you met my plane in February, 1969. It was hot then, too! Anyway, Harry, what was the situation in June, 1966, as you saw it, and what were you being told? Also, what was the situation in South Vietnam as a whole and then in your particular area?

DUNLOP: Well, when I stepped off the plane and onto the ground in June, 1966, I was somewhat bewildered. My knowledge of Vietnamese wasn't yet up to speed, and it took me some time to get the view that I now have. However, looking back on it and drawing on whatever else I knew or had experienced at that time, and also by drawing on hindsight, I would say that in June, 1966 the Thieu-Ky Government or, rather, the Ky-Thieu Government at that time, had been in power for some months, after another one of those seemingly endless coups d'etat. We didn't know that this process would be "endless" at that time. It happened to be the last, military coup that took place in South Vietnam before the country fell to the communists in April, 1975.

There were no attempted coups d'etat after that.

One of the objectives of the Political Section was "coup alert" reporting. We really didn't know that there was not going to be any other coup d'etat. A look at recent history in South Vietnam would have suggested to any observer that it was quite likely that there would be another coup d'etat.

This was a time when the political instability which followed the overthrow of the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem, appeared to be still very much to be expected.

Q: Diem was killed...

DUNLOP: In November, 1963. So this was three years after that, a period when there were revolving door governments in Saigon. Prior to March, 1965, the American presence in South Vietnam had been mainly in the advisory and support functions. After that point the American presence changed to an actual, combat role. By the time I arrived in Saigon in June, 1966, the American combat presence was beginning to be felt.

At the time there were still areas of very predominantly Viet Cong influence, which the American forces had yet to penetrate. There were also significant areas where American forces had begun to penetrate and where the security situation, in its broadest terms, was beginning to improve. In late 1964 and early 1965, and this is drawing on hindsight and things I learned after I arrived in Saigon, the South Vietnamese Army had essentially been defeated by the Viet Cong. North Vietnam introduced regular, combat forces into South Vietnam, mainly up in the northern part of South Vietnam closest to North Vietnam, during this period of time. The North Vietnamese thought that they were headed toward a complete victory. In my view, at least, it was the intervention of American combat forces in the spring of 1965 which prevented a communist victory from happening. However, the South Vietnamese military capability had not recovered to any significant degree. The South Vietnamese Armed Forces were still pretty feckless. There were exceptions to that in certain units, certain provinces, and certain areas. However, generally speaking, the South Vietnamese Armed Forces looked at this American military presence with a combination of "Thank God!" and, "Now let them do it." That also was not so evident to those on the ground at the time, but I think that it was true, looking back on it.

The situation which I stepped into when I arrived was one where a beaten South Vietnamese Army had been rescued by the Americans. In various places this was beginning to be significantly apparent. In other places, this was less so. What I experienced during my three years in South Vietnam was more and more of the American presence. When I left South Vietnam in late 1969, I think that the American forces were at their greatest strength, about 550,000 troops.

Certainly, the Nixon administration had announced its policy of a slow but steady "drawdown" of American forces, but it hadn't progressed very far. If you were to take a look back, as we are now doing, at the eight provinces that I had to deal with, two of them had never been subject to strong Viet Cong influence. That was just my good luck. I could always find two provinces about which I could say wonderful things regarding the security situation. Those provinces were An

Giang and Chan Doc, which were in the upper part of the Mekong River Delta, toward the Cambodian border, along that gorgeous, huge Mekong River.

Why had they been and were they to continue to be so secure? This was because they were provinces controlled by the Hoa Hao sect, a Buddhist sect. We could talk a lot about the Hoa Hao, because it was my job to learn something about them, which I did. Essentially, they were a kind of puritanical or perhaps "reformist" Buddhist sect. They emerged during the French colonial period but did not have any kind of French sponsorship. The French always looked at them as very suspect. Members of the Hoa Hao sect were Vietnamese who wanted to do things in a different way. They did not approve of the lack of political involvement of the Buddhist church, as they saw it. This would not have endeared them to the French, who would have been perfectly happy to see a quiescent Buddhist church from the political point of view.

The Hoa Hao were also unhappy with what they considered the self-serving character of the Buddhist hierarchy, which was very much involved in its own conspiratorial, bureaucratic infighting. The Hoa Hao were different people. They said, "Let's have a church where everybody can have access to God. You don't need a large hierarchy. We will have our priests and administrators out there, to the degree that is necessary, to provide a place for worship. But that's about all." A Hoa Hao Buddhist monk keeps a building intact. There is incense there to burn and an altar to direct his prayers to. He will provide good advice to people if they ask him. However, he's not an intermediary with God. The Hoa Hao "convert" who joins that church can, in effect, converse directly with his God, without any "layering" of intermediaries.

The Hoa Hao movement became quite popular in these two provinces. I'm not sure why it didn't spread further. That's a good question which scholars could investigate some day. Certainly, in these two provinces, which were heavily populated and very prosperous, the Hoa Hao hierarchy and this way of approaching religion had established itself and become very predominant.

The Vietnamese communists made a terrible mistake in dealing with the Hoa Hao. In the years immediately following 1945, they tried to "co-opt" the Hoa Hao movement. The chief "saint" of Hoa Haoism told them, "No," and they killed him. That was one of the grave errors that the communists made, because this act automatically turned the whole sect into very strong, anti-communists. If they found that somebody was a communist, they killed him. No question. So there weren't very many communists in these two provinces.

I'd be very interested in knowing what the VC [Viet Cong, Vietnamese Communists] did with the Hoa Hao areas after the collapse of the Saigon Government in 1975. I've never seen anything written about it. Of course, the North Vietnamese Government was strongly determined to "crush" any dissent in South Vietnam. How did they go about it, how successful were they, and what resistance did they find? I have seen no reporting on this subject.

Anyhow, those were two of "my" provinces. It was fun to go down there.

Q: Were you able to talk to the Hoa Hao? How receptive were they?

DUNLOP: They were very receptive. Of course, they identified us with the anti- communist side

of things, naturally enough. They were very worried that the Saigon Government was going to be unable to resist the communists. So that was one aspect that made access to the Hoa Hao good for us.

Once the political situation allowed it, the Hoa Hao also became active in Saigon politics. They elected members of the National Assembly, and we had contact with them there.

Q: You have been speaking of this admirable group. At the same time there was a Buddhist hierarchy in Saigon and elsewhere, which was much more "political" and "self-serving," or however you want to describe them. I would assume that the Buddhist hierarchy would have the ear of the Embassy to some extent, because, obviously, we were trying to "reach out" to all non-communist groups. Did you find yourself sometimes serving, within the Embassy staff, as a kind of "spokesman" for the Hoa Hao? Did you find yourself saying, "Don't let these 'slick' Buddhist monks..."

DUNLOP: You mean the Buddhist monks from the An Quang pagoda. Well, that's a good question. I never thought of my role in that way. Later on I became much more involved with the "city slicker" Buddhists. I thought that the Hoa Hao had a certain "country bumpkin" character. The Hoa Hao sect was out in the country, and Thich Tri Quang [a leading Buddhist monk in the An Quang pagoda group] was in Saigon. Tri Quang was the "symbol" of the politically active Buddhists.

There are a couple of things to say about that as far as the Hoa Hao are concerned. First, the politically most active Buddhists were not in the Mekong Delta area. They were in Central Vietnam, in Hue, Da Nang, along the coast, and in Saigon. For some reason or other those who were further South were never terribly responsive to the leadership of the more prominent figures at the An Quang Pagoda. That was certainly not true in Central Vietnam.

In Central Vietnam you could find traces of the influence of the An Quang Pagoda, as I found out later on when I did some reporting in, say, Nha Trang, or Binh Dinh province. By golly, those supporters of the An Quang Pagoda were very much aware of what was going on in Saigon. They had read the latest bulletins or statements, whatever they were, issued by the An Quang Pagoda. The foreign press tended to represent the outlook of the leaders of the An Quang Pagoda as if it were the outlook of all Buddhists.

Many Buddhists in the southern part of South Vietnam were not Hoa Hao supporters and were not Cambodian Buddhists. The Cambodian Buddhists came from another, large element of the population. They followed a different discipline of Buddhism, which came from Cambodia into Vietnam. The Cambodian Buddhists were much more politically quiescent. I don't think that I ever had to represent the Hoa Hao in a way which would amount to portraying them as opposed to Buddhists sympathetic to the views of the An Quang Pagoda leaders. I think that I performed a useful role in identifying the Hoa Hao group for the senior officers of the Embassy who, perhaps, would never have gotten to know them. So these senior officers had some idea, personally, of a group which was not insignificant, but was located in a limited area of the country.

Regarding "advocacy" on behalf of this or that group of Vietnamese, there weren't any "pro An

Quang Pagoda" voices inside the Embassy. [Laughter] You know, Tri Quang had been given asylum in the Embassy. He might have been killed, had he been arrested during a major confrontation with the Saigon Government.

[FYI: In fact, Tri Quang was picked up by Vietnamese Special Forces personnel acting on the order of the Saigon Government under President Diem in August or September, 1963, in an obvious attempt to bring an end to the more or less non-stop anti-government demonstrations then under way at the An Quang and certain other pagodas. President Diem, supported by his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, ordered the Vietnamese Special Forces to "raid" the more activist of the Buddhist pagodas and arrest everybody in them. About 20 pagodas out of the total of about 5,000 pagodas in South Vietnam, were raided, and Tri Quang, among others, was picked up. He was briefly interrogated and then released by the South Vietnamese Police, who obviously did not realize who he was. He knew that this was a mistake on the part of the police and he was afraid that the authorities would learn of their mistake, pick him up again, and, perhaps, kill him. When he arrived at the Embassy at night, he applied to the Marine Guard for asylum. The Marine Guard referred the matter to the Embassy Duty Officer, who made the first decision to give him asylum. Ambassador Lodge confirmed the decision to give him asylum on the following day and reported the matter to the Department. When this became known in Washington, it caused a considerable uproar, as the United States normally does not grant asylum to anyone, unless they are in immediate danger of death from an armed mob. Tri Quang was under no such pressure from a mob, but an "order" from Washington to release Tri Quang would have meant directly challenging the position of Ambassador Lodge. President Kennedy appreciated that it was unwise to do this, as he and Lodge had been political opponents in Massachusetts. So Tri Quang was given asylum for about six weeks or so in the office of Jim Rosenthal, one of our Vietnamese language officers, on the second floor (third floor, American style) at the Embassy. Tri Quang's presence quickly became known to the Diem Government, but he was allowed to stay in Jim's office at the Embassy for about six weeks before the Diem Government was overthrown on November 2, 1963, and Diem and Nhu were killed. Tri Quang then left the Embassy and resumed living at the An Quang Pagoda. [End FYI]

Tri Quang never seemed to show any particular gratitude to the Embassy for having saved his butt.

Q: So the Buddhist hierarchy was not on our "pampered" list.

DUNLOP: Oh, they sacked the Consulate up in Hue. There was no reason to do that. It was to demonstrate their power. They wanted to show the rest of the Vietnamese how strong they were. From that point of view, "sacking" the Consulate was probably a good thing to do. It certainly didn't endear them to the Embassy. [FYI: Incidentally, when the Buddhist mob sacked the Consulate in Hue, the building was empty. Tom Corcoran, the Consul, had anticipated this action and moved everyone to Da Nang, where he reopened the Consulate. END FYI]

I had some dealings with the An Quang people later on. We can talk about that when I get to my second tour in Saigon. I'll share my impressions of him in that context in greater detail than now. Like any group of human beings, there were people in the An Quang Pagoda group who were very "self-serving" in the sense that they were opportunistically looking for power and influence.

If kicking the American "butt" was the way to get it, fine. If, by sidling up to the Americans, they could enhance their power and influence, they would do that. There also were some earnest and decent Vietnamese who saw their country being wracked by war. They were trying to find some way to use their Buddhist affiliation to be helpful. Anyway, I never found any of them, although maybe some of them may have fooled me, who really wanted the Viet Cong to win.

Q: Sticking strictly to the Hoa Hao group, were we doing much in the way of providing them with aid or assistance?

DUNLOP: Well, because there was no large, refugee population and conditions were relatively "happy" in the Hoa Hao area, we didn't have a large aid effort. However, we did have the usual AID provincial assistance. I never saw the figures on amounts involved and never thought to look at them in comparison to other provinces. However, I hope that we were smart enough not to give them disproportionately large amounts of aid, just because it was easy to do. I hope we spent the money elsewhere, where it was needed and, perhaps, more difficult to spend effectively.

We had a very conventional provincial structure in the two provinces where there were large numbers of Hoa Hao. We had an Information Officer, whose job was basically to help the province insofar as they needed it and would accept it for "psychological warfare" efforts, although not all of it was probably, technically "psychological warfare." We certainly had an AID [Agency for International Development] officer whose job it was to dispense aid. We had our AID Public Safety Advisers who were almost totally useless there because they were not needed, although they were a part of the standard, organizational structure. We also had a CIA Base in these provinces.

Now part of the Hoa Hao area abutted the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. The Hoa Hao also straddled the Mekong River. The Mekong River was sensitive for many reasons, among which was the fact that, after the South China Sea was pretty much closed by us to waterborne infiltration of communist personnel and supplies, this was an area where the Viet Cong could and did "infiltrate" personnel and supplies from Cambodia into Vietnam. They put these supplies and personnel into sampans, which hid them very well, because the Mekong River was swarming with sampans. So the security side along that river was important, and we finally put armed river patrol boats in there to help the Vietnamese armed forces, who did not have much of a waterborne capability to monitor that traffic.

I went on two operational missions there with the river patrol boats that were being deployed there along the Mekong River. Perhaps I should explain that. It was an interesting aspect of my experience in Vietnam.

Q: Let me stop for just a second.

Q: Perhaps we could continue with your description of operations on the Mekong River in South Vietnam.

DUNLOP: I would like to comment on operations on the Mekong River, which was always of concern. First of all, it's a huge river system, composed really of two branches of the great Mekong: the Cao Tong(?) and the Bassac. Secondly, these two rivers are connected and interconnected throughout much of their length..

Q: The river is called the Mekong...

DUNLOP: By the time it reaches Vietnam it has divided into two rivers, beginning right about the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. Each of these two rivers looks like about 10 Potomac Rivers together. Much of the commerce of the area moves up and down the river, of course. It's a powerful economic factor. Because it's so big and because there's always so much traffic on it, it was one way in which the North Vietnamese communists could gain access further and further South, into Cambodia. They could bring in supplies and personnel down the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" in North Vietnam and Laos and then ship them into South Vietnam.

I can't give you the exact time but I believe that it was probably the winter of 1966-1967 or, perhaps, the spring of 1967, when the U.S. Navy was ordered to operate on the Mekong River with a newly-developed type of river patrol boat. They were called "Patrol Boat, River" or PBR. They looked something like World War II torpedo boats, but they had a different role. For one thing, they were intended for use in fresh water and therefore had a very shallow draft. Secondly, they used a newly developed water turbine engine which drew in water from near the bow and pushed it out from the stern. They developed high speeds and were highly maneuverable. They were designed for river warfare on the Mekong River and so were armored and had lots of guns on them. These guns were more or less in the category of "small arms," but they had a lot of guns on board. They had .50 caliber and .30 caliber machine guns and grenade launchers. They carried a crew of five and up.

The U.S. Navy set up a PBR base in Vinh Long province, next to the provincial capital of Chao Doc Province, which, in turn at that time, was next to An Giang province. Vinh Long province was not completely dominated by the Hoa Hao. It had some Hoa Hao supporters in it, but they were not the majority of the people. The purpose of the river boats was to assist the Vietnamese National Police. At that time the Vietnamese National Police had responsibility for security on the Mekong River. They had a few police boats, but they were really very ineffectual, and were probably subject to being "bought off" by the Vietnamese communists, anyway.

So here came the Americans, who said to themselves, "We're going to 'fix' this situation, huh?" Well, they were good guys, wonderful guys. I got to know the U.S. Navy people down there very well. They were very sensitive to the fact that this was going to be the first time that armed, American forces would be on the Mekong River, that most of the traffic on the river was totally "legitimate," and that only a fraction of the boat people were composed of communists. However, the U.S. Navy people knew that it was important to try to figure out how to tell the difference.

The U.S. Navy developed some rather sophisticated operational orders about how they would conduct their operations after the evening curfew. We decided that there was nothing that we

could do during the day. There was just too much traffic on the river. However, we thought that the Navy patrols could help to enforce a curfew at night. One could argue, as I heard it argued, "Well, if you have a curfew, it will be 100% effective because the communists won't come down at night. They'll just come down during the day." Anyway, the idea was to start off with a curfew at night.

So the provincial authorities in the provinces along the Mekong River, under orders from the Vietnamese Government in Saigon, proclaimed a curfew on the river after something like 8:00 PM. Vietnamese boats were ordered off the river. Anybody who was on the river at night wasn't to be "sunk" but was subject to being stopped and subjected to a rigorous search. This meant boarding such boats. The U.S. Navy PBR's were going to help with this effort. To start off with, the U.S. Navy members of the PBR crews realized that no U.S. Navy officer or crewman spoke Vietnamese. This enormously complicated their task. Also, there was a question of Vietnamese sovereignty. It may not have been appreciated in the U.S. that the Vietnamese Government always considered itself a sovereign government. Some of the American opponents of our policies in Vietnam, such as Prof. George Kahin of Cornell University, used to say that the Republic of Vietnam "did not have the least attribute of sovereignty." This was an extremist view, of course. In fact, it had virtually every aspect of sovereignty. The South Vietnamese Government was always very sensitive to things which impinged, particularly publicly, on its sovereignty. This was about as public an infringement as you could get. This would be like having Vietnamese cops down on Ward Circle, in the District of Columbia, directing traffic, this might be seen as suggesting that we weren't capable of directing traffic on Ward Circle.

So then the idea was to put a Vietnamese policeman who could speak English on each PBR. This was a good idea. In fact, I promoted this idea to some degree, although I don't think that I was a key figure in getting it adopted. I certainly supported it and made sure that the Ambassador knew about it and that he understood why it could be important. So they did this. Then the question that came up was, "How was this working?" The U.S. Navy said that it was "wonderful." I had some doubts, so I was asked, and I would have done so, anyway and made it a part of my business in any case, to find out how well this system was working.

Well, one way to find out was to go out on some of these PBR patrols. These were "combat" missions, and we weren't supposed to go on "combat" missions. I asked a couple of "what if" questions of my boss, Dick Teare, back in the Embassy: "What if one of us went out on a PBR?" We knew what the rules were. However, I figured that I should go out on a PBR and see what happened. I should explain at this point that Brian Kirkpatrick, a very capable officer who went through Vietnamese language training with me and who spoke Vietnamese quite well, was covering other Mekong Delta provinces. We decided that for this particular operation of going on the PBR that there should be two of us, so each of us could tell his version of events. It's a little bit like going into a bordello to check on the health of the prostitutes. It's good to have somebody with you to confirm your story. That's one reason why you might want to go into the bordello. There were some funny jokes about it.

Anyway, Brian Kirkpatrick and I both went down to the PBR base in Vinh Long and asked the Lieutenant Commander in charge of these operations, whom we got to know very well, to let us go on two or three PBR operations. He said, "Do I have to tell anybody?" I said, "No." He asked

again, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes." So we went on two PBR operations. They were wonderful experiences, though a little bit scary, because the job was not just to stay on the main channel of the Mekong River but to go up some canals leading away from it. One side of the river was a lot more secure than the other, so we went up the canals on the less secure side. The PBR's did get into some firefights, and some people were wounded. However, not on the early patrols that we went on. Our job was to sit there, like a fly on a wall. So there were two extra guys on a boat that was supposed to have a crew of five or so people. Our job was to watch what happened when the PBR pulled up to a sampan on the river or canal. Maybe you might say that this was useless, because the Navy wouldn't behave improperly when we were around. I didn't think that way. I thought that they would do pretty much what they normally did, anyway.

So we went out on the river. On the first night we intercepted three boats and stopped them. Two of them were on the river and claimed that they simply had not known about the curfew. They said, "Curfew? What curfew?" Well, they seemed to be legitimate. At least, if the persons on the two sampans were not legitimate, at least their cargo was. There was nothing in their cargo of any interest to us. The third boat, interestingly enough, was carrying a badly wounded, Vietnamese woman across the river to a hospital. She was from the "bad" security side of the river. There had been some fighting over there. Her family rented a sampan and was taking her across the river to the hospital. Of course, that seemed OK.

I went back to the Embassy and said, "Look, better to have a Vietnamese policeman on the PBR than not. The U.S. Navy PBR crew seems to know what they are doing."

Q: Were you or others getting reports about Viet Cong supplies and personnel coming into South Vietnam on the Mekong River?

DUNLOP: Oh, yes. Lots of them. In fact, the Vietnamese Police would intercept some of this traffic. Usually, they did not discover this on the water. It had been "offloaded" and moved away some distance from the river bank. They had their intelligence agents, who would report something like, "If you happen to stop in such and such a hamlet and look into the third sampan on the left, you'll find some mortar shells in there."

Whether this effort had any significant effect, I don't know. It was like a lot of the things that we did. It probably had some effect.

Q: What about some of the other areas that you say were affected by communist activity?

DUNLOP: One of the areas involved was the two provinces just South of Saigon, on National Route 4, Long An and Dinh Tuong provinces. Both of these provinces were areas where the Viet Cong were conducting a lot of operations and had been of high security concern to the Vietnamese Government. This was partly because, if the communists ever "cut" Route 4, it would cut off the supply of rice to Saigon. The rivers run East-West. Route 4 ran North-South. There might have been other ways to get the rice into Saigon from the producing areas farther South, but rice is a heavy and bulky commodity to transport. Rice was the absolutely crucial food for that part of the world. There were other things as well: fish and pigs, for example. The Mekong Delta produced huge numbers of pigs and amounts of rice. The Mekong Delta was so

fertile. Stu, you've flown over it, I'm sure. It's so gorgeous and so fertile. They say that, if you drop a lead pencil there, three things happen. First, a tree will grow [from the wood], a rubber tree will grow [from the eraser on the tip], and a lead tree will grow [from the lead]. [Laughter] So it was important to keep that route open. Long An and Dinh Tuong were both provinces where there were some "bad" areas, particularly to the West of Route 4, which abutted on the famous "Plain of Reeds." The Plain of Reeds was an area which the French had never gotten around to draining and turning into a fertile area to raise crops.

This area remained largely swampy. It was not heavily populated and was a significant Viet Cong "base" for operations against Route 4, the rest of the Mekong Delta, and Saigon itself. It was not all of that far from Saigon.

So I was assigned Long An and Dinh Tuong provinces. Long An had long been the subject for special projects, such as Operation "Sunrise," or the construction of strategic hamlets. All of these bright ideas had failed, not so much because they weren't any good, though some were not as good as others, but because of the way they were implemented. The South Vietnamese Government wasn't doing things the right way.

Long An province was the first place that the United States Government, in its wisdom, decided to deploy U.S. combat forces in IV Corps, other than the river patrol boats which I have mentioned and which did not involve large numbers of troops. I spent a lot of time arguing against this deployment, which I likened to "shoveling sand into a strong wind." I said this to anybody who would listen, and to many people who didn't want to listen. Well, that's not quite true. People listened politely. The U.S. military listened politely, they always listened politely. I said that it seemed to me, in my "wisdom," that the place for American combat forces was up in the highlands of Central Vietnam, up in I Corps, the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, up there where there were regular, North Vietnamese Army units which had been operating there since 1965. I said that another, suitable area for the operations of U.S. forces was along the "bad" coastal provinces, such as Binh Dinh and Quang Ngai, but not in the Mekong Delta. For operations in the Mekong Delta, the Vietnamese forces could handle them with our help and if they handled them in the right way.

But, no, we decided to put in our heavy military units in the Mekong Delta area. We wound up having the "atomic cannon" in Dinh Tuong province!

Q: Are you kidding?

DUNLOP: I am not kidding. This was a 280 mm cannon which could fire nuclear rounds. To me that was a supreme symbol of idiocy. We had this damn gun and wanted to deploy it. So we deployed it.

Q: What was it used for? Did it ever fire?

DUNLOP: It was deployed to fire into Kien Tuong province, where the swampy communist base areas were. But bombardment of these areas could have easily been handled by B-52 aircraft, and was bombed on various occasions.

One of the little figures that I got was that this gun had such a muzzle velocity that, when it was fired, it would tear the tin plate roofs off Vietnamese houses half a mile away.

Q: I remember nuclear artillery when I was in Germany. They had to clear the traffic to move it around. It would fire a shell, perhaps, about 25 miles away, or something like that.

DUNLOP: Those guns may have some use, particularly for firing nuclear weapons in a special, tactical situation. However, this was not one of the first things that we should have been doing. It was one of the latter idiocies that we did. And I don't think that everything that the U.S. military did in Vietnam was either useless or idiotic.

However, I lost the argument, if anybody even noticed that it had been made. Actually, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker was very much against the deployment of this nuclear artillery piece.

Q: Where did the pressure come from for bringing this equipment to South Vietnam?

DUNLOP: It was a curious situation. You know, the South Vietnamese were basically concerned about the security of Saigon. The cannon was deployed in the southern area around Saigon. Route 4 went straight through the middle of Long An and Dinh Tuong provinces. On the right hand side of Route 4, which, if you were going South, would mean to the West of the road, the security situation was "dicey." The Viet Cong had a readily accessible base area not far from the Vietnamese border with Cambodia. That was the swampy area in Kien Tuong we have mentioned previously. At that time this base area was to be the southern terminus of the "Ho Chi Minh Trail." It hadn't quite gotten that far yet, but the trail was about to be completed to that point.

This had long been an area where the Viet Cong had found refuge. They had base camps, hospitals, and so forth there. It was a threat to Saigon and to the heavily populated area along Route 4. That was it. As long as we didn't think that the 7th ARVN [Armee du Vietnam, Vietnamese Army] Division was up to defending this area, and the provincial authorities seemed to be competent or incompetent, in varying degrees, here came the Americans who said that they would solve the problem for the Vietnamese.

At one time we had two whole divisions or major elements of two whole divisions in the Mekong River Delta Area. We mainly had deployed to the Mekong Delta the U.S. 9th Infantry Division, plus one brigade from another U.S. division, probably from an Airborne Division. Imagine, deploying an Airborne Division in the Mekong Delta area! Anyway, we did it.

The First Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division was the first major unit to be deployed to the Mekong Delta area. I still had my responsibilities in Long An province. After having argued against deploying this brigade in there, I made it my business to do a really thorough job, as best I could, in reporting on the impact of this deployment. In other words, how the Vietnamese population view it, how the American troops behaved, and what impact they had on the situation, once they got in there.

I spent a lot of time during the latter half of the time that I was following developments in those seven provinces South of Saigon, worrying about the heavy American troop presence in Long An and Dinh Tuong provinces. Since these two provinces were close to Saigon, it was relatively easy for me to get down there. I probably exceeded our 40 percent "target" of travel outside of Saigon by quite a lot during those days. Nobody ever kept close track of how much time I spent down there.

Q: The main idea was to get you out of town.

DUNLOP: Right. To get out of town, and then come back to Saigon, write up my account of my trip, and talk to people in the Embassy. I would also do some shopping at the Commissary and plan the next trip. Planning the next trip was something of a problem for a while, because I had to go and "bum" rides in helicopters and so forth. Later on Air America [an air transportation company wholly owned by the CIA] developed something close to a scheduled flight system. They had regular courier flights to some places. You could even reserve space on these flights. You would go out to Saigon airport, sign a "chit," and get a ticket! However, in the early days, shortly after I arrived in Saigon, you went out to Tan Son Nhut airport and stood there at the Operations Desk until a flight going to where you wanted to go became available. Or, if there was no flight going to where you wanted to go but could get you relatively closer to your final destination, you might take the alternative and then try to fly on to your ultimate objective. So a lot of time was spent in making travel arrangements.

Long An and Dinh Tuong were a focus of a lot of my attention during the latter part of my first tour in South Vietnam, when the American forces were deployed there. I remember traveling a lot. I remember one conversation, because it was encouraging. Not all of the things that I heard about the American troops were "bad," and here is one of the more positive stories. It is rather typical of what provincial reporters did, me and others. In Long An, near the U.S. 9th division base, there was a little Vietnamese Buddhist pagoda, not a Hoa Hao or Cao Dai pagoda, off one of the roads that I often drove on. To get there, you turned East off Route 4, going toward where the U.S. Army encampment was. I had long thought about stopping off there and talking to the local bonze (Buddhist priest). On this particular day, that is what I did. I had enough time to do it.

Q: What is a "bonze"?

DUNLOP: A "bonze" is a Buddhist priest or monk. I don't know where the word comes from. [Webster's Unabridged Dictionary says that it is a French word derived from the Portuguese word, "bonzo," defined as a Japanese or Chinese Buddhist monk.] However, the chief bonze would have one or two people working with him. They had very nice, though modest living quarters. These little Buddhist pagodas were often well maintained. They would have things like carp and lily ponds, and always a bell. You were always received with exquisite courtesy. They really didn't know who the hell you were. However, Vietnamese bonzes were genuinely hospitable. You would be given a cup of tea and maybe some cake.

Anyhow, I remember the conversation on this particular occasion. This bonze was a very

interesting man. I often stopped in to see him later on, because I had gotten to know him. I would bring him little presents from Saigon, and so forth. Even in our first conversation it turned out that he had been there for 25 years! He wasn't very young. I introduced myself. He nodded politely. He asked me if I wanted to speak French. I said that, if he could stand my "bad Vietnamese," why not try that. So this conversation was conducted in Vietnamese.

In due course I asked him about the American soldiers at the 9th Division encampment and what people thought about that. Without hesitating at all, he said, "Let me explain something to you. Your forces have moved into the same cantonment, the same barracks, which the Senegalese troops from the French Union forces occupied when the French were here." He said this, suggesting that this was supposed to enlighten me a lot. In fact, it began to enlighten me a little bit. The Senegalese were black African troops in the French Army. They weren't in the Foreign Legion but they served all over the French Empire. They were renowned as tough fighters. The Senegalese were rough soldiers, big and black. They include some of the tallest people in West Africa. I asked what conclusions I should draw from that comment. He said, "Your soldiers are not like the Senegalese. They are different." I thought to myself, "I'm glad of that, I think." He said, "There are a lot of blacks in your Army, aren't there?" I said, "Yes." He said, "But they're not like the Senegalese." I didn't go into any great detail on what the Senegalese who had been stationed at that encampment actually did. However, this was a favorable comparison.

I said, "Surely, the people must have some concern, since many Americans are so black and may look like the Senegalese from a distance. This must raise some apprehensions." He said, "Oh, yes, of course. However, we Vietnamese know how to distinguish people from people. There are always good people and there are always bad people. We try not to draw conclusions without knowing which is which." I believe that what he said was true, and it was one of the times when this view was articulated for me by a Vietnamese. I think that this was not an untypical point of view and attitude. This is one of the reasons why I grew to like and respect the Vietnamese as much as I did. I think that, no matter how badly we foreigners look, how badly we smell, and how clumsily we act, we're still going to be viewed as members of the human race.

Q: How well equipped and prepared do you think that the 9th Division was to fight the war in Vietnam? I'm not necessarily talking about equipment so much as attitude and so forth. You had been in Vietnam for a while, by this time.

DUNLOP: What was usually the case, when an American unit would first move into some place in Vietnam, is that they would be extremely well briefed. The commanders, the officers, and the soldiers would be well briefed. They would be made to understand as well as they could be made to understand that they were "guests" in the country, that not all "slopes" were enemies, and all that good stuff.

Q: "Slopes" is a term used for people whose eyes have a different shape and who may be Asians.

DUNLOP: The term "Gooks" comes from our experience during the Korean War. The word for Korean in the Korean language is "Hankuk." So when Koreans might tell an American, "Me Hankuk," he was a "gook." This effort to brief the troops and to sensitize, if you can, this gigantic, military machine just didn't have much staying power. The replacements for the troops

initially deployed weren't briefed. That was also of interest, politically and from a security point of view.

For example, the Americans did not understand that Cambodians and Vietnamese are ethnically totally different. They look different from each other. The Cambodian and Vietnamese languages have no relationship to each other. The Cambodian variety of Buddhism, and, perhaps, the Cambodians are even more active in their religion than the Vietnamese are, is called "Hinayana" [Lesser Vehicle] or "Theravada" Buddhism. I'm not sure that I can tell you much about what the differences are between "Hinayana" and "Mahayana" [Greater Vehicle], the Buddhist faith which the Vietnamese practice. "Mahayana" Buddhism developed in China and came South with the Vietnamese. "Hinayana" Buddhism came into China from India "Mahayana" around through Tibet or somehow up North. It took a northern route. "Hinayana" Buddhism went due East from India, through Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia. There are differences between the two variants in doctrine, and Buddhist recognize these differences. However, Buddha is Buddha, and he is considered wonderful for both of the followers of these variants, but they have different ways of going about things.

For example, Tri Quang and his Vietnamese followers adopted the brownish general garb of a Mahayana or Vietnamese Buddhist. Monks' robes in Cambodia are always saffron yellow in color. That is a very superficial view. The Cambodian Buddhists do much more singing or chanting, which is wonderful to hear. The Cambodian Buddhists have choirs. There is something of that in the Mahayana Buddhist faith, but it is not such a feature of their ceremonies. It is very attractive to go into a Cambodian Buddhist temple and hear them say, "Oh, you must hear our choir." And they will trot it out. Then 10 people will sit down, of course, always men and often young, and chant beautifully, in an a cappella way. It's something like Gregorian chant.

The southern provinces of South Vietnam were entirely inhabited by Cambodians at one time, because the Cambodians were there before the Vietnamese came. The Vietnamese invaded the Mekong Delta from the North. They pushed the Cambodians out of this territory. Of course, they don't like each other. There is an ancient tradition of dislike for each other. The Cambodian Buddhists were stranded in southern Vietnam and live as if they were in an enclave. They are cut off now by a sea of Vietnamese who swept on through the Mekong Delta. The Hinayana Buddhists in southern Vietnam now have very little contact with Cambodia. At various times during the Vietnam War some Americans had some ideas about recruiting some of the Hinayana Buddhists for use as mercenaries in the fighting in Cambodia. It didn't work out very well. The terms "Khmer Serai" or "Khmer Krom" [Cambodians from the far southern area of Vietnam] were used to describe Cambodians recruited for this effort. I know very little about all of that but I don't think that it worked very well.

The Cambodians living in South Vietnam basically wanted to duck out of the way of the fighting. They considered this a Vietnamese war. It turned out that for them a Vietnamese is a Vietnamese, and the color of his politics didn't much matter. They figured that they were going to get the short end of the stick, no matter how it turned out. I don't think that the Cambodians living in South Vietnam ever gave any comfort to the Vietnamese communists. They certainly didn't cooperate more than they had to with the GVN [Government of South Vietnam]. They just wanted to cultivate their own garden. Unfortunately, life in the world didn't exactly allow them

to do that. The Cambodians living in South Vietnam were always very hospitable to us. I think that it's just part of their culture. They may have been even better disposed toward us than they may have been otherwise. The Cambodians always looked at the French as their "protectors" from the Vietnamese. Maybe they felt that some day we might play that same role for them. I don't think that we ever saw ourselves in that role.

It was the French who drew the border that separated Vietnam from Cambodia. It was the French who said to the Vietnamese, "Stay on your side of the border." Of course, the Vietnamese generally did this until 1971 [the time of the Vietnamese-American "incursion" into Cambodia]. [FYI: Prince Sihanouk would never agree with this statement. During the period from 1958 to 1965 he regularly claimed that the South Vietnamese continued to "invade" Cambodia, although he made no mention of the substantial sales of rice and other resources which he made to Viet Cong and North Vietnamese installations in the border area. He and his wife, Princess Monique, personally profited from the sale of these supplies to the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. END FYI] The Khmer say that in 1976 the Vietnamese continued their "rapacious" incursions into Khmer territory.

Q: Let's cover the period prior to the communist "Tet" offensive against South Vietnam in January, 1968. Prior to this time, what was your impression and what were you reporting back to Washington on the strength and capabilities of the Viet Cong? Was that in opposition, say, to what we were getting from our other sources?

DUNLOP: A good question. I have an anecdote to tell on this subject. I was due for home leave in January, 1968. I wanted to take my home leave, and the Department knew that I was coming back to Saigon for a second tour. I was asked to stop being a Provincial Reporter and to come back to Saigon and head the Provincial Reporting Unit. I had come up to Saigon, I guess, in about September, 1968, leaving "my" provinces to somebody else. The chief of the Provincial Reporting Unit was supposed to continue to travel a bit and "keep his hand in," as it were. However, he would go to all of the Staff Meetings and had administrative responsibilities, which were more burdensome than for the Provincial Reporters. So I began to attend the Thursday morning meetings of the Mission Council in my exalted, new capacity as chief of the Provincial Reporting Unit. I think that there was a more restricted meeting of this kind on Tuesdays.

The Mission Council was composed of the senior officers of the Mission, meeting under the direction of the Ambassador, to discuss and coordinate reporting and policy matters of general interest. We always started out with a military briefing. I was due to go on home leave on January 23, 1968. I had a plane ticket for the last flight out of Saigon on the afternoon of January 23, 1968. I had absolutely no intention of attending the Mission Council meeting on that morning. I considered myself on leave as of midnight the night before. However, lo and behold, something came up on the agenda for the Staff Meeting, and my boss asked me to be there for the Mission Council meeting. So I packed my bags and got ready so that I could leave shortly after that meeting.

So I went to the Mission Council meeting on January 23, 1968. I think that this was five days before the "Tet" offensive began. The commander of the U.S. 25th Division was present at the meeting. I've forgotten his name. Anyhow, the 25th Division was stationed due North and West

of Saigon. That was the division under whose headquarters the great Viet Cong "tunnel complex" was built near Cu Chi [Binh Duong Province] which the Vietnamese communists now take great pleasure in bringing American tourists to Vietnam to see. The comic strip, "Doonesbury," by Gary Trudeau, has mentioned this during the last few weeks. The commanding general was at the Mission Council meeting and gave us a briefing. Much of the discussion was over what kind of "alert posture" we should have and what kind of "alert posture" we should urge the Vietnamese Government to adopt over the "Tet" period [Vietnamese New Year's holiday], because "Tet" was coming up in about five days, on January 28 and 29.

I remember that Mission Council meeting fairly clearly. First, a couple of general statements. There was a lot of information about something "big" coming down the pike. The question was whether it would be concentrated in one place. The intelligence dilemma at that time, as I recall it, that we had a base in western Quang Tri province near the Laotian border [Khe Sanh], concerning which we often heard reports. There was a lot of attention devoted to this base. It was being supplied by air, and a lot of people were saying that it was like the siege of Dien Bien Phu [the French base in Lai Chau province near the Laotian border which was overwhelmed and captured by the North Vietnamese in May, 1954]. The North Vietnamese Army had thrown two regular divisions against Khe Sanh. Although it was holding well, and all of that, there was always a worry about whether they would throw three divisions against it, seeking the gargantuan political victory which Dien Bien Phu had been for them.

Some people said that these indications of a "big attack" were centered on the attack on Khe Sanh. None wanted another "Dien Bien Phu" victory for the communists to boast about. Some people said that all these other reports of something "big" coming up were intended to divert our attention from Khe Sanh. Other people said that Khe Sanh could hold out anyway. The reports of attacks elsewhere had to be taken very seriously. A course of action was discussed at that meeting which was later made into a decision, following those and other discussions. It was decided that U.S. forces in I Corps, where Khe Sanh was, would go on "increased alert" over the Tet holidays. It was also decided that we would urge the South Vietnamese NOT to have their usual stand down from operations over the Tet holidays. I believe that was done, and I believe that in I Corps the South Vietnamese did not have their usual holiday stand down.

I left Saigon on the afternoon of January 23, 1968, and was not there during the Tet offensive period, which began at about midnight January 28. So I have no stories about the Tet attack on the Embassy to tell, although I learned at second hand about what had happened after I returned from home leave.

The American forces canceled their planned stand down in I Corps for the Tet period. However, I understand that the Vietnamese forces did stand down elsewhere in South Vietnam, with unfortunate results, particularly in towns like Hue. The whole town was taken by the North Vietnamese. The U.S. didn't have any military forces in Hue [Thua Thien province]. The cities of Nha Trang and Da Nang, where we had forces, were not taken by the communists, but they were attacked. In Saigon, where we had forces, the city wasn't taken, although the Embassy was attacked and there was heavy fighting on the southern edge of Cholon, the sister city to Saigon. The North Vietnamese deployed a larger military force in the southern part of South Vietnam than ever before, and their Viet Cong auxiliaries were able to do quite a lot of damage for a short

period of time. So that's what I remember. I remember the Mission Council meeting at which these issues were being discussed. I remember concern being expressed and a decision to keep the U.S. forces on alert status throughout South Vietnam.

So I caught my plane and learned about the Tet offensive when I was staying in a friend's cottage in the Cascade Mountains. He came up to the cabin at about 5:00 AM, holding a transistor radio which had very poor reception. He said, "The communists have attacked and taken the Embassy in Saigon!"

Q: Of course, they hadn't. They didn't get into the main building, although they got into one of the annexes where the Consular Section was located.

DUNLOP: I'll tell you one story, which I believe is true. First of all, E. Allen Wendt was the Embassy Duty Officer on the night of the attack on the Embassy.

Q: I am interviewing him now.

DUNLOP: OK. He will tell you that the communist sapper squad didn't get into the Embassy. He was lying on the floor and had an open telephone line back to Washington. Have you talked to him about this? He was talking to Phil Habib, then Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs.

Q: He mentioned this incident, though he didn't mention talking to Phil Habib. He mentioned that he had Washington on the line.

DUNLOP: Then if it wasn't Phil Habib that he was talking to, it was somebody else. He was telling Washington that the Embassy had not been taken. AP [Associated Press] was reporting that it had been. The Department actually "patched" the AP Bureau Chief in Washington, D. C., to talk to Allen Wendt. I may have this wrong.

Q: I'll go back and ask him about this.

DUNLOP: Go ahead. I've been dining off this story since then. I understood that Phil Habib was on the phone in the Department. He got so teed off, if that's the polite word; it's probably an understatement, that the AP was getting the story wrong. He had arranged for the AP Bureau Chief in Washington to get patched into the phone to talk to Allen Wendt, the Embassy duty officer in Saigon. Wendt said that the Embassy had not been taken, although it was still under attack, and the garden surrounding it had not yet been cleared of communist sappers. Wendt said, "Well, I'm inside the Embassy, and you ought to believe me." The AP Bureau Chief said that, "My guys are outside the Embassy, and I believe them."

Q: Well, I'll check on that with Allen Wendt. What were your impression of the strength of the Viet Cong? Going back to the time just before the "Tet" offensive, when you left Saigon on home leave, by this time you were in charge of the Provincial Reporting Unit.

DUNLOP: I had a lot of experience. That's a legitimate question. I'll tell you what I felt. I was

very upset, and most of the Provincial Reporting Officers were upset with General Westmoreland's claims of victory in a triumphal march through the U.S. when he went back in November, 1967. He addressed Congress. He told them all of those splendid things about the American soldiers, which I didn't object to. Mostly, they did their job and did it as well as they were allowed to do it. However, his story that we had secured a triumph of "good" over "evil" and that South Vietnam had already been "secured" just wasn't true. It hadn't been "secured." At that time none of us could say, "We're going to pay a triple price for claims like this, because the 'Tet' offensive is going to make this claim look even more feckless and stupid." We thought that this claim was feckless and stupid enough because the situation simply did not merit that kind of claim, although we could not prove it. We were still involved in fighting a very difficult fight.

It is true that some fundamentally "good things" had happened. If the war didn't have two sides, political and military, we would have won the military side a long time before. However, there was also the political side of things. One aspect was establishing the framework of a representative government. Later on it was my job to report directly on the National Assembly and on what was going on in the overall, political structure of the country. Clearly, progress had been made away from the unstable, ineffective, and heavy handed rule of President Ngo Dinh Diem and those who followed him. President Nguyen van Thieu and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky were no angels, but they had some legitimacy in the eyes of a lot of Vietnamese, because they had subjected themselves to a reasonably open, electoral process.

We haven't talked about the elections, but we had a lot to do with observing them. This was very much a part of my job. Elections were held in September, 1966, for the Constituent Assembly, which was then to debate and adopt a new Constitution. Then, in September, 1967, elections were held to choose a new National Assembly, which would then ratify the Constitution. Although South Vietnam was no Jeffersonian democracy, we saw some significant improvement.

However, on the military side, the presence and activities of the North Vietnamese Army [PAVN, or People's Army of Vietnam] were greater than ever. They were introducing artillery, which they had never had before. There was a long way to go, militarily.

Q: What about the elections? What were your observations concerning them?

DUNLOP: I felt that they had been well conducted and were basically as portrayed by the U.S. and Vietnamese Governments as representing something that the Vietnamese wanted to do and did do, despite Viet Cong attempts to disrupt them. Over time the elections had the desired effect, although they did not have a perfect, immediate effect.

I observed both of these elections. While the elections campaigns were going on, they had the highest priority that the Political Section had, as is usually the case in most Embassies. Both the Internal Political Unit and the Provincial Reporting Unit were reporting on the campaign, from their respective viewpoints. I felt that the elections which the Provincial Reporting Officers and I observed were handled very well. There were some attempts made by the communists to disrupt them. Although the Viet Cong threatened "total disruption" of the elections, I think that they backed off because they realized that they didn't have the power to do it. A "failed" attempt to

disrupt the elections, to the extent that they had probably hoped to accomplish, would be worse for them than an erratic and inconclusive effort. Making the threats, then seeing the elections held, and then saying that it didn't matter would only reflect negatively on their power. We never received any documentation of this apparent communist decision to let the elections go forward, although maybe someone has it now. I think that this is what happened.

The Constituent Assembly elections of 1966 were real elections, they were really fought, and there was determined campaigning. There were candidates in the Hoa Hao area of the southern part of South Vietnam. There were campaigns in the Hoa Hao and mixed Hoa Hao and other areas, which had every aspect of a genuine campaign for the attention of the people. The vote was essentially unfettered, and the people voted in large numbers. They were not "herded" to the polls. Maybe the people did not have huge expectations for automatic and instantaneous improvements in their daily lives, but they certainly didn't think that the elections would hurt their interests.

Q: What was your impression during the period prior to the "Tet" offensive of the rather "fancy" infrastructure on the U.S. side of "CORDS" [Civilian Operations and Revolutionary Development Support] and the "HES" program [Hamlet Evaluation System], which sought to identify which hamlets were free of communist influence and which ones were not? Particularly when Robert McNamara was Secretary of Defense, and this was later carried on by his successors. There was a very fancy attempt to develop a numerical system for determining how we were doing. In a way, the Provincial Reporting Unit was designed to take an "outsider's" view of this. How did you feel about this?

DUNLOP: Well, I'm not exactly sure about the timing here. I think that the "CORDS" and "HES" systems were developed after the Tet offensive. Some improved coordination of the civilian effort in the provinces was badly needed. So the development of the "CORDS" structure was badly needed. Until then, each of the agencies contributing funds for political, economic and social development in South Vietnam, including CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], with its Station in Saigon and its people running around the provinces; AID [Agency for International Development], with its program people moving around the provinces; USIA [United States Information Agency], with its information assistance programs and its people moving around in the provinces; and the District Advisers, who were U.S. military officers but had the key U.S. relationship with the Vietnamese District Chief, who was also a military officer, all of them reported through different channels. The District Adviser reported to MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam]; the USIA adviser reported to the head of USIS [United States Information Service] in Saigon, Barry Zorthian; the CIA people reported back to the Chief of Station in Saigon, whoever he was; and the AID people reported back to whoever was the AID Mission Director in Saigon, whoever he was, he may have been Ted Mann, although I am not sure of this.

Robert Komer [Deputy Chief of MACV for CORDS affairs], a hard-driving, bureaucratically smart, and very effective leader, was charged with putting this all together. I've just been running across this period in the FOIA program [Freedom of Information Act], our declassification of documents activity. That effort was badly needed. When you had an effective leader like John Paul Vann, whom I can also talk about from personal experience, to head the CORDS operation

in III Corps, where I was stationed, that organization was badly needed and was very helpful.

I think that the other side that you are talking about was an elaborate system called HES [Hamlet Evaluation Survey]. Each U.S. District Adviser, with the assistance of other people in his area, was supposed to "rate," on a scale of 1 to 5, I think, the security situation in each hamlet in a definable, geographic area of his district. Everybody had a map, with all of the hamlets drawn on it. Some of the hamlets had virtually no people in them because they had fled and become refugees. Some of the hamlets had huge numbers of people in them. But the District Advisers had a map, and they were supposed to "color" the map and send it in to Saigon. It would then be computerized in CORDS, coordinated, and compared with the map of the previous month, because this was a monthly report. [FYI: I recall a MACV District Adviser refer to these figures as "WEG", "Wild Eyed Guesses." Obviously, their quality and reliability varied widely. END FYI]

I remember a briefing session which, I think, took place after the Tet offensive of 1968. I had come back to Saigon in March of 1968, although it could have been prior to this time. There was a man named George Carver, a Vietnam analyst from CIA, who came out to tell us about this bright idea which was going to be implemented. We had several Provincial Reporting Officers attending this briefing, myself, and lots of other people. I remember making two very disparaging remarks about this system. One of them was, "And what else is the District Adviser going to do that month? Where is he going to find time to handle this extremely time-consuming effort?" There was a list of about 40 criteria, each of which had to be applied to each hamlet. Perhaps each criterion, on its own, had some relevance.

Q: Wasn't one of them, "Can you safely sleep in the hamlet?"

DUNLOP: That criterion alone might have been enough. But, no, that wasn't it. I forget what some of the other criteria were. Sure, there were at least 25 criteria. However, if you had 200 hamlets in your District, you had to multiply, say, 25 criteria times 200 hamlets. That makes 5,000 individual decisions. Then you had to add them up, multiply them, and divide them, apply a dose of something or other, and then color a map! To me, it was foolish, from the standpoint of time consumed, if nothing else.

At the same meeting I also asked, "What is to keep this system from being subject to the same, personal bias that affects every other rating system? What is inherent in this numerical system that is different from any other system, such as simply asking the man to give you his rating of each hamlet?" I said, "Go ahead and rate each hamlet, but leave out all of this other stuff." I was given a fishy stare. It may sound self serving, but I can remember those two comments.

Later on, and I have to be honest about this, it was kind of neat to have these maps available for briefing purposes. [Laughter] However, I think that what happened was that, after the HES system was in place for a while, the Provincial Reporting Officers who were knowledgeable, and they were very knowledgeable after they had visited a given province on several occasions, could look at what a hamlet map for such a province said, and give a pretty good evaluation of it. That, in and of itself, was not bad. At least it allowed us to see whether CORDS was being pretty honest or whether they were "winging" it [guessing]. Or, worse, deliberately distorting it.

So we looked at the HES maps and, in fact, read them with great interest. We looked at them to see if there was information there that we didn't know about, and there sometimes was. Or, if there were areas which we felt that we knew pretty much about, we looked to see how well the views of the MACV District Advisers corresponded with what we knew and believed. This would then tell us that our judgment coincided with theirs, coming through totally different channels, and maybe was right. Or, the HES maps were wrong. Naturally, we would always feel that "they" were wrong, not that "we" were wrong.

Inside the Political Section we insisted on evaluating the HES system every so often. Sometimes we did that every month. I don't know whether I instituted that or whether Al Francis instituted that. I guess that we made this evaluation on a province by province basis. We would occasionally prepare a memorandum for the Ambassador, which shows how far up the line it would go, attaching the ratings for each province. I think that there were three colors in use in the HES. "Uninhabited" by either side and "uncontested," white; blue was for hamlets controlled by the government side; red was for areas controlled by the communist side; yellow was for "contested" areas. Thus, we would prepare memoranda or think pieces for given provinces.

Do I think that HES was a good system? No. Did it take up too much time for too little a result? Yes. Was it of no use at all? No, it was of some use, but not, perhaps, in the way its creators had devised it.

Q: Let's go back chronologically. You were in the U.S. during the first wave of the Tet offensive. What did you bring back to the Embassy in terms of the impact of the "Tet" offensive on U.S. public opinion?

DUNLOP: That is also interesting. I left the U.S. in 1966, following Vietnamese language training, for assignment to the Embassy in Saigon. You asked me how the Vietnamese language training had worked out. I had some "ups" and "downs" not unknown to other bachelors at that time. For a while, it impacted on my study time, but I managed to do enough to do all right in terms of learning to speak Vietnamese. This is very relevant to your question. I had a very nice girl friend in Washington, a pretty girl whom I really liked and perhaps could have gone on and married. I had met her in 1965 and made a major pitch for her attentions. She came up to Washington for a visit. We had been corresponding, and there were all kinds of hopeful things I saw in the future. I arranged to meet her and asked her for a date. She said that she had to meet some family members and was very reluctant to pin down any exact time. Finally, I arranged to see her, for breakfast, for heaven's sake.

Howard Johnson's hotel and restaurant is on Virginia Avenue, across the street from the Watergate Complex. Here I was, with all of my expectations, having breakfast with this gorgeous woman. She unloaded on me about Vietnam and called me a fascist! She then sent me packing, as they say. That was a shock for me.

When I went on home leave in early 1968, I didn't have time to do any of that stuff. However, I was not wholly unprepared for the lack of understanding and even hostility that I began to sense. On a very personal note, my mother was a very intelligent, sophisticated, college-educated

woman. She made her own life, started up her own business, traveled abroad, and spoke at least one foreign language. She very much believed in American involvement abroad and in her sons' doing their duty in serving their country. She had sent off one son to the Marine Corps during the Korean War with great anguish, but he didn't wind up in Korea, thank God! She certainly approved of my serving in the Air Force and then in the Foreign Service. However, she had been totally and utterly convinced by Walter Cronkite, the CBS TV commentator, despite all of my efforts, that our policies in Vietnam were wrong. I didn't realize that I was competing with Walter Cronkite for the attention of this major figure in my life.

Q: Walter Cronkite was the most prestigious TV News commentators in the late 1960's.

DUNLOP: He is a man who happily admits and claims to be among the very first national opinion makers to conclude that the Vietnam War was unwinnable and, secondly, that it was "wrong" to pursue it.

I had taken a lot of time and trouble, it was no real burden to me, but in the course of my travels, knowing of my mother's great interest in her son, to take a lot of pictures. I thought of how I was going to convey to her some idea of this very strange place, Vietnam. Well, the Chinese say that a picture is worth 10,000 words, but I wrote little captions on them. These included pictures of old men sitting, perhaps, alongside a Buddhist temple. Or fascinating scenes in Vietnamese markets. Or American soldiers, tanks, and airplanes. I am sure that I sent her some pictures taken from helicopters. You could see an air strike going on over in the distance. I tried to give her the whole picture through little things. This was all a drop in the bucket. Walter Cronkite won this contest for the heart and mind of my beloved mother, hands down.

When I came back to Saigon, I knew that we were in trouble at home and that the war was rapidly losing the support which I felt, as a democratic American, that we needed to have. But we were going to have to stick it out over the long haul. I was very concerned about that.

Q: What was your impression of how Embassy personnel felt during this time after the Tet offensive? Actually, when you returned to the Embassy in June, 1968, was there still fighting in Saigon?

DUNLOP: Yes, we actually had something called "Tet Two" [also called the "May" offensive in Vietnamese]. When did you get to Saigon?

Q: I didn't get there until early February, 1969.

DUNLOP: So a whole year after this. Well, the first attacks in Saigon in January- February, 1968, had been very limited in scope, although the attack on the Embassy compound got all of this publicity of which we have spoken. The enemy had put together about four commando or "sapper" teams, these superbly briefed teams which had carefully prepared models of various cities.

One of these teams was sent against the Embassy; another one against the Vietnamese Prime Minister's residence, which wasn't too far away; against a radio station; and one at Tan Son Nhut,

more for diversion than anything else, trying to reach the flight line. There was much heavier fighting in the rest of the country. When I returned to Saigon, in March, 1968, having left on January 23, 1968, all of the holes in the Embassy had been patched up. There was more security in the Embassy, lots more. In fact, I have an anecdote to tell about that. Saigon looked about the same. There wasn't much difference.

However, in May, 1968, the Vietnamese Communists made a great error. They attacked Saigon again, this time using "main force" units. That's when heavy fighting took place in the Saigon area. I was there for all of that. Cholon, which is a mostly Chinese district just South and East of the main center of Saigon, was heavily infiltrated, and there was fighting around the airport at Tan Son Nhut. The communists suffered huge casualties, but we inflicted a number of civilian casualties as well. The fighting was in built-up areas, and civilian casualties were just unavoidable. Then the communists began to fire rockets and shells against the city.

I don't think that anybody in the Embassy held the view that the Tet offensive was a watershed event and that the communists were unbeatable. There had been a lot of fighting, and the communists had taken a lot of casualties. We knew fairly well that the communists had taken very heavy casualties in places like Hue, and now were taking them around Saigon. I don't think that there was a big change in the Embassy's view of what was going to happen, except personally, for me, because I had just come back from the States. I had this strong, sinking feeling about domestic support for our efforts in the war in the U.S.

Regarding the anecdote about security, when I came back to the Embassy after having been away on home leave, my office in my exalted position as chief of the Provincial Reporting Unit occupied a corner office of the second floor. It had two windows, overlooking the main, vehicle gate of the Embassy. There was a tree outside, and I could look through the slotted cover of the Embassy facade to see the tree. When I came in to the Embassy, I arrived early, at about 6:30 AM, because I knew that there was a lot of work to do. Perhaps I still had "jet lag" or something like that. There was an Airborne paratrooper sitting in my office with his feet on my desk, which I didn't mind, and with his helmet down over his face. He was sort of dozing. He had been deployed to the Embassy to beef up its internal security and was still there. These troops were pulled away after a while.

I walked into my office, and he said, "Oh, my God! Sorry, sir!" I said, "Relax, everything is perfectly fine." He had a little less comfortable place to doze out in the hall. I said, "I'll just clean off my desk," and I reached for a couple of things. He said, "God, don't touch those, sir!" It turned out that they were triggers for "Claymore" anti-personnel mines and were still alive.

Q: Oh, my God! [Laughter]

DUNLOP: Because my office faced the gateway out of the Embassy property, we had about four Claymore mines just inside the gate. Nobody had defused them and picked them up as yet. [Laughter] I said, "Son, just disconnect those Claymores," or something pompous like that. I said, "That will be just fine. I'm going to get a cup of coffee and will be back in an hour."

The Embassy's morale was good all through this time. I think that we all had enough to do, and

this was one of the reasons why. If you get bored, you begin to think about things, and maybe you get discouraged. We all had contact with a lot of Vietnamese who were splendid people and really were committed to keeping their country out of the clutches of this bunch of old, genocidal leaders up in Hanoi. They were grateful for American help, although they were somewhat disparaging about the way we did this and were sometimes resentful about the behavior of our troops. We didn't have any illusions about the effectiveness of the GVN provincial governments, which varied, depending on the personality of the province chief. We knew that some of them were corrupt -- that is, corrupt at a level which really impacted on the government's ability to govern. I think that there was an attitude in the Embassy that this was Asia and that we paid for things that you shouldn't have to pay for. The American view is that you shouldn't pay for things that ought to be yours because the government owes it to you to provide them, and you don't owe the government for them.

This view was acceptable up to a certain limit, and everybody had their own idea of what the "acceptable" level of payoffs should be. My own view was that about 20 percent payoffs, the people grumbled, but were not particularly upset. When 25 percent payoffs were required of the people more than grumbled, they were upset. When the payoff figure reached 40 percent -- as it did on occasion -- the people were mad as hell, and they might be prepared to do something about it. For example, they might toss a grenade against somebody else's front porch. Some province chiefs were "40 percenters." Some were "10 percenters." They got paid almost nothing for risking their butt. So "10 percent" didn't always look so unreasonable.

We had a bunch of young officers in the Embassy whom I was proud to be associated with, then and since. I think that any feeling that "This is the only war we've got, so we've got to go out and show our manhood in it" had worn off pretty quickly. It didn't wear off on everybody, but it did on most of us. We knew that we had a job to do and that it was a good job. We had responsibilities and we were listened to. We had no illusions that if we said, "Don't send the 9th U.S. Division to Long An province," we were going to "win." However, at least we had an opportunity to "say our say." I remember that I did one report on Binh Dinh province, which was in II Corps, along the coast. There was a Province Chief there who was really bad. He was, probably, about a "45 percenter," according to my own scale which I mentioned previously. The situation was worse because he was colluding with the South Korean forces stationed there, who were probably about "60 percenters." I went up there with Jim Mack, one of the Provincial Reporters, because there had been some queries as a result of a Congressional visit, or something like that.

We had no inhibitions about reporting anything. Nobody ever told us, "Oh, don't say those things. You can't do anything about them. A report like that will just be misused back in Washington."

Q: You didn't have that feeling?

DUNLOP: Not at that time. Later, the South Vietnamese Government came to detest the Paris Accords [signed on January 30, 1973]. Most South Vietnamese officials came to accept what President Thieu said, that the Paris Accords were "the first drop of poison." We can talk about that a little bit later. Embassy reports of that nature, that is, opposition by the South Vietnamese

to the Paris Accords, was not welcome in Washington. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wanted to get his Nobel Peace Prize for the Paris Accords, which he had the major role in negotiating.

Q: We've been talking pretty much about the period after the Tet offensive of January, 1968, and feelings in the Embassy at that time. How did this affect your role?

DUNLOP: The guys I dealt with in Saigon, that is, my colleagues in the Political Section, and not just the Provincial Reporting Officers, were really a great bunch of people. There was a large number of them and a chance for a lot of good ones to be there. It was really one of the very best groups of Foreign Service Officers that I ever worked with. We had great leadership.

First of all, we had Phil Habib as the Political Counselor, who was inspirational, if somewhat intimidating. Then we had his replacement who was not intimidating but very good with his troops, John Archer Calhoun, who was also Political Counselor. Embassy officers had the greatest respect and, later on, real affection for Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. After you had been around him for a while, Bunker was so clearly a man of integrity that, if he thought that something was a good thing to do, and right and proper for the United States to spend its treasure and, to some degree, the lives of some of its young people, that was very helpful. If you had any doubts about the situation, you could express your doubts about it. We had a couple of people come out to the Embassy who didn't like to fly in helicopters and didn't like to be shot at. They left fairly quickly. I think that I'm fair in saying that most of the people assigned to the Embassy believed that the war, at least at this stage, was the "right war, in the right place, at the right time."

A lot of us had doubts about the way we went about prosecuting the war. One of my earliest doubts was about the deployment of those heavy U.S. combat units to the Mekong Delta, which I mentioned previously. I thought that this was really stupid. However, you could always express yourself. As I've said so many times here, Ambassador Bunker made a point of seeing the Provincial Reporting Officers at dinner about once a month. There would be a lovely dinner over at his residence. He would not make this a "debriefing session" but would make it an opportunity to get to know the Provincial Reporters and to let them say whatever was on their minds. This was always a very nice dinner. People could bring up anything that they wanted to. Ours was a well-run Embassy staffed with people who were well-motivated, at least at this time.

Q: Did you become involved with the press, and could you talk about the American media and its coverage of the war? For many people this was as important as American troop involvement, because the American media set the standards for what we were doing and what we...

DUNLOP: Walter Cronkite was reading what other people wrote before he made up his mind. That's for sure. Well, I came away from Vietnam with a lot of contempt for the American press. As I look back on this experience, I don't think that my attitude was all of that unjustified. Since then, as a general statement, I have somewhat modified my views, as I think I should have. In Vietnam, I ran into American journalists in increasing numbers. They weren't so much out in the provinces, although they went with American combat troops, give them credit for that. They went up where the heavy fighting was going on in the A Shau Valley [in I Corps], which was a bad scene.

The more I got to know some of them over time, and sometimes socialized with them, the less I thought of them. Some of them were personable and bright, like David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan. No flies on those guys. I think that, particularly after the Tet offensive, following which I spent another year and a half there and spent more of it in Saigon, where I was more likely to run into them and did run into them, I began to develop the feeling that they were really there to "punch their ticket" and were competing with each other to find things that buttressed the view that this was the "wrong war, in the wrong place, and at the wrong time." I was very unhappy with them collectively and, in some cases, individually.

Remember Fox Butterfield? He was one of those I saw. I remember where I saw him. This would have been after the signature of the Paris Accords in 1973.

Q: This would be a matter for comment later on.

DUNLOP: OK. As of 1968 I had not had that much contact with the American press. I had just come back to Saigon from home leave, and they were swarming in Vietnam like bees around a hive. I saw a few in the Mekong Delta area but not very many of them and not often. At this point, other than the impact that Walter Cronkite had on my mother (who revered him), I don't think that I had a particularly negative view of the American press. I developed it later, but I did develop it. I came to regard them with a lot of disdain.

Q: During this time after the Tet offensive in 1968, what was your impression of the operations and reporting of the CIA?

DUNLOP: I can say almost nothing about that. But that's also what I can say about CIA operations as they affected what I did throughout my career. I've thought about this quite a bit lately, now that my active duty career is over. I can't think of any time when what the CIA told me at any place where I served abroad or wrote about something at any place where I served abroad which made a decisive impact on how I viewed a given situation.

Q: In other words, are you saying that what the CIA was reporting was already in accord with the thrust of what you knew?

DUNLOP: Let's take the Buddhists in Saigon. The CIA Station had been all over the Buddhists during the early period of Buddhist unrest in Saigon, beginning in 1963. Later on, there was supposedly a "compact," which was signed in blood or something, in the "dark of the moon" and with knives and skulls on the table, that they would "lay off" the Buddhists in the An Quang Pagoda. So the Political Section theoretically had unfettered access to the An Quang people. This "agreement" didn't make any difference, as far as I could tell. If the CIA Station had some brilliant insights, I think that we would have been smart enough to have reported them. Certainly, this was true of the provinces. Whatever else the CIA people were doing in the provinces, they weren't competing with our Provincial Reporting Officers reporting on the security situation, on the impact of American troops on local politics, or on how politicians were trying to influence events in Saigon. They just didn't do it. I think that we would have seen it.

They did a lot on North Vietnam, which they should have been doing. They had some bright analysts. Frank Snepp was one of them who comes to mind. Their analysts were accessible to us, and we enjoyed talking to them. We were not in competition with them, and that was fine. How much they got right and how much they got wrong, I guess it worked both ways. That is true of all of us.

When I was down in the provinces, there was a CIA "Station" house in each of the province capitals there, usually called "the Embassy house," which somewhat irritated us. It would be a nice house, with a compound and walls around it, sometimes with barbed wire. You could go over there, maybe get the American Province Senior Adviser to take you over there and introduce you. You would be welcomed politely. They would open up a can of beer, talk a while, and then you would leave. I don't remember learning anything. I don't remember their being very interested in what I knew. They had something else going on which, whatever it was, didn't seem to make any difference to anybody. I didn't come into a Province Team there and find them seething with anger at the local "Station," like someone saying, "You know what those guys did yesterday?"

They must have been in touch with the Vietnamese intelligence people. We know that, later on, under the "Phoenix Program," there was a major effort made to identify or "turn" communist cadres. However, whatever effort the South Vietnamese Government was making to identify, root out, or otherwise destroy the VC infrastructure, that must have been the CIA's principal effort. How successful they were, I don't know. Later on, I heard that the "Phoenix Program" under Colby was coordinated more effectively and made some contribution to our overall effort. However, I don't have personal knowledge of that program.

Q: What were the major developments, as you saw them, during the time between when you returned to Saigon in March, 1968, and, when did you leave Saigon?

DUNLOP: I left in June, 1969.

Q: What was the major development during that tour of duty?

DUNLOP: The major development in my life is that I became engaged to be married. [Laughter]

Q: Yes, I remember. I went to your engagement party.

DUNLOP: Do you remember that a rocket hit a building about 200 meters from my engagement party at the home of Galen Stone [chief of the Political Section at the time]?

Q: That was on the first night that I was in Saigon. We were driving there. I heard this tremendous explosion but noticed that nobody seemed to be paying attention. I thought that this was like some British movie called something like, "Stiff Upper Lip." I thought that this happened all the time. I was a new boy on the block and I wasn't going to say anything. But I thought, "Good God!"

DUNLOP: Well, let me think about it that way. I never thought to compartmentalize my time in

Vietnam in this fashion. Let me just think out loud a bit.

The peace talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris began during this period [March, 1968, to June, 1969].

Q: At first they were "talks about talks."

DUNLOP: Yes. Do you remember that resident Johnson made his announcement on March 31, 1968, that he would not be a candidate for re-election? This seemed to catch everybody by surprise.

Q: I was in the U.S. at the time.

DUNLOP: Shortly thereafter, we set up a specialized Mission in Paris, and "talks about talks" began, with very grudging GVN [Government of Vietnam] participation.

Where I worked in the Political Section, we were not privy to any of the traffic that came into the Embassy about negotiations with Hanoi. [FYI: I believe that at least Ambassador Bunker, Arch Calhoun, the Political Counselor, and Roger Kirk, the chief of the External Unit of the Political Section, saw most of the traffic the Embassy received on this subject. Probably, Galen Stone, the chief of the Political Section and Roger's supervisor, also saw the traffic. END FYI] I never saw any of this material, which was all in "special communications channels." "CHEROKEE" was one of the codeword compartments used for such material. There were other communications channels in addition to that.

I think that we had the best feel for how the South Vietnamese government people were reacting to what they were reading in the press about the meetings. The reactions were not good, to put it mildly. GVN representatives, of course, participated in most if not all of the meetings with the North Vietnamese, and the GVN Foreign Ministry would have known of the substance of most of the meetings. (Not the very, very secret Kissinger-Tho talks.) In my own case this GVN reaction was interacting with my own negative feelings about support for the war on the home front in the U.S. I had experienced this reaction during the Tet offensive period, when I was on home leave in the U.S. and which I had brought back with me to Saigon. You could see in the eyes of the Vietnamese a look of skepticism and internal questioning about what the Americans were going to do in the negotiations with the North Vietnamese. This questioning attitude had not yet reached any substantial proportions, but I remember it as being one of the things that struck me. I'll tell you when this attitude first began to appear in significant measure.

President Johnson had announced that he would open talks in Paris with the North Vietnamese under certain conditions. He said that he would reduce the bombing of North Vietnam, and so forth. One of the conditions he mentioned was that the shelling and rocketing of Saigon would have to stop. As you well know, this didn't stop, and Johnson didn't do anything about it. This was a very visible, audible, and personally apparent way in which the Americans were saying two things, that is, talking out of both sides of our mouths. Nobody has ever accused the South Vietnamese of being stupid in such matters, and particularly on issues of such importance to themselves. So, as this year and a half went by, I had this sense that there was a doubt in the

minds of the South Vietnamese about our continuing commitment to their defense against communist aggression. Perhaps this did not make so much difference at that time. However, when I came back to the Embassy later [in September, 1972], it made a big difference.

Q: Are you describing your views in retrospect or were you reporting this?

DUNLOP: This is not totally in retrospect, particularly the views expressed by South Vietnamese who asked for my opinion on this issue.

Q: This was being relayed back to the Department in Embassy reporting?

DUNLOP: We weren't being given very good ammunition to answer such inquiries. The President had said one thing and then did another. He made a statement about the continued shelling of Saigon and then he didn't do anything about it.

Q: Did you ever raise this question with Ambassador Bunker?

DUNLOP: Oh, there was a lot of talk around the Embassy, both with him and with our supervisors. I mean, everybody felt this way. I'm sure that Ambassador Bunker felt this way.

I've read some of Ambassador Bunker's reporting from this time but I don't remember having read anything on this subject. However...

Q: Of course, this was very much a political decision made by President Lyndon Johnson.

DUNLOP: And by the Secretary of Defense at the time, Clark Clifford. I'll tell you another feeling that I had. The security situation is a generalized term which I use for the "balance of power" in any given province. Communist forces increasingly consisted of regular North Vietnamese Army units, against the combined U.S. and GVN forces.

During this time the "balance of power" began increasingly to improve in our favor.

Q: During the 18 months that I spent in Saigon from 1969 to the middle of 1970, I felt that the situation was not bad at all.

DUNLOP: Things were improving. We now know, although we knew some of this at the time, that the North Vietnamese took tremendous losses during the Tet period of 1968. However, the South Vietnamese communists, or the Viet Cong, took much heavier losses. There were always these two elements: the Viet Cong "local" battalions and the North Vietnamese Army. The North Vietnamese Army was a very effective fighting force. The Viet Cong were unpredictable. Sometimes they were much better than at other times. But the Viet Cong were "committed." The North Vietnamese leaders threw the Viet Cong into this "meat grinder" against the U.S. forces at the height of their strength and, to some degree, a GVN Army that was beginning to show some improved capabilities. It got much better later on.

One of the results of the very heavy casualties suffered by the communist forces, of which I was

not so aware until later on, was that the North Vietnamese leaders couldn't find replacements in the South to make up for Viet Cong losses. So they increasingly sent North Vietnamese units down into South Vietnam. This exacerbated the deep animosity between North and South Vietnamese. For example, it made it less and less easy for the North Vietnamese sergeant in command of a battalion or company of South Vietnamese communists from the Mekong Delta area to represent himself as standing for the interests of the local people, who were southerners. This is what happened.

So the situation in South Vietnam did get better. Clearly, we in the Embassy were all teed off at the rocketing of Saigon. We were pleased, though, that you could begin to drive to Dalat [a once popular resort in the mountains North of Saigon] or to Vung Tau [formerly Cap St. Jacques, a popular beach area Southeast of Saigon]. Route 15 opened up.

Q: I remember driving down there to the beach.

DUNLOP: This was not something that you could have done a year before.

Q: Did you note a difference in the mood of Embassy personnel or anything like that, between the election of President Nixon in November, 1968, and the time you left Saigon in 1969? You arrived back in Saigon in March, 1968. [FYI: The following section should be reviewed carefully, because it seems to confuse the presidential elections of 1968, when Vice President Humphrey ran against Nixon, and the presidential elections of 1972, when Senator McGovern ran against President Nixon. Harry was in Saigon during both election campaigns, but the choices were different. I have taken the liberty of trying to "fix up" this section, to make it more coherent, but I suggest that Harry review it carefully. END FYI]

DUNLOP: Yes, we did, because one of the things that bothered us was the prospective candidacy of Senator McGovern on the Democratic ticket in the presidential elections of 1972.

Q: Who?

DUNLOP: Wasn't it McGovern who ran against Nixon in 1972?

Q: Yes.

DUNLOP: Some of the Embassy officers were Democrats, some were Republicans. However, I think that McGovern was viewed by most of us as a feckless disaster.

Q: God, I voted for Nixon.

DUNLOP: Well, I also voted for Nixon. I recall that we saw the election on TV and heard the results on the radio. Remember that there is a 13 hour difference between Saigon and Washington time. We heard the results around a swimming pool at the residence of Arch Calhoun, the Political Counselor [on Tu Xuong St.]. We all trotted over to Arch's house to listen to the results of the presidential election of 1968 on a short wave radio. Or maybe AFVN, Armed Forces Radio, Vietnam, carried it. I remember that everybody around that pool was really very

pleased.

What did Nixon do, early on, which impacted on the situation? He announced a very reasonable program of "Vietnamization" of the war. I don't think that he announced this right away, and it wasn't part of his campaign. However, the actual Vietnamization program, drawing down steadily but surely the American combat presence in South Vietnam and replacing them with revitalized, rearmed, and effectively led South Vietnamese troops under South Vietnamese political leadership. This was something that we all welcomed. We all applauded this. Most of us felt that the U.S. had been too much involved in the war, although I imagine that nobody would have minded another division or two of U.S. troops right at the time of the Tet offensive in 1968!

Generally, the view of Americans bulldozing a position, where a backhoe would have been better, was a matter of concern to us. I think that there were a lot of people in the Embassy who were in favor of Nixon's policies, if not pro-Nixon himself. Of course, I left Saigon only five or six months after Nixon's first inauguration in January, 1969. Not much had been done by Nixon in this short period of time to implement the Vietnamization program. The South Vietnamese welcomed it, with this reservation. They wanted to be sure that Vietnamization was not just a cover up for our bailing out of South Vietnam. Well, four years later, in 1973, we were still there. Then we did bail out at the end of April, 1975.

Ambassador Bunker's slogan began to be, and I don't recall when he began to repeat this point, although, at the end of his time in Saigon it was very much his view, "Long haul, low cost." In other words, reduce the cost to the American taxpayer and reduce American casualties to the minimum. However, he did not believe that we could leave South Vietnam any time soon.

My own, personal, view is that had we been able to sustain that policy, South Vietnam would still be an independent country, and the North Vietnamese would still be limited to North Vietnam. Lots of people wouldn't have died in the intervening years. That's my view, it is one of the great "what ifs" of history.

DUNLOP: After 1972 I returned to Saigon. I had a telephone call in the spring of 1972 from somebody I knew in Vietnamese affairs who asked if I would be willing to return to Vietnam. I thought about that a lot. I had spent three years there, from 1966 to 1969. This was now 1972, and did I want to go back to Saigon?

In 1972 the Vietnam War was still going on. Vietnamization had largely been completed. At the time I got the phone call, there was a very large North Vietnamese offensive under way, the so-called "Easter offensive" of that year. It didn't look as if the negotiations in Paris over the next three years would be any more successful than they had been during the previous four years. However, the major consideration for me involved my family. I had gotten married since I had left Vietnam, and we had one child. But I was told that the policy allowed me to take my wife and child back to Vietnam, so I decided to go. My wife, Betty, a Foreign Service secretary whom I met in Saigon was very supportive.

The job I was offered was also a good one. It was to be in the Internal Unit of the Political Section, a job for which I felt well qualified. So with very little transition I went from Zagreb to Saigon, with some home leave in between. I arrived back in Saigon in July, 1972.

Q: You were in Saigon this time from when to when?

DUNLOP: July, 1972, to, I guess, June, 1974. That tour spanned the signing and implementation, as far as you could use that word, of the Paris Accords on Vietnam signed in January, 1973.

Q: When you returned to Saigon, could you describe first how the Embassy was, how your job was, the Ambassador, and so forth?

DUNLOP: The Ambassador was still Ellsworth Bunker. By then he was about to complete his fourth year in Vietnam.

The Political Section had been reorganized, to the degree that the Provincial Reporting Unit had been eliminated. I had been involved in this unit, both as a provincial reporter and as its head during my previous tour in Saigon. There now were Internal and External Units, as well as a very large Political-Military Unit. The Political Section was set up along the conventional lines of most Embassies.

I heard that the Provincial Reporting Unit had been abolished because Ambassador Bunker had become upset at some of the younger officers who were assigned to it in the 1970-1972 time period. These were officers who had come into the Foreign Service during the 1960's. They were full of the "piss and vinegar" of that generation. They were skeptical and even defiant of authority. I think that Ambassador Bunker thought that they were whippersnappers and "know-it-all's." Anyway, I'm not sure of everything that happened, but Ambassador Bunker had become convinced that the Provincial Reporting Unit was not worth the money that we were spending on it. So he dissolved the Provincial Reporting Unit.

Some of the former Provincial Reporting Officers were still in Saigon when I got there in 1972. Two of them, in particular, had been reassigned to the Internal Unit, where I was also assigned. I got to know them very quickly when I got there. They still had a lot of the resentful attitude which had offended Ambassador Bunker.

Q: They probably resented everything. It was an "odd" period of time. Foreign Service Officers from our generation generally accepted the fact that we were representatives of the U.S. Government and that there were limits to expressing our own views publicly on how the world was.

DUNLOP: Well, these two guys did not endear themselves to me when I heard them sneering at me as a "true believer" in our policies in Vietnam. I was not unhappy about the comment that I was a "true believer." However, the sneering tone was not so acceptable.

Q: As far as "sneering" was concerned, when I think of it, this was a tone of voice which you

hear from some commentators who are still around, 20 years later.

DUNLOP: Well, I think I can say that both of these guys, and I know one of them better than the other, since our careers have been parallel to some extent, have now undergone that "transformation" that they used to talk about. You know, they say that you have no heart if you're not a rebel in your 20's and 30's and you have no brain if you're not a conservative by your 40's.

When I returned to the Embassy in Saigon in 1972, the Mission was run by some very "tough" officers. I think that Martin Herz had left...

Q: And I think that Galen Stone was chief of the Political Section.

DUNLOP: Galen Stone was there. I had known him before. Then Josiah Bennett took over as Political Counselor. He was an old-line, "China hand." Bunker was still the Ambassador. The Political Section was still doing a lot of the things that it had done in the way of provincial reporting. I must say that I was glad to see that. I would have tried to re-institute some of it, had such reporting totally disappeared. There was still a lot of travel into the provinces, although this travel was no longer institutionalized into a separate, Provincial Reporting Unit.

When I first returned to Saigon, my responsibilities involved covering the Buddhists and all other religious groups, including the Catholics, the Hoa Hao, and the Cao Dai. I also covered the Chams, insofar as they played a role, and they played a small role in a couple of provinces. I also followed developments among the "Montagnards" [ethnic peoples, especially on the high plateau of Central Vietnam]. That's when I got to go up there and drink their locally-made, fermented rice wine through a straw. I also followed National Assembly developments, beginning with the Senate, or upper house. Later on, somebody else took over following developments in the Senate. At the time the Republic of Vietnam had a bicameral legislature. So I had those responsibilities, as well as some supervisory duties.

I did the usual things that you do when you get to a post. You read what went on before. Much of it was very familiar to me. I tried not to let too much of what I had experienced before influence the way I saw things. I tried to look at everything from a fresh point of view, which is very difficult to do.

When I arrived in Saigon in July, 1972, the "Easter Offensive" by the North Vietnamese had about run its course. This was the first time that the North Vietnamese employed regular battalions with full armor and artillery support. This offensive had been defeated, without any American ground force involvement. There was a lot of American air and naval bombardment support.

However, this was war of the kind that you were familiar with from World War II or even World War I. Certain parts of the country, particularly "I Corps" [the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, organized into Military Region I], when you rode North from Da Nang to Hue and, even more so, from Hue to Quang Tri, which I had an opportunity to fly over not too long after I got there, was littered with recently burnt out armored vehicles. This was something that you might see in movies about German Gen Erwin Rommel in the North African campaign of

World War II. I think that most Americans still don't think of this stage of the Vietnam War in that way.

This combat was the result of an effort by the North Vietnamese Army [People's Army of Vietnam -- PAVN] to "close the book" on the Vietnam War without a negotiated settlement. They wanted one more crack, using military means, before they tried to get in the back door, through a settlement which they might be able to manipulate. Perhaps we didn't fully understand that at the time, although maybe some people did.

This North Vietnamese effort failed, and they suffered terrible casualties before they gave up on it. There had also been heavy casualties on the South Vietnamese side. The South Vietnamese Army [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, RVNAF] had fought very creditably in some respects. In other respects, less so, although this was also true of the North Vietnamese.

There were times when North Vietnamese units did not perform at the high level that we were accustomed to, because they usually were militarily very efficient. Some North Vietnamese units had simply "broken." We had taken a lot of North Vietnamese prisoners. Some of the North Vietnamese armored troops had simply "quit." They were out there, a naval bombardment came in like holy hell, and they jumped out of their tanks and ran over to the South Vietnamese forces with their arms up. That kind of thing had happened, too.

The government led by President Nguyen van Thieu, which was much reviled in the American press, was somewhat more efficient and functioned somewhat better than it had when I was previously in Saigon. I don't think that it was any more "impressive" or any more "repressive" than it had been previously. It still had an authoritarian approach to the opposition, particularly on the Left. There was very little of this leftist opposition, but there was some. The South Vietnamese Government was still throwing people into jail for activities regarded as "subversive," which the American Left regarded as activities by "heroic, nationalist defenders of truth and justice." However, there weren't too many such cases.

Q: This was still during the "high noon" of the first Nixon administration. Kissinger was still very much involved at this point.

DUNLOP: He was still the chief negotiator in Paris as National Security Adviser, when I arrived back in Saigon in July, 1972.

Q: Was there any "tension" between the reporting that we were doing and what was happening in Vietnam and how it was received and used in Washington?

DUNLOP: Yes, there was. I'll give you a couple of examples in which I was involved, but there were certainly others as well. After the North Vietnamese "Easter Offensive" of 1972 had been repulsed, I think that President Thieu claimed that every inch of soil lost to the North Vietnamese by their offensive had been regained. This was not true, because there were parts of South Vietnam which were never regained from the North Vietnamese. However, almost all of the ground lost had been regained by September 6, 1972. The reason for relating it to that date was either that it was the anniversary of his election as President in 1967 or the anniversary of the

promulgation of the constitution.

Anyway, there was a period of about three months between September and December, 1972, in any case, well into the winter, when we in the Embassy, at least at my level, were not aware of anything approaching a "breakthrough" in the Paris peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese. Then, all of a sudden, in October, 1972, I guess it was, the "word" was out that the negotiations were very close to completion in Paris.

Keep the sequence of events in mind. I'm doing this for my own sake, as much as for anything else. The Accord on Vietnam was signed after the "Christmas bombing" of Hanoi and Haiphong in December, 1972. I think that the Accord was signed on January 28, 1973. The "word" about an imminent "breakthrough" in the negotiations would have reached us on about October 28, 1972. The three month period between the end of October, 1972, and the end of January, 1973, when the Accord on Vietnam was signed, was a period of increasing apprehension on the official South Vietnamese side and, to some significant degree, on the side of South Vietnamese public opinion. It was feared that the Accord on Vietnam would deal a fatal blow to the prospects for the survival of the Republic of Vietnam.

This pessimistic opinion grew very rapidly in South Vietnam. It was reflected in the Saigon press and in what individual South Vietnamese would say to us, at a time when those of us in the Embassy at our levels did not know anything about what was going on. We could not understand what it was that these South Vietnamese contacts of ours were worried about. We certainly knew that they were getting very worried. Were they simply worried that the Americans had grown tired of the war and were going ahead with the negotiation of an accord with North Vietnam? Or did these South Vietnamese figures know something that we didn't know? I think that it was partly the latter, because President Thieu had been informed of the shape of what this final agreement was going to be. He didn't like it one bit. I think that this attitude, these concerns, and this resistance of his were leaked by Independence Palace [the residence of the President of the Republic of Vietnam] to the Vietnamese press. We were seeing that before we saw anything that gave us a clue as to why these South Vietnamese were so upset.

I'm not necessarily blaming the State Department system for not telling us what was going on in Paris. However, it made reporting difficult. I remember that. I would be puzzled at the virulence of some of the anti-Kissinger material which began to appear in the South Vietnamese press.

This is what gave rise to my first getting my wrist "slapped." We thought that it was pretty interesting when Kissinger began to be portrayed in these really wretched, sometimes scatological and very pornographic cartoons. We assembled a package of these cartoons, appropriately translated, and sent them back to the Department. We said that this kind of material doesn't reflect what everybody is thinking in Saigon but a lot of people read these newspapers, and the Department ought to know about this. We were very quickly told that this kind of material was not welcome and we were asked not to send such material in to the Department. Now, that's pretty minor, but that was evidently considered a case of "lese majeste" [something close to high treason]. It was nowhere like reporting that the South Vietnamese were happy with everything in South Vietnam, and the U.S. Government should go ahead and sign the Accord on Vietnam and saying that we would get no flack from the South Vietnamese. We were never told

to do that. We were able to report this concern we had noted among the South Vietnamese. The Department just didn't want to see the cartoons about Kissinger, although I am sure that they were a source of some hilarity around the Department of State. Some of these cartoons were just incredibly bad.

There was a period of time when some of our provincial reporting on corruption involved some of President Thieu's principal supporters, and particularly Gen Dan Van Quang. You may remember that name. He became the "overlord" of the Mekong River Delta area. This area was THE most prosperous and populous part of the country. It provided enormous opportunities for taking "cuts" of rice shipments to Saigon. Gen Quang was corrupt down to his toenails. There was lots of evidence for that, although maybe not all of the evidence would have stood up in court. However, we had officers in Can Tho [Phong Dinh Province], which was the largest city in the Mekong Delta and the capital of IV Corps [Military Region 4], who reported some of these things. Through the Internal Reporting Unit we thought this was pretty interesting stuff to send on to the Department.

Josiah Bennett, the Political Counselor, became uneasy at this kind of reporting. I had a lot of fights with him about this. It was not something that was very pleasant, although he was a very pleasant man, individually. I guess that he felt that warts were not to be focused on. I don't think that we were unduly focusing on them. It was a matter of degree. I felt that there was some good reporting coming out of the Mekong Delta area and I think that we basically did what we had to do. However, to me there was an unnecessary degree of arguing which had to go on before some of these good reports could go out. I ought to add that Ambassador Bunker never stood in the way of honest political reporting

The Thieu Government was corrupt. There's no question about that. It was corrupt, but the degree to which that had an impact on events is another matter, because a certain level of corruption was very common in South Vietnam. Today the Vietnamese Communist Government is very corrupt. If you want to get something done in Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City these days, you have to find out how to get the right people paid off. When corruption reaches a politically damaging level, this is a matter for useful debate and inquiry. We used to have a lot of that debate and inquiry. I think that it had gone over the level where it became politically damaging in the Mekong Delta area.

Q: This raises one of the standard questions that face any Foreign Service Officer. If you see corruption and criminal influence, as I saw in Naples with the Camorra [similar to the Mafia]. It was there, it was endemic to the system. However, if you report it, it can sometimes take on an overtone of suggesting, "To hell with this country. This place is corrupt or criminal, and we just won't deal with it." Or it may lead to complete dismissal of the society. This is true again and again. It's like talking about Senator Kennedy or President Kennedy coming out of the "corrupt" Massachusetts Democratic Party system. Yes, corruption was there as part of the process. However, describing it can sometimes take on an overtone that really inhibits our dealing with the practicalities of the situation.

DUNLOP: I think that's certainly true. I think that Americans tend to be a little bit hypocritical, although I'm not sure that's the word. "Sanctimonious" comes to mind, although I'm not sure

that's the right word, either.

Q: It's "within the ballpark" of those words.

DUNLOP: It's a little like dealing with people like Tito of Yugoslavia, as I was saying earlier. There is the view in the Foreign Service that, if we have to deal with somebody who can be called "corrupt," for God's sake don't report anything "bad" about him because we have this conscience and we don't want to have...

Q: It's not only that. We know that we can report such matters in what we might regard as "balanced" fashion. However, the report goes back to Washington. If there's anything "juicy," it will end up on the desk of a Senator, a Congressman, or of a journalist, all of whom are either out to titillate an audience or grab attention at the time. This can have profound effects. We have this problem.

DUNLOP: That is true, and I must say that, to give the Josiah Bennett's of this world full credit, they are well aware of this. And, of course, South Vietnam was a classic case of corruption. There was a whole constituency in the United States looking for ways to say, "I told you so." They felt that the Vietnam War was the "wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time." Then a provincial reporter would come back to Saigon and say, "You know, people I know and really respect down here in Can Tho are sick at heart about what's going on down there. They are really disgusted."

There was a case of a Province Chief in the Mekong Delta area who resigned from office, which was almost unheard of. He was one of the "good guys" who said, "Well, 20% corruption is all right, but 40% corruption, no. That's too much." If you report that back to Washington, it gets into Walter Cronkite's Evening News broadcast [on CBS TV], which was already a powerful influence on my mother, as I mentioned before. He was, perhaps, the dominant influence on her, as far as the Vietnam War was concerned. Yes, it is a dilemma.

I don't feel too badly about how we handled the reporting on corruption there. I think that we managed to do what was necessary. If anybody back in the policymaking world wanted to understand the degree to which the South Vietnamese Government was functioning efficiently, as well as where it was not functioning efficiently, if they were willing to do the hard work of reading all of the reporting, they would have been pretty well served.

Our main question should have been, "Is the South Vietnamese Government going to be able to function sufficiently well that it will survive?" My answer to myself to that question was always, "Yes, it is, but we will have to support it for a long time." Just as we did in South Korea. I would have to say, "Yes, we could have done that." One of the motivations of the South Vietnamese for doing that is that they just detested North Vietnam. They didn't want the North Vietnamese to come down and interfere in their affairs. Thich Tri Quang, the Buddhist thorn in everybody's side, didn't want North Vietnam to win the war. He may have contributed to North Vietnam's winning the war, but this wasn't his objective. His objective was to get a Catholic President [Ngo Dinh Diem] out of Independence Palace! He succeeded in doing that, at least in part.

Q: How did you find the "religious factor" operating during this 1972-1974 period?

DUNLOP: Personally, I had a very fortunate relationship with Monsignor Nguyen van Binh, the Catholic Archbishop of Saigon. He suffered horribly after the communists took over South Vietnam. I think that he may have been made a Cardinal "in pectore" [appointed secretly by the Pope, without a public announcement].

That was part of my job. I would go over and see him. He was a wonderful man, of compassion and erudition, gentleness, humanity, and all of the things that you would like to think that a Prince of the Church is. He would talk to me about whatever I wanted to talk about, which was how things are going, there had been such a pro-Catholic President [Ngo Dinh Diem]. I would ask, "What does this mean?" If I remember his point of view correctly, he would say, "The Vietnamese people have had sufficient experience with religious extremism so that they have discarded it. There are no longer 'extreme' Buddhists who matter. There are no longer 'extreme' Catholics who matter. There no longer are Hoa Hao or Cao Dai supporters who think that they can run everything within sight, without regard to anybody else. We have passed beyond that point. The chapter has been closed on religion as a powerful, political influence wielded by some people to the detriment of others."

I accepted his view after thinking about it and talking to other people. I would go over to the An Quang Pagoda to see Thich Tri Quang but wasn't received by him. He didn't want to see Americans at that point. However, he designated somebody to speak for the Vien Hoa Dao [Buddhist Institute], that influential portion of the Buddhist community. Those Buddhists were no longer seeking the kind of power that I think they felt was within their grasp in 1963-1966. They were certainly vocal when they didn't like something and they were going to protect their own interests, as in the case of the Buddhist University. They wanted to make sure that the government, as a secular power, didn't try to tell them how to run their university. They were no longer trying to determine who was going to be the political chief of the state, or who was not going to be chief of state. They might well have liked doing that, but they came to realize those were unrealistic goals.

Religious dissonance in that regard still existed, as well as dissidence, to some degree. However, it did not have the power, and certainly did not seem to have a potential for powerfully influencing the course of political events, during the 1972-1974 time frame, as it seemed to have had some 10 years earlier.

Q: How did you see the political-military relationship within the U.S. Mission? I mean political-military reporting and...

DUNLOP: I think that it was pretty smooth and I think that we have to credit Ambassador Bunker for that. Bunker had seen two commanders of MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] come and go. He had seen Gen Westmoreland and Gen Abrams. He was excellent at handling that relationship. If the two top people in the U.S. Mission understand where the other one is coming from and accord him the "space" that he needs to get his job done, and are willing to work together on a reasonably agreed, common purpose, then that filters down to lower levels. I was never involved directly in political-military relationships with MACV in Vietnam, as I

certainly was later on in South Korea. So I can't say too much personally about this.

During my second tour of duty in Saigon, as of January 28, 1973, the American forces were given three months to leave South Vietnam. This involved all combat and operational forces. They did that. By March 28, 1973, they were all gone from South Vietnam. The people who were helping to maintain the aircraft of the Vietnamese Air Force on the flight line were all gone. The only military elements left in the U.S. Mission were the Marine Security Guards [a detachment of about 200 Marines] and a DAO [Defense Attaché Office], with about 50 military personnel assigned and attached to the Embassy. The DAO's main job was to funnel the large amounts of military assistance that we had going to the South Vietnamese.

Q: From the ripples that were coming out of Washington what was your personal feeling about the peace efforts and what we were doing in this regard?

DUNLOP: You're speaking of the period before -- during the run-up to -- the Paris Accords, and the period which followed the Accords. I was increasingly unhappy with the trend of the situation. The more I got to understand the process, which included reading the Accords on Vietnam and then reading how the U.S. interpreted them, I could see why the South Vietnamese authorities were concerned about how things were going. Of course, we were reporting, word for word, what President Thieu was saying about it. Thieu gave a major speech in December, 1972, known as the "poison cup" speech. In it he said to the South Vietnamese people, "I am in a terrible situation here. I have been offered a 'poisoned cup,' but I have been offered the opportunity to drink it, one drop at a time." That analogy seemed to make sense to me.

Of course, earlier on, during the first six months of application of the Accords on Vietnam [January-July, 1973] the true horror of the Watergate Affair had not fully manifested itself. Ambassador Bunker adopted quite a positive attitude on the Accords. Part of this was probably due to his intent, as our leader, to present a positive, confident face on the situation. We still saw Ambassador Bunker a lot, even though we were not provincial reporters. However, he always made every effort to talk to his working level staff. He always said, in those early days of the application of the accords, "This is a long haul at a low cost." He felt that President Nixon had found the right solution for the future. He said that we would be in South Vietnam for a long time and that we had reduced the cost to a tolerable level. He would use the analogy of South Korea. He would say, "What makes you think that the South Koreans were better able to run their lives in 1953-1954 than the South Vietnamese are now?" He would add, "We have to keep the bad guys out and give the South Vietnamese time."

I guess that I was willing to accept that. However, I also began to see that the fact that we had declared a peace seemed to suggest that it was necessarily going to be so. We could not criticize the Accords on Vietnam. Washington did not want to hear any criticism of them.

For example, the ICCS [International Commission of Control and Supervision] was deployed in South Vietnam. This was one of those international teams that the United States is so fond of. Look at Bosnia. These teams descend on chaotic situations with clipboards to take notes and see how things are going. The theory seems to be that people will see them standing around with their clipboards and will alter their behavior in a positive direction, because they are being

watched.

The ICCS was a failure. It was a total failure, almost from the beginning. Canada was one of the four countries participating in the ICCS. Members of the ICCS included Canada, Hungary, Indonesia, and Poland. The Canadians tried to make the Accords on Vietnam work and succeeded in doing so in terms of a few pieces of it. However, the most you could say was that the Poles and the Hungarians were never functional members of the ICCS. The worst that you could say is that they deliberately set out to sabotage the Accords on Vietnam. The Canadians soon saw the futility of it all and cleared out.

The ICCS was reported to the American people as a major component of the Accords which were going to bring peace to Vietnam. The theory was that this whole thing was going to work, but nobody in Washington was facing up to how it was functioning. This was very disturbing.

Q: You know, at one time the international press was covering and talking about all of the "horrors" of the war. Had the press lost interest in what was happening in terms of the implementation of the Accords on Vietnam? Some people think that the press was at least partly responsible for how things turned out in South Vietnam. Did you find that the press did a good job of reporting on the failure of the ICCS?

DUNLOP: I'm trying to remember about press reporting on the ICCS. If we couldn't get that story back to Washington, certainly since we thought that it was a "bad" story, it would have been newsworthy, and the press would have reported this. I can't remember that. I have no recollection of what the press was saying about the ICCS or of thinking that if somebody says that, then it will be read, since the Embassy reporting on the ICCS wasn't particularly welcome in Washington. I don't recall any particularly better attitude on the part of the press toward the American effort in Vietnam as a whole. The journalists whom I came in contact with during the 1972-1974 period still dripped with contempt for the official American effort in Vietnam. They not only believed that it was the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time, but they seemed glad that this was so. I bitterly resented that attitude when I encountered it.

If we were going to have a failure in Vietnam, and it was always possible that we would have a failure, OK, well that's that. However, in my view, to rejoice over your country's failure was just an unacceptable personal attitude. I couldn't stand it. And, of course, at that point we hadn't totally failed, though we seemed to be on the road to failure. We hadn't gotten there yet.

Q: Did you find any change in the contribution and role of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and what they were doing? Did you get much from them in the way of reporting?

DUNLOP: I think that I said in discussing my earlier tour in Saigon that I never knew much about what they were doing. They didn't cross my path very much. During my second tour [1972-1974] I think that I probably had more contact with them on the analytical side. I had a slightly higher position in terms of my level in the Political Section. I'll give you an example of that.

Toward the end of my second tour in Saigon [1972-1974] and after the Accords on Vietnam had

been in place for a year, we had seen the collapse of the ICCS and the resumption of this relentless buildup by the North Vietnamese. They began to pave parts of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, put steel-truss bridges on it, and installed an eight-inch pipeline or something like that to bring fuel down to South Vietnam to supply the trucks that were going to drive over the improved bridges and macadamized roads. I had a strong feeling, shared by Harry Sizer, a Political Officer in the Internal Unit of the Political Section, that North Vietnam was not going to wait very long before they brought the hammer down on South Vietnam. Remember, this was after the Accords were signed in January, 1973. The North Vietnamese saw the weaknesses in South Vietnam after the American withdrawal. They also saw that the ICCS was not going to be around to notice what they were doing in any meaningful way.

The North Vietnamese were also looking at the U.S. domestic scene. By this time the Watergate affair had begun to influence their thinking in a most important way. They saw that the Nixon administration was increasingly crippled by the Watergate controversy. There were a lot of smart guys in Hanoi.

I advocated, and finally got approval for compiling an Airgram, a "think piece" on the intentions of the North Vietnamese. I got seven people in the Mission to contribute to it, including myself, of course, as one of them. Another of the contributors was Harry Sizer, the other Political Officer in the Internal Affairs Unit. Another contributor was Frank Snapp, the chief CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] analyst on North Vietnam at the time, who later wrote the book, "Decent Interval." An officer in the DAO [Defense Attaché Office] also contributed to it. We arranged to have a couple of other people contribute who were well known in the Embassy as North Vietnam watchers. We wrote seven, separate pieces to address the question of whether we thought that North Vietnam would launch a full-scale offensive within the next six months in an attempt to end the war. This six months period we addressed ended on June 30, 1974.

The Airgram finally went out to the Department of State in January, 1974, so this analysis covered the period from January to June, 1974. I felt very strongly that somebody ought to be saying something about this. Maybe it was being said elsewhere, but I didn't know it. I was really delighted that Airgram went out. Not everybody agreed with it, but at least I had my say.

I found that Airgram last week in the documentation that we were going over as a part of the declassification program in the Department, the so-called Freedom of Information program. It was kind of fun to see it in the files of the Department and to recall what it had said. Five of the seven contributors to this Airgram said, "No, there won't be a North Vietnamese general offensive during the next six months" that is, before June 30, 1974. Two of us, Harry Sizer and I, said, "Yes, there will be a North Vietnamese general offensive within the next six months." In that sense Harry Sizer and I were wrong, (by about a month) and the other five were right. However, only two of the seven contributors said that the North Vietnamese would not conduct a general offensive at any foreseeable time. Of course, the five of us who said that the North Vietnamese would attack, but only differing on the time frame, were right in that regard. So, if it cared, Washington could have known that 5 of 7 analysts in Saigon were predicting a major NVA offensive.

Frank Snapp, who wrote the book, "Decent Interval," and who took credit for having foreseen

the North Vietnamese general offensive, was one of those who said the North Vietnamese wouldn't attack. He said that they were too much involved in the reconstruction of North Vietnam, they had taken too many casualties, and all of the efforts going on along the Ho Chi Minh Trail were preparatory and contingency efforts. He felt that they were not going to attack, in any near time-frame.

That kind of analytical reporting, with the implications for policy in it, is among the hardest things that the Foreign Service has to do. This is partly because of time. You are always reporting the "here and now." We had to report on the ICCS, on what the Vietnamese Senate was saying about the Paris Accords, on President Thieu's most recent speech. That's why I remember that Airgram so well and for many years afterwards, because it was sent to the Department. I was very pleased that it was submitted, because it was not an easy thing to do.

Q: Now regarding reporting on the ICCS. Was this a "touchy" issue?

DUNLOP: Yes, it was, although a lot of great reporting was done, and I've seen some of that recently. In anticipation of the signature of the Paris Accords on Vietnam, the Department prepared a list of 100 Foreign Service Officers who had formerly served in South Vietnam and asked them to accept short assignments back to that country for periods of up to six months of TDY [Temporary Duty]. The idea was that they would go back into areas that they may have been familiar with. The purpose was to track what was going on. When this program was announced at a staff meeting, I thought that this was going to create chaos. These officers would hardly have gotten off the airplane in Saigon and unpacked their bags before it would be time for them to return to their posts of assignment. The arrangement was that they would not be replaced in their posts of assignment and would have their TDY time in Vietnam added to their tours of duty wherever they were assigned in the world. Actually, these FSO's came out and by and large did a super job. About 44 FSO's were initially assigned back to Vietnam. Of these, about 10 were assigned to the Embassy, and eight more were assigned to each of our Consulates General in Da Nang, Nha Trang, Bien Hoa, and Can Tho. There were two other groups of FSO's who returned to Vietnam later on for similar periods of TDY.

For example, Dick Teare and Jim Mack were among those who returned to Vietnam in the first group. John Helble and Steve Johnson came back to organize U.S. Mission support for the ICCS. (John Helble has commented extensively on this period in another interview in this Foreign Service Oral History.) Jim Mack was one of the officers who went back up to Nha Trang, where he had previously served. Dick Teare initially served in Bien Hoa and later in Saigon. We had a special unit in the Political Section set up under FSO Roger Kirk, a superb senior officer, now retired. He was very valuable in commenting on ICCS reporting. He ought to write a book about it. Maybe he has. These guys did wonderful reporting on the Indonesians and the Canadians in the ICCS, who were trying, at least. The Poles and Hungarians did what they could to sabotage the effort, and we learned of this, too.

Later on, the Iranians replaced the Canadians. The Canadians saw this developing chaos in the ICCS and bailed out. This made the Department of State furious, but I understand the Canadian decision. The Canadians said that this was not only a catastrophe in the making but was a catastrophe actually happening. They said that they didn't want to be part of any sham. So we

persuaded the Iranians to replace the Canadians on the ICCS.

Q: What was the reaction to the developments within the ICCS? I assume that we were reporting what was coming out. Did you feel any inhibitions on reporting on this?

DUNLOP: Well, the reporting on the ICCS went to the Department. I've seen the results of it, much or even all of which I saw at the time. No, I don't think that there were any inhibitions on reporting on it. However, I don't think that anybody in Washington wanted to pay any attention to it in any policy sense, because it was on failure and Kissinger and Nixon were committed to making the Accords a success.

You would have to talk to specific people in this area. Retired Ambassador Bob Miller would be a good person to talk to on Vietnam in general. Bob, I believe, was the head of the Vietnam Task Force in the Department during this time. Bob was a very well informed, balanced guy who would have welcomed the challenge of reporting on the implementation of the Paris Accords, "warts and all." He saw these reports and probably experienced a lot of frustration in trying to get them factored into policy thinking.

However, who was making policy on Vietnam? Wasn't the whole process getting out of control in Washington? The ability of anybody in Washington to do anything about Vietnam was diminishing day by day.

Q: Did you understand what was happening in connection with the Watergate affair at that time?

DUNLOP: Well, I think not at first, at least. In the 1972 presidential elections, President Nixon [the Republican candidate] triumphed over Senator McGovern [the Democratic candidate]. A lot of us in the Embassy in Saigon were really glad about that.

Q: I think that most of us probably "leaned" toward the Democrats. However, I voted for President Nixon.

DUNLOP: Well, those were the times which made you change your outlook. Personally, I also voted for Nixon. I think that most people that I knew voted for Nixon. I think that is probably true but I really have no basis for saying that. I just believe this was the case.

The period between the presidential elections in November, 1972, to Nixon's resignation from the presidency in August, 1974, was about 21 months. Nixon resigned from the presidency after I returned to Washington. I think that the Watergate affair must have become increasingly a weight on our minds. Especially in the spring of 1974, when our support -- logistical support -- for the RVN was being slashed in Congress and Nixon was more and more helpless. We came to believe, as I've said before, that the North Vietnamese must be licking their chops, as indeed they were.

Ambassador Bunker, of course, kept a stiff upper lip. Then, of course, he was replaced during that period of time by Ambassador Graham Martin, who was going to play the role of Horatio at

the bridge.

Q: Were you in Saigon when Ambassador Martin took over?

DUNLOP: Yes.

Q: Had you heard about Ambassador Martin before he arrived in Saigon? When did he arrive in Saigon?

DUNLOP: I'm pretty vague on that, but he probably arrived in the spring or summer of 1973. I think that he had been Ambassador to Vietnam for a year when I left Saigon in 1974. Then he continued for another eight months or so before the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam. I was working for a superb officer, FSO Al Francis, who had worked with Ambassador Martin in Bangkok. So my views of Martin before he arrived in Saigon were largely framed by what Al Francis told me. Al used words and terms like "formidable," "steel-trap mind," "miracle worker," a "consummate bureaucratic infighter," "ruthless with people that he felt were under-achievers," and "dedicated" to describe Martin.

Q: Yes, but he also was not "negative."

DUNLOP: No. Not "negative" in the sense of "small minded," "mean," "malicious," or "nasty." Ambassador Bunker had this old-school, Vermont, gentlemanly aura about him, which was all reflective of who he was. I'm sure that Ambassador Bunker could get mad as hell. I'm told that he could tell dirty jokes, although I can't imagine that! Somebody told me the other day, "Boy, did you ever hear Ambassador Bunker tell all those dirty jokes?"

Q: I can't imagine.

DUNLOP: I said, "No, I never heard him tell dirty jokes." My friend said, "Well, he was good at it." I said, "Well, I missed it." That's one thing that I missed in my Vietnam experience.

Graham Martin was a street smart, North Carolina guy who came up in the WPA [Works Progress Administration, a creation of President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the 1930's]. He was something like President Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon Johnson also came to Washington to serve in the WPA. Martin and Johnson had learned all of the tricks of bureaucratic street fighting.

Then Martin had gone on to have a very distinguished career. He had been Ambassador to Italy and Thailand, where Al Francis worked for him. That was when we were basing B-52 intercontinental bombers in Thailand, under agreements reached with the Thai Government. This was an unheard of concession by a Thai Government. Over the centuries it had been known for keeping foreigners out of its affairs.

Well, Martin arrived in Saigon with this reputation. Al Francis was one of the officers in the Mission whom Martin trusted. Because Al liked and trusted me, I guess he gave me a good reference to Martin because I saw Ambassador Martin quite a lot. Martin would call me up. It

was always quite a jolt when I would get a phone call, saying that Ambassador Martin would like to see me. I would go up to his office. He would have some question about reporting and all of that. As I saw him, Ambassador Martin was never a mean spirited man. He never seemed to take pleasure in demeaning people, which is sometimes done by people holding great power and authority. He wasn't a "warm, fuzzy", he was a "cool, prickly" type of person. I was always glad when he called me but also kind of glad when I got back to my office and that nothing had gone wrong in my meeting with Ambassador Martin.

Ambassador Martin was very interested in the reporting of the warts. That is, bad things happening. This is not the image that he may have with many people. For example, the disastrous failure of the ICCS. The Vietnamese commander of IV Corps [that is, the area South of Saigon], as I mentioned before, was corrupt to his toenails, to a point where this situation was actually impacting on the ability of the Vietnamese Government to function in that area.

During those months FSO Ken Quinn produced a very interesting series of reports. I think that they impressed Ambassador Martin. They certainly impressed me. Quinn was a colleague of ours who has gone on to be the Director of the Executive Secretariat [S/S] of the Department. Ken was a relatively junior officer in those days down in the Mekong Delta area. Ken began to interview refugees who at that time had begun to stream over the border from Cambodia into South Vietnam. They were telling utterly horrendous tales of slaughter that were so far beyond what anybody had heard previously that he encountered a rather incredulous audience for his reports. However, Ken was meticulous. He took time to cross-check these reports.

These reports turned out to be the first accounts of Khmer Rouge slaughters. The Vietnamese had a word for them. They called these incidents pick axe murders, because pick axes were used to kill people. These murders were mainly directed against Buddhist temples and priests at that time. At least, they were one of their earliest targets. These Khmer Rouge units would come into a village and slaughter the Buddhist priests in front of the horrified eyes of the village populace, who would then think that maybe this was not a good place to live in.

Ambassador Martin was very supportive of that kind of reporting. If that was what was happening, it was what he wanted to hear about. Of course, I guess that he felt that these reports might help him back in Washington. Ambassador Martin had lost a son in South Vietnam. Whether he was his only son or not, I don't know. Martin had other children. The loss of his son was something that affected Ambassador Martin very deeply. I would expect that to be true of most people.

Some people have said that the death of his son gave Ambassador Martin an ideological commitment to success in South Vietnam. He may have thought, "My son will not have died in vain." This may have kept Ambassador Martin on that bridge which he was defending almost alone at the end [in 1975]. He is said by many people to have stayed in Saigon longer than he should have. I was not in Saigon at the end, so I simply cannot speak to that point. I knew people who would say that and I knew people who would say something else. I had left Saigon in June, 1974, some 10 months before the final collapse in April, 1975. Ambassador Martin was certainly determined to do everything that he could to keep intact the commitment to South Vietnam which the United States had made. He failed in this effort. The North Vietnamese knew it. When

they became convinced of it, they came down on South Vietnam like wolves on the fold.

Q: When did you leave Saigon?

DUNLOP: I left Saigon in June, 1974. I always seemed to make June my departure or arrival month. I guess that's the way the Foreign Service works.

Q: So you left in June, 1974.

DUNLOP: I left with two children. I arrived with one child and left with one more.

Q: Now, when you left Vietnam, from your point of view where did you think that South Vietnam was headed?

DUNLOP: I was very pessimistic. I had participated in writing this Airgram on future prospects a few months before, to which I have already referred. My contribution to it had said that North Vietnam was acutely aware of the increasing debility of the Nixon administration in the United States and showed every sign of preparing to exploit it, as soon as they had the right number of tanks and 130 mm artillery pieces in place. After September, 1973, the United States was prohibited under the Case-Church amendment to a Defense Department appropriation bill from using our armed forces in combat in Southeast Asia. Even more, we seemed unable to do something to replenish the supplies and thereby the morale of the South Vietnamese Army. By that time we had ample reports that the South Vietnamese Army was beginning to understand what was in store for them and what they had to face without what they had known before in terms of American support. At least, American support at the level of what had been provided at the time of the North Vietnamese Easter offensive in 1972. Nothing that I learned when I got back to Washington convinced me to the contrary.

FRANK N. BURNET

**Political Advisor, Commander in Chief Pacific Command (CINPAC)
Washington, DC (1966-1967)**

**Province Advisor
Bien Hoa (1967-1969)**

**Intelligence Analyst, Southeast Asia, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1971-1975)**

Frank N. Burnet was born in New York in 1921. He entered the Foreign Service in 1954 and served in the Philippines, Thailand, Laos, the East Asia Bureau, Taiwan, and Washington, DC as the Department of State political advisor to CINPAC (1966-1967), and as a province senior advisor in Vietnam at Bien Hoa (1967-1969). He was interviewed in 1990 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: You came to a really rather unusual assignment, but very pertinent to what you were doing. You were transferred to CINCPAC in Honolulu from 1966 to '67, where you were the Deputy Political Advisor. Could you explain what this meant and who were some of the personalities you were dealing with at the time?

BURNET: CINCPAC had a vast military staff. There must have been thousands. I've never been in such a place before. It was kind of a mini-Pentagon. All of the G-numbered staff, the G-1, G-2, G-3, all the way up to G-7, -8 and so on. All presided over by the Commander in Chief Pacific CINCPAC, who, at the time I was there, was Ulysses S. Grant Sharp.

I arrived there in 1966, and the air war in Vietnam was in progress. And one of Admiral Sharp's roles was to run the air war for the various staffs back in Washington. He took it very, very seriously.

Of course, I was kind of on the periphery of it, because, after all, I was the Deputy POLAD. But yet I regularly attended the briefing sessions that were held in the big briefing room daily for Admiral Sharp, so that I could see what was on his mind, what he was trying to accomplish, and perhaps finding out what we had accomplished.

You're right. It was more exposure to the counter insurgency type of conflict which I had seen on a smaller scale in Laos. But here is where it was being planned and especially the intensive air campaign in North Vietnam. And the interface, I think, between the diplomatic and the military was something to be observed here.

These briefings always included reports on the bombing of North Vietnam. U.S. planes inevitably flew up toward the China border. We had a really good Foreign Service officer, an old-timer, in Hong Kong, whose name escapes me at the moment. I'll think of it in a minute. He was Consul General.

Q: Was it Ed Rice?

BURNET: Yes, Ed Rice, an old China hand.

Q: He's a real old China hand.

BURNET: He's written a book about Mao Zedong. As a matter of fact, I saw in the recent months he's come out with another one.

In any event, he knew China. And of course he knew the whole history of Korea and what had happened there when U.S. forces wandered too close to the border. So he was, naturally and understandably, concerned that we were getting a little bit too close, too often, to the China border in our air operations over North Vietnam.

And so he would weigh-in, in his messages back to Washington, which always were tagged "CINCPAC for POLAD" or "CINCPAC," so that Admiral Sharp read a good deal of the messages coming out of that part of the world.

And one day, after several of these messages in which Consul General Rice had warned about flying too close, what might happen if there were an incident on the border involving our aircraft, and I suppose Admiral Sharp was under a good deal of pressure from Washington, he said, "God damn it, I hear about all I want to hear from Mr. Rice. You guys who are doing this briefing, now I don't want to hear any more of this stuff. Just keep it out of your briefing." He just laid down the law that he did not appreciate having to take advice from a diplomat at his own briefing. That made quite an impression on me and on members of his staff, too.

I would get a good idea from the back-and-forth between him and his staff at the briefing sessions what his role was, how he saw his role, and what he was trying to do and so on. It was a fascinating assignment.

Q: Who was the Political Advisor at that time?

BURNET: Bob Fearey.

Q: And how well did he work within this context?

BURNET: He worked very well indeed. I think Fearey enjoyed this. He saw his role as being very close to the Admiral and told me when I first arrived there that an awful lot of the work was going to be shoved off on me, because he, Bob, had to devote himself almost exclusively to the needs of the Admiral. And whenever the Admiral took these long trips through East Asia, he had to go with him, and that I would have to run the office by myself then.

There is an awful lot of staff work that goes on in a place like that. Every operation had to be planned as a staff paper, each one having at least two officers to bird-dog it. They had to get a chop from all the offices concerned. One of the chops was almost always the POLAD chop, particularly if the operation or project impinged upon an Asian country.

So many papers, and these included some of the intelligence missions that we were running in Korea, came across my desk. I would have two guys from the staff sit down in my office with their piece of paper, and their one job was to push that piece of paper through each office concerned. They had to tell me what the paper was about, what the operation was about, what it was trying to accomplish and so on. As I think about it I remember putting my chop, my OK, on the ill-fated mission of the USS Pueblo.

And I was supposed to see how it would fit as far as our foreign relations were concerned in that part of the world, whether there would be any problems with countries that we had good relations with and so on. That kept me pretty busy. There was a lot of this paperwork, beside, I was running around to meetings and attending briefings.

Q: You say Sharp was focusing on the air war. Talking about a worm's eye view, I was the equivalent to a Corporal in the Air Force in Korea during the war there. And actually my job was to listen to Soviet Air Force radio transmissions during the Korean War. But I was a college graduate, I looked at this appendage, which is Korea, with high mountains, not much forest, the

American Air Force had complete dominance over the thing and yet was unable to stop some very massive Chinese armies from being resupplied. And, as a Corporal, I said, "Gee, this Air Force really doesn't work very well as an instrument." And having known about the strategic bombing survey in Germany, which showed that the Air Force with all the impression of destruction, German production went up rather than down during this period.

BURNET: And it didn't destroy morale as they hoped it would.

Q: And you saw what we were doing in Laos, and you flew over and you saw this jungle and all. Wasn't everybody saying: "You know, this isn't working."?

BURNET: You just couldn't put that down. The problem came up again and again and again as to how effective we were with our air power. These things made some very deep impressions on me.

I remember how, to go back a moment, in Laos in the early years of the air war, we heard from our Air Attaché and from people who came up from Saigon, again and again, in messages coming out of MACV in Saigon, that what we had to do was to cut a particular LOC as they called it.

Q: Line of communication.

BURNET: Line of communication, Route Number Seven, which comes right straight in from North Vietnam into Northern Laos by the Plaine of Jars. We had a beautiful choke point, they told us, by a little village called on the map, Ban Ken. If we could get permission from Souvanna to bomb that bridge, we would create a choke point. Then the Vietnamese would not be able to bring their supplies and men into Laos, as we would cut their line of supply. It sounded reasonable.

By 1964 or so the relations between the U.S. and North Vietnam had gotten to the point where we were steadily increasing the pressure. Finally, MACV got an approval to bomb this bridge in the little village of Ban Ken in neutral Laos, which was going to cut the main route from North Vietnam and got permission from Souvanna. So the mission came along.... And Yankee team, or what was it called?

Q: Yankee Station.

BURNET: No, Yankee Station was where the Navy was in the Gulf. But we had another name, this code name misses me at the moment.

Q: Something about Tiger?

BURNET: No, this was before "Tiger Hound," which was a free bombing zone along the Ho Chi Minh trail in the Laos corridor. So they bombed it. They did a pretty good job of bombing this bridge. But do you know that within 12 hours the North Vietnamese trucks were successfully going around it, and within 24 hours they had started to rebuild the bridge. And very soon that

LOC was right back in commission again.

That made an indelible impression on me, that air power ain't gonna do it in this part of the world.

Q: It really doesn't do it most places.

BURNET: It didn't do it in Germany. But of course that happened again and again.

Q: But you're really talking to true believers, aren't you, when you're talking about proponents of air power.

BURNET: Absolutely. You haven't convinced them even to this day.

Q: Well then in POLAD, in the time you were there, were there any incidents that made Admiral Sharp pay more attention to the diplomatic warnings, or were there no responses from China?

BURNET: Fortunately nothing more than an endless series of "serious warnings." I think that Admiral Sharp probably got most of it when he went back to Washington. I'm afraid he didn't get much from us, from the two members of the State Department. Fearey was very, very... As a matter of fact, there was the story going around the staff at CINCPAC that the biggest hawk in the whole staff was Bob Fearey, who was a diplomat who should not have been a hawk but was. Some very responsible members of Admiral Sharp's staff told me they were greatly bothered by this.

Q: This often is the case. We had one interview with somebody who I think served under Sullivan and Godley and was quite unhappy about these... I can't think of his name, he was on the National Security Council at one time, I think.

BURNET: Not Holdridge? But Holdridge had a lot to do with the war in Laos under Kissinger on the NSC.

Q: But anyway who was really unhappy serving under these two men because he felt that they... I just looked it up and I think it was Lindsey Grant, but I'm not sure.

BURNET: He wasn't in Laos.

Q: Well, maybe it wasn't, it was somebody else in our interviews, but who really felt uncomfortable because he felt that diplomats became, and this had been noted other times, often become accessories, almost infatuated as by war, which is true often in Washington, by William Bundy and...

BURNET: You have those who are and those who are not. Those who are seem to forget they are diplomats and often defer to the military. My impression is that a good example of those who are would be somebody like U. Alexis Johnson. And somebody who is not -- Marshall Green. Marshall Green was very much his own man anyway. I remember attending Foreign Service Day

several years ago which featured an address by the new chief of the NSC, Colonel Bud McFarlane. He made a strong pitch for continuing covert operations. A large part of the audience applauded. I noticed Ambassadors Green and Johnson sitting together as they are old friends. Only Ambassador Johnson applauded. But I think a strong case can be made that over the years since WW II, the State Department has not served the country well by its policy of working so closely with the military. In most cases, we would be far better off if the Department had stuck to its own diplomatic, peaceful, proposals for consideration by the White House instead of serving as the handmaiden of the military as we have done so much of the time.

Q: Is there anything else about the relations within CINCPAC? Did you find that there was a difference dealing with the Air Force and the Navy on matters you were concerned with, particularly on the war?

BURNET: Let me go back to Laos. There was a great deal of difference. Most of our difficulties were with the Navy. I don't know what the problems was. Was it training? Was it inadequate briefing? Whatever it was, we had constant problems with Navy aircraft bombing the wrong targets in Laos, and bombing, in particular, one village.

You could almost spit from this village to the Mekong River. And anybody who knows *anything* about Laos knows that any population living within sight of the Mekong River, certainly, and even beyond that, is in friendly territory. But the Navy planes were forever bombing this friendly town.

And we had to go down there several times to give some compensation to poor villagers who had been bombed by U.S. aircraft. The Navy, as we would say in those days, "screwed up" more often than the Air Force did. So it was a problem with the Navy. I recall that in one of his famed cables, Ambassador Sullivan wrote, "Tecumseh weeps..!" referring to several of these Navy screw-ups.

Q: How about in CINCPAC, did you see this?

BURNET: We saw an awful lot of the Navy, but I didn't have that impression. You were asking to what extent Sharp was impressed by or listened to the diplomats. I think that the visitors who came through there, and there were many, I think he gave them a good hearing, and I think he was impressed by them. And of course he read most of the diplomatic cable traffic.

He was always very friendly toward me and didn't show any impatience which he exhibited with his own staff in that one instance that we talked about. My impression is that he wasn't totally out of control as far as civilian control of the military was concerned.

Q: Well, for a Chinese language officer, your specialty... I'm talking about your next assignment. You went to Bien Hoa from 1967 to '69. Didn't you feel you'd had enough of this? Or did you have any choice in the matter?

BURNET: Well, I didn't really like the assignment, for one thing, in CINCPAC. I was there for a year, and it had its difficulties, mostly personal. And, I guess I thought that there was a

contribution I could make in Vietnam. They were putting pressure on us, as you know, to go to Vietnam, and there were inducements. So the totality of it convinced me that I should go out there and have that experience. So I went and got to Saigon just a week before Tet.

Q: What happened to you during Tet? This would be Tet, January '68.

BURNET: I got there just before our new year, in December of '67.

Q: Where were you, and what was your experience during Tet?

BURNET: You know there was a holding hotel for U.S. civilian personnel there, the old Oscar Hotel on Nguyen Hue Street in Saigon. I arrived there with a group of other FSO's who had been in training with me in Washington. We were awaiting assignment. In the meantime, we were sort of getting acquainted with Saigon, going out to see friends, or out to eat, maybe, in a restaurant.

But to get back to Tet. I remember very distinctly in the days before Tet eating in the so-called mess hall, and as we went through the line, seeing notices up on a bulletin board saying: We've received intelligence that there are enemy forces trying to penetrate the area. We expect some activity over Tet, and we should all be very cautious and careful. We all read it, commented a little bit about it, then forgot about it.

Went to bed that night, and I was awakened early in the morning. I don't know whether you know this particular hotel. The Oscar had a wonderful roof on top. You could see the whole city of Saigon.

Q: Yes, I think I used to go to movies up there.

BURNET: Yes, like the Brinks had movies on the roof. I don't know, maybe they did at the Oscar.

Q: Well, maybe not. Maybe it was the Brinks.

BURNET: Well, anyway, it was a great place to see Saigon. Every night you'd see the flares hanging in the sky and an occasional burst of something or other. So we had been up there as usual the end of the evening to see the sunset, talked to one's neighbors, and then retired.

I went to bed and, realizing this was Tet, awakened about two or three in the morning to one hell of a racket. I thought, "Oh, this is just more of the same fireworks going on in celebration of Tet."

Then I heard it more and more, and it sounded more persistent. And I said, "My God, there's a coup. There's a coup."

So I put some clothes on and went up on the roof. And it seemed like a good part of Saigon was ablaze, with tracers being fired all over the place, and loud explosions -- just all hell breaking loose. And I thought to myself, "Coup. No question about it." You see in Laos we had had two

full-fledged coups in three years.

Of course I didn't know until the next day what had actually happened. In the morning we watched reinforcements landing by helicopter on the Embassy roof. We were told to stay in quarters. Nevertheless, we slipped out and went up to the Embassy a few blocks away just to see what had gone on. And it was a real mess, really torn apart. I could see where the VC blew the wall and forced entry and got the gist of what had happened from some marines on guard. Were you there in then?

Q: No I wasn't. I came a year later.

BURNET: About a day or two later, I got a telephone call from somebody, I had no idea who he was. He said, "This is John Vann. I need somebody up here in my provinces. Would you like to come up and work for me?" Did you ever meet Vann?

Q: I think I met him very briefly.

BURNET: Well, he talked just like this [in a high-pitched, commanding voice]. And I said, "Sure, I'd love to. I want to get out of here and get to doing something."

He said, "Ok, I'm coming down tomorrow, and I've got an appointment or two in Saigon. I'll see you at such and such a place and we'll get together." So we met and we talked, and we went to his girlfriend's restaurant. Did you read *A Bright Shining Lie*?

Q: Yes, I did.

BURNET: That's quite a book.

Q: By Robert Shaplen. [NEIL SHEEHAN]

BURNET: No. This is *A Bright Shining Lie* by... It's a name like that, but it's not quite the name. He got the...

Q: Pulitzer Prize.

BURNET: Yes, and a national book award. In any event, his girlfriend, Lee, was running a restaurant and we went over there and had something to eat. And we agreed that I'd like to work for him and he'd like to have me work for him. So he said, "I'll send my chopper down such and such a date." So he did. Vann was then Deputy for CORDS 2 for Military Region III. CORDS stands for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. This was a civil-military pacification army formed in November 1966, headed by Ambassador Komer, who was officially "Deputy to COMUSMACV for CORDS."

In the midst of all the battle in Saigon going on, air-strikes and all, his chopper flew into the Free World Compound where I met Vann's pilot and, without stopping the engine or the rotors, took off with him for Bien Hoa. What did they call that place where the military headquarters was

located in Saigon? Free World Compound? Something like that.

John Vann's usual procedure with a new man was to send him to the four provinces surrounding the province that he was going to be assigned to, to live with the Advisory Teams there for a few days and see what their problems were and so on.

Well, this was the period a few days after Tet. Everybody had just been hit and they were just groggy. Each province I went to was the same story. These guys had just been knocked over by the Tet attack, so they were in kind of rough shape. I heard all of their experiences and learned a lot about this kind of war in a short time. I also learned the fellows in these outposts are uncomfortable if you are not carrying a weapon. Later on, I kept an M-1 carbine in the back of my car for only this purpose. I never had to fire it.

Q: Bien Hoa, for the sake of this thing, is located where?

BURNET: It's about 20 miles northwest of Saigon. So I stayed a few days in Bien Hoa, in John Vann's headquarters, and got assigned to the province of Binh Duong, which is still further to the northwest of Bien Hoa, toward the Cambodian border.

I went to four or five provinces around Binh Duong Province, including Loc Ninh Province, which is right up against the Cambodian border.

A good friend of mine, a Foreign Service officer named Tom Barnes, was the Province Senior Advisor (PSA) there. (This is what I was being trained to become, a Province Senior Advisor.) I visited with him for several days.

Tom was an intrepid sort of guy, who was in Saigon at Tet, and he had managed to get back to his own province after Tet broke out. He was a Vietnamese-speaker and he decided that he had to get himself back where his Advisory Team was.

I think he drove. He drove through all of that fighting between Saigon and the Cambodian border. He drove by himself and managed to get back to his own province. It took him several days, but he did it.

Anyway, as I was saying, he's very intrepid. He showed me around his province, including a trip, just the two of us, up to the Michelin plantation, which is a rubber plantation on the Cambodian border. I don't know what he expected to see there, but we just went up there.

We saw absolutely nobody, but yet he had said, "Frank, whenever I take these trips, I just take all my personal I.D. off of my person. If we get captured, we will pretend we are French and not American. The chances are the VC will then let us go."

So we got into his Jeep, which I noticed had sandbags on the floor, and drove over terrible roads almost due north of the capital of his province to the Cambodian border. Just to look around.

Of course I thought, "Good God, are we going to get ambushed? Are we going to get blown up

by a mine? What's going to happen?"

Well nothing happened. I don't know whether he was testing me, or what, but there was something rather scary about going up that lonely road with not a friend or foe in sight. But I wasn't going to let him get me. That was probably a dumb thing for me to do, but I did it.

I got assigned to Binh Duong and became the Deputy Province Senior Advisor to Colonel Bud Kitts who had been there a year or so. Eventually I got reassigned, after about six months there, to Bien Hoa where I became the Province Senior Advisor.

Q: Well let's talk about Binh Duong a bit. What did you do? You talk about Province Senior and Deputy Senior Advisor, what does this mean?

BURNET: Well, we were running a combined American military and civilian staff comprising an Advisory Team. What we were doing was trying to backstop the Vietnamese provincial military forces and civilian administration. The Vietnamese military's job was, of course, to protect the people of the province. All under the leadership of the Province Chief, who was a Vietnamese military man. Under the Province Chief, you also had all of the usual civil services of government: utilities, transportation, police, welfare, you name it, the whole gamut of services, which people need to survive.

So we were to backstop the provincial military forces and the local government, down to the village level in all areas: security, agriculture, home economics, information programs, even CIA. We had all these. It was a polyglot mix of personnel from various agencies. In Binh Duong I worked for the PSA who was a full Colonel. In Bien Hoa, I was the PSA and my deputy was a Lt. Colonel. This was part of Vann's idea to interlard civilian and military.

With the American input, particularly matériel input, the idea was to try to turn the situation around, provide some security in the villages and the hamlets, create a zone or area of security, and gradually push the VC out. Of course it was a losing proposition from the word go. But that was, in effect, what was going on when I arrived in Binh Duong. I soon learned that this province had been the scene of heavy fighting in the Iron Triangle, part of Michelin, and the village of Ben Suc.

It was an eye-opener for me in many, many ways. On the one hand it seemed like: Hey, there doesn't seem to be a war going on here. Then the war would suddenly erupt, somewhere in the province, usually at night. We had to get out quickly and see that the Vietnamese took care of casualties, provided sheltered, distributed food, etc.

I remember one night, about two or three weeks after Tet, the Province Chief got intelligence that we were going to be attacked that evening. We were, what, 30 miles maybe, from Saigon, and we were going to come under attack. The Province Chief, by the way, was Colonel Ly Tong Ba whom John Vann tried unsuccessfully to get to attack the VC with his APC's in the disastrous battle of Ap Bac in 1963 and who later committed suicide when surrounded by a NVN division in the final days of the war.

The intelligence was that there was a VC unit that was going to attack the Province Chief's headquarters. Word went out to all of the members of his staff and our advisory team to sort of circle the wagons. We were going to go to the Province Chief's headquarters, which was a pretty solid French-built house, and set up a perimeter defense and slug it out.

I thought, "God, how, Frank, you in the Foreign Service, a diplomat, did you get involved in a situation like this?"

We were there one whole night. And the attack did come. It didn't amount to much, but I remember in the process some heavy firing coming in our direction. It seemed like it was pretty big stuff to me. I was told it was .50-caliber.

I thought, "I'm at the receiving end of this. What does this guy want to shoot at me for?" A .50-caliber machine gun barking at you from out of the blackness of the jungle sort of concentrates your mind pretty quick.

So that was one of my early experiences as a Deputy Province Senior Advisor in Binh Duong, in a situation where we felt we were going to be broadly assaulted by the VC. Fortunately, they didn't really come very close. But they did come into other parts of town there. Well, there were a few occasions like that from then on, even in Bien Hoa. We had an assault by a large VC force right in the main streets of Bien Hoa during the time I was there.

Q: Looking at this the first time, were you concerned, because you came out of -- not just looking at this as a military problem, but a political problem -- that duplicating this, you really sound like you're describing a colonial situation. I almost can see you in your pith helmet and your swagger stick, going around and hoping the natives will do better, but you can always intercede to take care of it. And of course all sorts of things go with this. We're trying to make these people stand on their own and all this. But are we cutting them off at the knees by doing this type of thing?

BURNET: I must admit that at that time I really thought that what we were doing was the right thing and would work. I thought that if we could get all of these economic processes going, this thing might just survive by gathering its own momentum. That the VC and their effort would sort of fall by the wayside, as security improved and people began to have an investment in their homes, business, schools, etc. That this whole mechanism might just sort of slowly creak forward. But it never really worked out that way. It never did. Even when I left Vietnam in '69, I remember thinking that on the long haul it just might catch on.

Q: I came in '69, and I felt we were kind of making it. Things seemed to be jelling. It wasn't that bad.

BURNET: Well, I think it's a question of the spin you put on it. I mean, after all, there are lots of people looking at Tet: those who say that it was a terrific defeat; others who say that it was a great victory. Which was it?

Q: And you can argue it either way.

BURNET: You can argue it pretty well either way. But I would argue that it was a great defeat, because it was a watershed and a turning point. I think that they achieved a great deal in that effort, and certainly on the home front it had a tremendous impact.

I left Vietnam thinking that it was an awfully bloody way to do things and awfully expensive. And I just hated to see the civilians chewed up the way they were being chewed up. But you accept a certain amount of the inevitability of all this.

Q: How about when you went to Bien Hoa, what were you doing there, and what was the situation there?

BURNET: It was my job to run the CORDS program, the counterinsurgency program in Bien Hoa, under John Vann's overall leadership in MR III, whose headquarters was just a half a mile or so down the street from mine.

I took over a team [Advisory Team 98] of about 200 individuals, who were both military and civilian. You had AID civilians, CIA civilians, Agriculture, USIA, you name it, and U.S. military. I think I had one Foreign Service officer--a junior officer on his first assignment -- with me who was a District Senior Advisor in Nhon Trach in the south.

We all had our assignments. Most of us had Vietnamese counterparts to "advise." We had a daily military situation briefing and a team briefing; I would take over on the latter. If there were assignments for the day, or some new guidance from Vann's headquarters, I would brief them to the whole team, most of whom would attend these daily briefings if they were in town. We were running this program under the general guidance of the Assistant for CORDS (in Vann's huge headquarters) in all of these various fields. There were a lot of administrative tasks involved, and I had to do a lot of moving around the province to visit all six District headquarters under my jurisdiction or to look at projects, often with the Province chief. Sometimes we slept over night in a hamlet to "prove" how safe it was.

Q: I wonder if you could talk a bit about John Vann -- how you observed him and his operating style. He's a figure of some interest to anybody dealing with Vietnam.

BURNET: John Vann was a phenomenon, no question about it. I knew, as soon as I met him, that he was a very high-powered guy, who was very dedicated, who thought we could win this damn thing if we could just get everybody pulling in the same direction and get the Vietnamese to fight their own war. That was his prime objective.

You couldn't help but be impressed when you heard him because immediately upon hearing him speak you felt his dedication and conviction. What he said, as far as that was concerned, seemed to me to make a lot of sense.

Yet he was, let's face it, a military man -- he'd been bred into the military, he lived and breathed it -- so that he barked. He didn't have anything like a conversational tone, like you and I are conducting here. He *spoke in a very high-pitched voice*, and you were very clear and had no

question as to what he was trying to communicate. He was then a civilian working for AID, for CORDS, and at times he was very critical of US and GVN military and the way they were fighting the war.

Every month he would have an in-gathering of Province Senior Advisors from all over III Corps, which is the center section of Vietnam down toward the Delta covering areas north and south of Saigon. How many provinces would that be? About 11 or 12, something like that.

That was a very interesting session. It usually lasted all day and into the evening. Vann was very much in the fore and very much on the podium giving us the word: What we were doing right and what we were doing wrong, what we were going to try to do in the months ahead, and how we were going to improve this and improve that. And it was all very stimulating.

We had a very good get-together in the evening. Had a buffet dinner at Vann's house, sitting out in the back yard, lots of tables and so on. Here was a mix of mostly Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels, who were Province Senior Advisors in the other provinces, other civilians, Foreign Service officers like myself, maybe half a dozen or so. So it was an interesting mix of individuals.

There was a good feeling of morale and élan, we felt we were being well led and we knew what we had to do, and all we had to do was go out and do it. We felt what we were doing was at least as important as the main force war.

Q: How did you feel about reporting from the various provinces and all? Because there was this very fancy reporting: Is the village subdued? Is it friendly? Unfriendly? and so many points in between. We got very report-conscious, and we felt that if we made the right report, the war would be won. You always had to show progress. How did you feel about that?

BURNET: It was bad. I think I approached it with a certain amount of skepticism. This numbers-counting and head-counting, and counting the number of latrines that were dug and school houses that were built, and how many medical forays were made into this village and this hamlet and so on, and trying to add it all up and put a grade on it from A through D or F, according to the HES or Hamlet Evaluation System requirements, and measuring your security that way.

I was skeptical, but yet I went ahead and did it, and did it to the best of my knowledge. Where I saw things bad, I reported it bad. And when in doubt, I settled it in the direction of my doubts.

Q: Were you getting any feeling that there was pressure from somewhere to show progress? And if there was, where was it coming from?

BURNET: There definitely was that feeling that wanted you to show progress, particularly in these monthly sessions that we had, in our oral reports. We all had to make an oral report in front of Vann and the whole crowd and then there was a general discussion. I think there was a general tendency to make things look good. And maybe I was guilty of some of that, too. Probably was. Also on the monthly HES, as we called it, the Hamlet Evaluation Survey, do you remember that instrument?

Q: Yes, I do.

BURNET: Later on, when [William] Colby was the head of CORDS, through '69, he made a big thing of that. And there was a tremendous amount of pressure to get reporting from every hamlet in Vietnam. It wasn't so blatant that we would bend things in the direction of showing how we're winning the war. I never thought it was that blatant. But it was an undertone, it was there, it was present.

Of course we were just fooling ourselves. When you get down to it, when you finally turn to the peasant and ask him which way things are going, he will tell you what you want to hear. He will take a measure of you. You want it bad, you get it bad. You want it good, he'll give it to you good. So how good is it?

Q: This is how peasants survive through the centuries.

BURNET: Yes, it's survival, of course.

Q: How did you feel things were going when you left?

BURNET: I guess I thought that we were holding our own, and if we're lucky, this thing will catch on. And the sheer natural acquisitiveness of mankind is going to prove the edge, that the free Vietnam is going to win out over the other side, just through man's natural instincts, as this economy got developing. This is what I really thought.

I remember seeing Bill Colby at MACV headquarters in Saigon. We all had to have an exit interview with him when we left. And this is the way I talked to him about it. And he sort of nodded his head: yeah, yeah, yup. I think maybe he had other more immediate concerns on his mind.

Q: Well, I think this very much reflects an American approach to things. If you try hard enough and work hard enough, you can do it.

BURNET: That's right. But we were up against something quite new for us. Still, we should have known better. The French experience for one thing. But I was feeling pretty good about it, as I look back.

BURNET: In '71, I transferred to INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research], where they offered me a good position as Chief of the Southeast Asia branch, which I think suited me more. I could put some of these things to use that I had learned on the ground in Laos and Vietnam.

By that time, I felt that the war was really going badly for us. I was also getting exposed to a number of people in CIA and some of the people on my staff coming back from Vietnam, who by that time had even fresher experience than I had, saying that things were really going badly.

So we wanted to report this in our various products that we were putting out, intelligence briefs, etc., that things were going badly.

Q: Were you under any restrictions on your intelligence briefs, or could you report...?

BURNET: I had the feeling that we definitely were. It was mainly the spin or the slant. They couldn't argue with us too much about the nuts and bolts of something we were talking about, but we'd see our stuff edited so that the overall effect made it look better than it really was.

Q: So you would write it and then it would go up to be condensed and all to go to the Secretary.

BURNET: And sort of polished up.

Q: So-called polished up, which would usually...

BURNET: Put a better spin on it. Our cries of alarm were muffled. They weren't really turned upside down, but they were certainly muffled. I had the feeling that some of our people desperately wanted to make us look better than we were. This is getting into the early years of the Nixon Administration. So it was kind of tough sledding there for awhile, particularly with the young men working with me, who were even more convinced than I was that we were losing.

Q: These were usually people who had served there. Because at that time, when you're talking about Vietnam, you had a huge cadre of people who had Vietnamese experience.

BURNET: That's right, that's right. So I had several, all of whom had been in Vietnam.

Q: So thinking positively was not always the... It's easier to do it from the vantage point of Washington, instead of having had field experience. Were you there during the peace talks? Was this of any concern to INR as far as supplying information to...?

BURNET: We were pretty remote, it seems to me, because, don't forget, there was a Vietnam task force, which was run, as a matter of fact, by Bill Sullivan at this point. So the center of activity, the focus was on them. And they were running the show. But we would get tasked (to use that lovely phrase) to produce various pieces of paper, or bits of intelligence, or whatever, as was needed.

Q: So really you weren't as much a separate think tank as almost a staff job of supplying information for specific points.

BURNET: Yes, but we churned out an awful lot of stuff, particularly later on as Cambodia got hot and the war came to sort of a close there. There was a pretty heavy demand for information on what was going on, or what our opinions were.

Q: How much was our opening to the Peoples Republic of China coloring the way we were looking at Southeast Asia, at least from the intelligence point of view? Was this changing our attitude do you think? Were we beginning to rethink China at that point?

BURNET: I think that move was certainly afoot, but it really wasn't perceptible to us in the Southeast Asia branch of INR in those days.

Q: Were you there during the peace accords? I can't remember exactly when they...

BURNET: When Harriman went to Paris and so on, was that in '71? Yes, I was in INR then, sure. We were pretty much out of it. Although, as I say, we would, through the task force, get assignments laid on us for this or that.

Q: Well you left INR in 1975. What was the situation? Do you remember how you saw things when you left there? Had it fallen apart by that time?

BURNET: It hadn't quite, because, don't forget, this was January of '75. You see, it didn't fall apart until June. But I had an official trip back to Vietnam in February '72, when we were expecting a big offensive. Were you there then?

Q: No, no, but I...

BURNET: Well anyway, you heard about it. And so I had an extensive trip going all through I Corps and II Corps. By that time, Tom Barnes was sort of a number one assistant to John Vann in II Corps, and he took me around with him on a visit by helicopter to all of the large western provinces in II Corps, like Kontum and Pleiku. Things looked ok then. But Vann, a few months later, had command in a terrific battle in Kontum and held it together for a little while before he was killed in a helicopter crash.

But when I went out to China and left Southeast Asia branch of INR, I felt that the dominoes were falling and things were slipping out of our control. I didn't think that our Vietnamese could hack it under the conditions in which we had left it, the Vietnamization and so on. I really didn't think it would hold together. But not for lack of equipment but for lack of will and leadership.

Q: Was this feeling pretty well shared by those that you were working for?

BURNET: No, it wasn't. I think my chiefs wouldn't have shared it. But the working level shared it, and our counterparts, too, at CIA, we all felt it -- kind of an underground feeling.

LAWRENCE H. HYDLE
Consular Officer
Saigon (1966-1967)

Political Officer
Saigon (1968-1972)

Consular Officer

Bien Hoa (1973)

Ambassador Lawrence H. Hyde was born in Indiana in 1940. He went to the Occidental College and graduated in 1960. He also went to Columbia University. Before entering the Foreign Service, Hyde was a newspaper reporter in 1961, and from 1962 to 1965, he was a radio writer. He entered the Foreign Service in 1965. His posts include Vietnam, Ireland, Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Kuwait. Ambassador Hyde was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1994.

Q: *What were you doing in Vietnam?*

HYDLE: Initially, I was a consular officer, Consular section but that lasted only 6 weeks or so. Then I went into a vacancy in the political section. The political section at the time was very large. I would say there were about 20 people, it must have been the largest in the world. I was the biographic officer, the full time biographic officer keeping track of all the Vietnamese personalities.

Q: *'66 is the time -- what was the political situation in Vietnam?*

HYDLE: We were in the midst of a big American buildup. The political situation was that Thieu and Ky, there was a military junta more or less led by Thieu, who was not only the Chief of State, and Nguyen Cao Ky was the Prime Minister. The situation was a little more stable than it had been in the period after Ngo Dinh Diem was killed. Then, as you may recall, there was a lot of turbulence but things were stabilizing at this point.

Q: *At this point, how did you view the Vietnamese government?*

HYDLE: I thought it was kind of a weak government, not very effective but I felt sure that it was better than anything that the communists might offer as an alternative. I wanted us to shore them up and strengthen them better.

Q: *How did you feel about, you know we've talked about shoring them up and all of that, but there's the problem that the more one gets in there, the more we get involved, the weaker it makes it, the more dependent -- was that a concern at that time?*

HYDLE: Yes, it was. I thought it was a dilemma, but at that time the US was encouraging the South Vietnamese government to develop its own institutions -- not only militarily. The government infrastructure in the countryside, and especially the political infrastructure, there was a push for a presidential and a congressional election which culminated in late 1967.

Thieu ran as president and Ky as vice president. They won an election but I think it was a pretty fair election. They had only 35 to 40% of the votes but they had about 7 opponents who, Vietnamese style, refused to give way to each other and split the votes. They were able to win.

There was also a lower and upper house that were freely elected toward the end of my final tour there. I felt that was good. I felt that would strengthen the government among the South

Vietnamese people, and also would make the South Vietnamese government more acceptable to the American public and Congress, whose support, of course, was needed for our own continued efforts there.

Q: How'd you work as a political officer and as a biographic officer?

HYDLE: Mostly I would just gather biographic information that came up about Vietnamese figures, file it and make reports if somebody needed to know something about some individual. As time went on, when the elections were coming up for example, I made it my business to learn more about the different political parties and the different new guys that were coming up. I did an analysis of the new lower house, it was a constituent assembly, as I recall its members -- their origins, their professions, their religions -- a sort of demographic analysis of these people. We did an airgram, as it was at the time, about 130 pages because there were 130 guys and each one got his own page.

Q: Did you find yourself working closely with the CIA? Or were they doing their thing and you were doing your thing. How did this work?

HYDLE: It wasn't that close. They were doing things separately. If I saw a report of theirs that I could use, of course I would file it and draw upon it.

Q: But you didn't find that CIA was somewhat a different operation?

HYDLE: Yes, they were on separate floors of the embassy.

Q: This is in the new embassy.

HYDLE: Well, it was during that time that we moved from the old embassy into the new embassy. I started out at the old one and then I moved to the new one in 1967 along with all of the other people.

Q: How was the political section organized? Who was the head of the political section?

HYDLE: When I first got there, as I recall it was Phil Habib, but the section was so large that there was also a deputy in the political section. I'm afraid I don't remember everybody. Sorry, Phil was the political counselor and Martin Herz was political counselor, and John Calhoun followed him eventually. The deputies, or the guys who actually ran the section most of the time, Tom Reichnaveil filled that role at one time; Galen Stone later and so forth. But I'm getting the dates a little confused because I was there for 2 tours.

Q: This is during the Johnson administration. Was there a sort of, in the political section did you feel any constraints? I mean biographic was a little bit neutral but still, within the section, did you feel any constraints about reporting?

HYDLE: Yes, this was something that bothered me a lot over the years. On the one hand I thought that the embassy was basically trying to make the South Vietnamese government look as

good as possible, to minimize critical reporting. On the other hand, I knew that there were opponents of the policy out there who wanted to be hypercritical of the South Vietnamese government and our effort there. The argument that the senior political section guys would make was that: "Yes, we realize how bad it is but if you write critical reports they'll be leaked and they'll be used against the policy." That was their rationale, anyway. Reports were continually massaged and changed around to make them seem less bad than they were.

Q: I can understand. This is true say in African nations and other places. For example, if you report on corruption this is part of life in many places. If one, not over-reports but just reports instances of this, it tends to get blown up and stops everything.

HYDLE: I've heard that argument before. I felt at the time, and I still feel, that it's our job to report objectively. It's the right thing to do. Also, you have to maintain some sort of reputation if everybody thinks that the embassy has gone to the tank for the local government, then eventually you disillusion everyone. So yes, I was constantly concerned about that kind of thing.

Q: What was some of the, at that time, our major concerns about the problems in Vietnam?

HYDLE: Corruption and inefficiency on the part of the South Vietnamese government and authoritarianism were some of the problems then.

I supported the main thrust of our policy. I volunteered to go there. I wanted us to win, wanted the South Vietnamese government to become better than it was. I wanted the South Vietnamese people to achieve democracy and development. I knew that the critics of the Vietnam War, for the most part, didn't care about that at all. All they wanted was either to get us out of there and just wash our hands of it; or in some cases, they were actively pro-Communist for some reason.

Q: Let's talk about this. Did you get any feel for how they operated or were they too removed?

HYDLE: I felt that Lodge had a good reputation because of his first tour there in 63, for being an independent guy, and then again in 65 to 67, but I didn't have a good feel for what he was. I think that maybe he was becoming a little disillusioned and was trying to find his way out by 1967. Things were just falling apart and he wasn't quite sure how to deal with it.

Bunker, of course, was a towering legend even before he came there. I always felt that he also wanted to emphasize the positive. The people around him also didn't want to tell him things. It's one thing if the ambassador knows what's going on and then he decides to spin it in a certain way. It's another thing when his senior staff people protect him from knowing what he needs to know.

I remember that we used to have, this is more my second tour, but the ambassador did try to keep in touch with the younger officers. He was always very nice to us, certainly, but you had the feeling that he too was sort of looking at the bright side and not ready to confront the problems.

Q: Were you getting a feel for the military situation, about how the ARVN, the army of the Republic of Vietnam, was doing?

HYDLE: At that time it seemed that they were gradually improving but I didn't know as much then as I did in my second tour about the ARVN. Generally this was a period -- things almost fell apart in 64, 65. In 66, mostly because of the enormous increase of the US presence, things were stabilizing and the ARVN was not falling apart. As I recall, it was really later that we got into a serious Vietnamization program and the capabilities of the ARVN became more important to everybody than they were at the time.

Q: Did you get out and around at all?

HYDLE: At that time I didn't get out that much but often we would have congressional CODELs or VIP delegations and I would be assigned to escort them around. So I did get out, occasionally, to different parts of the country.

Q: Here you were, a junior officer, first tour out there. There were a lot of other junior officers, many of them in CORPS and stuck out there, what were you getting from them, you know, they'd come into Saigon.

HYDLE: I think the basic difference between attitudes of the junior officers and the senior officers was that we were more focused on problems at the ground level. For example, senior officers would have counterparts who were Vietnamese officials. We would have counterparts who were Vietnamese politicians, labor union leaders, people who were more likely to tell us that things were not going well. We all would hear a lot of criticism of the course of events. We were cynical of this problem of reporting honestly. We knew the newspaper reporters that were covering, we'd hang out with them, but we weren't the same as anti-war activists in the US, although maybe the senior officers thought we were. They may have thought we were some kind of fifth column.

Q: Did you ever get that feeling that any of the senior officers were sort of, was there a real gap do you think?

HYDLE: Yes I would say that there was a significant gap along the lines that I was just describing.

Q: Do you have any examples of when they'd say that you just don't know enough, or something like that?

HYDLE: Oh yes, we would tell them how bad things were and they would say, "Hey, we read reports that you don't even read, and things are worse than you say but we can't say that because blah, blah, blah."

Q: There is this problem of understanding (1) what the mission is and how you work this, but also, how about the real cynicism? Do you think it developed a lot of cynicism, particularly among the junior officers?

HYDLE: Yes, it did.

Q: I'm just trying to get a feel for the flow of information. There must have been people coming out from Washington of all levels. Was this sort of the time to kind of unload on them?

HYDLE: We did that. I remember that in September, it was the Fall of 67, one of the people that I was assigned to escort was Roger Hilsman. Hilsman had been the director of the INR and then had resigned, more or less, or left. He was friendly with Bobby Kennedy. I believe he had already written his book, To Move a Nation, which was very critical of our Vietnam policy making.

I was assigned to escort him around. I took him to places like Bien Hoa near Saigon. John Paul Vann was the DEPCORDS as we called it, Deputy for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Developments Supports, the civilian pacification chief. Vann was a legend already because of his exploits as an army officer. Vann would brief him. Vann was a hero already to me at that time because he had been very honest about the shortcomings of the South Vietnamese. Also, he wanted not to drag down the policy and cause it to fail, but because he wanted it to succeed.

Q: How did Hilsman

HYDLE: I think he already had his views. For example, there was an election, the election that I was describing earlier, was coming up. Ambassador Bunker urged him to stay an extra day and watch the election. He didn't want to stay an extra day and watch because, I think, that would have conflicted with his agenda. He was then in the position of being basically against our policy.

Q: While you were there, the Tet business, were you there during that?

HYDLE: Not exactly. I actually left my first tour in December 67, during my first tour I had been learning Vietnamese at the embassy from a tutor that was paid for by FSI. I was doing pretty well, in fact, I picked up a lot of Vietnamese through a combination of learning that style and just listening to it all around me, talking to people whenever I could. I was going back to take more Vietnamese and to take the course, and then to come back to be an officer in the provincial reporting unit, which was a subunit of the internal unit of the political section.

So I left in December 67 and I was actually away in the US when the Tet offensive struck. I didn't really return to Vietnam until June of 68. But when I was back there, I was taking these courses and I was also speaking on Vietnam to audiences around the country.

Q: Talk a bit would you about your reception and how these -- you know, they were taking anybody who had been in Vietnam and putting him out on the speaking circuit. This was combat sometimes under very difficult conditions.

HYDLE: It was, it was tough although later it was even tougher. But around 68 the big problem was that the Tet offensive had shattered American complacency about Vietnam and the notion that things were getting better. Of course students were particularly concerned, not least that they were going to get drafted when they finished school. Since I was relatively young, I was often

put out there to talk to student audiences. I did the best that I could but obviously people were very skeptical.

I felt, in a way, that this proved that I was right about the way we were reporting on Vietnam. We were overly optimistic. Therefore, when the Tet Offensive occurred, people felt that they'd been duped -- even though the Offensive failed militarily and greatly weakened the Viet Cong, who never again posed a significant military threat -- because of the over inflated expectations created by our own reporting. We were screwed. We had hoisted ourselves on our own cartage.

So I was in this same position. I had to admit that things were not going well, that it was going to be a long struggle, but I thought we had to persevere. My line was that the South Vietnamese people may be dissatisfied with their government but they still, whenever they had the chance to live in the Viet Cong or the South Vietnamese countryside, they would choose the latter or become refugees. I said that the government was an elected government, there's no chance that this would happen under the Viet Cong. I wanted us to persevere.

Of course I was more focused on what would happen to the South Vietnamese people. The American public, at this point, were far more interested in what was happening to them; what was happening to the Americans; what else was happening in the US and do forth. So this interim period was when the Tet Offensive happened. It was when Johnson, in late March, announced he would not run for reelection; it was when Martin Luther King was killed; and finally, it was when Bobby Kennedy was killed. All this was a tumultuous period back in the US as we all remember.

But it was also, as I recall, Johnson said that he would increase the troop presence in Vietnam a bit more but that it would top off at a certain level. He also replaced Westmoreland with his deputy, Abrams. That was when the program, I can't remember if it was called it then, but basically the Vietnamization Program began. I was in favor of that too, because I thought we had to have some kind of, eventually a way of strengthening the South Vietnamese so that they could defend themselves. So I still felt at that point, although it was a tough blow, that we were on the right track.

Q: *You went back.*

HYDLE: June '68.

Q: *June '68, where you were there until how long?*

HYDLE: I was there until March or April 1970.

Q: *When you went out initially, what were you up to, what were you going to do?*

HYDLE: For that tour?

Q: For that tour.

HYDLE: I was assigned to the provincial reporting unit. This had 8 officers, basically junior or young officers. Two of them in each of the CORPS areas. You know, there were 4 military CORPS areas that the country was divided into.

We were suppose to be reporting on the political situation on the countryside. Some of us, at least, were also supposed to be political advisers to the DEPCORPS. So we had a unique insight into the situation in the countryside. Also, we were supposed to come back and report regularly in to Saigon.

I was assigned to Bien Hoa and I was working for John Paul Vann, the DEPCORPS.

Q: Bien Hoa, it was a very large base.

HYDLE: Yes, it was. It was a huge air force base as well. It's about 18 or 20 miles area from Saigon. It was a III CORPS area. It's area included several provinces around Saigon including Long Khanh province which was to the south.

I would spend part of my time in paperwork there, part of my time in Saigon, partly in traveling around the provinces and talking. There were always a good supply of young officers in the pacification program like myself, and military officers, sometimes. The Vietnamese, of course, that we would talk to.

Also, there had been created in III CORPS, where I was and eventually it expanded, a team of Vietnamese public opinion surveyors. As I recall, there were about 3 to a province. They would write reports on situations in the province. Sometimes they were individual province by province reports. Sometimes they were survey questions that had been issued province-wide. My job was to direct them. We also had a translating unit and I also vetted the translations and rendered them into good English. These reports were circulated.

I think that what we did was quite interesting. It really sort of gave a second opinion on how the South Vietnamese government programs were, how our programs were, and how they were going down in the countryside.

Q: The pacification program -- there was this hamlet evaluation system that's come in for a lot of criticism, particularly in the hands of the military. You always, if you were an officer assigned out there, you had to show progress. Progress was not always there.

HYDLE: Everybody sort of joked about the hamlet evaluation system. It was subject to that problem of showing progress, that you point out. Since most military officers were only district or province senior advisers for 6 months or a year, there would be steady progress during their time. But then, it would fall again because they were succeeded by somebody else who had a fresh look and was creating a base for himself.

Sure there was a lot of cynicism involved but, on the other hand, people would say that what

really counts is not exactly the hamlet evaluation system -- which says that we have 40% of the hamlets secure and so many percent were not so secure -- what mattered was not the actual numbers but the trends. Over time these swings from individual advisers would work themselves out. What had counted were the trends.

I basically bought that. I thought then, and I think most historians say now, that actually in that period the situation in the countryside did, in fact, improve from 1968, the Tet Offensive, the hamlet evaluation system was put into effect; and the pacification programs were coordinated in ways that they had not been initially. There was a gradual improvement in coordination on the American side and the Vietnamese side. The countryside did, in fact, become more secure. There were roads that you could travel on, during the day and even at night later on, that you couldn't have done earlier.

Now, why this is so, I don't know. Some people would say that the North Vietnamese were just laying low until we left and they would come back. But, remember, when they did come back they had to use conventional military forces. There was no general guerrilla uprising, it was an invasion.

So I think the pacification program was well conceived and on the whole it was well executed.

Q: There was a book written on John Paul Vann called A Bright Shining Lie from your observation, how did he operate? Can you tell me about the man?

HYDLE: I read the book by Neil Sheehan. Sheehan had known Vann in the early 60s, in that period when he was an army officer and he was very critical of the South Vietnamese government at the time. Sheehan was able to show that Vann wasn't actually as courageous, from a career point of view, as he led people to believe he was, because I think he was retiring anyway, or he had no chance to advance further or something.

Well, I don't know about that, that was before my time. When I knew him, that was a period that Sheehan pretty much skips over in his book because he wasn't there when I was there. That was the period when Vann was head of the pacification program III CORPS when I was working with him. Later, he was down in IV CORPS and finally he was down in II CORPS toward the end.

I thought he was brilliant. He obviously had no illusions about the South Vietnamese government. He was a great organizer, he was a charismatic leader, he was an inspiration to me and especially to a lot of other junior officers. People would tell John Paul Vann stories when they would gather, all the time. I never worked for anybody since who even was remotely as exciting and as interesting to work for.

Q: Can you give me a little flavor? Can you think of any of your John Vann stories?

HYDLE: This is a story that I used to hear, it was later but it does give the flavor.

When he went into II CORPS later, he put a young guy that he had confidence in into the

position as his deputy. There were 3 or 4 officers already there, maybe civilian and military, who outranked him. So they all caucused and then they came to him and they said, "We don't really think it's right that this junior guy is the deputy over us." He said, "You're absolutely right." They were out by nightfall.

This is the kind of story that we junior guys used to love. as you can imagine.

He seemed to be interested in getting things done. He did use more junior people where I thought that they were good. They would be province or district advisers.

There were a lot of stories, of course, about his sex life. He encouraged those stories and would tell them himself, and, it was mostly that he was a very active guy.

Q: Were you able to get out? In your going around, what were your feelings? You're saying that this was a relatively progressive period.

HYDLE: Yes, I thought that things were getting better. We, in the provincial reporting unit, were controversial. We were reporting things about how the South Vietnamese government or specific officials were screwing up. We had friends in the countryside but we also had constant clashes. The same kind of reporting problems that I described to you in the earlier period.

Q: Were you getting any constraints on your reporting? You were basically sending things into Saigon and what happened to them?

HYDLE: They would adulterate them.

I remember one time, for example, that there were some elections for a province, or maybe it was village districts or village councils. The elections were less than they were cracked up to be. For example, there would be 10 seats but there would be only 12 candidates, so 10 out of 12 would be elected. In order to make sure that the communists couldn't disrupt the election, the government would keep secret the location of the elections. How do you have elections? At the last minute, the government would show up in trucks and bus the people to vote.

We would point out these shortcomings. At one point, a report that we did was, we wanted to be a telegram -- we wrote it up as a telegram. It was held up for a little while and eventually it was sent as an airgram, which meant that it went in the mail. Basically, they couldn't dispute the facts but they didn't want as many people to see the report. That's the kind of thing that would happen -- mostly not blatant lying but they would sort of downplay it and undercut.

Q: Martin Herz was the

HYDLE: Martin Herz was the political counselor. The head of the provincial reporting, that I worked for, was Nick Thorn.

Q: Were you coming in and telling your piece fairly frequently?

HYDLE: Yes, especially since I was so close to Saigon.

Q: How were you received?

HYDLE: This was a period when we would have dinners, from time to time, with Ambassador Bunker, Hertz and others, the provincial reporting unit. But it was an occasion when we thought we should use the occasion to warn him about the problems that existed. But he thought that he should use the occasion to, sort of, cheer us up. I guess he said, or I heard that he had said this from somebody after one of these sessions, that he hoped that it had made us feel better and that it cheered us up about the prospects. So he didn't really see it the same way we did, kind of patronizing in a way.

Q: The American military was impacting on the Bien Hoa.

HYDLE: Very heavily, especially in the part of the Bien Hoa area. The economy tended to be oriented around the care and feeding of the military. So it distorted the economy quite a bit and it led to social problems and so on.

Q: I was there at this time. I was there from 69 to 70 in Saigon just doing consular work. Did you view the embassy as, not the enemy but at least a, almost a hostile power or something?

HYDLE: I was not fond of Martin Herz at all. I thought that he was basically a bad guy. He was the one who was suppressing the reporting and creating a rationale for doing it because he would say, "We know how bad it is but we can't report it that way." Bunker seemed like a benevolent but elderly guy who didn't know, or maybe didn't want to know, what was happening. Nick Thorn, the provincial reporting unit chief, was in the middle. He had been a province senior adviser so he knew what we were talking about but he was under pressure from the top as well. He was troubled, I think, by all the pressures that came from both sides.

Q: What about your military counterparts? Did you feel that, as a Foreign Service officer, not under the same discipline as a military person? Would be that you were sort of freer to operate and to report than they were?

HYDLE: I didn't feel that way. Also, we knew a lot of military people in these pacification teams, people in Bien Hoa, and some of those guys were barely more disciplined than we were. Like they were lawyers who somehow had to be military officers, they were graduate students who somehow were doing their time. So at times there was not such a big gap between military and civilians.

I, myself, although I never served in the military per se, I never was anti-military and never felt like I wanted to bait them or taunt them or call them baby killers or any of that stuff. I respected what they were trying to do. I thought that they should be subject to criticism like everybody else.

Q: How about the media? What was your feeling towards the reporting in the media that you were in contact with?

HYDLE: They were also a mixed bag. I don't really remember very much about them but certainly Bob Kaiser of the Washington Post was a reporter in those days. Now I think he's the managing editor. Johnny Apple was there as the New York Times correspondent and married an FSO. I think they're no longer married.

We would hang out with them. I remember one time during Joe Alsop's visit, one of his visits to Vietnam, I somehow got caught up with him. He took a bunch of us to lunch and asked us what we thought. He really already knew what we thought. Joe Alsop's wife, Susan Mary Alsop, was a cousin of Charlie Whitehouse who was the DEPCORPS succeeding John Vann, 1969 I think. When Vann went down to IV CORPS which was a bigger pacification problem and had a smaller US government presence. So, somehow, I got acquainted with her one time. Later, when I came back to Washington, they had at the time old fashioned entertainment Washington dinners, old fashioned dinners where you had equal numbers of men and women so that you could seat them at table. Sometimes I would be asked to fill in. I knew Joe, I guess I'm getting far afield.

Basically I thought the media were a mixed bag. Some of them understood the problems, others were just in there to stir things up and cause problems

Q: I did get the feeling at that time that there were, what you would call the professional people, but there were also the stringers and the ones going after a little adventure. They were, in a way, just looking for trouble but they weren't serious.

Were you getting from any of your friends or anything, because this is the period where the sort of, the Vietnam protest was really picking up. Were you getting any reflections on this through correspondence or people visiting you or anything like that?

HYDLE: We were getting reflections of it but I'm sure it wasn't nearly as intense for us as it was for people back here. People here were feeling the heat. Occasionally, I was asked by Ambassador Bunker, through Martin Herz or Calhoun, to draft letters responding to letters to them from student critics. They thought I was a young guy and I could think of some way to answer a young guy's letter, I suppose.

Q: You left there 1970. How did you find the problem of corruption and ineffectiveness of the government of Vietnam by the time you left. What was your evaluation.

HYDLE: I thought that it was still a big problem and that it was important that the US government should try to fight that problem and try to tell the South Vietnamese government to set up structures in which they would be less corrupt. You know, inspectors or whatever. But because of our support for the general policy of being there, I thought that Americans were -- the US embassy and the US mission -- was more involved in trying to downplay the talk about corruption than they were doing something about it.

There was a guy, Bill Hitchcock, I think he was the political counselor or the number two guy in the political section at one point. In 1969 I had moved from Bien Hoa up to Da Nang. I was in

the consulate working for Terry McNamara, the consul general. The marines were up there in the I CORE-gram, as we called it. Hitchcock was there and I was complaining about corruption and so on. He said, "I just came from Calcutta, tell me about that, I know corruption." But he was missing the point. We didn't have half a million troops. We had to do something about it.

Q: When you were in Da Nang, Terry McNamara was quite a character.

HYDLE: Yes, he was.

Q: Actually, we probably met at that point because, purely technically, I was consul general in Saigon and I use to write Terry's efficiency reports but I didn't really have any control, who could control Terry. But anyway, it was really more of a political thing.

Could you tell me your impression of Terry and his operation.

HYDLE: I remember that as being a lot of fun. He was a smart guy, I thought he understood about pacification, our policies and so forth. But he never took himself too seriously; he never took the situation too seriously. We use to joke around a lot and we still remain good friends to this day. I was the, sort of the vice consul for political affairs. It was more or less my title. So I never really did consular work unless there was an overload of visas to be signed. I don't know if I should tell you this or not.

Q: It's all right, it's all over now.

HYDLE: One thing that happened up there that sticks in my mind, was that we were changing the status of the office from a consular office to a consulate, or something like that.

Q: Yes, that was it.

HYDLE: We wanted to make a big deal out of it and invite Ambassador Bunker and so forth. I thought there was a man up there who was a geomancer, and who was an old guy, and who was reportedly very highly regarded by the Vietnamese. I thought, you know we're just picking a day to open the consulate, let's pick an auspicious day. We called the guy in and we talked to him about it. He said that it was important that the cat, the goat and the monkey be in confluence, if memory serves.

We were reporting all this to Ambassador Bunker and we actually did get him to change his original plan to the exact date, telling him that this would be an auspicious time. Of course we let all this be known to the Vietnamese that we had paid attention to this issue.

Ambassador Bunker came up to Da Nang. At first he went out on the bay with Alex Hurfer, who was the AID guy up there. It was not a very good day for sailing, overcast weather, no wind and so forth. So he finally came back over to the consulate, it was 4:00, the clouds parted. We had a beautiful day and we got a good picture of Ambassador Bunker and the geomancer -- who told Ambassador Bunker that he hoped he'd work for 50 more years.

Terry. Not everybody in the Foreign Service would have gone along with this fanciful approach.

Q: Did you find a different situation in Da Nang than you did in Bien Hoa?

HYDLE: The main difference at that time was the marines. The marines had a different approach than the army did toward the Vietnamese. I'm sorry I just can't remember the name but they had a system in which marines and South Vietnamese troops actually were in the same squad together. I just can't think what it was called.

They were integrated at the squad level. The marines were able to provide their supplies of course, but also their military knowledge to the South Vietnamese troops. I think they were pretty successful. Although, once again, it was hard to make the transition from a mixed unit to a purely South Vietnamese unit. We had some good officers up there. The then province chief of Hue, I'm sorry I can't remember his name but later he was the I CORPS commander. It was possible to travel in most of the coastal areas although it was a bit dangerous to go inland.

Q: I remember that it was about that time that I drove from Da Nang up to Hue.

HYDLE: Oh yes, you could easily do that.

Q: It was the old "street without joy."

HYDLE: You could drive on up to Quang Trai.

Q: Did you have any problems with reporting on corruption? I recall the South Vietnamese general in I CORPS was notorious for his corruption.

HYDLE: I just don't recall. I don't remember writing, or wanting to write, about that in particular. In general, I didn't have trouble writing candid stuff. Terry McNamara certainly never would muscle us on that.

Q: Were the South Koreans in that territory?

HYDLE: No, they were more in Quang Ninh which was in II CORPS. I never dealt with them very much.

Q: When you left in 1970, whither Vietnam, as far as you were concerned.

HYDLE: For a while, I was thinking of going back for a third tour in Vietnam, and working in a sort of an evaluation unit in the pacification headquarters that was headed by Craig Johnstone, a bright young officer. But I eventually ended up going to the Vietnam working group.

But after I left in April 70 I took some accumulated comp time, as I mentioned earlier, to finish the draft of my dissertation. I had finished a draft and they had sent it back with some revisions. I worked on that. I was in California living at home with my parents.

Q: So we'll leave there. You did have this interlude over in Vietnam after the peace agreement in 73. What were you doing?

HYDLE: I was in Northern Ireland from about April, as I recall, until January 73. When the peace agreement was reached I remember hearing that Alex Johnson had said, "We need to send 100 old Vietnam hands back to monitor the success of the peace agreement." People supposedly said, "100?" He said, "Okay, 50."

It wasn't that vigorous an analysis of personnel needs but it was decided that we would go back, and we would be attached to all of our consulates there, and we would be reporting on the progress of the agreement.

So I went back and I was assigned, once again, to Bien Hoa III CORPS. The consul general at that time was Bob Walkinshaw. I was there from January to September although I squeezed in some home leave and some leave in the middle of that. They were very generous with leave provisions and other things. It was kind of silly, in a way, to take me out of Belfast where they had just added me, an additional person, and they were in the midst of trying to normalize the situation with elections and so forth. But they didn't want to make exceptions because everybody else would start coming in with requests for exceptions.

We just did reports which at first were daily reports and later tailed off, led to less. We got about 5 FSOs there. After a while, I was made sort of like the chief of this mini-reporting in Bien Hoa.

That was a very interesting time because since all of us were back there on TDY, we all knew how things were done in Vietnam before. We were not about to put up with any nonsense about reporting. We would report just whatever we'd want to report. I remember, for example, there was an election coming up for the senate. A regular election under the South Vietnamese government system. That would have been an opportunity to bring in the communists, if you were really pushing for peace and normalization, but they were excluded and the election was run on the old system. It was just a silly process. We wrote something like: Enthusiasm for the senatorial election in III CORPS is under total control.

Another thing that we did that I was involved in was a dissent message. Tony Elito and I wrote a dissent message to the Department about the impending visit of President Thieu. Thieu, now that the peace agreement had been reached in January 73, Thieu wants to visit the United States. We recalled that after Vietnamese leaders had made previous visits, they had come back and felt sort of re-strengthened vis a vis their opponents, including legitimate opposition figures. We wanted to forestall that especially since we knew that Nixon, like many other people, tended to go into hyperbole during state visits. One time Nixon had said that Thieu was one of the top, maybe 5, politicians in the world.

So we wrote a message saying that we didn't think we should go overboard in welcoming Thieu because of this past history. Tony and I sent it out. People in the embassy didn't exactly quarrel with what we said. They said, "We don't disagree with that much so why are you calling it a

dissent?” But we sent it anyway.

Then we got a message back from San Clement, the western White House, I think from Ambassador Porter, then the under secretary for political affairs, he said, “Your message was received and read carefully.” It was an encouraging response. In fact, the Thieu visit did go off without the excesses that we had feared. So we were very encouraged that we had done the right thing.

Q: It had gotten up to make, hopefully, some penetration.

HYDLE: I think so. Of course that was also the period Nixon was preoccupied with Watergate, he had other things on his mind. But still we had accomplished everything that we could have hoped with that message.

Q: How did you feel this time in 73 about the situation in Vietnam. This is basically your third time, how were you seeing it?

HYDLE: I thought there was a military stalemate of course. I thought there was no progress toward peace and that the South Vietnamese were just going to have to hang in there. That proved to be right. Eventually, things fell apart.

It was the US government that was unable to come to the aid of the South Vietnamese because even though the agreement required us to stop all of our military presence there, if we had been able to bomb the North Vietnamese troop concentrations, because these were not as I said earlier, these were no longer guerrilla operations but main force North Vietnamese units with big guns and tanks and all that. If we couldn't respond to that then things were doomed.

My feeling is that because of the Watergate crisis and American fatigue with Vietnam and so on, the eventual defeat was because of that more, in my opinion, that it was the weaknesses of the South Vietnamese.

Anyway, the North Vietnamese chose to be a highly armed garrison state. The South Vietnamese tried to be more like a normal state. Why should that mean that they are not allowed to survive as a state? But at the time it just seemed like a stalemate.

FRANK PAVICH
Program Officer, USAID
Saigon (1966-1972)

Frank Pavich was born in 1933 in California. He graduated from the University of Southern California 1955 and then served in the US Marine Corps. Pavich served in the Peace Corps before joining USAID in 1966, with whom he served in Vietnam, Ethiopia, the Yemen Arab Republic, Somalia, Ghana, Pakistan, and Egypt. Pavich was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.

PAVICH: One morning I had an appointment in Oakland, California to interview for a job in their urban renewal office. I got two telegrams at the same time. One was from AID and one was from CARE. Rather than reading them I stuck them in my pocket and went across the bay to Oakland to do my interview. I didn't want to be distracted. It was a good interview and I got a job offer. I came out of the Oakland City Hall and walked down the street and opened up the telegrams. The one from CARE invited me to take a job in Yugoslavia or Egypt. I opened up the other one from AID and it said they were starting to recruit people for a program in Southeast Asia, Vietnam, and would I be interested.

Q: This was what year?

PAVICH: This was in 1966. I continued walking down the street and I saw a sign that said Western Union. I reached in my pocket, pulled out a quarter, flipped it, and it came up AID. I then sent two telegrams, one to AID saying yes, and one to CARE saying no thank you. That was how the decision was made.

Q: Would you have believed the quarter if it had come out the other way?

PAVICH: Well, in hind sight I think I made the right decision, but at the time I really didn't know. I had worked a little bit with CARE in Iran and I was rather intrigued with what they were doing.

I came to Washington and joined a group at FSI for preparation to go to Vietnam. We were in language training, area studies and were told to play soccer because they thought our counterparts would be playing soccer. They took us down to the Marine Corps base at Quantico and we qualified on the pistol, semi and automatic weapons and were advised to buy a small arm for ourselves.

Q: What was your understanding of what your job was?

PAVICH: Provincial Representative somewhere in Vietnam. They suggested we all have a personal weapon. I mulled that over and didn't buy one at the time. I remember a group of us went out--a mixed group of male and female. We had nurses, former Peace Corps people, people just out of law school, graduate school. I remember one night over a couple of beers we were talking about what was going to be our greatest challenge of this career we were about to set off on. We were all new to this. It was almost like the Peace Corps again. We thought about the danger there and that we might get killed or captured, as some did. Or, we might step on a land mine, or something like that. I thought our biggest problem would probably be our own bureaucracy. I don't know why that came to me at that time. However, for me, throughout all of my career, it has been a battle between myself and the bureaucracy. There has been a sort of give and take on that. I often wonder what made me think of it then. I knew Public Administration before I went into the Marine , which was my first taste of bureaucracy, and I could see the problem.

We went to Vietnam and the next thing I knew we were being interviewed by John Paul Van,

who was the Provincial Coordinator at that time. We were given our assignments. I was assigned to go to Plei-Ku province in the Central Highlands. One morning at sunrise in Saigon I got on a small aircraft and headed for a place called Nha Trang, which was on the coast of Central Vietnam. I got off the plane and went to the regional headquarters and met a man named Hatcher James who was the Deputy Regional Director at that time. He was a former Green Beret and he said, "Okay, Pavich, you are going out to Plei-ku. We are going to send you out to Cheo Reo and Kontum [and one other place which I don't remember], to stay with the Special Forces B Team for a couple of nights just to let you know what you are getting into. If you have any doubts or questions about what you are getting into this will be a good test because the B Teams are small teams out on the frontier. They will have around five Americans and 70 or so militiamen who are defending the out-post." I went out there and sat around for a couple of days. We didn't go out very much because it was dangerous. We got to know the U.S. Army Green Berets who were there and talk to them about what they were doing. I looked at the fortifications and learned about the Vietcong.

Then, I got to Plei-ku and worked with a gentleman named John Rogers, who was the Provincial Representative. I was his assistant "Prov. Rep." We had programs in health, agriculture, fisheries, education and in two or three other areas. These programs were provided through a special budget that was funded by USAID. The purpose was to supplement and improve upon what the Government of Vietnam was doing.

Q: How big a population was there in this area?

PAVICH: I can't remember. Plei-Ku Province is basically a Montagnard province so the population of Vietnamese is very small and the population of Montagnards is probably not even known because they are not settled.

My job was to work with the provincial service chiefs on the implementation of the development programs in each one of these areas.

Q: What was the objective?

PAVICH: To improve the service. To provide the people in the province with the kind of services that they needed in their agricultural development and the education of their children and the health of their families. In some cases where there were refugees coming in from the jungle areas where there was a free fire zone, our goal was to house them and care for them and protect them until they could return home or be resettled.

This meant traveling out into the districts, which we did and this is where the exposure to the U.S. Special Forces was good, because in all of these areas there was a Special Forces Team and you coordinated with them before you drove down any road to make sure it was clear. All the major roads were cleared every morning at a certain hour. You would find out when they were cleared and safe and then go out there, or, you would go up to a Special Forces camp and use one of their helicopters and fly out to the district.

We were doing water projects with the Montagnards, building small dams around springs and

putting plastic pipes in the wall of the dam so that you had a spill of water going onto a concrete apron in front. People used the apron for washing and bathing. It was very popular. They did the work, we provided the material. We also provided material for building schools.

Q: How many in the AID team were doing this?

PAVICH: There were two of us.

Q: So you were expert in all of these fields?

PAVICH: Yes. It was administration. We didn't have to be substance experts because the Vietnamese service chiefs were. We spoke enough Vietnamese to get by and it really wasn't a technical problem, but more of a question of resources.

Q: Were there any problems or events that you remember from that time?

PAVICH: There were attacks by the Vietcong and if you were in a district there would be problems of being cutoff from transportation out and being stuck there for a while. You flew across the plains in helicopters at about 40 feet and sometimes you were shot at. The helicopter pilots liked to fly low, they called it contour flying, because it was hard for anyone to know you were coming until you were there. If you were up high everybody would know you were there and could shoot at you.

I spent a year and a half there and then I had an opportunity to go to Saigon to work in the AID Public Administration Office. There I worked with the Director General of Reconstruction and Urban Planning and the Director General of Housing as an advisor and program manager.

Q: In the government?

PAVICH: In the government. I was physically located in the office of the Director General of Reconstruction and Urban Planning. I was the only American there. I had a staff of about 21 young Vietnamese architects. Our basic program was a Land Use Study which is an inventory of the use of land in the Saigon metropolitan area, which had a 10 million population. We had aerial photographs and maps and checked each parcel of land in that whole area, and categorized it in terms of its use. It took us two years to do this.

Q: This was for planning and laying out development of all kinds?

PAVICH: Planning for infrastructure, for utilities, etc. Almost everything you do is based on the population and the use of the land. It was also to assist them in determining a zoning program and to decide where they wanted and didn't want to put industry and things like that.

I was there for pretty much three years doing this work and other assignments. We did some housing development plans for relocating people who were burned out of their houses in the TET offensive in 1968.

Q: Were you there in the TET offensive?

PAVICH: Yes, I was there. Actually, I missed it by one day, but I was there for the rebuilding of these areas.

Q: Was there a lot of destruction?

PAVICH: In certain districts where the Vietcong had come in. They would come into areas where there were a lot of squatters. In these areas, there were no facilities like fire hydrants or water. Once a fire started there, there was no way that you could get a truck in because there were no streets, just lanes for bicycles and people, and the area just burned to the ground. There were several thousands of people who were displaced and had to be resettled somewhere else. We were doing a housing program. That pretty much kept me busy until I left Vietnam.

Q: How did you find working with the Vietnamese?

PAVICH: The professionals I worked with were very good. They knew their business. They were very cordial and welcomed what assistance I could give them on the development side. They were very friendly and always polite. I enjoyed their company very much and made some very good friends.

Q: How did you feel about your efforts to do all this development work in the environment of war?

PAVICH: I believe it was making a difference, otherwise the Viet Cong (VC) probably wouldn't have attacked Saigon the way they did. I think there was a point where the business of winning the hearts and minds, for whatever reason, was going our way. There were jobs, lots of money to be made. It might have been a false economy, but still it provided work for people and money for people. I think that was probably the reason that the VC did some of the things they did which were probably not in the guerilla warfare book of tactics. So, I think what we were doing did have an effect.

Q: Was it lasting, or was it all sort of lost when the Vietcong took over?

PAVICH: Well, I think like in the "Cold War" it is a question of who won and who lost. It was pretty clear that the Communists lost almost every place. Who won? I think that is still to be determined.

Q: What about in Vietnam?

PAVICH: I would like to go back and see.

Q: You haven't heard much about it?

PAVICH: No. My wife is Vietnamese and she has been back. My children have been back. But, I have never been back.

Q: How did they find things?

PAVICH: It is very poor. There wasn't much of an economy and the people had very little. They were not very happy with the way things were. The government was every bit as corrupt as it always had been, but I think in Asia as it is apparent these days, corruption is part of the socio-economic fabric.

Q: You saw this when you were working with the government there?

PAVICH: Yes. It was quite common.

Q: What form did it take?

PAVICH: There is always a certain amount of rake-off that happens. You know it is going on but you can't really put your finger on it. They know you know. You try to control it. You couldn't wipe it out, but it was possible to keep it to a minimum because that is the way things worked. People in countries like Vietnam and other developing countries who work in government are paid very low wages and have to have a second job. This means they don't pay much attention to their primary job, and are often taking bribes. As they say, "If you break the rice bowl (the means of livelihood), nothing is going to happen." It is a choice. You want something to happen or not.

MICHAEL E. TOLLE
Civilian
Da Nang (1967)

Michael E. Tolle was born in Kansas in 1947 in Kansas and educated at Georgetown. He went to Vietnam as a Civilian in 1967 and as a member of AID in 1970. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

TOLLE: Actually I might want to step back a little bit more because what figures into this transition was an arrangement my father made when I was scheduled to return to the safe haven for my summer vacation after my sophomore year, this would have been 1967. I came back to Manila having already been in contact with my father who had sent me a letter asking if I would like to spend the summer in Vietnam. I, of course, jumped at the opportunity. My transportation, 90 percent of it, was paid by the US government and I paid the balance. Shortly after returning to Manila in the summer of 1967, I boarded a plane and landed in Saigon. I signed on, which had been previously arranged very unofficially...I don't believe my name will ever appear in any records of any organization, I was unpaid and did whatever I could. My father had made the acquaintance of a man named Peter Winacharuk, who worked for a Christian, essentially fundamentalist, evangelical organization called "World Relief Commission." He and his wife were there stationed in Da Nang at the time, as was my father. I then showed up and said, "I am here and would like to learn and help you in whatever I could do."

So, I spent the summer of 1967 in Vietnam. My primary function was to serve as an escort officer for the distribution of relief commodities. The World Relief Commission would obtain some of them from USAID. They would obtain more from various assorted congregations of an organization that was known as the "Christian and Missionary Alliance," the C&MA, which is a collection of Protestant, fundamentalist, evangelical individual churches. It is not one denomination but individual churches who put an enormous emphasis on overseas service, both in relief and in proselyting, of course. So, they would get in many cases rather useless commodities brought over there. I can recall going through bags of shoes, for example, and having to discard the hundreds of pairs of women's high heel shoes that didn't really have a great deal of usefulness over there. Because of this I found myself flying or driving all over the northern part of the country.

Q: That was known as I Corps.

TOLLE: I Corps and II Corps. Da Nang, of course, was in I Corps. Most of my travel was in I Corps but some of it was down in II Corps. I flew commodities down to Da Lat at one point and stayed with the Christian Missionary Alliance group there. It was truly one of the most fascinating evenings I have ever spent in my life, to sit with these primarily elderly people who had been there in some cases since the thirties, telling stories about Vietnam. Although little of the details remain with me, the impression has remained with me all these years.

Q: Of course, it is considered like an Alpine village.

TOLLE: Absolutely, Da Lat is one of the most beautiful places on the face of the earth. In fact, the central highlands of Vietnam are absolutely beautiful.

So, primarily I was in I Corps and my father was able to take me to a few places. We went driving up to Quang Tri and out to Cam Lo. We hitched any number of rides on military airplanes. It was quite an easy thing to do.

Q: What was the military situation in the summer of 1967?

TOLLE: At that point, while perhaps not the high point in numbers, there was intense activity, a considerable amount of fighting. Yet, at the time there was the feeling of progress. It was reasonably close to war with the massive American presence in the north, the American military had a sense of its own unity and purpose that it lacked as it began to get more spread out through the south. Communications on the roads were somewhat shaky, but I don't like to fly, I never have, and much prefer to drive. So, we would drive around a considerable amount at that time. The military presence was overwhelming, particularly in Da Nang and all the way up to Quang Tri. I managed at one point...perhaps the high point, if you will, of the summer, was a distribution of several bags of cement to a couple who were living just outside of Khe Sanh at the time.

Q: Khe Sanh being what?

TOLLE: The marine base up in the north.

Q: *Yes, later it was under siege.*

TOLLE: Yes, the siege, itself, had not firmly set in but the NVA were around and it was coming. At that time there was this couple who worked for the Wycliffe Bible Translators who were attempting to translate the bible into a Montagnard dialect. There was this very nice, fairly young couple living in a little house out there among the Montagnards, a few miles outside the Khe Sanh base. Of course, there was no communication with them. So, I showed up in a C-47 one day, from Air America, dropped in on the Khe Sanh airstrip and the marines looked at me. They had no idea what this young civilian was doing there. I said I was there to deliver some cement and could I get some transportation? The major there was not particularly pleased with this because the area was insecure enough that he had to roundup essentially a full squad and a couple of trucks in order to make the journey. So, I sat out on the tarmac at Khe Sanh for quite a while and at one point a truck drove up with a US green beret and some Montagnard CIDG people who spotted my cement and wanted it. They kept trying to make a bargain. What did I want, an AK-47? What kind of souvenir did I want in exchange for some of this cement? I, of course, declined, it was not my place to trade away any of these sort of things. As a postscript, when I returned, it was not long thereafter when I read in the paper where this camp had been overrun by the NVA with the first recorded use of tanks in the war. And, of course, I got to thinking I should have given them some of this cement.

Eventually I did get the transportation and we drove out with a group of young marines, basically my age or younger, who were just literally amazed. They had no idea that this couple were out there, of course. So, we drove out and delivered the cement at this little building. The wife, who was about seven months pregnant at that time, cooked for us. I can remember the little dumplings she cooked up for us as very tasty things. She pointed out the bullet holes in the building and explained that periodically she and her husband had to lie on the floor while the bullets went through. Another postscript to that, she had the baby in the Vietnamese hospital in Da Nang which occasioned a no small amount of comment among the Americans at this time.

We returned to the camp at Khe Sanh and, of course, there was a curfew fairly early in the afternoon so we had to get back. Then, I had to figure out how to get back. My journeys out were always planned, but the journeys back were whatever I could arrange. I managed to get on a CH-54 helicopter, a marine chopper, headed for Dong Ha. As we took off, because these things don't rise straight up in the air, particularly the big ones go out at an angle, we took fire from the NVA. A man sitting about three seats away from me took a bullet in his leg. The indication was that something was developing. I recall flying back to Dong Ha and being dumped off the plane for a pallet of toilet paper and eventually making my way back to Da Nang. It was almost a matter of hoboing, catching rides not on trains but on airplanes. It was a fascinating day.

Q: *What was your impression of the Vietnamese at that time? What were you picking up from people you were working with and all?*

TOLLE: Here began the process of change from support to opposition. Perhaps it did not begin, but I had previously in arguing with Americans, the basis of my argument was that we really

didn't know anything about the place, and here I was learning. And, as I learned, the situation began to crystallize in my mind where it became readily obvious that their side, if you will, wanted this more than our side. There began to be a quite obvious thing in that when one looked at the numbers that we supposedly were fighting for and their equipment, but their inability to get things done, such personal contact with them (which was not a great deal at that time) began to eat away at the feeling that I had had that we were doing the right thing. Another thing that impressed me at that time was the enormous impact that we were having on them simply by our presence. That the infusion of the American people, American dollars, American material culture, was having an enormous and not particularly beneficial effect on the people. Part of this I think I was preprogrammed for because my father had been there for a little while and had already formed a very negative view of the Vietnamese. In fact, the extent surprised me and he continued it all this time. I am not sure why he continued.

Q: When you say negative view, do you mean as a government, a culture or what?

TOLLE: Pretty much across the board. He referred to them as curiously benighted people and he had nothing but contempt for the GVN, the government. His problem with the Vietnamese people was what he referred to as their infinite corruptibility. He placed the blame on them. I recall at that time thinking there was more to it than just these funny little people are not as open as they should be to the American way of doing things, and I began to see because, while I don't think I had been particularly culturally sensitive or anything along that line...when you grow up in a white suburban upper middle class without even encountering Blacks, you are hardly culturally sensitive...However, after two years in Georgetown I had begun that process. So, at that time I began to look not so much as why they weren't doing what we said, but why we were saying it to them.

Q: Then, when you came back did you say, "Fellas, this is really how it is out there?"

TOLLE: To an extent I did because at the time, particularly by the time of my junior year, I would make more or less a two-year change. The two years conservatism really dominated and the voices against it were voices crying in the wilderness, whereas in the beginning of the third year and certainly by the fourth year, that changed entirely. But at that time student power was developing and we established something called the Alternative University, or something along that line. It was an attempt by students to teach students at Georgetown in areas that you felt you had knowledge, getting out of the rigid, professor-student arrangement, etc. So, I hooked up with one of the other students, who was one of the more left wing students, who wanted to talk about Vietnam. I said you know we could make a good team here because I have been there. We team-taught "Vietnam Studies," made it up ourselves. His was the polemical approach at the time. Mine was an attempt to fill in the details of fact. I actually started with geography and population and began to talk to people about the Viets and Montagnards and Khmers and some of the different aspects of it. We had something of a fairly vigorous and healthy exchange of views on this. I would like to think that I contributed something. I am actually not all together certain that I did, because as was the case then and as I am sure is the case now, people tend to make up their minds on these emotional issues without too much regard to the facts, and you merely confused them if you put facts in front of them and asked them to consider them.

ANTHONY C. ZINNI
Second Lieutenant, Marine Divisions
Vietnam (1967)

General Zinni was born and raised in Pennsylvania. After graduating from Vallanova College he joined the Marines, which became his lifelong career. His distinguish career took him to Vietnam, Okinawa, Philippines and Germany, where he served in senior level positions. Attaining the rank of General, Zinni served as Commander-in-Chief of CENTCOM, where he was deeply involved in worldwide missions including Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. General Zinni was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: I would like to talk to you in this interview about your foreign affairs experience, your experience with the South Vietnamese Marines. Did you know anything about Vietnam before?

ZINNI: Nothing. Until the time I joined the Marine Corps I had never really been outside the Philadelphia area, probably not more than a 50 mile radius from my home and then in the Marine Corps I went to Quantico for training and my first year I spent at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina in the second marine division, so when I went to Vietnam, I mean, this was like going to a different planet. I went to Army special warfare school before at Fort Bragg and there we had language training by Vietnamese and Vietnamese families were contracted down there to not only teach us the language, but also to expose us to the culture. And when I got there it seemed so remarkable. The fact that here as a young second lieutenant I was immersed in a totally different culture, new culture. I rarely saw other Americans and the Vietnamese had a quartering act so when we were in the populated areas we lived in the villages and of course, there were only two officers to the battalions so I worked so I didn't have any other Americans around me. I saw the war from a different perspective. When I came back, and went to Quantico to train the second lieutenants, my contemporaries were coming back from tours of duty with the first and third Marine divisions in the north near the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) in that area. The Vietnamese Marines were their national strike force so they were the most elite of the Vietnamese military. But they moved all over the country so I saw the war from the Delta all the way up to the DMZ; in every poor area, every special zone, capital of military District 1, everywhere. When I came back I had an entirely different perspective on the war. I not only saw the war as it was being fought throughout the country, because there are many differences, I saw it from the perspective of the Vietnam people and the Vietnamese military and so I had a different sense. In many ways, this whole business of hearts and minds struck me because I began to realize we were not connecting to the hearts and minds and this is more than just war in sort of a traditional, conventional sense. I think that made an impression on me that lasted throughout my career.

Q: Let's take the first tour while you were assigned to the South Vietnamese marines. This was from when to when?

ZINNI: This was 1967.

Q: What was your impression of, in the first place, the South Vietnamese Marines?

ZINNI: The Vietnamese Marines were very small when I was there. There were really only five battalions fielded and a sixth battalion coming online. They were very elite. They had sort of the same socialization process, as in the U.S. Marine Corps, with a boot camp. They tended to be much more aggressive, courageous fighters. They were considered along with the Vietnamese airborne, as what they called the national strike force. So they were moved into hotspots all over the country where they were needed. My impression of them is they were, in terms of small unit tactics, small unit leadership, they were excellent. Obviously, they did not have the firepower or conventional capability that the U.S. military had. They didn't have the width and the logistics and things like that. Our role as advisers became to make sure that when they operated with American units, that we did the coordination, providing them with fire support, naval gunfire, air artillery, logistics requirements. But in terms of their ability to operate as small units down in battalion companies, platoon squad size, they were excellent. And I learned a lot from them in terms of jungle craft, small unit operations and how they operated in and around villages. They tended to be very tough fighters. The exposure to the Vietnamese people, especially living in the villages and everything gave me a whole sense of a culture that was very different and alien to me but it also gave me a sense of, as I said before, a perspective on the war that I don't think many Americans had.

Q: You know, as an adviser, a young second lieutenant, you weren't really bringing an awfully lot to the table. It was a great training experience.

ZINNI: I was the only second lieutenant, true second lieutenant. I think there were specialty advisers like motor transport officers and others that had been enlisted and the more senior staff NCOs were commissioned. I was the only sort of pure second lieutenant ever assigned to the advisory unit, as I was told and that was because the advisory unit had a number of casualties and sickness. We were also suffering casualties in the north. There was a shortage of officers and so where this would normally be a captain's assignment, I was picked because there was a shortage and they were down to the Z's, I guess, and sent over there.

You know, I would say in the overall scheme of things I learned a lot more than I imparted. But, you know, the Vietnamese Marines tended to look at an adviser and they wanted, first of all, to get an assessment of your courage and how you handled yourself under fire and secondly, in the things they really counted you on, your ability to deliver fire support, logistics support, transportation, you know, helicopters and that sort of thing, how you got all that. And I have to say, the American Marines in the advisory units, the captains and the majors that were in there that I sort of had to get a fast lesson and learn from, really schooled me up well, so it was a rapid learning process. I think I was able to come up one step quickly because you have to. There was no other way.

Q: How did you find this unit worked with the local population because this is often one of the key issues, when you talk about hearts and minds, I mean.

ZINNI: What I discovered in Vietnam is from region to region there were different loyalties so

we operated in certain places, obviously, where there were strong loyalties to the South Vietnamese government, if you will, for one reason or another, certainly in Catholic communities they tended to be, obviously, very much more strongly oriented to the south and in communities maybe where they received some benefits from the government, which I had to say, was maybe not the most responsive to the needs of the people. There were other places we went that were traditionally going back to the years of the Viet Minh, were traditional Communist strongholds. Up in the northern part of South Vietnam where we operated, we operated in an area of Binh Dinh province where the high school diplomas and everything else had Ho Chi Minh's picture on them. These were areas where Ho Chi Minh had left behind cadres after the French Indochina War, again, to begin the insurgency. So, you ran into places where you weren't as acceptable or they weren't as receptive to you as they might have been in other areas. It was an awakening to me because the Vietnamese Marines had to go up in the northern ICOR and put down the Buddhist revolt.

Q: I was going to say you were there at the time of the Buddhist barbecue.

ZINNI: I was there right after that. The Vietnamese Marines had gone up there and actually confronted the first _____; the South Vietnamese Army division, and there was a confrontation. While I was with the South Vietnamese marines, we actually attacked another South Vietnamese unit. So, I mean, you know it was interesting because you could see the differences. Obviously, we were all over Vietnam, so not only among amongst the Vietnamese but some of the ethnically different tribal groups and all that. You found it was a mixed bag in terms of where you went. But the Vietnamese Marines were sensitive to that. They were not that oriented to what I would call hearts and minds work. They viewed themselves as combat troops. We did, while I was there, the first real work of trying to get them to do things that involved sort of reaching out to the community. We used to run these county fair operations that involved bringing medical aid and working with them.

Q: You had a program of sending out the Marines.

ZINNI: The Marines in the north did the combined action platoons where they intermixed with the people, with the local regional popular forces in the villages. We were in the process of exposing the South Vietnamese Marines to more of this sort of interaction with the local communities there. At first they were very resistant to it. They really saw their job was to fight. Then, as they began to see that it was successful and it connected to the villages and it paid off in terms of intelligence and cooperation, they were much more amenable to it. I think bottom line is they really saw themselves as the national strike force and war fighting was their business.

Q: Looking at the situation there, particularly the corps commanders or whatever they were in the Republic of South Vietnam, they tend to be their rice bowl as far as there was a lot of corruption involved and all this. They were not as willing to go out and fight.

ZINNI: I think there were certain Army of the Republic of South Vietnam units that were a mixed bag. You found some regular army units that were fairly good and they ranged from that to terrible but I think when you looked at the more elite units like the Vietnamese South Vietnamese Rangers that were in each of the core areas and then the South Vietnamese airborne

and marine corps, they were very different. They were very courageous, very willing to fight. You know, our recruits had “Kill Communists” tattooed on their arms and the Vietnamese Marine Corps, the equivalent to USMC (United States Marine Corps), and those were tattooed on their arms so that if they were ever captured, they were marked as South Vietnamese marines and it made them fight harder and not be willing to be taken prisoner. They had a lot of pride in what they did. I do think though, they were politicized a great deal because they were the ones that took down the palace at Yaminu and actually, the battalion I spent most of my time with was actually the battalion that took Yaminu and executed them. While I was there, in 1967, there was an election and we brought all the Vietnamese Marine battalions around Saigon and ringed Saigon for the election, ensuring the outcome. So the Vietnamese Marines were seen as coup makers or, you know, if you wanted to win the presidency, you had to have them on your side.

Q: Were you up against the North Vietnamese regulars or was it its first time there?

ZINNI: Because we were all over, we fought everything from what I would call the Vietcong farmer by day, guerrilla by night, to the mainline Vietcong which were, you know, full-time fighters, to South Vietnamese insurgents, to NVA (North Vietnamese Army). We had experienced all of that and usually they knew by the area they were going into what they might confront, which made them, they went in stronger with more troops into certain areas than they would go into others. What was interesting was not only experiencing all the geographic differences from the Delta to the mangrove swamps in the south, to the mountains in the north, to the villages along the coast and all that, you also experienced this difference in enemies. One of the quickest things you had to learn is, of course, there's a big difference between sort of part-time guerrillas in the south and fighting them and the North Vietnamese regulars that you tended to find more toward the north along the borders that were much more formidable. So it wasn't a consistent kind of enemy that you faced and it required, I think, the ability to adapt to that. So we faced it all when we were there.

Q: Looking at this, when you're the new boy on the block, so you have often a clearer eye, did you see an equivalency of North Vietnamese to the Marine Corps? I mean, were these fighters as dedicated or was it a mixed bag there too?

ZINNI: I think clearly in terms of courage and willingness to fight, they certainly had that. What you would expect. They were certainly not as well-trained or technically competent. They were certainly not on a scale to manage the kind of fire support and logistics in all the kinds of integration in a major way. In other ways they might have been more skilled. I mean, in terms obviously, because of their affinity to the people and when we got into the villages and all, their ability to communicate and operate in amongst the people was much better. Also, I thought some of their jungle craft and that sort of thing were much more, they were much more skilled in that area. We didn't have rations, for example, so when we operated in the jungle, for example we spent time along the Cambodian border and elsewhere, really, truly in the jungles, we would go out on patrol. We had to spend two hours a day foraging or hunting for food. So you know, you learn a lot about what you could eat in the jungle, what you can shoot and kill and how to prepare it by doing it all tactically at the same time. Those are skills you don't have in the American forces because obviously they know they're going to get resupplied. There was even reluctance on their part even if they could be resupplied, they didn't like having helicopters

coming in to their position unless it was absolutely necessary, like a medical evacuation or whatever. They didn't always get priority of American helicopters and things so you know, for example, you take casualties, we took wounded and in one case where we had to keep the wounded with us for a number of days and so you now have to treat wounded over a period of time and it isn't like an automatic evacuation. So in many ways, some of those kinds of basic skills, interaction with the people, they were much better. I learned a lot from them that you wouldn't have gotten. But in terms of the mood shoot and communicating those skills, our NCOs are much better equipped to handle that. Their training is much more involved. Obviously, we had much more technical capability. I think it kind of panned out that way. I have to say the Vietnamese Marines were very courageous. They were willing to put their lives on the line, they were fighting and they viewed themselves as very elite. They were very successful and performed well, especially in the small units.

Q: When you left there after '67, at the time, wither South Vietnam? What did you think?

ZINNI: Well, I left right at the beginning of the Tet Offensive, you know, one of the first battles of the Tet Offensive we'd fought in and by then I had lost a lot of weight. I was down to about 123 pounds and I had contracted hepatitis and mononucleosis. I had dysentery and malaria so I was evacuated right after some of the first battles. We had a major battle up in Quang Tri and I left and watched the Tet Offensive you know, basically from hospital beds.

It was clear that militarily we had put a defeat on them but now we were beginning to see the erosion of the American role in this.

DAVID C. MILLER, JR.
Simulmatics (Business)
Saigon (1967-1968)

Mr. Miller was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio and was educated at Harvard University and The University of Michigan. After work in The White House he joined Westinghouse Electric Corporation, where he held a number of high level positions dealing with a variety of social, environmental and nuclear issues. He served as United States Ambassador to Tanzania, 1981-1984 and Zimbabwe, 1984-1986, after which he worked with the South Africa Working Group in Washington. From 1989 to 1991 Mr. Miller was assigned to The National Security Council. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: As you were moving through Michigan, getting ready to get out in '67, did you know what you were pointed towards?

MILLER: Sometime or other, probably getting near the end of the second year, the war in Vietnam was getting to be bigger and bigger. I reached two or three fundamental conclusions. One was that it was dumb and mismanaged and was something I was not very enthusiastic about. That said, I had a strong sense that my country was at war and that I ought to try to do something

to help. I didn't think that leaving the country was terribly helpful. Yet by the time I knew I wanted to get to Vietnam, I was convinced that killing more Vietnamese was in all probability not going to be of great use to anybody. By that time, I was married. Mollie and I got married that summer after my second year. We were expecting a child. Under the Selective Service rules of the time, I didn't have to go to Vietnam, but I wanted to go to Vietnam, so I started looking around for how to help. As fate would have it, I ultimately found out that Arthur Smithies, with whom I had worked on my college thesis and from whom I had taken courses, was going to Vietnam with a very odd little group of people, a company called Simulmatics. The gang at Simulmatics included Pat Moynihan, Ithiel de Sola Poole, Adam Yarmolinsky...and a lot of Cambridge intellectual talent, that came together to work for the Advanced Research Projects Agency at the Pentagon.

Q: Was this one of McNamara's grandchildren?

MILLER: Yes. In the ARPA compound, which was on the river very close to District 10 in Saigon, we had a remarkable collection of intellectual talent of which I was a pretty small foot soldier. There were a lot of professors. So, what happened was that virtually within a week or two of graduating from law school, I got on a plane and went over to work with Simulmatics and Arthur Smithies. We were tasked with determining (as best you could) what was happening to the economy in the middle of this war and was there a way to make the economy work in our favor. That broke down into two accounts. Having the economy work in your favor in the short run is, put directly, what intelligence can you glean from what's happening in the economy? Secondly, what works for you in the long run is, for example, the Strategic Hamlet Program of basically pulling loosely aggregated country residents into a defensible single village depended largely on the ability to make an economy run around that. It's cute to get everybody into the compound at night, but if you can't keep an economy functioning around the Strategic Hamlet it will fail. So, I launched off to Vietnam to try to do those two things.

Q: This was in the summer of '67?

MILLER: Yes. I basically stayed there through the spring of '68 and then came back to participate in the White House Fellows program. We got to spend a lot of time in the countryside. Vietnam is a long story.

Q: Vietnam is so pivotal. What was your impression of Vietnam?

MILLER: It was probably worse than I anticipated, but in keeping with the half-full glass of water thing, I went with enthusiasm and tried to figure out. There were two ways I looked at it primarily. One was IV Corps, which would have been the heart of the agricultural activity.

Q: This was down in the Mekong?

MILLER: Yes, this was down Route 4 from Saigon through the towns of My Tho, Can Tho, and Soc Trang down into the Delta, and then the areas south of the Da Nang Airfield, which was down Route 1. The northern area was primarily faced with this simple problem. What could conceivably be accomplished in an area of really severe conflict? The work in IV Corps, in the

Delta, was much more normal. Life in the Delta for the Chinese rice mill owner and the rice grower was pretty normal, and of course, they were a fountain of information on what was really happening in the countryside. I just spent a lot of the week running around in the field. I would return to Saigon on the weekends.

And now to tell you a story that is really wonderful, and illustrates the crazy things that happened during the conflict. The Advanced Research Projects Agency, which was responsible for me in country, was being run by General Hap Arnold's son, a colonel in the Air Force. After the first two months, my wife was coming over from the States to visit me in Singapore, from which she planned to proceed to Indonesia, where she would use her skills to teach English. Our first pregnancy had ended in a miscarriage, so it was not a very happy time. But she was coming over to Singapore to meet me. So, I went to Colonel Arnold and said, "This weekend I would like your permission to go down to Singapore to see my wife." He said, "Well, what's she going to do?" I said, "She's a linguist. She's been studying Indonesian and she's going to teach." He said, "Well, have her come to Vietnam." I said, "How can I have her come to Vietnam?" He said, "Well, we just won't tell anybody, will we?" I said, "You've got to be kidding me." He was a colonel. He said, "Well, my wife was with me in Korea. I think a family that's together in an effort like this is a good thing." That's what he wanted to do. He said, "She could teach at the Vietnamese-American Association. She could teach English as a second language." I got down to Singapore as quick as I could. When we met, I told her "You're not going to go to Indonesia, you can come with me to Vietnam." She said, "You're crazy," but she ended up in Vietnam for three or four months, basically up to the Tet offensive. But that was really bizarre. These wonderful stories from your lifetime. Peter Kahn, now the publisher of "The Wall Street Journal" and a Pulitzer Prize winner, and I had been club mates at Harvard. Peter was in Saigon at the same time. So, when Mollie arrived I decided I would introduce her to my friends in the press corps. We went out to dinner and I said, "This is my wife, Mollie," which was greeted by loud snickers and sort of, "But she can't be your wife! How did you get this babe?" I said, "No, no, she really is my wife." That's another whole long, humorous story. She was a great partner there. Was a fine teacher of English, but suffered as we all did, from the human damage occurring around her. On a serious note, I concluded two or three things in Vietnam. One is that the war was not winnable because the premises on which we entered were not sustainable. The analytic work that was done thereafter was warped to support the premises. My worst illustration of this involves General Lansdale, of Philippines insurrection fame. I came back from IV Corps on one particular trip, and was so enthused about my observations, that it was arranged for me to meet General Lansdale in Saigon to brief him.

Q: He was a very famous General. Those best-known anti-guerilla leaders our country had produced.

MILLER: So, I met with Ed Lansdale and had a lot of observations about the hamlet evaluation system and the measures of our performance in the districts and so on. General Lansdale said, "Well, you know, young man, we've already lost this war." I said, "Gee, Sir, there are a lot of people here in country that are still fighting." He said, "Yes, but what we're doing is so nonsensical that there's no way we're going to win. It's just a question of how long it will be before we can leave." I was stunned. With that, I developed a lifelong interest in accurate intelligence and some devotion to telling the truth that proved to be very critical in my public

life.

Q: We're talking about particularly the Hamlet Evaluation System, which was each person assigned to an area, an American, had to come up with positive figures.

MILLER: The basic problem with the system was the "warping of the truth" as it moved up the chain of command. If the hamlet didn't look good, then the district didn't look good, then the province didn't look good, then the Corps didn't look good, and then in Saigon, some senior general didn't look good. That was not acceptable. So each layer tended to make things just a little more favorable, until Saigon had a completely unrealistic picture of what was happening in the field.

Q: Yes.

MILLER: Most of the guys knew that they were warping the system a bit. Nobody would ever say they were lying about things. My favorite in the Delta involved the questions that we had on the HES form related largely to road transportation. In the Delta, you clearly had an option between water and road transportation. Frequently, water transportation was the more useful. So, you'd get to one of our little outposts and there would be Major Jones and his district team and we'd start talking to Jones about what was going on. Jones would say, "These are all Bs." We would say, "Why is that?" "Well, we control 90% of the roads." We'd say, "That is great, Sir. How much commerce is moving on the roads?" "Well, actually, none." "Well, why is that?" "We'll, they've got land mines and ambushes." I'd say, "Where is all the commerce going?" "Well, it's all in the canals." "And who controls that?" "Well, we don't." I said, "Oh, well, don't you think to give a sense of what's happening you might want to answer these questions a little differently?" He would reply that the question only asked about the roads. And the guy would look at you like you were dreaming. So, you ultimately came to the conclusion that you should really try very hard to get accurate data to policymakers. I don't think you should hold policymakers to rationality all the time, but those of us who are in public activity or living overseas really do owe our country our best efforts to try to decide what is true and what is not. The other thing that came out of my time in Vietnam was that war impressed me as a terrible activity. It happens. It's a terrible thing. The idea that it's a glamorous and fun pastime is just as close to insanity as anything you can imagine. That helped motivate and reinforce this idea that diplomatic work was a good thing.

Q: You're talking about the military reporting, which was essentially the hamlet evaluation and all this, which you remarked was extremely flawed. It was one of these bean-counting exercises. Did you get any feel for what the embassy was getting from its Foreign Service officers and the CIA was getting?

MILLER: Not as much. I had very little contact with FSOs. I had more contact with Agency people. I think that we were just on the cusp of the Agency giving up on trying to report honestly. I'd have to go back through the history there of the inability of the Agency to sustain its DI [the analytic function] function as an honest provider of data. There were so many careers that went up in smoke when they tried to tell people that things were not as Washington thought that sometime in '65/'66/'67, the Agency gave up on trying to tell people the truth. Nobody

wanted to hear the truth. The operational side of the Agency, the Phoenix Program, the SOG [Studies and Operations Group, the covert action program in Vietnam] activities, took preeminence and the ability of good analysts to come back and say, “We’re losing the war. We don’t know what we’re doing” disappeared.

Q: In your group of intellectuals under military control, what was the spirit?

MILLER: Like MASH, the TV series in which the characters survived by developing a whole range of rather outlandish “defense mechanisms.”

Q: A popular TV program.

MILLER: You developed a bizarre sense of humor to deal with this. We drank. One of our guys got on his motorcycle to Cambodia, returning with what he assured us was the best marijuana in all of Southeast Asia. For those who used marijuana this was truly a great accomplishment. When you got assignments from Washington like “We need an analytic model to validate the body count,” reporting, that took a couple weeks worth of drinking beer late into the evening to say “If you saw 50 left feet in a rice paddy at 4:00 PM in an engagement in which we had expended 1,000 rounds, how many bodies would there be in the rice paddy?” The answer is, nobody had a clue. One way to validate the body count would be to send out Lance Corporal Jones at dusk to try to do an accurate body count. The problem is that Jones would usually get killed. So, it was better to dummy the system than to lose Lance Corporal Jones. That we knew. So, what was it like? I still have very good friends with whom I worked over there. Like all of these experiences, they last a long time. It left me convinced we were going to lose and it left me with a set of objectives for my life in terms of trying to not let things like that happen again.

Q: Did you have any feel that we were on the wrong track? Was there a right track?

MILLER: There might have been a right track, which in hindsight is much easier to discuss. The right tracks go all the way back to Ho Chi Minh, who came to us and he didn’t like the French. The first response to that is, if Vietnam had existed in a vacuum and we had been able to tell the French to forget it as allies and we weren’t concerned about anyplace else in the world, we might have been able to reach out to Ho Chi Minh at that time and say, “We don’t like colonies or empires either.” But then obviously if you took France in the global context...

Q: We were concerned about keeping France in NATO.

MILLER: Yes. We had big issues with France and Ho Chi Minh wasn’t one of them. So, you sort of missed that opportunity. Then you get into the Dien Bien Phu aftermath. Did we do the right thing? Should we have stepped in militarily or should we have encouraged a sincere effort to bring an end to the civil war. Enough is enough. These are dedicated folks so let’s press for a political solution. Then you could have moved onto, let’s have a “light” engagement. Let’s use Special Forces troops. Let’s find a viable political structure. In one of the great examples of mission creep, we went from a handful of advisors to 500,000 kids or whatever. That was insane. The problem was, there was no ability to say, “Here is the game-plan. If it doesn’t work, we’re going to figure out how to go home now.” You need to have thought out how you went home.

The problem is, we had no exit strategy once we were in that far, which makes you think of today's Middle East problem. But we got in far enough that there simply was no apparent way to back out.

Q: You were there during Tet?

MILLER: Yes.

Q: Could you tell me your experiences during Tet?

MILLER: It was one of those days that altered your life. By that time, we were sleeping with small arms in the house.

Q: Where were you located?

MILLER: On the morning of Tet, I was asleep in a bed on the road between Tan San Nhut airport and downtown, relatively closer to the embassy and the center of the city.

The good news is that we had laid in some extra food, as over the holidays, the Vietnamese house staff was not going to be there. We were awakened by very low flying helicopters over the house, much lower than usual on their approaches to Tan San Nhut. So we woke up. It was maybe 7:00 AM. We said, "Well, we're awake. We're going to drive downtown and have breakfast." So, three or four of us got into a car, a small Toyota, and we started driving downtown. We had gone four or five blocks and there was a dead VC in the street, shot in front of somebody's wall." We said, "Somebody got into town last night. That's amazing." We drove on a little bit farther toward the downtown and we ran into a couple more bodies. But this being Vietnam, we just kept on, as we were used to seeing this in the countryside. We get downtown and we were going to one of the officers' messes, probably the Brinks, which was four or five blocks from the embassy. We parked the car. When we got out we noticed everybody had sidearm on. People were carrying weapons. This was like 8:00 AM on Sunday or something. We looked at this one trooper and said, "What's going on?" He said, "They've captured the embassy." We said, "Ah, come on. Don't give us that crap. It's Sunday. We want ham an eggs." He said, "No, they've captured the embassy. See those helicopters going in there? We're in the process of recapturing the embassy." Well, that was the first we had a sense that there was something really bad going on. We skipped breakfast and turned around and went back to our little villa.

Over time, we took an extra fridge, filled it full of sand, got that in front of our door. We had a grease gun with 20 rounds of 45-caliber ammunition which would have been absolutely useless. We went up to the roof and sat there with as much as beer and canned ham as we could find for two days and we watched close air support in Saigon. Then about the third day one of our friends from the embassy arrived and said, "You've got to go get your Vietnamese and you've got to get out on the street." We had a number of Americans who were fluent in Chinese and Vietnamese, which I was not, and probably 20 good Vietnamese interpreters. This fellow arrived and said, "You've got to drive around town, find these people, and we want you to start in District 10." District 10 was the Chinese area where we had completely lost control of the situation to what

turned out to be regular NVA units. So, we got in our little car, having been armed with a short barrel .38, and drove around Saigon, picked up our folks, and off we went. I spent the balance of my time in Vietnam interviewing people trying to figure out what had happened, what these troops looked like when they came into town, who fought well on our side, who did not. Then I went back through all the districts we had worked in to look at the economic impact of the attack, how people perceived what had happened.

Q: By the time you left there, was it the summer of '68?

MILLER: It was in the spring.

Q: What was your impression of the economy at that time?

MILLER: Actually, like many economies in wartime, I thought it was doing better than anyone had a right to expect. And that was particularly true of agricultural activities. More complex light manufacturing and so on was harder but we spent a lot of time with Chinese rice mill owners in the Delta, in IV Corps, interviewing them about the availability of insecticides, fertilizers, the prices of rice, how far they'd get boats out to collect rice, how far they would advance finance crops, which was a great intelligence data for us. If God has ever made a natural intelligence organization, it's a Great Overseas Chinese community. They know all. One of my partners was a Mormon who had done his missionary work in Hong Kong. He spoke reasonable Cantonese. We had an opportunity to talk to a lot of people and we concluded that the economy actually was working fairly well and that the supplements that AID was providing, the insecticides, were getting out and were maintaining a fairly healthy rice production base.

Q: Had the miracle rice appeared yet?

MILLER: I don't believe so. I don't remember any questions on that subject.

Q: When you left there in '68, what was your impression of whither Vietnam?

MILLER: I didn't know. I think one of the things that I did learn is that you have to play the hand that you're dealt. I didn't understand geopolitics at that point. I had no clue what could or could not be done. I knew we were losing on the ground and that an awful lot of our troops were walking around the countryside without a clue of what was going on around them. Every once in a while, we would end up along with Major Jones, the district advisory, trying to bring peace between an Army company protecting field artillery pieces, typically three 105's. Our classic was a company digging into the cemetery around Ba Tri district because the cemetery had headstones of poured concrete. If you were out there trying to stay alive, where would you dig? Next to the poured concrete. And I probably would have, too. Well, the Vietnamese, of course, were outraged. I've never forgotten looking at these young Americans and thinking, "They don't belong here. This is a disaster. We're going to fire harassment and interdiction fire into the bush tonight. We're going to expend 500 H and I rounds, three 105s, to drive the Vietnamese crazy and to win the war." Meanwhile, this whole district is saying, "If those Americans don't get out of our cemetery, we're going to personally go out there and strangle them."

Q: Did you get any feel for the Vietnamese government and their reach and how they operated?

MILLER: Not as much. I saw more of our people than of their people in Saigon, than the Vietnamese leadership.

JOHN E. GRAVES
Provincial Advisor
Rach Gia (1967-1968)

John E Graves was born in 1927 in Michigan. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degree from the University of Michigan, and served in the US Navy overseas from 1945 to 1946. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1962, he was assigned to Leopoldville, Bukavu, Antananarivo, Rach Gia, Lomé, Yaoundé, Tehran, Montevideo, Sidi Bou Said, and Rabat. Mr. Graves was interviewed by Richard Jackson on January 12, 1999.

Q: So, you arrived in Saigon in 1967 and then what?

GRAVES: I had several weeks of briefings and met top officials, listened to their programs and evaluations.

Q: Top officials being Henry Cabot Lodge?

GRAVES: Cabot Lodge was soon replaced by Bunker but more important in terms of my assignment were General Westmoreland and Robert Komer.

Q: Komer was the deputy responsible for the provincial...

GRAVES: Responsible for the infamous Phoenix Program, which I knew nothing about. I was selected to be the equivalent of governor of a province. The main reason I was assigned to Vietnam had to do with my experience with terrorism and guerrilla warfare. Also my French, which would enable me to easily communicate with Vietnamese officials. Spending a year or two in Vietnamese training got you almost nowhere. To learn to speak Vietnamese usefully, you have to be very gifted for language learning and very motivated. There are of course no intrinsically hard languages. But Vietnamese is far removed from English, far from European languages. For starters, the tonal system is difficult for a Westerner to cope with. For example, the act of asking a question where we use the same words as in a statement but with an intonation which indicates a question. Imagine a language where you can change the same basic word to three or four very different meanings by changing tonal relationships.

Q: Were you then with other provincial advisors designate, the Frank Wisners, Paul Hares, and Dick Holbrookes of that time?

GRAVES: Wisner was in Saigon when I got to know him. He was one of the few Americans

who seemed to have some understanding of Vietnam. Most of the Americans who briefed me, especially the military, parroted the party line. Aggression from the North and the evils of Communism. I learned to avoid these people. They were of no use to me. I eventually ended up in Rach Gia, capital of Kien-giang, part of the Delta of the Mekong on the coast of the Gulf of Siam, The northern part borders on Cambodia; the southern part was in the hands of the Viet Cong. What with other enclaves, I was in a province where something like half was Viet Cong.

Q: This was the year before Tet.

GRAVES: The Tet Offensive occurred right after the end of my stay there.

Q: What did you find when you got to your province?

GRAVES: The reason I had such a singular experience was that when I was assigned to Rach Gia I had to meet with the regional chief in Can Tho, my immediate American boss. I was also advised to let Can Tho hire me a Vietnamese interpreter-advisor-counselor. The people that Can Tho proposed had never set foot in my province. None of them could really speak French. They were young. They spoke very broken, very useless English. One of the reasons Americans did so badly in Vietnam was that they had no real communication with the Vietnamese. The best possible thing would be to have Americans who really could speak Vietnamese. The next best thing would be to have people who could really speak French. The top layer in Vietnam all talked (even with each other) in French. So when Can Tho presented me with a candidate, I asked, "Why should I hire him? How would he be of any use to me?"

When I got to Rach Gia, I hired a man who had just retired from the civil service. He had been in the French civil service for perhaps 20 years and then the Vietnamese civil service until mandatory retirement. Mr. Vinh proved to be a first-rate human being and an incredible source of information once I learned to ask open-ended questions. This is very important, especially with Asians. Never give them a hint as to what the answer should be. I learned a great deal about Vietnam, the Vietnamese, and what was really going on. A big mistake insofar as my career was concerned.

Q: How did that picture you were putting together differ from what you had gotten in your Saigon briefings?

GRAVES: Probably best to begin with black humor. Our body count reports which proved we were winning. Art Buchwald had a lot of fun with that. Custer's last stand. His body count reports show he is winning the battle, but the only American left is poor Custer and he's wounded.

One of the things I soon learned was that our maps showing what territory was secure didn't have much to do with reality. We were surrounded and infiltrated by the Viet Cong. There were few really safe villages in Kien-giang. I also learned that had there been an election, as was promised, in south Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh would have won hands down. Even Vietnamese who would certainly lose everything including their lives, if the Viet Cong won out, didn't dispute the fact that Ho Chi Minh was the most popular leader in Vietnam. In any kind of election, he would

have won. So it's not surprising that successive governments in Saigon had little standing, prestige, or power, and even less ability to administer and govern. We were backing what was essentially a dead horse, and it was getting more and more expensive to maintain the illusion that our horse was in the running.

I also had misgivings about Komer's Phoenix Program which began with the plausible premise that there were traitors in the South Vietnamese administration, army, and village hierarchies who should be eliminated. This sounds reasonable enough at first look, but when you bump up against the reality of how and by whom the condemned are designated, it gets uncomfortable. Rivalries, petty quarrels, family feuds, or even schemes to take over the position or land of someone. No real safeguards against mistaken or malevolent accusations. No trial, no proof, no defense. A group of black pajama types just goes in and kills the accused traitor.

Q: Americans?

GRAVES: Americans and Vietnamese together, always with the Americans leading.

Q: And you observed that at work in your own province.

GRAVES: I was called in and thoroughly briefed by Komer, who wanted each province advisor to understand what the program was and why it was and why we had to support it. We didn't have to be directly involved in it, just know that it was happening and to take advantage of it each time there was a strike.

Q: Were any of their actions based on information from provincial advisors such as you, intelligence?

GRAVES: Almost none.

Q: How did they get their information?

GRAVES: I personally think that some of it was settling accounts, vengeful Vietnamese. I have no reason to believe that accusing information was well-founded. I just don't think that our intelligence was good enough to pinpoint many important traitors, maybe the little chislers, but the really important people, I don't think so.

Q: In a province such as yours, one of maybe 30 provinces in Vietnam?

GRAVES: I've forgotten how many there were.

Q: A large number. What scale are we talking about in this?

GRAVES: Probably hundreds assassinated.

Q: You became conscious of this in your year there?

GRAVES: Right. People disappeared, were killed. Also, some torture was used. You could argue that it was justified, that we had to get information, but the information was often superficial. We were busy picking off the fringes. Obviously, it didn't work very well. The Tet offensive proved beyond doubt that South Vietnam was mined with tunnels full of Viet Cong and their stockpiles. In my province, the only areas not subject to Viet Cong influence were Catholic. The Catholics had come down from the North and settled after the 1954 settlement. They were profoundly anti-Viet Cong, anti-Communist. But they were the only group, the only villages which fought off Viet Cong infiltration. But they weren't pro-Saigon either. On the contrary, they detested the Saigon officials who were often corrupt, rapacious schemers. The Catholics listened to their priests rather than to Saigon officials or American do-gooders. They were the only group that I considered really hostile to the Viet Cong. All the rest were frightened, or didn't care or were sympathetic to the Viet Cong because they were against the foreigners.

Q: Some of your fellow provincial advisors considered their service in that role as the high point of responsibility or power in their career.

GRAVES: John Vann is a good example.

Q: How did you feel about it in those terms? What did you find there in terms of staff? What was your role and daily life?

GRAVES: Most of my staff (some 160) were American military. One of the things that really shocked me was that discipline in the Foreign Service was much better than in the military. The military were not prepared to do a lot of things. They were not prepared to take orders in the way that my Foreign Service officers were.

Q: There were senior military at the lieutenant colonel/colonel level under your authority?

GRAVES: Right. In fact, the lieutenant colonel who was my deputy became a very close and good friend.

Q: How did the military people like that take to this French-speaking academic?

GRAVES: They didn't. Worse than that, they were not prepared to do certain things or stop doing certain things. For example, our reconnaissance planes were armed with rockets. After they had done their reconnaissance, they would dump the rockets on so-called "free fire zones." I happened to be in a free fire zone when a plane dropped its load and saw what happened. So I prohibited all such gratuitous attacks and immediately found myself in a near mutiny.

Q: Casualties to Vietnamese civilians that you saw.

GRAVES: Right. I was in the midst of it and saw men, women and children maimed and killed. People I had come to talk with and try to understand. People we wanted to take a stand against Viet Cong infiltration. When I got back to Rach Gia, I was pretty angry. There was absolutely no reason to dump rockets on that village. Hard to imagine anything more counterproductive in terms of our goals. But the military had a kind of "shoot 'em up" attitude that was hard to control.

My deputy, a lieutenant colonel, was not at all in sympathy with such gratuitous attacks. We saw eye to eye but never succeeded in getting whole-hearted cooperation from the real gunslingers. My deputy even ruefully admitted that he was more sure that a Foreign Service officer would do what he was told than a military, who might protest and invoke his rights. Alas, many latter-day Foreign Service officers seem to have adopted the attitude of my military in Vietnam.

Q: I am understanding that you were then basically in charge of a group of about 160, mostly military, but including Foreign Service personnel. Nothing in the previous assignments we've been discussing had seemed to prepare you for that kind of management experience. What was it like suddenly?

GRAVES: I was confronted with problems which I had never seen before. I had to really listen to my more experienced staff. Then improvise and make mistakes. AID logistics (most of my civilians were AID), I knew nothing about. For example, tons of concrete. How to prevent it from being stolen or destroyed in leaky warehouses. How to get it distributed to villages participating in our projects. Much of it was waylaid by venal officials. A new experience for me, learning how difficult it is to give anything away effectively. Another example where I began without a clue. Our military were running patrols, but I couldn't make out what the goal or object of these "walks in the sun" was. They seemed to be "shoot 'em up" operations, revenge for all the casualties we were taking.

Q: Casualties occurring mostly on patrols?

GRAVES: Many, but all of us who traveled the roads risked land mines. I couldn't see how groups of armed Americans tramping around in rice paddies or ransacking villages was going to pacify South Vietnam and garner support for Saigon. Westmoreland's idea was that our presence be declared, repeated and emphasized. He came to Rach Gia several times to talk with us. The man was very conscientious. He even asked some good questions. In many respects he was admirable and straightforward, sort of a grown up boy scout. But he had little understanding of Vietnam and the Vietnamese. Not his cup of tea. I suppose he saw the war as a chess game rather than a problem of winning over a very foreign people to our values. In any case, I didn't see where there was much hope that he would come to see that what he was doing had little chance of promoting American interests.

Interesting question, "What was the American interest in Vietnam?" We normally define American interests in terms of security, trade, culture and family relations. In the case of Ireland or Israel, for example, American interest has to do with the fact that a great many Americans have Irish or Jewish origins. Then there is strategic interest. Oil in the Middle East, Central America's proximity. Finally, trade, which contributes to our interest in Canada or Japan. None of these criteria obtain in the case of Vietnam itself, but the domino theory had it that if Vietnam fell to the Communists, we would suffer a major strategic setback. When I was in Vietnam, I more or less accepted the idea that the domino theory was valid. But my daily experience gradually forced me to conclude that our programs and tactics were never going to pacify my province. And I began to wonder how long the American public would go along with the Westmoreland syndrome of bringing in ever more American soldiers and taking ever more casualties. Privately some of my colleagues in Saigon and in other provinces began to wonder

along with me.

Q: Who were some of the others who, in your view, saw clearly?

GRAVES: One that comes to mind immediately is Frank Wisner. He was well informed and skeptical. There were a few who resigned. Most just served out their assignment and departed.

Q: As you described what you were doing, a lot of the activities under your control were in contradiction with each other: the patrols to assert presence, and then on the other hand the food distribution and the AID activities. Those contradictions, with time, seemed to become more and more apparent to you.

GRAVES: Not so much the contradictions, but I couldn't see how our programs and projects were ever going to pacify Kien-giang. I remember Westmoreland asking me point blank if we had made progress in the last month. I answered, "I don't think we're any worse off than we were six months ago, but we're no better off either."

Q: Measured in terms of area of control?

GRAVES: Security? That was what mattered. What part of Vietnam was secure and under the auspices of the Saigon government and, therefore, the Americans. I said, quite frankly, I couldn't see where we had made any progress in the last six months. Westmoreland was unhappy with my answer. I was saying that our people were being killed to no good effect.

Q: Did you have civilian congressional, other fact finders?

GRAVES: Almost every day. One of the reasons I got into trouble was that I finally decided that I just didn't have time to deal with all those visitors. A never ending succession of congressmen, senators, journalists.

Q: Harvard professors like Henry Kissinger.

GRAVES: There were professors, politicians and bureaucrats aplenty. They would turn up and think they merited my full attention for the whole day.

Q: In your province?

GRAVES: Right.

Q: But getting there, having been cleared by somebody.

GRAVES: Right.

Q: On their own military aircraft.

GRAVES: The CIA ran an airline in Vietnam. I would get a telegram saying that, for example, Joe Alsop was coming to visit tomorrow and expected me to stay with him the whole damn day.

Q: How did he take it when you didn't?

GRAVES: It was shortly after Alsop's visit when I decided that I was going to say "No" and see what happened. My superiors were unhappy that I was saying "No" to many people, "no, I don't have time to meet and greet this man." Besides, it was too dangerous. For example, we had a well-known senator from the Middle West who was prominent in the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. He came out and I got a call from Westmoreland who said, "John, show him the war." The reason he called was that, unlike in many of the other Delta provinces, the Viet Cong controlled large areas of Kien-giang and you could be sure of getting into a fire fight if you ventured into those areas. There was an area called the "Three Sisters." Low mountains. So I foolishly took the Senator into the Three Sisters in a helicopter, escorted by two other helicopters, all heavily armed. We got shot down. This was instant worldwide news.

Q: You and he were in the helicopter?

GRAVES: Right. The other helicopters protected us but we had to establish a perimeter so one of them could land and evacuate us. I had military training. So I grabbed a machine gun to help establish the perimeter. No time to look after the Senator.

Q: When you say "military training," you had done a tour in the Navy in 1945-1946.

GRAVES: Yes, but I also had training in the Congo and in Vietnam, so I knew how to use an M-16, grenades, and machine guns.

Q: So, you were on the ground with the congressman and were eventually extracted.

GRAVES: Right. But his pants suffered greatly.

Q: Having risked lives on instruction to show him the war.

GRAVES: Stupid on my part. He was embarrassed about his messed pants and furious with me until we got to Can Tho and he realized that he was worldwide media. Then he was very pleased that he had been shot down. A war hero for the folks back home.

Q: You mentioned as the boss taking many losses in your group in this. How did that sit with you?

GRAVES: It was a chore I wasn't any good at. I let my deputy do most of it. But he was away at one point on leave in the U.S. and I had to do it all. Presiding over our ceremonies in honor of dead comrades and writing to their families to say they had not died in vain, that they had been protecting and sacrificing for our country and all of that, which I just didn't believe and couldn't easily express. I had to preside over body bags and say things that I didn't believe. Sometimes, I knew the man well, knew his views, a friend and comrade who didn't believe in what I had to say over his remains. That, I think, was one of the hardest things I had to cope with when I was in Vietnam. We had casualties and deaths and we had to deal with their families.

Q: You were yourself living in a military security cocoon of day to day existence, no?

GRAVES: No, in a pleasant villa presided over by a great Vietnamese cook. But I didn't trust the ARVN (Vietnamese army) to protect me there in the center of town, even though I was on good terms with the Vietnamese colonel commanding all ARVN troops in Kien Giang. The colonel, who enjoyed talking to an American in plain French, did not disagree with my judgment. So I hired Cambodian guards and stationed them up on my roof. I didn't want them out in front where any Viet Cong assault team coming in would immediately conclude that my house was a place to attack because it was being guarded. There was nobody in front of my house. But my armed Cambodians were behind sand bags on the roof every night.

Q: Was your office ever subject to this?

GRAVES: Our office building was shot up by rockets. I have a photo of my battered desk sitting there with the walls around it blown away. If I had been upstairs at my desk, I wouldn't be talking to you now, but I was down below participating in the shoot-out.

Q: You mentioned that Tet occurred.

GRAVES: The Tet offensive occurred after I was removed from my job. Rach Gia came under extensive attack, which was later described to me by my former deputy. (We were good friends and maintained close contact over the years.)

Q: How did the removal itself play out?

GRAVES: I was removed because I sent a highly classified message to Washington documenting my observation that we were making no progress overall in pacifying Kien Giang. I was careful to cite only my province where I could see no end to the war and no good coming from what we were doing. I ended by suggesting we reduce our aid to the level which we assumed the Viet Cong and the North were getting from the outside and that if our guys couldn't hack it, that ought to tell us we were backing a dead horse and should therefore get out of Vietnam. Or as the wags had it, declare victory and go home.

Q: That was a courageous message to send.

GRAVES: At first I was commended by Leonard Marks, Director of USIA, who had asked for a frank analysis of what I was seeing in Vietnam.

Q: In sending it, were you aware of what the consequences would be?

GRAVES: No. I was responding to a specific request from my director. A matter of doing my job, but there was also a personal calculation. What with MacNamara's radically new analysis of the war in Vietnam, I figured policy was up for grabs. My analysis and suggestion on how we could exit Vietnam would arrive at just the right moment to help Marks make a big splash in Washington. This could get me promoted. I was elated when I was congratulated for my

analysis.

Q: By who?

GRAVES: I got a letter from Marks, head of USIA, expressing his gratitude for my analysis. (See attached photocopy of Marks' letter of commendation.) I assumed he was planning to use it to wade into the high-level policy debate at the White House. A gross miscalculation on my part. MacNamara lost out to the hawks. Johnson remained adamant about Vietnam. No debate, no policy change. Nonetheless it was a good analysis and I hoped that someday it would be recognized. (To facilitate finding in archives my report, see attached photocopy of the first page of the report.)

Q: Is it not now already?

GRAVES: No.

Q: Was it a normal thing for provincial advisors to take on the overall picture and offer views on grand strategy?

GRAVES: Of course not, but I sent a copy to my superior in Saigon, Barry Zorthian.

Q: While you were a USIA officer, these were in regular embassy or military channels.

GRAVES: Essentially, military channels.

Q: We lost a bit of information when I changed the tape. You were talking about how reaction to your Vietnam report changed....

GRAVES: In Washington and throughout the country there was great controversy regarding our intervention in Vietnam. MacNamara repudiated his long-standing policies and strategies and concluded the war was not winnable. For a brief moment, it looked as if people who had other ideas might get a hearing. But it turned out that Lyndon Johnson had made his decision regarding the new views of our chief strategist. MacNamara was out.

Q: So, your report played into a larger Washington setting that you had no way of gauging and then it came back down to you from the embassy that you were on your way home.

GRAVES: Right, which is the normal thing in our service, as we all know.

Q: You had a certain amount of time to wrap up your affairs?

GRAVES: Dinners and receptions organized in my honor by Vietnamese in Rach Gia. Nothing in Can Tho or Saigon. As quickly as possible, I was shuffled out of Vietnam and back to Madagascar.

Q: As you leave this section of the tape in Vietnam, you had mentioned the rapid promotion cycle of some who were there. Was it your view that the network of people there somehow perpetuated

itself later in the Service? One does think of the Tarnoffs, Tony Lakes, Holbrookes, Wisners, and Hares.

GRAVES: It was a jumping off point. Vietnam certainly catapulted Barry Zorthian to fame and fortune. Others got hurt. Some left the Foreign Service. They didn't want to have anything more to do with the U.S. government. As it turned out, those who came to see that our intervention was wrong or at least not in the interest of our country were right. But the people who were essentially right suffered career setbacks and the people who were essentially wrong did very well. The cynical conclusion: officers should play the game, avoiding controversy and trying never to give offense (see "Falstaff au Viêt-nam" by John Graves, Éditions Tirésius, Paris, 1994; available Bibliothèque Nationale and in bookshops).

Q: Did you feel within USIA you were from that moment handicapped, or the other way, compensated for having gone through a tough time?

GRAVES: Once back in Washington, I found myself in quarantine, or as we call it, the corridor corps. No assignment, no prospects of an assignment, no office, and no address except the Foreign Service lounge. Director Marks was not available when I tried to get an appointment. Because it would be upsetting to our children to have a father who didn't have a job, I went off to "the office" every morning, which was mostly museums and libraries. Finally, after six months in limbo, a well-placed friend was able to quietly spirit me off to Lomé, Togo as public affairs officer.

Q: What was the reaction of your colleagues in that six month period? Were you a pariah, a hero? Did people shuffle by you in the corridors?

GRAVES: Many hardly said hello when they ran into me in the corridors. Others expressed sympathy and quickly moved on. A few invited me to lunch and assured me they were doing what they could to get me an assignment.

THOMAS F. CONLON
Head of Provincial Reporting
Saigon (1967-1968)

Thomas F. Conlon was born in Illinois in 1924 and received his BS from Georgetown University in 1948. He served overseas in the US Army from 1943-1945. Upon entering the Foreign Service, he was posted in Havana, Surabaya, Singapore, Saigon, Le Havre, Manila, Nice, Canberra, and Bangkok. In 1992 Mr. Conlon was interviewed by Arbor W. Gray.

CONLON: However, I had only spent six months in Manila when the Embassy in Saigon began to press me to return there for assignment. I felt personally that Vietnam was a very important testing place for the United States and, although I might have avoided returning there, I didn't feel that I could do this and still be consistent with my own views.

Q: So you accepted reassignment to Saigon?

CONLON: Yes, as First Secretary. Initially, I filled in as chief of the Internal Unit in the Political Section, replacing Ted Heavner, who was scheduled for reassignment elsewhere. After going on home leave Ted decided to return to Saigon, to his old position, and I was assigned as head of the "Provincial Reporting Unit." There were seven very capable young Foreign Service Officers assigned to it, most of them Vietnamese language officers, living in the provinces, working out of a central point, and reporting more or less on what they thought would be interesting and significant. My job was to keep in touch with them, review and send on their reports, and suggest other reports to them. Several senior officers from the Department told me how important this unit was, but it was apparent that few of them actually read the reports. I came to have considerable reservations about whether it was useful to have these guys risking their lives, frequently moving alone through a hazardous countryside, to produce reports that few people read. All in all, I felt that I was about 50% occupied, which was all the more disagreeable, since my family was still in the Philippines.

One incident occurred during this second tour in Saigon which made me reflect more deeply on how we should have responded to the Vietnamese generals' request for reassurance of support in 1963 in the event that they overthrew Diem. For a long time I had felt that, though it was regrettable, it was inevitable that we would reply that we would continue to support the non-communist side in South Vietnam. However, I believe that in September, 1967, presidential elections were held in South Vietnam, in which there were more than a dozen candidates. Nguyen van Thieu was elected president after a campaign which numerous American observers who came to South Vietnam for the event said was reasonably fair and democratic. Naturally, there were Vietnamese who did not accept the results and who were moving to have the National Assembly decline to certify the election outcome. At this point Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, a superb ambassador and a very perceptive but tough-minded man, called in all of the political officers and told us to pass the word to our Vietnamese contacts that if the National Assembly refused to certify the election results, the U. S. would regard this as a request for us to withdraw our military and economic support for the Republic of Vietnam and to pull our forces out of the country, leaving the non-communist Vietnamese to deal with the communists on their own. This quickly ended that kind of maneuver. I wondered what would have happened if we had taken similar action in the fall of 1963 when a group of Vietnamese generals asked for assurances of U. S. support if they overthrew Diem. Certainly, we never encountered as effective a Vietnamese Government as the one headed by President Diem.

Here, perhaps, a word or two about my long suffering but dutiful Foreign Service wife, Joan, would be appropriate. At the time I went back to Saigon in June, 1967, we had seven children, all living with us in Manila. I was able to get back to Manila from Saigon about once every six weeks or so, spending a week each time. This left Joan with all of the day to day problems of coping with a large family, handling local and U. S. bills (which I had always handled before), and having only indeterminate status in Manila. She had ordinary Filipino license plates on the car but still had access to the Embassy and Navy commissaries and the dispensary, as well as the clubs which we had joined when I was assigned to Manila. Although Joan could have returned to the U. S. or gone virtually anywhere else in the world other than Saigon, she decided to stay in

Manila. We had a very pleasant house in the Bel Air suburb of Manila, a good household staff, and the children were more or less content in school. Our eldest daughter, Peggy, however, decided that she would like to return to Washington, D. C., to go to high school with one of her best friends, Kathleen Conley. Kathleen's parents agreed to have Peggy live with them in Washington. During my absence in Saigon Joan also had unstinting support from the Political Counselor, Dick Usher, and his replacement, Frank Underhill, as well as other members of the Political Section, who treated her as if she was still the wife of one of the officers in the Section.

Then, just before I left Manila for Saigon, our eldest son Paco (so we called him, as he had been born in Havana), then not quite 17, asked if he could go to sea for a year or so. U. S. registered ships were being taken out of mothballs faster than the seamen's union could provide crews. A special arrangement had been made under which young American males in good physical condition could obtain temporary Coast Guard authorization to be signed on as ordinary seamen. The union grudgingly accepted this situation. I had myself wanted to serve in the Merchant Marine during World War II, but my mother refused her permission, as she said I "would meet rough men" if I went to sea. Poor Mother! I met "rough men" in the Army Air Forces instead and suffered no permanent harm. She must have been thinking of Eugene O'Neill's novel, The Long Voyage Home, made into a movie about this time, which depicted seamen as boozing brawlers. Well, I decided that I would sign the necessary authorization for Paco to go to sea. This relieved Joan of some responsibilities, as Paco was in a rather rebellious mood at the time, and his being at sea meant that she did not have to deal directly with him.

I think that the experience did him good, and he ultimately came to take this view. In fact, at the end of his year of service, he decided to return to Manila and complete his last year of high school. However, he had done a good job on the ship, and the captain was reluctant to let him go. I prevailed on the shipping officer in the Embassy in Saigon to go up to Cam Ranh Bay, where Paco's ship then was located, and "lean" on the captain to have him released. The task was made easier than seemed likely at first, because Paco had fallen down a slippery ladder while at sea, breaking an arm. This limited his usefulness on the ship. He was duly discharged, spent a week or so with me in Saigon, and then returned to Manila to finish high school.

VERNON C. JOHNSON
Vietnam Bureau, USAID
City Unspecified (1967-1968)

Vernon C. Johnson was born in Mississippi in 1918. He graduated from Southern University in 1948 and later from the University of Wisconsin in 1954. He served overseas in the US Army from 1942 to 1946. Working for ICA and AID, he was posted to various countries including India, Nigeria, Uganda, and Tanzania. He was interviewed April 12, 1994 by W. Haven North.

Q: Where did you go from there?

JOHNSON: From the War College I went to the Vietnam Bureau. USAID had set aside funds for

a separate Vietnam Bureau and I headed agriculture in the Bureau at that time. Jim Grant was the chief and our work was to back stop agriculture programs in Vietnam. I went out there twice and worked with the Mission in the field.

Q: What were we trying to do in agriculture?

JOHNSON: It was mainly security oriented; secure the villages, etc. All had a military purpose. For example, the agricultural programs were involved in the business of pig raising and pig feeding within the construct of a fortified village. We imported the first improved rice seeds that were produced in the Philippines and carried to Vietnam. I was in the Philippines when we were loading the ships. These were improved rice varieties. I understand those varieties of rice are the prominent ones in Vietnam even now.

Q: What other agricultural endeavors were you trying to promote in Vietnam?

JOHNSON: The general objective of agriculture was to improve village activity as I recall. Most of the people outside the cities were, of course, farmers and rice was the critical crop. Vegetable production was another element of activity and Taiwan was responsible for this work. You may recall that, at one time, particular countries were responsible for research in the development of particular crops. Taiwan was responsible for developing vegetable research and production; Mexico for wheat, etc. There were extension people assigned to Vietnam villages during the war. As for the Viet Cong... their feeling was that of non-interference in the production of food because they would probably get a share of it.

Q: What years were you back-stopping the work in Vietnam?

JOHNSON: This was in 1967-68. I was in that job there about a year and a half.

Q: Did you have any particular feelings or views about U.S. policy towards Vietnam at that time?

JOHNSON: Not really, I thought we should have been there and we should do what we could do. The war wasn't a pretty thing to see, however, but, I suppose, most Americans thought we should have been in Vietnam and being government employees we helped do what we could. The cold war was at its height and that was one of the main factors-with the Soviet Union supporting the North and, of course, with the Americans supporting the South. I had just left the country when the Tet attacks occurred. This was one of the main offenses from North Vietnam into the South. AID was there in great numbers trying to assist with food needs and, in general, to support the people of the South Vietnamese Government while they were trying to win the war.

Q: So it wasn't long term development?

JOHNSON: It wasn't long term development at all, no. It was, as I said, emergency work, doing whatever was needed in the villages that still were accessible day by day. A person might be assigned several villages and was expected to make his rounds. Each morning one checked with security about security in his village areas. If Viet Cong were in the area, our technicians stayed

away.

Q: Do you think there has been any effect of this work in Vietnam that was lasting?

JOHNSON: The Vietnamese were very industrious people, anyway. I think this was probably be true whether it was north or south. So with minimal help for survival, they would make it. They worked assiduously. I don't think that long term institutional building was intended, but some of the improved varieties of rice and vegetables that we took in are, no doubt, still being used; I'm sure the legacy of that is still there.

Q: Are any of the philosophies or American approaches to agriculture preset there?

JOHNSON: Not as such; for one thing, the farming there is dominated by traditional Asian methods of rice production. The best thing one could do was to provide the Vietnamese with those things that improve their own performance rather than give technical advice. So it was mainly a supply program more than anything else. And this was under unique and unusual conditions, so you would have not expected the typical A.I.D. organization and A.I.D. program, although there was a food and agriculture office, a Mission Director (always a top administrator, a very well thought of person.) The Director during my time had come from Nigeria-Don MacDonald.

CHARLES L. DARIS
Provincial Advisor, USAID
Saigon (1967-1969)

Charles L. Daris was born in 1938 in Massachusetts. He served in the US Navy before graduating from the San Francisco State College in 1963. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964. His overseas posts include Afghanistan, Vietnam, Western Africa, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Daris was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1998.

Q: You were in Vietnam between the Delta and the capital for a total of two years?

DARIS: Yes, I was there about two years and saw the war at both ends. And because I was between bosses at the time, I had the occasion after Tet to accompany the embassy's highlands political reporting officer on his rounds just two days after the attack, bearing witness to the bodies still on the barbed wires. The Tet attack, which occurred in January of 1968, was a turning point in the war for us. I remember arriving at the embassy and witnessing the carnage. I went up and inspected the Ambassador's office before he arrived with the idea of ensuring that no attackers were lurking in his bathroom. I'm certain this had already been done, but I remember holding my breath as I opened the door. I have pictures of me accompanying Ellsworth Bunker as he picked his way through the corpses littered around the embassy grounds. Alan Wendt had been the Embassy Duty Officer the night of the attack. He was on the phone all night with Washington and the U.S. military as the Vietcong came very close to penetrating the

Embassy. Afterwards, I took him home to give him some breakfast and try to calm him down. He did a great job.

At the time I don't think there were more than a fraction of my colleagues who didn't believe what they were doing in Vietnam was worthwhile. I certainly did or I wouldn't have volunteered. However, the war had become a quagmire that our political system could not sustain and it was a lesson painfully learned for the country. I visit the Vietnam Memorial, which as you know is very near the Department, from time to time and never fail to feel sadness as I scan the 58,000 names on the Wall.

Q: At the time you were there from 1966 to 1968, is that not the period? You left in 1968?

DARIS: I left in early 1969. I arrived in early 1967.

Q: How did you feel about Tet at the time or right immediately after it happened? You certainly probably didn't see it as a turning point at that stage. Was it seen as a defeat for the Vietcong, that they had shot everything and really hadn't achieved their objectives? Do you remember how you felt about it right afterwards when you went up to the highlands?

DARIS: I think we were all stunned that they made their way into the villages and into the capital, including our own compound. It was most sobering but the statistics showed that they paid a very, very dear price for it. It was only over time that the political costs in terms of our own political processes became apparent and over the long run it was not much of a victory for us, certainly not the victory General Westmoreland attempted to portray while talking to the press in front of the bullet-shattered teak door that was probably all that kept the Vietcong commandos from violating our embassy.

I'll tell you a little story. Many of us forget that 1968 was a very, very violent year all over the world. The Paris peace talks had begun in 1968 and Ambassador Bunker and his staff made a trip back to Washington, also stopping in Paris. I didn't go with him. I can't remember whether the sequence was Paris/Washington or Washington/Paris, but in the months following Tet I recall that Saigon was frequently under rocket fire and other violent reminders of war. From this scene in Saigon you must picture the party arriving in Paris. The famous *evenements* [French: events] were occurring, and Charles de Gaulle was tottering. Paris was burning. So they were under escort in Paris. Meanwhile, they arrived in Washington to experience the aftermath of the Martin Luther King assassination, and areas of the Capital were burning. In the end they all were glad to get back to Saigon, which of the three was the calmest. 1968 was quite a year.

Q: We are all kind of being reminded of that this year because it is the 30th anniversary of various events: Tet, the King assassination, and soon we'll probably be talking about Robert Kennedy and the events at the Democratic convention in Chicago, and so on. To come back to Saigon for a minute, where did you live? Did you have an apartment in the embassy compound?

DARIS: No. I had an apartment in a largely AID building on the road to the airport.

Q: You were a junior officer and you were in the Ambassador's and Deputy Ambassador's

offices so you certainly were at the center of things but did you feel kind of a personal sense of vulnerability with security or did that happen maybe more after you left Vietnam that you felt relieved to be out of danger so to speak?

DARIS: I never felt any great vulnerability. In the province where I was, there was some Vietcong activity but I was young and considered myself invulnerable and traveled at will. I carried a concealed automatic weapon, but I'm happy to say I never needed it. In Saigon the only real danger I felt was a wayward rocket that, fate would decide, might or might not kill me. I try not to worry about such things in life and I certainly didn't then.

Q: There wasn't much you could do about it anyway.

DARIS: No, nothing at all.

Q: Anything else we should discuss about the period in Vietnam? That was certainly a pivotal period, certainly in retrospect, while you were there.

DARIS: No. I guess the point I made was that everybody, or virtually everyone, believed that it was worth doing, worth trying and very good people were giving their all to serve their country at a time of war. Hindsight is always clearer but it wasn't evident at the time that it was going to end the way it did, not to most of those of us involved in it. That is not to say that we accepted all the official optimism, far from it. Until Tet, there were very few thinking we ought to give up the game.

Q: Did you have much experience in Saigon with the government, with Vietnam officials or was that pretty much done by others and you were pretty much working inside the mission?

DARIS: No, I had almost no contact because mine was an inside job. At other posts I was always a substantive officer out making contacts and that's what I missed most in my experience in Saigon.

Q: You were trying to make sure the memos arrived on time.

DARIS: Yes. It was an administrative job in which knowledge of substance was required, but it was a classic staff aide job.

CHARLES T. CROSS
Deputy, I Corps
Danang (1967-1969)

Ambassador Charles T. Cross was born in in China in 1922. He attended Carleton College and Yale University ,and served as a lieutenant overseas in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1942-1946. His assignments abroad included Taipei, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Alexandria, Nicosia, London and Danang,

with an ambassadorship to Singapore. Ambassador Cross was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001

Q: You were assigned to I Corps from 1967 to April 1969. Where were you stationed?

CROSS: In Danang. I was the deputy for I Corps after Barney Koren left. There were four of us - i.e., John Paul Vann, Sterling Cottrell, Charlie Whitehouse (later). We were mostly FSOs - except for the famous Vann.

Q: What was the situation in I Corps when you arrived?

CROSS: I Corps was in the middle of some of the heaviest fighting. At times we had as many as five North Vietnamese divisions on the periphery of the area we were guarding; sometimes of course they would make incursions into the area. The fighting along the DMZ was continuous. We had a very heavy military load. At the same time, the Marines had instituted some very enlightened pacification measures. For example, they had developed some ways to protect the rice crop. They held County Fairs, which they protected. They would also search villages for subversives. All of that protected the villagers against North Vietnamese and VC [Viet Cong] incursions, although there weren't many VC left in our area.

I had a very good relationship with the commanding general, General Robert Cushman. He gave us full support. We were advisors to the South Vietnamese on all matters except military operations, again with the exception of military operations in support of pacification; we did give advice on those. We had district advisors most of whom were military officers. There were 42 districts in the five provinces of I Corps. The U.S.-South Vietnam establishment in the I Corps area was huge and since we were responsible for all pacification activities - hospitals, education, police, etc - we had 500,000 regional and popular forces in the militia - a heavy workload.

Q: Where were most of the South Vietnamese forces?

CROSS: There were 2 ARVN divisions in I Corps, roughly: the First in central/north, the Second in the central/south. We had a brigade of South Korean Marines; they were not very good. In I Corps, there were three American divisions: two Marine and one Army - the "Americal." One of the Marine divisions was on the DMZ; the other was south of there, near Hue and Danang. The Americal was further south and was involved in the My Lai [atrocities].

Later on, two more Army divisions were added to the command - the 1st Cavalry division and the 101st Airborne. So most of the time we had a lot of troops in the I Corps area and lots of fighting.

Q: What was your job?

CROSS: As I said, I was the deputy to the Marine commanding general. I was in charge of the pacification program, which was one of the general's major responsibilities. My title was deputy for CORDS [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support] and I was involved in everything. I wrote about my work in great detail in Born a Foreigner (chapters 13-16).

Refugees were a major problem. About a third of the refugees were really not too far away from their homes. Many had moved just a few miles to live in the larger towns. They were not really refugees; I would call them “disrupted” people. That was a large challenge for us trying to ease the transition for these people.

We had a number of very good people working in the field; two or three were actually killed. Right at the beginning, I had a difference of views with a guy named De Haan, who was Ted Kennedy’s top assistant working on Vietnam. He came out with a group that was working on Laos, although he himself focused on the refugee problem. I told him that the refugee program was not a nation-building program as far as we were concerned; it was intended to take care of a large group of human beings who had no immediate means of support. For some reason, De Haan took my words out of context and used them as part of a Kennedy attack on the whole refugee program. I thought that was a very unfair attack, particularly since it was made in Congress where it got good coverage. I meant to say that it didn’t matter what one did for the Vietnamese refugees if they couldn’t be assisted, initially anyway, with food and shelter. Those basic necessities came first; it was a task that only we with our resources - capital and human - could do. The South Vietnamese just were not able to take care of these people. Born a Foreigner (pages 176-177) has this difference more clearly than I have just stated it.

I must admit that I changed my mind later and came to the conclusion that in the refugee program it was vital to have some South Vietnamese participation. But the philosophical difference with Ted Kennedy and his staff soured me on them.

Most of the American visitors we saw in the I Corps area who were opposed to the war did not change their minds because they saw only what they wanted to see, which would reinforce their preconceived notions. Ted Kennedy and his staff were a case in point. One time, he visited Saigon and looked at the medical services there. He was then going to come to Danang. We were instructed to make sure that every minute of his time was filled because he didn’t have time to wait. One of his staffers came first and when he saw the program that we have developed, he said that it would have to be changed entirely. He told us that Kennedy was totally booked in Saigon, visiting one hospital after another, but he was not seeing any war casualties. He wanted to see wounded civilians who had been “victims” of American gunfire. I told the staffer that perhaps Kennedy might not be able to find what he was looking for. In Danang at that moment, there may have been no more than ten people who might have been harmed by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese mines; by far the largest number of occupants in hospitals were sick from malaria or other diseases or burned by stoves. There may have been times when there was a larger number of wounded. Nor were the wounded always our fault. Many came from mines laid by the Viet Cong. This whole experience really embittered me because I thought that people like Kennedy were looking for any excuse to destroy the good work that we were doing. People who had no preconceived notions, like the British ambassador, Sir Murray McLehose, Bob Scalopino - a well known scholar - and some journalists, were willing to see the situation as it was and would go with me to visit all parts of our area. They would follow me around while I was doing my work and observe our efforts. When we were in a helicopter, I had a chance to explain to them what I saw as the situation on the ground. They got a balanced view of the situation because they were seeing the same things that I was.

These people were impressed by what they saw and heard. They heard junior military and Foreign Service officers express their desire to do more in terms of the pacification program if they only had the necessary resources; they would point out that certain programs could not be conducted for military reasons. A listener might well have come away realizing that despite the many problems, there were some solutions and that things might work out. When I left Vietnam, I was confident that we were on the right track.

Q: You were there for Tet?

CROSS: I am glad you asked about that because one of my FSO friends was captured during Tet. I had just returned from a ten-day leave in London the middle of January. There had been a couple of bomb incidents in Danang near our office. I had been briefed that the North Vietnamese were making a major move south, moving a large number of troops, many apparently targeted at Danang. At the same time, the North had asked for a truce to last over the Tet holidays. The South Vietnamese had publically agreed to that proposal. So despite the intelligence reports, the South was reluctant to take any action which might subject them to criticism for opposing or violating a truce. We tried to tell them what we thought was happening, but we couldn't convince them to take any action - even defensive as it may have been.

One day before Tet, I called all the of the senior advisors in the provinces. All the provincial capitals had been attacked in 1967, except for Hue. So when I suggested that they might be attacked again, they were prepared. Our guy in Hue was Phil Manhard, who was a good friend - I got him that assignment. He had been in Hue since Thanksgiving and I think he had good control of the situation. He also had been a Marine and therefore had some experience in warfare. Phil said that he would bring his people together, but not in the MACV compound. That was the last word I had with Phil; he was captured and remained in North Vietnamese prisons for five years and two months.

The night before Tet all of the servants had the evening off to celebrate. I was invited to the nurses' apartment as the senior civilian in the area. We shot off firecrackers in the backyard after dinner and heard similar explosions all around town - not legal, but done anyway. As the evening went on, so did the firecrackers. Somewhere along about midnight, you could begin to hear those noises interspersed with heavy machine gun fire, followed by rockets. Then the firecrackers stopped to be followed by some very large explosions. These were from rockets that the North Vietnamese were firing into the town. There was some fighting in the outskirts around the I Corps headquarters. The Marines were not attacked directly; the North concentrated on South Vietnamese troops.

By the end of the next day, it became clear that the North's offensive had only been successful in Hue, which they overran - except for the American military compounds. The rest of the city was entirely under their control. We had Marines south of the city which we moved north; but we didn't have many reports of what was going on except for those people who were in the MAC V compound, who really were not aware of what was happening in Hue itself. The North captured some 20 of our people in Hue; they killed seven of the American CORDS people. As I said, Phil was among those captured. The VC invaded his house, but couldn't find him because he had

retreated to a hidden room in the house. The VC grabbed the servants who were threatened with sure death if they did not get Phil to surrender. The North Vietnamese were apparently working from a checklist and knew exactly whom they were looking for.

So Phil surrendered, but I have always assumed that the servants were killed anyway. They took Phil off somewhere near Hue, took his shoes away and tortured him for a couple of days. Then they dragged him and the other captives to the north on a journey that took several weeks. They had to be hidden often because obviously we and the South Vietnamese looked for them intently. Eventually, Phil was put in solitary confinement; behind his cell was a very small outside enclosure which held a cistern and toilet. That was also his exercise area. He was never allowed to use the area when the person in the next cell was out there. A sentry would come into the cell to make sure that Phil would not leave. One day, someone peered over the outside cell wall and whispered, "Are you an American?" Phil gave him a signal that the guard was in the cell with him. Later, the other man threw a cigarette wrapping into the enclosure which contained a tap code. Phil memorized that code and then communicated with the fellow in the next cell. They tried to remember all the names of the people they had encountered. This fellow eventually was sent to the "Hanoi Hilton" and reported to his fellow prisoners that he had met Phil, who secretly got the news home. That was the first indication that we had that he was still alive. This was 1969 or 1970.

Phil was totally incommunicado after the U.S. Army officer next door was taken away - until a German nurse was assigned to the cell next to him. She discovered a pencil-sized canal between the cells which drained water and used it to transmit messages to Phil using cigarette wrapping that she poked through the canal with a stick. He sent replies back, poking the same paper. That opened a channel of communications.

Eventually, the North Vietnamese figured out that Phil was the highest ranking American in North Vietnamese hands. They wanted to hear his views on all sorts of issues. They sent an "interrogator" who was nicknamed "Walter Cronkite." Six months after an event took place, the North Vietnamese would try to get Phil's views as if the event had just occurred. He was asked about such developments as Johnson's withdrawal from the presidential race in October 1968 when Johnson had announced his decision in April. One day in 1972, he was taken to Hanoi for treatment for a carbuncle on his back. When he was better, he was treated to a dinner before going back to the camp. His host was apparently a high ranking Vietnamese, according to his guard. This man assumed that the peace negotiations were moving along well enough in late 1972 so that the North Vietnamese could begin to think about opening an embassy in Washington. So Phil was asked a lot of questions about what that might entail logistically. By this time, of course, Phil didn't really know, having been out of contact with the world for five years. But they left Phil with the impression that the war was practically over.

Phil remembered that experience quite well. Two interesting developments came from this conversation. His interlocutor turned out eventually to be a vice foreign minister. He told Phil that the Soviet Union had been urging North Vietnam to retreat on questions of "our national interests." But the North Vietnamese responded to Soviet president Podgorny that taking such a stance would not only create great objections from the North Vietnamese people, but the whole socialist world would find it repulsive. Phil asked whether the Chinese had participated. He was

told that Zhou En-lai had come and had urged the same things. But he didn't get anywhere either; the North Vietnamese were not about to do either the Soviets' or the Chinese's bidding.

Eventually, Phil was sent to the "Hanoi Hilton" himself. By this time, in early 1973, I was in the Department's Policy Planning staff. I was one of the few people who knew Phil well - our families were quite close. When it came time to bring the American prisoners home, the military sent a friend of each prisoner to bring him back. I was sent to bring Phil home. That was a real experience.

Q: What did you do after the Tet offensive?

CROSS: Our first job was to insure that those programs that we had managed to start in the rural areas were resurrected. For a while, all of South Vietnam went into a state of shock. It turned out that we were in fact in better shape than we had anticipated because the North Vietnamese, in order to attack the small cities and towns, had bypassed the villages and then attacked their main targets, most of which they did not conquer. The North Vietnamese took extremely high casualties so that when the offensive was over, there were very few traces of VC or North Vietnamese in the rural areas. So they could not impede our pacification efforts. Once these facts became clear, we really turned up the vigor of our programs. By May - or a few months after Tet - we were going full steam, even though Saigon had to withstand another attack. Hue had to be rebuilt.

The Tet offensive had some positive effects. For example, through blood drives, Danang was collecting only a few pints of blood. After Tet, they collected 300 pints in a very few days. Those province chiefs who had not performed adequately during the Tet period were replaced. There were quite a few who did very well and fought the enemy quite well once they got organized.

Q: What happened in Hue?

CROSS: Eventually, the Marines found ways to fight the North Vietnamese off. Before that happened, the North Vietnamese executed people. I think they killed about 3,000 inhabitants. It was a massacre. We had seven guys killed in our Hue CORDS programs. One was an FSR by the name of Miller. He had just graduated from Harvard and had taken a temporary commission to go to Vietnam. A wonderful guy - eager about his work with the Vietnamese. He was among those killed by the enemy.

Q: Who were the South Vietnamese who were shot in Hue?

CROSS: It was a long list which included government people, the "prosperous" ones. It was a very sizeable proportion of the population.

Q: Was this seen as an example of what would happen if the North won?

CROSS: The Vietnamese in I Corps were a tough bunch from top to bottom. In my opinion most of the Viet Cong from that province, if not all, were eliminated after Tet; they were descendants of revolutionary groups that had fought the French. They had come from Hanoi. They were a

tough bunch. So we had two groups which were well matched. The South Vietnamese were from the south-east delta area - not from large cities like Saigon. I think that part of my optimism was that good province chiefs were being assigned to my area, as well as some very tough soldiers. I think we were actually winning the military war; we were able to protect the population and property. That left me with a slightly optimistic view about South Vietnam's future when I left the country.

Q: Did you get involved at all in the battle for Khe Sanh?

CROSS: Khe Sanh was the subject of many morning staff meetings. I only went to Khe Sanh when it had been secured after the battle. It was an example of Westmoreland's attrition strategy. With our air superiority we could do a lot of damage from the air. We saturated the area with bombs - day after day after day. The VC and the North Vietnamese took an awful beating, and we did as well. Eventually, both sides left the area. It was a very sad chapter. I would guess that at least 10,000 North Vietnamese and 600 of our Americans died in Khe Sanh. It had no strategic value; I think the main reason for the North Vietnamese actions was to draw American troops away from pacification.

Q: How effective were the South Korean military?

CROSS: I didn't have a chance to watch their army, but I was told it fought quite effectively. The two South Korean divisions were in II Corps. We had one brigade of Korean marines. Their officers looted the PXs [post exchanges] all the time. Furthermore, when they had to protect themselves, they were very aggressive. They held on to the territory assigned to them, but in doing so, were quite hard on the local population. I received several reports of massacres by the Korean marines. The American general would raise hell with the Korean general, but it didn't have much effect. I don't think it was clear to the Korean military why they were in Vietnam, other than they had been ordered to go there.

Q: That may have been true for a number of "allies" such as the Thai. They also looted the PXs in Saigon and would drive off in their trucks filled with the goodies.

CROSS: The PXs that were American-run did not suffer from raids by American soldiers.

Q: How was it to work with a young FSO or FSR who may have been totally unprepared for war or the pacification programs?

CROSS: It was interesting. Many had spent their academic lives studying European history or some other entirely unrelated subject. But I don't think we could have recruited a more superb bunch of guys. Many of them objected to our participation in the war, but once they got to know the Vietnamese and the American GIs who were interested in helping the Vietnamese, they really performed well and were very popular. They were all very decent and put their hearts and souls into doing a good job.

Q: Terry McNamara was the consul in Danang. I guess he was under your supervision, but he seemed to operate pretty much independently.

CROSS: He did fit his operations into those of I Corps and CORDS very well. He wanted to have another Foreign Service assignment and that is the way he viewed his job in Danang. He didn't want to be seen as being outside the "mainstream" as we were. I remember discussing this issue with him and telling him that none of us, including he himself, were doing "Foreign Service work." I pointed out that as a senior officer, I certainly was not in a regular assignment, but that it was incumbent on me and all of our FSO and FSR officers to make the CORDS program work. That called for the full cooperation of the military as well as the consulate. He performed well, but he just didn't want to be known as part of the team. That irritated me in some respects, but he ended up in Can Tho with the same kind of job I had in I Corps years later.

Q: Did you have any problems with the U.S. military officers? In the Army, they tended to spend six months with the troops and six months in a staff job before being returned to the U.S.

CROSS: These officers wanted to "punch two tickets" on the same tour. That is one of reasons why the staffs were so large and cumbersome. What were called the "maneuver" battalions were not really a big part of the American military effort and many of those officers served later with CORDS. We did have many differences with these officers, but we had some hold over them because all the senior officers received efficiency reports from us. So they at least pretended to pay attention to us. They used to be very upset unless each of their efficiency reports said that they were the "most outstanding" officers we had ever seen.

Q: Did you get involved in planning military operations?

CROSS: Yes, I did. We had the use of the military staff; I had a personal aide, a Marine first lieutenant. We could use the staff in any way we wanted; we had our own staff, which worked with the Vietnamese units in the provinces. So if we heard of a major operation that they wanted to conduct - search and destroy or to meet a potential attack from a North Vietnamese force - we would steer them away from areas where large numbers of refugees might be created by the military action. This helped both us and them.

When I was in Danang I had my own staff coordinating with military staffs so that we could support the efforts of the Marines.

Q: I think that one of our problems was that people served in their jobs for such a short time that by the time they began to become familiar with their responsibilities, it was almost time to leave. I remember being chairman of a civilian board with responsibilities similar to those of a court martial for civilians who worked in the black market or other civilian violations. I was the institutional memory having been in Saigon for nine months or so.

CROSS: The problem was not that acute for the CORDS people; they stayed longer. Furthermore, many were true experts. We had people from the Department of Agriculture who knew their stuff and had also served overseas before. They were able to assist in increasing rice production in the provinces. They established an immediate and close rapport with the Vietnamese farmers. It helped that many of the civilians were accustomed to working with foreigners, which the military was not. We advised the military on various approaches that might

be made to the Vietnamese civilian society. I did, but rarely, with Cushman, the Marine commander, who had a fine touch in any case.

Q: How effective were the “popular forces” that defended the hamlets?

CROSS: They were the key to any successes. They were tremendously helpful if they were strong and “popular” - in the sense that they were from the village or hamlet - ones that wouldn’t just surrender at the first sight of a VC. We had a lot of great “popular forces.” Some were completely wiped out because the South Vietnamese forces didn’t respond on a timely basis. The Marines developed CAPS (Combined Action Platoons); they were a group a little larger than a regular squad. The leader knew the rules of engagement. They used to live in a hamlet and made friends; they protected the hamlet, trained the “popular forces” and teamed up with them. Then we had a Marine Reaction Force which was ready to support the CAPS if any gunfire began. That was a good set-up. The CAPS did a lot of good work; they played with the kids, taught them something, helped with minor construction. It was a well-conceived program. The CAPS stayed until the area had been secured.

I learned a lot about being a general because that was the level at which I operated and I had an aide and a cook, etc. I don’t think the military ever leveled with us. I got a lot of cooperation because I had been a Marine myself, but I got the straight army attitude as well. At the high level, there was a strong feeling of competition and concern for professional reputation. I don’t think that the military in general had a very high opinion of us civilians. They never showed any sign of being discourteous. They would sometimes tell me that they couldn’t do something or other; then the chief of staff would be called and he would have to take on the burden of being negative, if that was the way it had to be. That was a game they played - a very intricate game.

I must say that we in the pacification program were not very admiring of Westmoreland. Bob Komer was the father of CORDS. He had the right idea, but unfortunately the wrong personality. He was a difficult and mean guy, although I never had any problems with him. So Komer had trouble getting along, which Bill Colby did not. When General Abrams succeeded Westmoreland and with Colby in Saigon, we probably had the best military-civilian leadership team. The top team was very good. I wanted to get home to see my family; had I stayed, I think I would have been part of a major success which I think really started in 1970-71.

Q: When I was in Saigon from 1969 to 1970, I thought that progress was being made.

CROSS: I think that somewhere along the line the opposition to the war came to a head and Congress just abandoned the war effort. I have made the following point in my book - it is also very fundamental to military analysis of the war: we did not lose the war; in fact we were more than holding our own. We left Vietnam because our democratic system had elected officials who forced us to withdraw due to the strong national feelings. Therefore, the military reasoned that despite the very high stakes that our leaders had set in Vietnam, despite all the casualties, despite that we were not losing, we left. That taught the military a lesson, I think, and that was that wars like Vietnam would not have any domestic support; a military action had to have a clear beginning and a clear ending when the pre-stated objectives had been met. They believed that in this world, our military should be engaged only to protect U.S. national interests and not to

advance American interests. I think that is the national consensus.

I want to mention one more thing about Vietnam. I was there during the My Lai massacre, but I didn't hear of it until I went to Singapore years later. Seymour Hersh had his story published all over the world: I was sick to my stomach when I heard about it because that hamlet was in the I Corps area. It had happened three weeks after I had taken over; I was asked to testify about this incident by a commission chaired by General Peers. But I couldn't return to Washington at the time and therefore submitted a deposition instead. I had to admit that I didn't know about the incident. Under normal circumstances, the system required that I be informed whenever any civilians were killed as result of American action. Normally, I would have heard about it through Vietnamese-CORDS channels, but in this case, I didn't hear a word. So in my deposition, I pointed the finger at several officers including the deputy province advisor who was the deputy to Jim May. That deputy just didn't pass the word up the command because he didn't want the battalion commander in trouble. The whole episode was a big disgrace. General Koster, who was the senior officer in the Corps area, was sent to West Point as commandant not long after the massacre. He was not what I consider to be a figure to be emulated; I wouldn't have left the education of young officers in his hands.

Q: *What about the Montagnards in your area?*

CROSS: I didn't have very much to do with them. They were in the Khe Sanh area. I think that they were essentially cheated by us; we used them too often and had them do too much. The overall Special Forces commander was an officer who was a classmate at the War College. He was a good guy, but I think they pushed those people too far.

Q: *What was your impression of CIA's work in your area?*

CROSS: The CIA was an integral part of our efforts. They ran the Revolutionary Development teams. The guys I worked with were first class. The senior advisor in a town just south of Danang was a CIA officer who previously had been in Mexico. He was so good that I selected him to be my deputy. He did a fantastic job. CIA had some rough types among its staff, particularly in the PRUs (Provincial Reconnaissance Units). They were doing some things they weren't supposed to do. Some of the PRU advisers were regular U.S. Army officers, some were New Zealanders and Australians. I used to worry about PRU activities because they could arrest or assassinate people and in general act outside the rules we had laid down, although I think our advisers were basically well-disciplined. The PRUs were Vietnamese operating against Vietnamese.

The *Phoenix* program was long overdue. It didn't really get started because the U.S. army and CIA couldn't get their acts together. It took several years even to get a program designed. We finally assigned U.S. military advisors to South Vietnam units, but the program really didn't get started until after I left and Bill Colby got control of it. Ted Shackley, the Saigon CIA chief, didn't particularly want CIA to be involved; he didn't think it was an appropriate role for agency officers.

Q: *The problem as I understood it was in identifying the target and then "taking him out."*

Wasn't there something akin going on while you were in Danang?

CROSS: Of course; the PRUs were doing this all the time. We had control of them - theoretically - their operations were supposed to be approved by the provincial senior advisor - or sometimes by the district advisor. They would pick a target, but sometimes their intelligence about an individual was not entirely accurate.

Q: The Vietnamese general in the I Corps area was General Hoang Xuan Lam. I have heard stories that he may not have been entirely forthright. Was that true?

CROSS: He was considered to be more honest than his subordinate with the 2nd Division. He was not a soldier at the same level as General Troung, who was the 1st Division commander and was considered to be an outstanding officer who would have been so considered in any military organization. Lam was more political; he was considered to be a Thieu supporter from the beginning. When Thieu became president, Lam rose from a lieutenant colonel to a lieutenant general almost overnight.

There was no indication that Lam was stealing warehouses full of stuff. His misdemeanors were pettier than that. He was not always quick to remove commanders and province chiefs who were known to be on the take. That was our major problem with Lam. I never saw any real proof of his profiteering. We had a lot of information about some of the province chiefs, but they all had been replaced by the time I left Vietnam. They used to play poker with each other; that was the way they paid each other off.

Q: What about the Buddhists in the area? At one point, they had been a big thorn in our side.

CROSS: They were centered in Hue. I think they really were trouble in the early 1960s, but by the time I got there, they had been pretty much brought under control, although we used to watch them warily, because as Buddhists, they really had no philosophical attachment to either side.

Q: Did Thieu interfere with our operations in the I Corps area?

CROSS: As I said, General Lam was his guy. Troung got along with Thieu because he was such a good soldier and we kept telling Thieu that. General Ky came often. He didn't trust us Americans very much. One time, Cushman and I were invited to have lunch with Ky and three or four Vietnamese generals and a couple of Vietnamese civilians. We were the only Americans. They talked Vietnamese most of the time among themselves; every once in a while, they would address a question to us in English. At the end, they all stopped talking and Ky said, "We believe that the United States will leave us. What do you have to say to that?" Cushman denied it; he said he thought that we were too deeply involved to withdraw. Ky argued that we would not stay until the end. I said that I thought we would stay as long as it appeared that the South Vietnamese seemed serious about their war efforts. That ended the conversation. I didn't report it because our embassy in Saigon hated to hear that kind of view.

Q: Did you notice any kinds of disaffection among our military?

CROSS: There were many officers at my level who criticized the way the war was being fought. At the junior level, there were quite a few who were outspokenly against the war; most had been ROTC graduates who were sent to Vietnam for their tour of duty. But in my area, I thought the command handled them quite cleverly. The young officers were told that they would be in Vietnam for a year and therefore might as well spend the time profitably. It was suggested that they seek employment with CORDS where they could help the Vietnamese directly. Many of them did that and when their tour was up, went home feeling that they had had a positive experience.

TIMOTHY MICHAEL CARNEY
Rotation Officer
Saigon (1967-1969)

Ambassador Timothy Michael Carney was born in Missouri in 1944 and graduated from MIT in 1966. Carney studied abroad in France for a year before joining the Foreign Service. In the Foreign Service Carney served abroad in Vietnam, Lesotho, Cambodia, Thailand, South Africa, Sudan, Indonesia, and as ambassador to Sudan and Haiti. Ambassador Carney also spent time working with the Cox Foundation, USUN and the NSC. Carney was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: How many of your class went to Vietnam?

CARNEY: It was about 12. But most were assigned to the CORDS program via language training. They learned Vietnamese. I was upgraded in French.

Q: So you were sent to the embassy in Saigon?

CARNEY: That's right.

Q: You served there from when to when?

CARNEY: November of '67 until June of '69.

Q: What were you doing at the embassy?

CARNEY: I did two things. I was a rotational junior officer. My first rotation was in the political section which was fascinating and confirmed that that was the kind of work I wanted to do. I wound up doing the airgram on the biography of the newly elected Vietnamese parliament, and then following youth and student affairs.

Q: Who was the ambassador and how was the political section structured?

CARNEY: There were 80-plus people on the diplomatic list in Saigon at the head of which was

Ellsworth Bunker, and at the bottom of which was Timothy Carney. I felt like an FSO-9. In fact, the first time I met Bunker was in the elevator, which I was reluctant to board while he was in it. He just said, "Come on in." The political section had 22 or 23 "real" officers in it and a large number of Agency people in what was totally nominal cover.

Q: They were their own section, weren't they?

CARNEY: They were all over the town. There were a lot of Agency people there.

The head of the section was Tom Recknagle with Ted Heavner as his deputy and then Galen Stone replaced Tom. There was an external unit and there was a political-military unit and there was an internal unit and, also, a provincial reporting unit. That last was an innovation for Vietnam which had a number of officers with good language skills. I would have been part of the internal unit doing my biography.

Q: What was your impression of the national assembly's caliber, of the people in it and its effectiveness?

CARNEY: I didn't have much feel for it from the biographies I was doing. I have never been brilliant at understanding things from reading about them. It was only when I started to meet members of the Senate and the Assembly that I realized what an inadequate group it was for South Vietnam to be dealing with the threat from the North.

Q: How did you go about doing this? Where were you getting your information?

CARNEY: Files, and talking to my colleagues, and running pieces of paper through them and that sort of thing. Then, of course, I began to develop my own contacts, including teaching English to a Vietnamese Senator. More valuable to understand what was going on was my work in the area of youth and student affairs.

It was in that latter area that I came in contact with General Lansdale's staff. He had a peculiar and not very influential role at that time, in contrast to his days in the 50s in the Philippines and in Vietnam. His young staffer working on student matters was Charlie Sweet.

Q: Did you find your French useful?

CARNEY: Not until I moved from the political section to the commercial section. Then it was vital. You just had to have it.

Q: You arrived there in November of '67. What was the situation like?

CARNEY: The feeling was things were moving. There seemed to be a congealing of South Vietnamese authority, and a growing capability and competence. I was in no position to challenge that. All the information I was seeing seemed to support it up until the Tet offensive.

Q: We move to January/February of '68. Where were you?

CARNEY: I had gone to bed at the hotel. There was such a lack of housing, I was in a hotel from November until I got an apartment in April of '68. I shared that apartment with another political officer. I had gone to my Vietnamese teacher's house for a Tet party and had drunk entirely too much. Exceptionally, fireworks were permitted for the Tet celebrations. I woke up in the morning to an enormous amount of fireworks and got back to sleep and then got a call from the embassy saying, "Don't come into work."

Q: What hotel were you in?

CARNEY: The New Saigon Hotel, which was just past the palace and the Cercle Sportif.

Q: It wasn't a short distance to the embassy. It wasn't right around the corner.

CARNEY: No, it wasn't. Normally we took a bus or a shuttle.

Q: What was happening in the hotel?

CARNEY: Well, it was full of mainly USAID people due to the circumstances of my arrival and who I got hooked up with for the initial housing assignment. We were basically on the roof of the hotel looking at what was going on around town – air strikes and firefights. A helicopter crashed on the roof of the COMNAVFORCV headquarters about 3 blocks away. Bullets would go overhead, sounding just like they do in the movies. Interesting stuff.

Q: Did you feel this was what you had been paid to do as a diplomat?

CARNEY: I knew it. There wasn't any doubt. I had no doubt that any amateur status had been revoked. I was always astonished when my colleagues didn't seem to grasp that in later years.

Q: Did you have any weapons?

CARNEY: I arrived with a .32 automatic that I had bought at Interarmco in Alexandria, but only recall actually wearing it two or three times in the 18 month tour. I had been on the freshman pistol team at the university, had hunted and shot birds using a shotgun... I had respect for firearms, but certainly wasn't afraid of them.

Q: Did the Viet Cong come close to your hotel?

CARNEY: They were on the grounds of the nearby Presidential Palace or on the grounds of a hotel on the other side of the Presidential Palace, but we're talking 6 or 8 blocks.

Q: When were you able to get back to the embassy?

CARNEY: Two days later. I went up and found the windows all awry in the office. The rocket propelled grenades that had hit the embassy's attractive outer shell, which was in fact a blast screen, had caused enough pressure to wrench the window frames out of the building wall. There

was a fellow in full body armor and helmet with an M-16 sitting in my office from the 101st Airborne Division. Those people were withdrawn within a day or two.

Q: Was there a feeling that the attack on the embassy was a bad thing, that it had been stopped?

CARNEY: The feeling was, it was brilliantly conceived by the Viet Cong - it was a Viet Cong operation. The NVA clearly wasn't involved – that they had done their best, and it wasn't good enough, that we had responded to the surprise with a successful defense, but that the effect in the United States was clearly what the Vietnamese communists had intended.

Q: Were you getting any feel for how this was playing in the United States?

CARNEY: We would see TV and newspapers. There was no lack of information on how America was looking at it.

Q: Was there a feeling that the media was the problem or part of the problem?

CARNEY: There was a feeling in that way which I didn't know enough to share, and wasn't going to take without knowing more about it. I met a number of journalists there, some of whom I came to know, and am in contact with to this day. It was clearly an odd time. I was a little puzzled as to why we didn't know more about what the Viet Cong were up to, considering how many people there were from the various intelligence agencies – NSA, CIA, DIA - all over the town of Saigon and upcountry as well.

Q: Did the embassy seem to be either in disarray or functioning or puzzled?

CARNEY: It was more or less business as usual – carry on, let's focus on what we're doing. Arch Calhoun was Minister for Political Affairs there, to be replaced by Martin Herz. (I don't remember when Martin Herz came in.) I only felt it at the time... This is analytical, and I only felt it at the time by its absence: There is no leadership in the Foreign Service. Foreign Service officers, most of them, do not know how to lead even if they have the basic talent for leading. This was very conspicuous by its absence. People were more or less left to cope.

Q: I think this is a failing but it's an attitude... Everyone does their job.

CARNEY: Exactly.

Q: You're lead by indirection. "It would be nice to have somebody do something about such and such" and then you're somebody who's supposed to go out and do that.

Was your bailiwick still the national assembly?

CARNEY: I moved to youth and student affairs.

Q: Were the students pretty quiet during this period?

CARNEY: I'm not sure I can remember. I was talking with student leaders. The Vietnamese in general were very good at manipulating students through their leaders. The leaders were very good at grasping when they were being manipulated and allowing themselves to be manipulated to the point that they could get their own agenda satisfied as well. The leaders that I dealt with were very smart, well connected across a range of political fronts, very active, but I didn't see what they were doing that would be effective, nor did I see what their ultimate goals were. One of those leaders ultimately made his way to the U.S. as a refugee and got in touch with me, having changed his name to Freeman to celebrate his escape from Vietnam.

Q: I noted that students were sort of against things and protesting but it was pretty hard to come to say "Let's make peace with the communists."

CARNEY: Exactly, especially after the Tet offensive.

Q: What was the attitude you were getting about how the Thieu government responded to the offensive and where it was going?

CARNEY: Bunker shortly, at Washington's urging, began a set of conversations with Thieu himself, as I recall, that Steve Johnson, who was in the political section external unit then, essentially went along as notetaker for, and wrote up the cables. This was all focused on "What do we ultimately do? How do we engage in negotiations?" It was leading up to the Paris meetings.

Q: How did you see yourself in this? Did you want to get out in the field? Was Vietnamese such a prerequisite that this was sort of...

CARNEY: Vietnamese was an absolute prerequisite. It was my introduction to that and made me understand that I couldn't be a political officer unless I had at least one of the languages of whatever country I might be in. In any case, the rotation that was coming up was into the commercial section. That was after the May offensive in '68. I went to the commercial section.

Q: You were doing that from May of '68 to when?

CARNEY: June of '68 to April or May of '69. Then I went to do a protocol related job for the ambassador's office.

Q: Let's talk about the commercial section. Who was your boss?

CARNEY: The boss was Richard C. "Dick" Devine. Above him was Bill Sharpe, an AID official. The commercial section was under the joint economic section, State and others. I can remember wondering if I was in good hands because one of the last things I did as political officer, was to be at a meeting of a delegation, possibly a Congressional Delegation, with the economic counselor at which there was talk about what all of Southeast Asia was doing. There was nothing coming back to the visitors, and I interjected, "Well, this all might be related as part of the way that this new Association of Southeast Asian Nations develops." ASEAN was founded in '67 or '68. The economic counselor didn't seem to have heard of it and didn't know

anything about it. A little alarm bell went off in my head.

Q: Let's talk about commercial life at that time. In the middle of the war, one doesn't think about a commercial officer.

CARNEY: Well, this was deliberate. There was a commodity import program, a CIP program, and a major effort to get business going between American suppliers and Vietnamese buyers using U.S. government money to help fund all of this. That was the period when the Department of Commerce still did the World Trade Directory Report, the WTDR. I got actively involved in that. We were also working with the Vietnamese Directorate of Foreign Trade. Dick Devine's only rating comment that rests in my mind was that I was able to measurably improve relations with the Vietnamese official who was the director for foreign trade because I could speak French with him – in other words, wasn't insisting that he use his non-existent English or a translator. I can't remember any specific thing.

Q: Sometimes when you get two systems coming up against each other – the American commercial system and the Vietnamese commercial system, which I suppose is probably a mixture of French and Chinese bureaucracy – were we having a lot of trouble with trade disputes?

CARNEY: Relatively little, but there were lots of issues about corruption and corrupt practices and bribing officials. The commercial office also had as one of its other functions monitoring excess property sales from the military. That was a very difficult thing to do. There was a huge amount of scrap brass being generated – lots of scrap metal from vehicles that weren't maintained well or had battle damage. There were several Vietnamese firms that were dealing in melting down scrap. Very complicated set of inspections and investigations and that sort of thing.

Q: At that time we didn't have a federal law against anti-bribery, did we?

CARNEY: Not to the best of my recollection.

Q: It came later. Were the French in there using their...

CARNEY: I do not recall any specific detail of French embassy/French government commercial action. Their embassy was still in Hanoi and they had a consulate general in Saigon. I think they were much more political than they were commercial and just simply let longtime business contacts between France and Vietnam carry the trade side. I could be mistaken.

Q: Were the Chinese dominant in trade?

CARNEY: The commercial market part of Saigon, Cholon, actually means "Big Market." There was an enormous Sino-Vietnamese community, but it was Sino-Vietnamese, which is a bit more congenial than the Chinese community in Cambodia proved to be.

Q: Was there a solid commercial life at that point?

CARNEY: Very solid. Very active. Everything from importing Mercedes Benz to the sale of scrap steel and imports of textiles and cloth and cotton. Lively market activity. Electronics. Tools. Machinery. Various parts and bits and pieces for repairing their tools and machinery and consumer goods.

Q: You mentioned corruption. Were we trying to root out corruption?

CARNEY: We were more interested in where it applied to political matters – who was buying whom, who was renting whom, and what the quid pro quo was. I do remember being waved off corruption stories in the political section partly because of lack of evidence and partly because of a philosophical belief that we couldn't totally impose our standards on other cultures.

Q: Also there was the thing that comes up again and again that if there is what we call corruption, if reports go back to Washington, they get leaked and they give ammunition to the enemies of doing anything with X country. So, you can report it once, but if you continue to report it, it isn't helping at all.

CARNEY: The most complicated and difficult intersection of this problem was with our allies, the Filipinos, the Koreans in II CORPS, enormous problems of corruption, and the Thais, of course. Whenever the commissary would get a shipment of tape decks in, you would see these three elements with their people there all with the proper amount of MPC (military payment certificates in lieu of green dollars) and their ration cards in hand to buy out 200 units that would ultimately be sold to the black market.

Q: I remember watching Thai contingents marching in and all buying things they obviously needed like shampoo and feminine products and the like, all getting exactly the same thing and then coming out and piling into a truck while the provost marshal got red in the face watching this. There wasn't much you could do about it.

CARNEY: Exactly.

Q: It was very difficult. Was there talk of saying, "Well, we're trying to get goods in like this to help absorb the excess money so it doesn't move into inflation?"

CARNEY: I only remember that from my Cambodian days.

Q: I remember hearing this at one time.

In '69, you moved over to protocol?

CARNEY: Briefly, yes, and the only thing I can remember doing in that was counting up the number of general and flag officers of the United States in Vietnam, which had reached 107 for 500,000 troops.

Q: What was your impression of the leadership of Ambassador Bunker?

CARNEY: I didn't really have an impression of him. He was far too remote for me to get much of an impression. I am going to be interested to see the biography that Howard Schaffer is now doing.

Q: As far from being in Vietnam, did you belong to what might be called a coterie of junior officers there? Were you getting together with them?

CARNEY: Yes, a number of us hung out together. I used to play a lot of bridge with some of them as well. Then there was a very active social life within the younger people of various embassies and some Vietnamese as well. But there was much less of that and I had much less time for it. Certainly after the Tet offensive, things got intensively busy.

Q: Could you discern a divide that often happens when we've got a controversial policy of the junior officers wanting to get out and change the world and the more senior officers wanting to keep things the way they are?

CARNEY: No, I didn't see anything like that. The junior officers got engaged with Vietnam as Vietnam is, especially the language officers. They developed a deep interest and affection for the country as a country apart from the issues of war and policy. We generally recognized that what we were doing was not going to effect the independence of South Vietnam. We didn't know how to do it any better except that there were clearly some things - our relations with the Saigon government, our approach to enhancing the capabilities of the South Vietnamese army - that just simply weren't being properly addressed until General Creighton Abrams became MACV Commander and started to work on it after Westmoreland's unlamented departure. Those issues of how do you get Thieu and his government to govern seriously? How do you make the South Vietnamese armed forces capable? And what to do about corruption, not only of South Vietnamese entities, but also among our allies and elements within ourselves? Those three were touched on heavily. There was some discussion of the Phoenix Program, but it was more on whether it was succeeding rather than the morality of it or whether it was right.

Q: This was the elimination of the Viet Cong infrastructure using polite terms.

CARNEY: Assassination.

Q: How about the CIA? Did the CIA junior officers mix?

CARNEY: I knew one fairly well who was there under an alias as I subsequently discovered when we ran across each other elsewhere in the world. He seemed to be okay but no great shakes. That realization persisted throughout my career.

Q: Did you develop a group of people who went through the Vietnam experience who stayed with you and you kept in contact with? Was there a distinct group?

CARNEY: Not really. What I found was, people who had that experience over the years generally had better judgment on what was possible to do diplomatically, and indeed with the

entire quiver of our foreign policy tools. People who didn't have the judgment notably include mainly people engaged in the Middle East, because so few people with that specialty ever went to Vietnam, plus they had their political masters here in Washington, the Israeli lobby breathing down the necks of whatever they might report or try to recommend... Basically the Vietnam hands in my experience just seemed to have their head better screwed on their shoulders.

Q: You left when?

CARNEY: June of '69.

LARRY COLBERT
CORDS Refugee Advisor, USAID
Da Nang (1967-1969)

Mr. Colbert was born in Ohio in 1940. He attended the Universities of Ohio and Missouri. After a tour in Turkey with the Peace Corps and a year as an assistant on Capital Hill, he entered the Foreign Service and was sent to Vietnam as Regional Advisor. His subsequent postings, where he served as Consular Officer include: Ankara, Turkey, Oran, Algeria, Dublin, Ireland and Manila, Philippines. At Tijuana, Mexico, Madrid, Spain, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and Paris, France Mr. Colbert served as Consul General. Mr. Colbert was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November, 2006.

Q: How did you find the training?

COLBERT: For Vietnam?

Q: For Vietnam.

COLBERT: Probably better than the training for Diplomacy 101.

Q: When you were told you were going to CORDS what did they tell you you would do?

COLBERT: That's interesting. I knew I was going to Vietnam but Senator Ted Kennedy announced he was going to have hearings on the terrible plight of the refugees. The White House announced that they had sent refugee experts over to fix that problem and then they told six of us that we were going over. Then they said we had left and then we left. I arrived - I couldn't take any leave but must get right there, and I reported to the embassy who told me I belonged to AID (Agency for International Development), which I knew, and then I went to AID and they didn't know what to do with me. They sent me to CORDS, which had been just created.

So every day for about two weeks I would get up from my hotel I was staying in and report to CORDS and say, "What do you got for me?" Well they didn't know I was coming, they didn't know what to do with me, they didn't know they were getting any refugee experts of which I was

theoretically one. So after a while they just got sick of seeing me, and I came in after several days of saying, "Well, I'm here" and they said, "Would you go to Quang Ngai?" I said, "What's that?" They said, "It's a province." I said, "Sure, I would go to Quang Ngai." So the next day I am on a DC-3 Dakota which had a bronze plate noting its construction date of 1938, so the plane was older than me, flying me via various in sundry stops to Da Nang.

Q: Air America.

COLBERT: Air America, exactly. The plane had all kinds of mechanical problems with several mechanical issues en route, but we finally arrived in Da Nang which was I Corps headquarters for CORDS and I got a briefing there. They then sent me off to be a refugee advisor in the province of Quang Ngai.

Q: Where is Quang Ngai located, vis-à-vis Da Nang?

COLBERT: It is south and west of Da Nang. It's between Da Nang and Cambodia and Laos.

Q: In the first place how did just when you hit Saigon how did it strike you?

COLBERT: Saigon? Apart from the noisy street generators and the ubiquitous military running around it was a lovely city. No, Saigon was a very nice place. But Saigon for me was a place that I rarely went to. I was there for maybe a week, ten days while they finally figured out what to do with me. Then I flew to Da Nang. I didn't even go in the Bunker's bunker, the new embassy. I was only in it once and that was when I was leaving. We in CORDS really weren't part of the State Department in the traditional sense. I lived in blue jeans and black pajama tops and combat boots. I think if I have a strong prejudice it's of the people who came up from Saigon embassy political section wearing their Abercrombie Finch outfits and their soft leather briefcases and flew in on Air America at 9:30 in the morning to find out what was going on but made sure they were on the 3:30 flight out. Although they were reporting that it was safe, they sure as hell wouldn't spend the night with us.

Q: Yeah. When...

COLBERT: Pardon me, that is a little bit of prejudice but...

Q: Well no, no I mean I think that's the normal prejudice. I mean it was the suits from the big city you are telling me.

COLBERT: They knew everything but they didn't know anything.

Q: Yeah. You were in Quang Ngai from when to when?

COLBERT: I was there for eighteen months from you know I can't remember exactly. I know maybe from November of '67 until whatever eighteen months would be. I know that after eighteen months having buried a few people doing what I was doing and having lived barely through the Tet Offensive because my town was overrun, people doing what I was doing in Da

Nang were executed, I got a cable from my personnel person in the State Department saying that they had agreed that since I had done my eighteen months in up-country I can have my choice of assignments and they would give me a refresher Turkish course and send me to Turkey as a political officer. But the language class wasn't set to start so they had decided to just extend me in Vietnam for six months.

Q: Oh how nice.

COLBERT: I sent back, "I don't want to be extended in Vietnam for six months. I've come here for eighteen months, I'm out of here." They said, "Well, you know we don't really have anything for you, you'll have to go on leave without pay." I thought to myself, hmmm, I've been shot at, I've been spat at, I've been flying around in helicopters, this person in Washington is not going to play this game with me. So I went back and said, "Fine, I'll go on leave without pay, but I've consulted my attorney about whether you can do this to a person." I didn't have an attorney.

Q: No.

COLBERT: In the meantime I was newly married and I thought well I've been in Vietnam for eighteen months. I've accumulated lots and lots of money; I was working for AID, and they paid me overtime. I was working seven days a week, fourteen, fifteen hours a day and being mortared and shelled at night, so I was not in a mood to be trifled with. I figured well we'd just go on a six-month holiday, or my wife can go back to her job in the Library of Congress. I don't have to work for six months; clearly I didn't have to work for six months. So I said, "Not acceptable." Well they blinked and they sent me back to the Vietnam training center to train other people for six months, which was probably a good thing.

Q: Well let's talk about Quang Ngai.

COLBERT: OK.

Q: In the first place when you got there this is getting close to a rather crucial time but when you got there what were you supposed to be doing?

COLBERT: Nobody had a clue. Somebody decided they could send me to Quang Ngai. I arrived in Quang Ngai along with another Foreign Service officer who was going to do the same thing so we were both assigned as assistants or deputies to a retired Navy warrant officer who was advisor to the provincial social welfare minister. This person was in charge of orphanages and poor people and handicapped, sort of he was the social welfare minister. He had his cadre of people who worked for him around the province and in the capital of Quang Ngai city. My boss, this warrant officer, was supposed to advise him. He was terrified of leaving the city, this little town...

Q: This is Tape 2, Side 1, with Larry Colbert. Yeah.

COLBERT: I was saying that I was assigned to work for this Navy warrant officer who got up in the morning and went to the U.S. mini-compound on the ARVIN (South Vietnamese) division

compound and had western style breakfast and then came and sat at his desk. He then went up by his vehicle to have lunch at the military compound and came back and then went there and had dinner and a drink and then went to bed. He never left his office. He didn't speak Vietnamese, he didn't speak French, and all he would do would be to ask for statistics from Vietnamese counterpart that had been requested by U S officials in Saigon. He would go with his interpreter and get the statistics from the person he was supposed to be advising and go back to his office.

He didn't know what to do with us and we were young and active. We wanted to do things, but he was really, really very cautious. We were young and foolish and wanted to do things. His tour was up and my fellow junior JO had gotten to know a district senior advisor, that's to say a major who was in charge of a small cadre of American military in a district outpost south of Quang Ngai so he went down there to be the civilian person there. I thought I wanted to do that at the time also at another district compound but I think it was a little nuts. Probably had I gotten the chance I would have done it then but later on I would probably not done so. But he went down there and I became the advisor and I had French so I could communicate with the Vietnamese official. Once I understood what an effective role should be, I became basically his pimp, not pimp in the traditional sense. I thought that there was very little advice I could give this man who was 45-50 years old who was a University graduate and Vietnamese and a professional welfare person - this from this 26 or 27 year old kid from another culture! So my solution was OK tell me what you need and I will get it for you. You want typewriters? I will get you typewriters. Do you want transportation? I will get you transportation. Whatever you want I can acquire. So I basically then saw myself as a facilitator. I did things which were quasi-legal but all for the good of our national interest. Nothing stuck to my fingers, I was given a black box full of local currency and each month I could use the black box to solve problems. The only question was no receipts. The people, the American officials who gave me this black box of money, wanted problems solved and the only time I got in trouble was one month when I didn't spend the money. So I basically was this Vietnamese official's conduit to the things he needed to help people. If it had been the mafia I would have been the person over whispering in the don's ear and making things happen.

The Vietnamese official was a really fine person; I think he was one of the most outstanding civil servants I've ever met. He had an impossible job. I remember once early on I went with him to visit an orphanage. I had a gun and I walked into this orphanage and I felt like such an ass. From then on I never carried a gun anywhere I went although there were guns all around me, and we certainly had guns in our compound. I just felt that I was doing such a welfare work promoting developing, and I didn't think that I should have a gun, so I traveled with him everywhere without one. And given my aptitude with weapons it is more likely I would have shot myself than anything else. He was a good person.

My big boss on the other hand, my first boss was a total idiot. He was an FSO-1, which at that point in my life as an FSO-7, which I was, put this person as close to God as one could get. He was the province senior advisor and was totally consumed with Vietnam. He spent most of his recent life, or most of his career in Vietnam. He had been in Quang Ngai forever. He was just - well it' hard to describe this person. I will tell you a story, which will probably help explain. I remember going once to a staff meeting where he asked me "Have you distributed the blankets that came in for the refugees?" I said, "Blankets?" He said, "The blankets in the warehouse. Why

haven't they gone out?" So I get in my little International Scout "jeep" and drive out to the warehouse, which is managed by a great AID person who was a retired military sergeant who had been in supply who was subsequently murdered in his bed Quang Ngai by the VC while I was still there stationed there. I said, "George, where are these thousand blankets?" He shows me the warehouse and it is empty. No bulgur wheat, no oil, no *nada* (nothing). He said, "What blankets?" "Well Jim says there are blankets here." He said, "We haven't had any blankets since before you came a year ago." I said, "I didn't hear of any blankets here either. I'm in charge of social welfare; if there were blankets I would know. I know when you get..." "No, no, no blankets." I go back the next day, "Have you distributed the blankets yet?" I said, "Not yet." I go back to see George and I said, "George what is it?" I ask. George, "Just tell him you did it." At the next staff meeting, "What about the blankets?" I said, "Oh we passed them out." "Oh good." So the report went back to Washington that we passed out a thousand blankets, there were no thousand blankets but you couldn't tell him because he wouldn't believe it. Though on another occasion, after a terrible flood (this is after George's murder, I tried directly from Saigon to get blankets and was told there were none in country. I conferred with my Vietnamese counterpart who told me how urgently the blankets were needed. I then phoned AID in Saigon and asked for talking points for the US network reporters who were coming to cover the flood victims and noted just in passing that the victims were likely to ask about blanket. We got several thousand the next week, and for the record, I lied about the reporters.

The first month or so we were there, we learned the State inspectors were coming, Foreign Service inspectors. So Paul Barbari and I, (he was the other young JO who was working there) get invited to the Province Senior Advisor Jim May's house for dinner which we were told was in honor of the inspectors. May had a Vietnamese live-in mistress who I really thought was a wonderful lady. We arrived and he gives us little white coats. We are to serve the meal and certainly not meant to sit at the table,

Q: Jeeze.

COLBERT: So we do, I mean what do we know, I mean we were mad as hell. We thought we were invited to dinner, but we were invited to work. So the inspectors say, "Well, what are you doing?" I said, "We are here serving you dinner." They thought that was quite interesting. Luckily they wrote it up.

But he got in big trouble because of My Lai. He knew about My Lai and My Lai took place in Quang Ngai.

Q: This was a massacre by American troops.

COLBERT: A military unit had gone into a village and shot a lot of people. Lieutenant Calley was the officer in charge of the unit.

Q: Lieutenant Calley.

COLBERT: Well I was there when My Lai occurred. I had been on the Batanga Peninsula where it occurred, and I was on the Batanga peninsula after it occurred. People weren't very friendly to

me, but I never understood why. I expected to be called and asked about it when the investigations began, because I was there, but I never was called. Luckily for me I didn't know anything about it, which on the one hand shows you how little I knew. On the other hand perhaps how much I should have known but I didn't know. But he certainly knew about it and covered it up.

Q: Who was that?

COLBERT: James May, Jim May. I mean the guy was certifiable. He was replaced by a much more competent person later on. Vietnam would probably fill up an entire just one tape.

Q: Well let's talk. I think the Vietnam experience is an important factor. Let's talk about Tet because it happened shortly after you arrived.

COLBERT: It did because I arrived and Tet occurred. I arrived in the fall, and Tet was on February 1. The weekend of Tet was a long holiday, and I had flown on Air America to Da Nang to see my buddies doing what I was doing. We all met in the Navy officers club in Da Nang, had dinner and flew back to our various and sundry posts. It was sort of like a busman's holiday for the weekend. The guy who was in Hue, a good buddy -everybody envied him because he had gotten Hue. Hue was a very sophisticated polished cultural city and the rest of us were in the boonies. During Tet, he was captured by the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) had his hands tied behind his back and executed in cold blood.

Q: They found him in a ditch.

COLBERT: Absolutely. Then you know.

Q: Who was this, this was...?

COLBERT: I can't remember his name but he was AID, a good guy. A friend of mine went back to Quang Nam and I went back to Quang Ngai. I got back to Quang Ngai and at some point maybe late afternoon, early evening, there was a feeling that something was going to happen. I know I was staying in Jim May's compound; the provincial senior advisor had a house with a wall around it, a big concrete wall and built into the wall were rooms, not apartments, rooms. I had a room; my room for my first year in Vietnam was smaller than this room by probably a third. It had a bed, a desk, a lamp and there was a bathroom down a little hallway and this was built inside of the wall. You went up some stairs and there were three rooms, not exactly luxury class accommodations, probably maybe 25,000 times worse than Motel 6. But, it also had a firing port with a screen.

Anyway Tet began and it was awesome. The three of us climbed up onto the roof of our little "apartment in the wall" and watched the firefight, because they were shooting over us. We all had small arms; I had a carbine, maybe two or three magazines and ammunition. Everybody had something like that; but nobody fired; because this was really between the big boys. These were rocket launchers, machine gun and this was the NVA regulars going at the Vietnamese Second Armored Division and the American military advisors on the compound. We were outside the

compound; we were in the town. There were probably one, two three, four maybe five houses that had Americans living in them, maybe less. The Agency people, the Phoenix program were just down the street and then us and a couple others. So we, I don't know what the Phoenix people did during the fight but they had a lot more "toys," but we just sort of kept our heads down. It went on all night, and it was tremendous. You really were sitting in the middle of a storm of lead going in both directions, mortars, rockets and everything.

Then morning came, and the magic dragons came, puff the magic dragon. These were converted DC-3s with Gatling guns. Then the ARVIN pushed the NVA back to the edge of the city, where they stayed for a while and then they retreated further back. When it was over I think it's fair to say I could have walked from the May villa, basically just a small house with a wall around it, to the intersection which was probably 100 yards I could have just walked just on bodies of NVA and NVA that were in the streets dead without touching the pavement. I mean there were just bodies everywhere. We came out and it was all over; it was so quiet. You could smell cordite everywhere.

Every night we would back one vehicle against the metal gate. We had two metal gates that came together, and we backed the vehicle against them, so that a zapper (a person carrying satchel charge) couldn't blow the gate open. After some of weeks of agitation Paul and I had gotten our first vehicle. We had our own brand-new Scout International. The two of us that we could actually go to the refugee camps, we could go to the districts, and we could do other things – we were not tied to our office-bound warrant officer boss. We were mobile, and we were very happy. To keep our family jewels we had lined it with sandbags.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: So here we were standing in the yard along side our new Scout parked against the metal gate with the evening Tet battle over when there was this poof noise, and we were standing about as far away as your couch there...

Q: We are talking about 15 feet.

COLBERT: Thank you for helping because obviously the readers won't know, and a 16 mortar millimeter incoming went through the International Scout and blew up in the sandbags and showered sand on us. We didn't get a scratch, but that mortar missed us by 15 feet and if it hadn't gone into the sandbags it would have done some serious damage to us. So we then kept the jeep and we took the...the roof blew in very jaggedly and we pulled the jagged parts out and painted them red and labeled our Scout "The Flaming Asshole" We continued to use that Scout for the rest of the time. When it rained it was a little problematical, but it was great fun to pick up the visiting Cold War warriors from Saigon who came up. We always picked them up in that. When they came up to tell us how wonderful things were we always picked them up in that one because it had a great effect on the lower portions of their body – at least one part tightened up!

Q: What was it like getting around there?

COLBERT: If you are not going far you can go in a Scout. You can drive to Chu Lai, which was

up the road maybe sixty miles. You can drive to the nearby districts. If you wanted to go to Mo Duc or Duc Fu, which were the far consular districts in the province you had to go by Air America helicopter or short take off and landing Air America plane. If you wanted to go to the highlands and there were four highland districts where the Montagnards were, then you flew by helicopter.

Q: Were you dealing with refugees the entire time? Was that...?

COLBERT: I was dealing with social welfare issues, getting and making sure that there was cooking oil and bulgur wheat and sheet metal or roofing material and concrete available for these people and to collect information from the Vietnamese to provide to the embassy people and vice versa. I think if there is any one example of how the system worked or didn't work - perhaps it is indicative of our current situation right now - I remember once I got an instruction from the embassy actually from CORDS telling me to, go my counterpart and tell him to do 'X'. So I make an appointment to see my counterpart and I say, "Mr. Le Dam the U.S. government thinks you should do 'X'." He say, "Well Larry you know 'X' is a good thing and I would agree with you 'X' would be a really good thing to do but my government telling me to do 'Y'. He said, "Now if you can get your people in Saigon to convince my people to tell me to do 'X' I will do 'X' but as long as my people are telling me to do 'Y' I will do 'Y'."

So I sent back a message saying that I went in and asked him to do 'X' and he said as I explained. I got this message back, "Don't tell us how to do our job, go back and tell him to do 'X'." What I'm really saying is they couldn't get the people in Saigon to do something, and they are telling me to get the people who work for Saigon to do it. Does that sound familiar to you somehow?

Q: Oh yes, yes. They said, "Well we told him to do it, and that takes care of it."

COLBERT: Yeah. They were saying no to us so you go tell him to do...I mean it was crazy.

Q: I think we probably ought to stop.

COLBERT: OK.

Q: But we will put here, we were talking about time in Quang Ngai, we've talked about your time in and put it on the tape so that we will pick it up during the Tet Offensive but afterwards we are talking about how you worked with your counterpart and where you've got. There are several questions that I would like to ask the next time. The problem of corruption and lack there of or how that played, the Montagnards did you see any discrepancy between the coastal dwellers and the Montagnards? Was there a resettlement program? How did you work with American military and I guess the ARVIN and maybe did the CIA have an...

COLBERT: An operation?

Q: An operation there.

COLBERT: Sure, I can answer all of those questions.

Q: Then I don't know was that the area where the Koreans were or not?

COLBERT: When I arrived Koreans were there and I can talk about that too.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: OK, sure.

Q: And anything else that and I take it did you meet your wife there?

COLBERT: No. We can talk about your wife but we would have to back up a bit to do that.

Q: Back up a bit.

COLBERT: I would like to talk about the flood too so we should make a mental note about the flood.

Q: OK, yeah.

COLBERT: OK?

Q: Yeah, very good.

Q: OK, today is the 9th of November 2006. Larry we've got a bunch of things. Well you say you want to back up a bit about your wife. Why don't you talk about where and how you met your wife and a little bit about her background?

COLBERT: Fine. My wife is Chinese; she came to the States I think in 1962-1963 one or the other I'm not quite sure, to do a masters program.

Q: She is from Taiwan I assume?

COLBERT: She grew up in Taiwan; she's from the mainland. Her father was a petroleum engineer who worked for the nationalist government and her mother was a teacher who was from a very prominent Beijing family. I think her grandfather was the police chief of Beijing at some point in the past, presumably way back. She's quite unique in the sense that she for a woman of her generation my mother-in-law I'm talking about now, had gone to a teachers school, learned English as a young woman and had unbound feet because she refused to have her feet bound. When her father was a widower and when he remarried the mother-in-law and the new bride and the daughter-in-law or the stepdaughter more accurately didn't get along so my mother-in-law to be ran away from home when she was 15 or 16 years old which is quite remarkable for a...you are talking very early twentieth century when this wasn't done in China. She actually went several streets down to her aunt's house, but she literally left the house and refused to go back. She also selected her own husband so this is...my wife's spirit obviously was earned and derived

from her mother.

In any event, as I was saying earlier, my wife came here as a graduate student initially at the University of Oregon at Portland and then transferred to George Peabody College which now is part of Vanderbilt where she got a masters degree. She then had a series of short jobs moving up for more money and change I think from Pittsburgh Carnegie Library to Albany State Law Library. When I met her she had just started working at the Library of Congress in cataloging. I met her at an assignments party, that's to say in those ancient days when Foreign Service officers didn't know where they were going, new officers, but were simply told at the end of their basic training class she came with her apartment mate who was in my Foreign Service class, another young woman because that young woman's boyfriend was somewhere else so she brought her roommate. I met my wife at that point. I courted her while in French language training at the Vietnam Training Center. Since she was then a Green Card holder, that's to say a Permanent Resident Alien, not a citizen, I had to write two letters to Secretary Dean Rusk who of course didn't see them; one letter requesting permission to marry my future wife and another letter, which was a letter of resignation. The policy then was they either gave you permission or they didn't. If they gave you permission, they tore up your letter of resignation, hopefully, and kept your letter requesting permission to marry or conversely if you didn't get permission, they took your resignation on the assumption that you would choose wife over career, which I certainly would have done.

When I left for Vietnam permission had not come through so we didn't get married until maybe four months after Tet. Our plan had been to meet in Saigon and fly together to Taiwan to get married since my mother was long since deceased and her mother was still alive and weddings are really for mothers and for brides as opposed to grooms. In fact, her flight was cancelled in the West Coast because Ton Son Nhut airport in Saigon had been overrun and whatever American airline it was presumably Pan American couldn't land, and I, of course, was stuck in Quang Ngai ducking away from Viet Cong and NVA bullets. So we had to wait until that all quieted down.

Q: Well later we will return at some point to your wife to see did the Taiwan-China equation affect you at all and all that but anyway we will come back to that.

COLBERT: You want to come back to Vietnam now I think.

Q: Yes, let's go back to Vietnam. Why don't we start as I say how about corruption?

COLBERT: You know I didn't see it but then I wasn't really in a position to see it. I was in the province I think the big money was being made in Saigon. You heard stories about Americans who worked for AID selling things. I never saw that, you heard; well let me change that because actually I can give you a case of corruption, which I actually was involved in, that comes to mind. Not in the sense that I was corrupt.

We had sent some money to I think Tra Bong, one of the four Montagnards districts of Quang Ngai up on the Cambodian border and we learned somehow that this money had been extorted back by the army officer who ran the district. There was a Vietnamese captain in each district that was essentially the district governor. Somehow we in the provincial adviser that I worked in

learned that this man had extorted the money back from the people who were supposed to get it, the victims or the people who were refugees or whatever. So I being a relatively minor player in this, very junior and being young and being the advisor to the Vietnamese refugee social welfare person, was sent by ARVIN helicopter, that's an old pot-bellied Korean War vintage helicopter - an old Marine helicopter with an Arvin crew. I was sent to this district to ask for or to get the money back. He knew I was coming; he had been told by the provincial ARVIN colonel who was the provincial governor that I was coming. So I went to his office and this Vietnamese captain had a humongous stack of piasters, the local currency. Visualize if you can a stack of money perhaps a foot wide and a foot deep, or maybe two feet wide and two feet deep, loose money which was turned over by him to me and then I had to get the money back to Quang Ngai city. I flew back to Quang Ngai city in a semi-open helicopter, that's to say it was a closed helicopter but not successfully closed, there were some drafts, sitting on all this loose money. Basically I sat on the money for about 30 minutes on this helicopter trip and then was met and we unloaded the money and took it back to province headquarters where I'm sure it disappeared again but in any case I did bring it back. So that was a case of corruption that I am aware of.

Speaking of corruption though I think it brings to mind another story, a true story. One day we came out of province headquarters in the center of town and there was this flashing in the air and it sort of sounded almost like lightening, or thunder. But in fact what it was a Chinook helicopter was carrying in a sling capacity underneath the helicopter big pallets of metal sheet roof that corrugated roofing that AID passed out. It had been improperly slung, or rigged or the rigging broke, so that it had tilted to one side at about a 45-degree angle and the roofing had started to come out at several thousand feet and it was going back. It would make a noise as it came out like a crack as it buckled and then it would flash from the tropic sunshine but it would come down...

Q: Sort of willy-nilly.

COLBERT: Willy-nilly, sort of cascading down flashing in the sun. It was quite impressive, perhaps ten or twenty-five, or thirty thousand dollars, maybe \$100,000 worth of roofing cascading everywhere. I worked; my immediate boss was the deputy province senior adviser Colonel George Swearson, a wonderful man, a Marine. He said, "Larry, that's the only honest distribution of AID supplies I've seen since I've been here." I think maybe that was a good case of fair distribution because God decided or the winds at least decided where that sheeting landed. If it didn't slice you in half, you had some nice free sheeting.

Q: The Montagnards, you were on the border between the Montagnards and the Lowlanders weren't you?

COLBERT: I was in Quang Ngai city, Quang Ngai was divided into ten districts, six low land and four highlands. I don't know if I can come up with all the names now but there were four highland districts and I would occasionally go up there. At each highland district there was an "A" camp, a Special Forces camp and they were the advisors and the people who worked with the Montagnards in the highlands. I would go up and visit with them. I remember asking this one grizzled old Special Forces officer how the campaign for the hearts and minds at the "rice roots" level were going. I asked him sort of in a sardonic sort of way because it was just making

conversation and he smiled and said, “Up here we grab them by the balls and the hearts and minds come along.” I didn’t spend a lot of time with the Montagnards but I did have contact with them.

Q: I was wondering, did you see sort of was there a clear line between the Montagnards and the sort of regular Vietnamese?

COLBERT: I think that there was distain on the part of the mainland Vietnamese for the Montagnards and I don’t think there was any great love lost on the part of the Montagnards either but I didn’t experience any of it directly.

Q: Well then moving on to the resettlement.

COLBERT: I was only involved in one large resettlement effort. I was probably in the middle of my tour when for one reason or not it was determined to move people from Quang Ngai which was in I Corps in the northern part of South Vietnam to the area around Cameron Bay which is south, I think, and east of Saigon- Ho Chi Minh City now-and in that case we flew families of people who had been displaced by the war from the contested area around Quang Ngai, Quang Ngai province, to this area around Cameron Bay. We flew them in I think Caribou’s which were small military cargo craft and maybe C-130s as well. I knew I flew with them, and we then trucked them to this area and gave them their concrete and their roofing material and their cooking oil and their bulgur wheat and that’s all that I remember. It was a big operation; I played a very small role in it because I was just a minion.

Q: What was your impression of the American military and the Arvin military? How did they get along?

COLBERT: Well where I was the only U.S. military units were north in a place call Chu Lai, which was an area, a U.S. military base on the beach, which is one of the initial points that we landed when we involved with our own forces. It was a large base and the Americal Division was based there, which had a very checkered record.

Q: Including the My Lai...

COLBERT: I was coming to that yes. Americal Division was the division, which had the unit, which operated in the so-called Russell Beach operation in the Batanga Peninsula. But it had a checkered record in any event in terms of it just wasn’t one of the best units. I think it was a reconstructed unit that had not been active since probably the Second World War.

I had very little to do with them other than the fact that for most of the time I was in Vietnam I lived in a house, I had luckily moved from that villa where the province senior advisor lived and I had my little hole in the wall place I described earlier. I along with one, two, three other young men, or two other young men and an older man shared a house, which was really on the outskirts of town. I would say that we were part of the defensive perimeter although we weren’t in that business. We felt well removed. We had a standing invitation for any U.S. military personnel who passed through who weren’t assigned there. They could stop there and have a sandwich or a

beer or whatever they wanted; it was just well known that they could come and go, as they liked. So we had a lot of people come by. Things fell off trucks there all the time, off the back of trucks. Often people would come in; we had a Montagnards housekeeper/cook and she would cook somebody a steak or serve them a BLT (bacon, lettuce, tomato sandwich) whatever they wanted. We aren't talking about hundreds of people now, we are talking two or three or four a week but they were welcomed to stop and eat and have whatever they wanted.

Often a week later we'd get ourselves a gift of a case of grenades or a shotgun something that we might need. We couldn't acquire weapons, as we weren't provided weapons so we used the midnight auto supply. We could pretty much get whatever we wanted because we got along well with them and so they would say, "Thank you very much for putting us up this evening, what can we do for you?" "Well, we could use a couple gas masks."

So my encounters were basically of a social nature or there was an advisory group within the Arvin, the Second Arvin Division, which was based in Quang Ngai city, which was in charge of the security of the province south of Chu Lai. We could go there if we wished, and have a beer in the officers club or NCO (non-commissioned officers) club. It was a very small club, a very small officer's club because it was a very small advisors group. My encounter with the U.S. military was mostly with the people who were involved with CORDS. CORDS was a sandwich operation, that is to say each level was military civilian, military civilian or vice versa. So that above me was a lieutenant colonel and below me in some instances there were public affairs or public civic action teams, which were headed by lieutenants and sometimes by second lieutenants. I could call on them for projects and things. Those are the people I mostly dealt with in the military.

Q: What was the impression that you were getting both of your own observation and your other American colleagues about the performance, effectiveness of the ARVIN in your area?

COLBERT: That's a difficult question. I think the U.S. military generally held the ARVIN in somewhat disdain yet the ARVIN properly lead fought very well. I think that sometimes the leadership was poor; on the other hand the U.S. military had this tendency to step in and do it themselves. 'We can do it better, we can do it faster, we can do it.' So there was this tendency to not let the ARVIN face up.

By the same token I found it strange that a lot of South Vietnamese men of military age weren't in the military. A lot of people who worked for me, I had a cadre of Vietnamese who worked for me or indeed worked for my counter part who were of military age and weren't in. So I don't think the distribution of responsibility or the distribution of burden was equitable. Of course, that's probably true in our own society as well if you think about it. Maybe Senator Kerry didn't make his joke very well the other day but the reality was then that people who wanted to avoid service could and they could go to Canada, they could go to Europe, they could be conscience objectors or they could just stay in school or they could join the Foreign Service. I mean there were all kinds of options so even with conscription the burden wasn't being fairly borne by us so far be it for me to criticize them. Sorry for a long answer.

Q: No, no that's fair enough.

COLBERT: I would like to talk about something else for a minute. This is sort of amusing. I think I said earlier that when I went to college I got a deferment from my local draft board in this small county I'm from. From college I went to graduate school and I got another deferment and the draft board people said, "We are watching you, we know where you are." I told them, "I am from a small town so you know where to find me," and I went to graduate school. From graduate school I went into the Peace Corps and again required another deferment, which made them unhappy. That would be of 1964 when I went into the Peace Corps so that required another deferment. When I got out of the Peace Corps I came back and I had already passed the Foreign Service written and was about to take the Foreign Service oral and was asked to take my pre-induction physical.

I went to Fort Haliburt in Baltimore and I at 125 pounds to 130 pounds soaking wet was classified 1-A. The same week that Joe Namath who was then playing football for the Jets was 4-F because he had flatfeet or something. In any event, I remember that I was 1-A when he was 4-F and I couldn't do what he was doing. But I was still 1-A when I joined the Foreign Service and I was 1-A when I went off to Vietnam. About a week or so after the Tet Offensive when the APO, the military mail, was restored to Quang Ngai I got my draft notice to report for induction into the U.S. military. I was working for this wonderful Marine colonel who I just thought was the best thing since sliced bread, I mean one of the best bosses that I have ever had, one of the people that I most admire. So I said, "Colonel Sir, we have a bit of a problem here." He looked at this and said, "What are they going to do send you Vietnam? I'll fix it." So I never got drafted, I just stayed in Vietnam. I don't know to this day why my draft board did not pursue it, I think at this point the statute of limitations has long since passed and I probably saw more action direct or indirect than most people who got drafted. But I never got drafted and I avoided the draft by going to Vietnam before they drafted me so I think that was an interesting little side that probably has nothing.

Q: I got my draft notice after I had enlisted in the Air Force and I was in Korea. During the war I got my draft notice and I said, "Well here I am."

COLBERT: Bring me back.

Q: What was your impression of the CIA operations?

COLBERT: The part of the CIA that I saw was the long-range reconnaissance units, which were operational from my city although I had nothing to do with them. I knew they were there and the Phoenix program which was the program to eliminate...

Q: The cadre?

COLBERT: The infrastructure, to arrange for the termination with extreme prejudice of people who were in leadership positions in the Viet Cong or the NVA and the Chu Hoi program which was the program to encourage people to leave the Communist side and come to our side for grants of land and unity and all that sort of stuff. I knew people in those programs, some of them were former military and some were career CIA. I think they varied in quality from very good to

very bad.

Q: From where you were did any of those things impinge on you?

COLBERT: On my work?

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: Only in the sense that if people thought that I was doing that work then I could have become a target, more than I already was. In one instance I found out that a person who worked in the Phoenix program was using my name rather than his name to protect himself and I took umbrage of that because I didn't mind his using a cover name but using my name and my position was a bit much, a bit off the top I think.

Q: How about the Koreans in the area? The Koreans had a division around Da Nang.

COLBERT: That was in Quang Ngai where I was located. They were there when I arrived and their area of operations was very secure. They basically, I'm told, told the village elders that you are with us, everything is wonderful and grand and we'll protect you and everything will be fine. If anything happens and you don't tell us about it, don't warn us, then everything will be very bad. I think the Vietnamese were totally convinced that the Koreans had zero tolerance for any misbehaving so it was pacified in the sense that the cost of otherwise was just too high. I'm told, although I don't have any evidence to the contrary, that they ran the black market in Quang Ngai while they were there and ran it very well. But shortly after I arrived they left and it was strictly ARVIN and I think security varied from so-so to maybe almost good, back and forth.

There were areas of Quang Ngai that were no-go areas but you have to know that Quang Ngai was a problem even for the French. When the Japanese took over Vietnam after maybe 1940-41 when they came to Vietnam they didn't even try to pacify Quang Ngai and it was the Japanese who had maybe a few soldiers in the center, if at that. Major leadership elements of the Vietnamese Communist party were born there so this was real Indian country.

When I was at the Quang Ngai Airport ready to depart at the end of my tour, my Vietnamese counterpart said to me just before I went up the stairs, "Larry, you do know that every family in the province has at least one member in the VC – even mine"

Hopefully in his family it was him. I say that because if it were, if it had been then when Quang Ngai fell very quickly as the South Vietnamese government began to collapse he would not have suffered and I admired the great man a great deal. If he happened to be a member of the other side he was doing a good job at what he was doing and he was certainly a good person so he wouldn't have been persecuted and he wouldn't have gone to a resettlement camp and he wouldn't have been killed.

Q: The flood.

COLBERT: Oh the flood. There was one day or a couple days when there was tremendous

monsoon rain and the rain occurred just as the tide was coming in so at the same time we had this major tide coming back from the sea, I presume it is the South China Sea. But anyway we had this terrific influx of water and then we had this terrific flood because of all the rain. So the water coming back from the tide, the rip tide and the rain the entire city flooded. You are talking maybe up to six, eight, ten feet everywhere. Let's say at its highest six, eight feet but virtually the entire town is covered. We were as I said earlier we were staying in this house, the four of us and we got a lift in a military truck, to a location perhaps one hundred yards from our house and then sort of floated or walked barely touching with our toes, but we basically got to our house and got into the house. It was a one-story house with a roof that you could get up to. The water was up to almost the top of the ceiling, there was probably maybe a two-foot gap where from the floor and it was all solid, muddy water. But the ceiling and the remaining part of the wall, which had not been covered by the water both, were black, black with insects, which had come in to escape the flood. So it was an incredible experience. There were, the house was totally, totally covered with no open space at all with insects that were trying to avoid from being drowned by the flood. We proceeded to the roof to sit it out until the rip tide went back and the water went down and amused ourselves by shooting snakes with 45s, and we just popped them both for amusement and safety until the water went down.

It was one of the most remarkable things I have experienced. To be in a city totally covered with water to a certain level and then go back and see your entire living quarters absolutely chuck-a-block full of insects of all kinds and not to mention insects of all kinds and not to mention insects, small animals as well. They had all come there for safety.

Q: Did this require an awful lot of work to put things back together again?

COLBERT: I think we had to get a new refrigerator and somebody had to clean the place up. I'm sure we didn't do it and life got back to normal in a relatively short time. I think maybe a day or two we lived on C rations of which we had lots.

Q: Well then you left there when?

COLBERT: The fall of '69. I left the country in the fall of '69. It was really quite remarkable at that point a number of people were doing what I was doing or similar things had been killed. I had gone there with that normal feeling of youth that I was indestructible and didn't really worry about it, although we were often shelled and certainly zappers came in and assassins came in and it was a dangerous place. I don't think I ever really had any angst about being killed. But as I got closer to the end I got a little more concerned with my well being because people that I knew had been killed or seriously wounded.

I remember flying on Air America from Quang Ngai to Da Nang, which was my first stop on the way out. I had to check out through Da Nang. And when we landed in Da Nang airport there was an accident, which occurred as we were landing. They were cutting the grass around the runway and one of the employees thought it would be easier if they used fire because it was much faster so they lit the grass on fire. Unfortunately there was an ammunition dump. So the ammunition dump went off just as we were approaching, and we had to get out of that plane and run. I sat then in this ditch for 45 minutes while the ammunition cooked off albeit perhaps a mile

away but it was close by when you are watching an ammunition dump going over.

Then from there I went on to my last time in Saigon to check out. I remember I was walking to Bunker' bunker that is to say what we used to call Ellsworth Bunkers embassy, this big monstrosity that we built. I was walking there to process out and a Viet Cong unit tried to take over or blow up the local main post office and I was going by at the time. So my last week in Vietnam was rather eventful. I flew into an ammunition dump blowing up and then what was an unwelcome intruder in an attempt to blow up or take over the local post office.

Q: The local post office was on a square with a cathedral wasn't it?

COLBERT: It's in the main square, that's right. You know Saigon then? Oh that's right you said you...

Q: I was there at the time. I remember. Whither in '69, the fall of '69, where did you go?

COLBERT: I went back to the Vietnam Training Center to fill time, and we found a one-bedroom apartment in southwest in one of the new high rises, relatively new then. My wife went back to work at the Library of Congress. We discovered she was pregnant and in due course we had our first child. I went back to Turkish language instruction and I was assigned to Turkey. My thought was that I had spent two and a half years in the Foreign Service; I had really no State Department experience and sort of no embassy experience. I had been upcountry winning hearts and minds or losing them. I felt that I was somewhat behind my classmates in terms of experience. In fact I was ahead of them promotion wise because I went to Vietnam as a 07 and left as a 05. So I had two promotions in less than three years and I was ahead of my class because I had gone to Vietnam and been shot at and so on and so forth. I was doing well.

On the other hand I felt really somewhat at a disadvantage because I didn't know what an OM was; an Operations Memorandum was for those of you who don't know. I didn't know how to do an Airgram; I didn't know what an Airgram was. I certainly didn't know about things like TAGS and all that good stuff. I knew nothing at all. So I thought I should at least know Turkey and my Turkish was pretty good although very, very rusty and I spoke like a peasant rather than an Istanbulu, a person from Istanbul or an Ankarli a person from Ankara. So I thought if I went to Turkey at least the language would give me some heads up to make up for the lack of any other knowledge I had. So I asked for Turkey and they assigned me to the political/military section in Ankara via Turkish.

Q: In the first place how long were you, a few months, in the Vietnam training place?

COLBERT: Three or four months until the Turkish language class started.

Q: How did you find, you might say, the spirit there and the approach? What was your impression?

COLBERT: It's a long time ago. I think people were, most people going through it were AID. State people were a minority and whereas in CORDS I which I was in, the first CORDS group,

we had already been assigned to Vietnam before CORDS was created. They weren't even sending FSOs to Vietnam for counter-insurgency work, upcountry work, when I came in. By the time I came back from Vietnam they were telling people that your first tour will be in Vietnam and if you won't go to Vietnam then you can't join the Foreign Service. So people I think knew they were going, some with enthusiasm, some with trepidation and some with resignation but basically everybody got along pretty well, I don't know. I think that the trainers, the people that talked about the politics and talked about the society and tried to prepare you for what Vietnam was about were very, very good people. Many of them had been involved in Southeast Asia for a long period of time. Erv Boomgardener who recently died, was one of them, a person from USIS (United States Information Service) who really knew the country very well. All I could bring to the table was the practical reality trying to work at a very junior level upcountry in a very big bureaucracy.

THOMAS B. KILLEEN
Refugee Officer
Da Nang and Hue (1967-1969)

Thomas B. Killeen was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in 1940. He joined the Peace Corps in 1964 and was posted in Chile. He entered into the Foreign Service in 1967 and his career included posts in Israel, Bolivia, Thailand, Ghana, Venezuela, and Somalia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: *In 1967?*

KILLEEN: This is the first working day after 1967 began. I think our class was seventy-six. The leadership of the class, to the extent that the matter came up, assured us that nobody in the class was going to Vietnam, that was just not in the cards. And apparently during the course of our six week A-100 course there was a change, and part of the change came about because USAID was really having considerably difficulty. They couldn't recruit people to staff the jobs that they had in Vietnam and they had to get people elsewhere. The State Department was tasked with providing some warm bodies, with getting on board with the Vietnam effort. Along about midway in our A-100 program the leaders stopped talking about nobody going to Vietnam, and nobody was asking anymore because it had been thoroughly answered. So that the day the assignments were out -- I can't remember what the fellow's name was, but it doesn't make any difference who it was -- they began to read in alphabetical order the members of the class and what their assignments were and somebody whose name began with "B" or maybe "C", bang! -- Vietnam. There was a deep intake of breath in the room. They went down the list and somebody who had brought his wife, his name came up for Vietnam, and she started to cry. As soon as the first name came up for Vietnam, I knew that if anyone was going to go to Vietnam, I would -- a bachelor, that gives them fifty points, former peace corps volunteer, that gives him another fifty points, former Marine, that gives him another fifty points, he's gone. I knew as soon as the first name came up that I was going to go and that the choice before me was either to stand up and just walk out of the class right then, and in effect to resign, or to go to Vietnam. So, of course, when my name came up that was the assignment. Prior to that we had had some kind of

consultation with our personnel assignment people. You know, "Where would you like to go, Killeen?" I said, "I don't care, any place in the world except don't send me to East Asia because I have no interest in that part of the world." And didn't; not anyplace, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, India; I had no interest in that part of the world. "And," I said, "I have just come from South America so I am not anxious to go there, send me to someplace new; I am not anxious to go to Europe either, so Africa sounds fine, or wherever is fine." I wasn't too picky; I never was picky about assignments in the Foreign Service, what came up came up, that was fine.

Q: Well you served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969. What did you do?

KILLEEN: Refugee work?

Q: Where were you working?

KILLEEN: I worked for a couple of months in a city called Hoi An, which was about 20 miles south of Da Nang. And then when the Tet offensive broke out there in January of 1968, the fellow who was doing refugee work in Hue was killed...

Q: What was his name?

KILLEEN: Jack Lunstead (?). He was killed, he was killed in his bathtub as a matter of fact. He apparently tried to take refuge in his bathtub, and the communists, who weren't very many, did go door to door on some things and they weren't going to allow anybody to do that and that was the end of him. Anyway, there I was twenty miles south of Da Nang and once again I was a former Marine and if anybody was going to Hue to be the refugee officer, I was going. Because it was, as it was said and explained and in the things they sought, a matter of high policy of the United States that we, the United States, would not give up the former imperial capital of Vietnam and we would not let the people displaced by war activities go unhelped. And we would be seen visibly helping even if at the particular moment the only visible sign of our help was the person of a refugee officer. So I went on up to Hue, and I went up to Hue twelve or thirteen days before the communists were kicked out.

Q: This was during the long Marine assault on the fortress there? The capitol building with the walls around it.

KILLEEN: The Marines were involved, the 101st Airborne Division was also involved and the South Vietnamese First Infantry Division, which was actually based in that area, was also involved. I have got a photograph, and I swear I am certain about my own recollection of it, that is a picture of the U.S. flag raised over the front gate of that wall by the Marines in violation of all policy orders and instructions and which was quickly removed. But I got a picture of that. That was some pretty hard sledding, that whole business. I went up to Hue, as I say it was over thirteen days before the communists got kicked out, I was there for a bit and then I went south to a refugee place that was north of the Marine base at Phu Bai and I shuttled back and forth.

Q: What were you doing? You not only had the problem of Hue, but was that also the time when they were cleaning out the Montagnards, getting them out of the area?

KILLEEN: No, oh no. And you have a little bit of the wrong slant on that. What you are thinking about, I think, and please don't be offended if I am putting words in your mouth, is: There were two distinct populations in Vietnam by broad group, one was the ethnic Vietnamese and the other was the mountain tribes. There was considerable antipathy between the people with the Vietnamese being the dominant group and the Montagnard population being largely content to let the Vietnamese have it all as long as they had peace and quiet in their own mountains. In those mountain areas, around some of the U.S. special forces camps, Montagnard populations did congregate; but to the best of my knowledge there was never any effort to move those peoples, in anything like a refugee guise, out of those areas and into the lowlands. There were some efforts to resettle them.

Q: Well I am really talking about resettlement more than anything, because I visited a couple of those.

KILLEEN: Of the Montagnards?

Q: I swear they were Montagnards, up near Hue, but towards the mountains. But we don't need to get into this. You were dealing with refugees, where were they coming from?

KILLEEN: They were from the city of Hue. The city of Hue got beat up pretty badly during the fighting. I just remember some rough numbers; the population was something like 138,000 people, 125,000 of them registered for refugee benefits. Something on the order of maybe 27,000 homes and dwellings, and something like 25,000 of them were either partially or entirely damaged or destroyed for purposes of collecting refugee benefits. It was refugee and rehabilitation. Specifically what I was doing was to try to, along with others -- by others I mean their own hierarchy -- to get the Vietnamese Refugee Service to do its work in getting the benefits into the hands of the beneficiaries, the people who were designated by law or regulation as beneficiaries. In order to do that there was a matter of registration, there was a matter of distribution, there was a matter of getting supplies, there was a matter of getting monies. The provincial treasury had been looted by the liberating forces; they had liberated the provincial treasury as well. Some things were as basic as that, we had to get food and money in, cash money, in order for the provincial treasury to operate, in order for civil servants to be paid, in order for beneficiaries of this refugee and rehabilitation package to get their cash benefits. Physically the cash money had to come in from out of town, from the capital.

As a matter of mechanics, some of what I did was to be a parallel channel of communications. If the Vietnamese service that I was attached to, advising, requisitioned something, I would pass through my channels of communication to the advisor to the Ministry in Saigon the fact that the request had been made and to move it along. And that is what would happen. If it was a matter of personnel, if it was a matter of material, if it was a matter of money, if it was a matter of awards, a matter of decorations, a matter of all kinds of things, I could use this parallel line of communication, and the converse was true. If there was something that was decided in the Ministry, a program to be initiated, this or that or the other thing, it could get passed down through American lines of communication to me and I could bring it to the attention of the local folks, who would often act upon the message that I was bringing because it was reliable.

Sometimes they would act upon it by resisting, but they would act upon it. Sometimes they asked for things that I judged to be something less than crucial and I would say, "This is on the way, but I don't agree with it," or words to that effect. In saying things that way I sort of implied that it was much more a tug of war, relationships were pretty good and we were pretty much on the same wave length.

Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese bureaucracy that you dealt with?

KILLEEN: Pretty good, genuinely pretty good. Pretty much dedicated to their war aims -- save the country, build a country, make a country, aims; their anti-communist aims. But in saying that I should make note that the bureaucracy, the ordinary clerk, was drawn from the best educated population in Vietnam -- the most intrepid and independent population in Vietnam, the group of people who had the highest sense of their own worth and the elevation of their place -- who were in fact angry that their city had been so beat up by their fellow countrymen. I say it that way and it implies that I am thinking of the physical property. Yes, some of it was the physical property; obviously the guys that beat up the property, the real estate, in a way were us, the Americans, the westerners, the South Vietnamese who were on our side. But it was the communists who came in, and really did kill an awful lot of the people of Vietnam. Killed maybe 2500 or 2900 while they were occupying Hue and then marched off an equivalent number, maybe it was only 2500, out into the wastelands to the east where they clubbed them and buried them alive. The people of Hue were pretty much universally angry about that, and they remained angry, they remained angry so that -- God, I am jumping ahead a long time -- more than ten years later a fellow was released from a reeducation camp, went home to Hue where he was dealing with local clerks. He decided he didn't want to stay in Vietnam anymore, he wanted to go and immigrate to the United States. So he went around, because he had heard about a program, the orderly departure program, to the local clerk -- this is the story he told me -- who was also from Hue. I say clerk, but he was a middle level bureaucrat. He said, "Yes, I heard about that program, let me see what I can find out for you about it," and walked this guy who had come out of reeducation camp through every bit of procedure without bribe or fine or anything like that. He was, in the current term, a home boy and he got him out of Vietnam. He was working for the communists, a communist functionary, but he was still angry at those guys who had beaten up the city of Hue so badly, and its people.

Q: What was your impression of dealing with the American military while you were there.

KILLEEN: Terrible, absolutely terrible. I didn't have much dealings with the Marines, I had dealings with the Army. I found some of their ways of doing business just impossibly obtuse, when not just plain flat craven. And it went on at all kinds of levels. I am going to try to build a little bit with stories. I got a ride on a helicopter and I told the fellow I wanted to go to a certain place and he said no, he couldn't take me there, that it was too dangerous and so on and so forth, that it was not a combat required priority to land there to put me down so he wouldn't do it. Well the next day I got an Air America helicopter to put me down in the same place...

Q: This was the CIA run airline. But basically it was sort of civilian type airline.

KILLEEN: Yes, not U.S. Army, it was a different chain of command. He put me down there

without the slightest hesitation. That's where the customer wants to go, that's where we go, down we went. I told him to go away and come back and get me in half an hour and he said sure he would come back in half an hour and when I wanted him to land to put out a smoke grenade. I did and he landed and we left. Because what we were talking about was a compound that was not a hundred yards square and everything outside the compound, I don't mean to give the impression of guys with guns pointed, was unfriendly territory. The opposite story, another Army helicopter and I asked him to put me down in a particular place and he did. When we got down or as we were landing, I said "Now you better get the hell out of here. Get out and come back and pick me up in a half hour." "No, no, no, I'll wait for you." "No, no, no, get out of here." "No, I'll wait for you." "Son of a gun get out of here, if you won't come back for me in a half hour then don't come back at all, but get out." He started to raise from the ground and he was not 50 feet in the air, I was walking away, when a .60 millimeter mortar landed where he had been. Nobody was hurt, but when it landed I looked up, he was looking down and his eyes were about as big as that television monitor. He hadn't wanted to listen to me, he wanted to be obtuse about things. We then took off and I said to him something about "you didn't want to believe me, but I guess now you will," he did come back and get me, and he said "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." I said to him something quite casual about how "most of this area in here is controlled by communists." At which point we flew out over the ocean and traversed the thirty or forty miles that we had to go to get back to Hue over the ocean and then cut inland to come into Hue to let me off.

I made those stories sort of rudimentary and sort of yuk-yuk stories because as far as I am concerned they illustrate some of the kind of things that happened. The fellow that I worked for was actually a U.S. Army colonel and I had a fair amount of respect for him. He had a principal deputy who was an Army lieutenant colonel for whom I had an awful lot of respect. The rest of the crew, there was a military deputy, the principal deputy, and then there was a civilian deputy who was a former Army officer. Most of this provincial advisory team were either active duty or retired military officers. A lot of those guys were fairly obvious retreads. I think that on balance the folks that were being sent to that particular provincial advisory team were the best available - I am not talking about myself. Although maybe I should put myself in just that same category stressing the available part of it. The former senior advisor to the province was a guy by the name of Phil Manhard and he was a State Department foreign service officer, now dead.

Q: No he's not. I am pretty sure he is not because I interviewed him, not on this but on China; I think he is in North Carolina now. I maybe wrong, but it must have just happened just recently.

KILLEEN: And you think he formerly worked in the city of Hue?

Q: He was captured. Later Ambassador to Fiji or Mauritius, something like that.

KILLEEN: Well I thought that I had seen that he had died. I don't know if he knows this story, and I don't know that it's true. The communists took over Hue by maybe a battalion of them walking into town during the course of a night, and the next thing anybody knew if there was any cop of the corner, or someone who looked like a cop on the corner, it was a communist. They found themselves in control of the city and called in their buddies who then marched on in in greater force. But during that particular period, which was the evening of Tet, the Vietnamese

New Year, one of the guys who worked for Manhard, a guy by the name of Augustino, was sleeping over with a girl friend right across the street from the U.S. Army's MACV compound where the Army advisory team to the First Vietnamese Army Division was lodged. Augustino found out, maybe he did so by looking or maybe by the one of the Vietnamese with whom he was staying telling him, that Manhard had not been taken. He went across the way to this MACV compound and asked them if they would give him a squad to go and pick up Manhard before the communists got him. And they refused; they refused to let anyone go out. So Augustino, as he told the story, as I remember, tried arguing with them for a little while and it sort of became a question of "You can come in if you want to, but you are not going to go out again. We are not going to open the gates for you to go out again. We are not going to open the gates for any other reason, including any kind of thing to go and get Manhard." Augustino at that point went to see if he could get Manhard, it was a matter of about three blocks, by himself before the communists got there. He found that they had already been there, or were circling in at the moment and he couldn't get to him.

This same MACV compound -- I think the commander of it was a colonel by the name of Kelley -- that doesn't sound right -- I don't remember. Maybe a mile away from where this compound was there was a little outpost where there were twelve soldiers headed by a sergeant. They were running the telephone lines and they asked the compound to let them come in so that they could get some food and water, or to send food and water, and the compound wouldn't do it. They were told to stay where they were, and they stayed where they were throughout the occupation of the south side of the city of Hue by the communists, which was, I guess, ten days or two weeks, without food or water. They didn't have any there on their little compound because they customarily took their meals at the MACV compound. They were kept alive, both by food and by water, by the madame of a local bordello at considerably greater peril to her life than in fact those communicators were. She ran food and water to them and kept them alive. In the meantime this MACV compound wouldn't let them in, told them to stay where they were. And they did and they kept those telephone lines open. I put that down as just plain craven conduct on the part of that MACV compound. There probably were, if not more, at least the equivalent number of troops -- not organized into combat units -- in that MACV compound as actually captured the city of Hue. They offered no resistance whatsoever, there may have been a couple of rounds popped off at some point or another.

I didn't actually realize this until sometime later as our compound was independent, it was several blocks away from the MACV compound. The CIA compound was across the street from us. We never abandoned our compound and they never abandoned their compound and I am confident in retrospect that part of the reason we didn't abandon our compound was because we weren't sure we could get out of the MACV compound once we had gotten in and quite literally had to get out of the compound in order to do the work we were there to do. That was, of course, true of MACV and they didn't come out of their compound.

Q: Did you spend all your time with refugees through the 1969 period?

KILLEEN: Yes. I took a couple of R & R's, but that was what I did and I did it there in the city of Hue and in the provinces.

Q: Did you have any feeling of being in the foreign service, this was your first assignment, or were you sort of off on your own?

KILLEEN: Such a question. You see I didn't really know against what to judge things. I knew I wasn't working in an Embassy, on the other hand I didn't have a clue what working in an Embassy was. It certainly didn't seem unnatural that a number of us would be separated out and detailed to USAID. During the course of the A-100 course, but apparently without any connection, the stories of other officers in Vietnam, both USIS officers and State officers, who were working in the provinces were told. They were told as some of the kinds of things that individuals sometimes get in to. We all knew of, and I certainly was dazzled by it, one-man posts -- there are still a couple of them left. The one that I had run into ..(?).., well as I said dazzled by this little jewel, was the one-man post at Antofagasta, Northern Chile.

KILLEEN: I was more than a little happy that I was able to get up into northern part of Vietnam where the Marines were. I felt a little safer in Marine country, because I could speak the language, than I would have elsewhere -- although I had a cousin who was working for ESSO in Saigon. There were no other State Department officers in Hoi An when I went there, but there were a couple of AID officers. The fellow who was the senior advisor in Hoi An when I was there was a CIA officer. There were a couple of AID officers and there may have been a USIS officer who was holding down the USIS slot. I am trying to remember and I haven't thought of these things in years. There was at least one military officer detailed to holding an AID slot in Hoi An. So then the world fell apart with the communists virtually overwhelming the country, it didn't really surprise me that when I was sent to Hue -- when I say it that way I was conscious of the fact that there was history being made there and it was an attraction to me to be close to it, that sweetened the things on going to Hue -- there were no other State officers in Hue at the time. There were CIA officers. Were there any civilian AID officers there beside the guy who was the retired army officer? I don't remember whether there were or not. But although he was a retired military officer he was in fact retired and was engaged by AID as a civilian employee. There had been Manhard who was there two weeks before I got there and was no longer there, but we really did have hopes at that time that he would either show up or be recovered. He was a State Department officer. There had been a consulate in Hue three or four years before I got there. There was an AID officer there who was an ordinary civilian. I didn't really have too much to judge it against. I knew that I was not dealing with a normal Embassy assignment; I didn't know how far afield it was. In fact I was part of CORDS 1; I and five others were part of CORDS 1 before there was CORDS. We were part of OCO and then OCO became CORDS and it was CORDS when it was the days of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, long before it got changed to Rural Development or anything like that.

Q: What about corruption? In the Far East and many other places you pay for services before you receive them often from the public. Or things are siphoned off; there was a lot of talk about the Vietnamese general in command of I Corps, how he had warehouses full of stuff. Did you have any experience with corruption?

KILLEEN: I didn't see it. I thought at the time, and still think, that because of the spotlight under which we were -- which was pretty intense; I even got a reporting requirement from the White House, came out of the White House, direct telex; and the Vietnamese were under the same

spotlight -- it just didn't happen. Now you have to bear in mind, and this is not intended as a big but, that what we were about was to put into the hands of little people certain limited amounts of foodstuffs, cement, tin roofing, and cash -- there wasn't a lot of cash involved, though in aggregate it was, for individuals it wasn't. It wouldn't have taken a very dumb merchant or corruptee to figure out that once you get it into the hands of people you can then come around behind them and buy the stuff back, and in fact use the same trucks to take it back that brought it up. I never saw anything like that happen, either. I felt, and I think we felt, that once we got it into the hands of people that we had done the very best that we could do. By people, I mean the people who were entitled by law, or what was passing for law, to be the beneficiaries of this stuff.

There was one kind of a thing that was maybe sort of an exception on that, it was after the communists had been kicked out but it wasn't very long after. One evening this same Augustino that I mentioned earlier was seen going off someplace with an M16 over his shoulder. "Where in the hell are you going, Augie?" He said he was going to guard the warehouse. "What the hell are you worried about the warehouse for?" "They" had broken in or at least broken through a wall and he was afraid that they were going to come back that night and pillage it. What was in the warehouse at that point, there may have been very small quantities of something else, was bulgar wheat which was not a very attractive food stuff for the Vietnamese being a rice eating people. This bulgar wheat had a certain amount of popularity in the Middle East, but it was totally alien to the Vietnamese population. Well, everybody, what there was of a provincial advisory team, jumped up on its feet and said, "No, no, no, you can't do that," and we then proceeded to have a quick but fairly intense discussion of what it was all about. We came to the conclusion that absolutely the worst thing that would happen was that this bulgar wheat would be stolen, and that the next thing that would happen would be that it would be sold. That would begin to reestablish market places in the city of Hue which would then draw other kinds of things and we would take that particular step toward reconstituting the city as a living thing. We prevailed upon Augustino to sleep on his own bed that night -- I don't know what he was sleeping on, maybe a desk as most of us were. And that is exactly what did happen. Now was that corruption on our part?

Q: No, there was a practical application of how do you insert something into the society, sometimes its leaving something on a street corner and saying "Oh my, they have taken it." This belongs to that rather than somebody getting and stockpiling something that really is of great value and creating money.

KILLEEN: I never had any dope offered to me for sale, I never went looking for any. I heard about marijuana being available, I heard about one guy walking down the street with two AWOL bags full of marijuana. This was before heroine became widespread.

Q: When I was in Vietnam, which was 1969 and 1970, a little marijuana, but it wasn't a big deal. That wasn't the problem.

KILLEEN: Again, I think really that both the Vietnamese and the American side, to the extent that it may have applied to the American side, really put into the city of Hue... You see there was a new provincial chief because the previous one had been terrible, hid out in the attic of the hospital when the communists came into the town. The South Vietnamese government because

of the glare of the spotlight, because of the terrible conditions that all of a sudden prevailed, put honest, upright, reliable, dedicated, nationalistic people into the city of Hue to supervise. Pretty much upright, remnants of the Vietnamese civil service that was left.

Q: You left Vietnam in April of 1969, is that right?

KILLEEN: April of 1969 it was.

Q: What had you been asking for and where did you end up going?

KILLEEN: I hadn't really been asking for anything, except as something on a wish list when I first came into the foreign service. First of all, I didn't really know that I was going to make it out of Vietnam. Three of us had Thanksgiving dinner together, three State Department officers. I went to Hue, another guy went to Kontum, or Pleiku it may have been, another one was in Saigon as part of the Embassy political section. He had come from the U.S. mission to the U.N.; he was by misadventure in Hue at the time the Tet offensive broke out and was scooped up by the communists -- he was knocked down a block or so away from the compound in which I ended up living and working and shot in the back of the head. The business about onward assignments and everything else like that I didn't give much if any thought to or consideration to, some of it was just because it was so far away and Washington was so far away and the Embassy was so far away, and I was busy and in a sense it was easier to be far away.

What actually happened was that a brother of mine died and I went back to the United States to go to the funeral. Then what transpired was one of those things that put the department's personnel system into my heart and to this day it remains very difficult for me to say anything against personnel. Quite literally at about 10:00 o'clock in the morning my supervisor told me that my brother had died and did I want to try to make it to the funeral. The message from the family made it quite clear that they understood that I was very far away and in a remote place far away. The funeral was set for, call it forty-eight hours and if I couldn't make it just let them know; they were not going to hold the funeral until I arrived -- although that's not the phraseology of it at all. Well I set off then to make it and literally packed an AWOL bag and that was it. After the funeral I took a couple of days off and I got a phone call from -- I'm not even sure who it was -- personnel and they offered me a deal. The deal was that if I wanted to go back to Vietnam of course I was welcome to, but if I didn't want to, then the department would TDY me to the Vietnam training center for a month and that would formally complete my assignment in Vietnam making me eligible for home leave and onward assignment. And I opted to do that, which meant that the folks back in Vietnam had to pack up for me. In that same period, which in my mind was about the time I was going to be doing it anyway, when I got back to Washington I would talk about an onward assignment. That is when I did it and once again I sort of got myself if not in trouble, out of joint, because I made some wrong assumptions.

When we were going off to Vietnam, the personnel folks had said, in effect, thank you all very much for doing this and take it from us, when you are finished with your Vietnam assignment you will have any assignment you want. I believed it. When I then went shopping for an assignment what I wanted was something in the Middle East so I could see what that particular area of the world was like. The assignment that came up, and I thought nothing of it, was to long-

term language training in Beirut. In my mind, having in fairly short succession and at government expense, put it in those terms, had some language training in Spanish for the Peace Corps, had some language training in Vietnamese for the State Department but for AID because they loaned me out, I was now getting language training for the State Department. It took me a couple of months and some consultation, not consultation, he more than sought me out, he looked me up -- I can't think of a good phrase -- a guy by the name of Perry Culley (?) who was an Inspector and had been the DCM in Paris, said to me in effect do you know what you are doing. I said, "Yeah, sure. A little R&R from Vietnam and studying some Arabic in preparation for another assignment." He said, "Do you realize it's not just another assignment, that it is probably two more and then back to Washington and then very likely another assignment in the Middle East, because you're taking this language course." I hadn't; I had sort of thought of it as the Vietnam thing. So that is how I got to the Middle East and the assignment process was in a very real sense the Department of Personnel folks fulfilling their commitment to us who had gone to Vietnam to give us anything we wanted. When I said I wanted to go to the Middle East, there being no jobs open, they put me into a language course. I am sure whoever made the decision to do that said, "Of course he will appreciate that he is slated for long-term assignment in the area." I didn't. When I found out I asked that I be recycled out of the long-term and into an abbreviated language course and that then I get an onward assignment. When I was finished with the language course, lo and behold if a guy in Tel Aviv did not take advantage of a then thing we had in the foreign service where you could retire and get additional credit for retirement.

RICHARD R. WYROUGH
Forward Base Commander
Bien Hoa (1967-1968)

Vietnamese National Military Academy
Dalat (1968-1969)

Brigade Commander, Task Force South
South Vietnam (1969-1970)

Colonel WyrOUGH was born in New Jersey in 1927 and educated at West Point and Georgetown. He served with the Military in Germany and Vietnam. He was deputy director for Panama affairs in 1975. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

Q: *Where did you serve in Vietnam?*

WYROUGH: I had been promoted to Lt. Colonel early in my Pentagon assignment, and so my first assignment in Vietnam was command of a forward base about 5 or 10 miles from the Cambodian border due north of Saigon, in a province called Bin Hoa. Our headquarters was in the middle of an old French rubber plantation. When I arrived, the French still had their families living in these homes. The first Sunday I was there, as the senior person, I was the guest for lunch at the home of some French administrator, whatever his exact title was I don't remember,

but it was a very colonial setting. And within days the VC [Viet Cong] attacked our base, the children and the families were all evacuated, and periodically on weekends the wives would come back, leave the children in Saigon. It was a relatively unreal, or surrealistic kind of situation.

About a month after I arrived I was selected for promotion to Colonel, a full colonel. And about that time General Westmoreland -- one of his pet projects was to expand and upgrade, from our perspective at least, the Vietnamese National Military Academy, remaking it from a two-year technical school modeled after the French style into a four year academic degree year awarding institution modeled after West Point. I was selected to go there. I left my assignment up near the Cambodian border on New Year's Day of 1968, headed for a series of briefings in Saigon. By that time General Abrams was the deputy commander under Westmoreland. In my interview with Westmoreland he said, now, tell me about yourself. You have a good Army wife, I may want you to stay up there longer than...at that time people were in and out in a year's time if they weren't carried out. That came as something of a surprise. Young officers in those days, you don't have much choice.

So, General Abrams that night at dinner said, Well, Dick, you go on up there and if you think it's worthwhile, then bring your wife and the boys to safe haven in Baguio.

Q: In the Philippines.

WYROUGH: I arrived in Dalat, which was the home of the military academy, the summer capital...

Q: A beautiful place.

WYROUGH: ...with a U.S. military police guard at the airfield to keep U.S. people out unless they were there for legitimate business. I arrived there in the middle of January of '68. I was the senior American, was met by the deputy province advisor, an American Army Lieutenant Colonel, and he took me to where I would live for two years. I said, tell me about your defense plan. In effect, my recollection was, he said, we don't have too much of a defense plan because this is R&R up here for both sides.

Q: That was sort of the story that went around.

WYROUGH: So, I said, well, you present me with a contingency plan because your responsibility is to advise the mayor, the province chief, my responsibility is to see that the American community here is secure. You present me with an up-dated plan. Which he did a week later, and I approved it and about a week after that Dalat was one of the cities hit during Tet. It was an interesting assignment.

Q: Could you talk a little about, as long I've got you on the microphone, a little about what happened in Dalat during Tet.

WYROUGH: Well, my team was in the process of being greatly expanded in size. We had just

rented a villa on top of a hill, across the street from the villa occupied by the U.S. Military Police detachment in the city, who were there to guard the airfield as I mentioned. And I had put four of my new officers into this villa. One night the Vietnamese guards, military guards, didn't show up. We must have gotten some sort of intelligence to put us on a little bit of alert. But I ordered the men into my villa in a little better part of town, I guess. And that night that villa, which was empty, as it turned out was the first building hit in the city. It was on a ridge line, and the VC came down the ridge line through the outskirts of the city, attacked that villa, went across the street, attacked the military police villa, which happened to be on the high ground immediately over the market place. The VC held the market place, as I recall, for a couple of days, but we mobilized forces, both Vietnamese and U.S., and drove them out. The cadets at the academy were assigned rear guard, local security missions, freeing up the regular Vietnamese military to join their units in the counter against the VC. A Lt. General, First Field Forces commander, would come in from time to time, set up his headquarters...if you're familiar with Dalat, that grand hotel overlooking the city. And they established something operating directly of First Field Forces Headquarters called Task Force South. It was a combined military operation, U.S. units and working in close coordination with ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] units of the 23rd division. But over a period of ten days the Vietcong were driven out of the city. There was some loss of life, but very little. And things returned to normal. It came as a great shock to me as one of the military in the country, to learn of the domestic reaction here. But that's another story, I don't want to get into that.

A month later, I took the first of a series of visits to all the U.S. supported military institutions in the region, military academies, naval academies, air force academies, Korean, Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia. Even went down to Canberra in Australia to visit the Royal Military College to get a feeling for their experiences and their efforts. The first one was to the Philippine Military Academy. I checked out Baguio, decided that Baguio was not the right place for my family. It was remotely located, it would have been difficult to get to. But decided to bring them to Clark Air Base, they were given a safe haven program such as the Foreign Service had in Bangkok and Taiwan. At that time there were only three-four-five, six at the most, military families of officers with special assignments in Vietnam whose presence was necessary beyond the ordinary twelve months. By the time my wife left in the summer of '70, that program had grown to about sixty families at that particular location, and there were comparable increases, I think, in Bangkok and elsewhere.

We graduated the first four year class in December of 1969. It was an optimistic moment. Ellsworth Bunker, as the ambassador, came up for the ceremony. I met him then. General Abrams had come up a couple of times. I had been selected to command this separate brigade that operated directly out of the First Field Forces, called Task Force South, its headquarters by that time was in a small town on the coast, but north of Saigon, south of Cameron Bay. I had three U.S. battalions under my direct control, and my headquarters was co-located with the headquarters of the assistant division commander of the 23rd ARVN, and he had usually under his control four ARVN battalions. So we had a sizeable force. Our responsibility was what the military calls an economy of force effort. Our area of responsibility was the southern four provinces of First Field Forces. That included Dalat, the two coastal provinces, and the province in which Dalat was located.

I turned over my command, in those days those brigade commands were six months only. I turned over my brigade in June of 1970, having served almost three years in country. Came back to the Pentagon for my second assignment. There I was assigned to Latin American affairs. Except for the six months with Cuban affairs, I had no background but there was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Latin American affairs who had remembered me from those days, and although I really didn't want the assignment, I got it.

DOUGLAS R. KEENE
CORDS Officer
Go Cong Province (1967-1970)

Mr. Keene was born and raised in Massachusetts and graduated from Colby College. He joined the Foreign Service in 1967, serving first in Vietnam and subsequently at Middle East posts including Jerusalem, Karachi, Cairo, as well as Amman and Muscat, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. His Washington assignments also concerned primarily Middle Eastern matters, including the Arab-Israel problem. Mr. Keene was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: What were they talking about when you came in, because this was just the beginning of our buildup in Vietnam?

KEENE: Yes. That was talked about a lot—Vietnam and Laos, Southeast Asia.

Q: So, how did that work for you? You were married so this meant you would go or not?

KEENE: I was the very first married officer involuntarily sent to Vietnam—one of my claims to fame.

Q: Firstly, how did you find the A-100 course?

KEENE: I found it quite interesting. I learned a lot; I mean, I didn't know how to write cables, or conduct visa interviews, or any of that stuff. And I didn't know the culture of the Department or of Washington, so I thought it was a very, very useful course.

Q: How did your wife feel about coming into the Foreign Service?

KEENE: I think she liked that; she liked the idea of traveling, living overseas. What she didn't like was when I got assigned to Vietnam.

Q: You went to Vietnam from when to when?

KEENE: Well, at first I took Vietnamese at the Vietnam Training Center in Arlington Towers.

Q: In the basement. In the garage.

KEENE: In the garage, right. That was ten months, then I guess they gave us another month of area studies, and so it would be...we went in April of '68.

Q: This would be after Tet (a North Vietnamese offensive waged at the time of the lunar new year)?

KEENE: Just after Tet.

Q: Where did you go?

KEENE: Go Cong.

Q: Where?

KEENE: In the delta, Go Cong Province. I was in Saigon for about a month first.

Q: You were in the delta from when to when?

KEENE: This was 1967. We were in CORDS I. CORDS was the acronym for Civil Operations, Revolutionary Development Support. This was later changed to Rural Development. It was part of MAC. MACV/CORDS. First group through. Very interesting. President Johnson had the CORDS I to the White House and then they lined the group up around the President, invited the media in and Johnson gave a little speech, talking about the new CORDS program, calling us "Warriors for Peace." (Some of the guys from that group are planning a first ever reunion later this year, so that should be fun.) It was 27 months. I got there in April and left two years and three months later.

Q: So you left in July or so of '70. What part of the delta were you in?

KEENE: It was IV Corps, but it was northern IV Corps. It's a small province. A lot of people haven't heard of it. The biggest close province was My Tho.

Q: Did you know by any chance Howard Gross?

KEENE: The name's familiar.

Q: Because Howard was down there; I visited him down there. He was in My Tho. I was in Saigon at the time as consul general at the embassy.

In the first place, what was the situation when you were there? It was shortly after the Tet offensive.

KEENE: Yes, yes. Well, there was still plenty of visible damage in the town. I started out working in the province capital as a New Life Development Officer, (which was pacification),

but then they eventually had four young FSO's (foreign service officers), including myself, and they decided that we had four districts, and each of us should concentrate on one district. So I did that for a little while in Hoa Tan District, and then when the army major who was district senior advisor, when his tour came to an end, I became district senior advisor, and spent all my time out there for the rest of my tour.

Q: What were you doing?

KEENE: Well, I was working with my counterpart, who was the district chief, and we were also doing military operations, we focused on pacification. We built a school and a medical clinic in every village, and we had ten villages in the district, something like 80 hamlets. We electrified one of the villages as a demonstration project, dug wells, paved roads, built markets. We were doing all of this "hearts and mind" stuff; at the same time we had military training teams there and military guys on the district team would go out with the Vietnamese on patrol, ambushes, stuff like that. We also visited local officials in their villages and hamlets on a regular basis to find out what was going on and where the problems were. It was a lot of responsibility for someone 22 – 23 years old. You were in charge of your District Team, Mobile Training Teams operating in your district, you could call in air strikes or refuse permission for them and you had \$10,000 a month for development projects. It was quite a while in the Foreign Service before I had a comparable degree of responsibility.

Q: Was there much fighting?

KEENE: There was fighting. Not as fierce as up in I Corps, but we lost a few guys. And we'd get mortared, stuff like that.

Q: Who were you fighting? Regulars, or...

KEENE: We had both. We had local VC (Viet Cong), and we had one mainline NVA (North Vietnam Army) division that would come in and out. In a heavily jungled area, they'd come in there and have their R&R (Rest and Recreation) and sometimes they'd attack someone while they were there. It was known as the Coconut Grove and it was on the border with Dinh Tuong, and they'd go back and forth. We had in My Tho area--forget precisely the name of their base--we had the U.S. ninth division, and they would often try to get our permission to conduct operations in Go Cong, and we would never let them, because they were indiscriminate: they'd kill anything that moved. Created more problems than they solved.

Q: What was your impression of the leadership of the Vietnamese, civilian and military, when you were there in your area?

KEENE: I got to know my counterpart and liked him personally, but there was considerable corruption. You could actually tell they were stealing us blind, but you couldn't figure out quite how they were doing it. And I suppose in retrospect it was petty corruption; they'd steal some cement or some rebar, and resell it and stuff like that. We didn't give them the money directly; we spent that ourselves. The Corps gave each district \$10,000 a month of AIK funds (Assistance in Kind)--recycled local currency, Vietnamese currency, which after a while you had to have a

shoebox to carry \$100.

Q: How did you find the Corp's operation, the direction from Saigon?

KEENE: I did think it was pretty good. I met with William Colby a few times, who was the head of it at that time, but more often we'd deal with the Corps guys. For a while that was John Paul Vann, and then Colonel William Wilson—Coal Bin Willie, as he was known. He was given to inspecting things down to that level of detail. Vann was an impressive guy; Wilson was not so much. Our local province senior advisor was a retired colonel who wasn't really all that impressive.

Q: Was Vann always pushing to get things done?

KEENE: He was a pretty dynamic guy. My little district—we did okay, probably because we weren't very high up on the radar screen of the North Vietnamese, so they were generally satisfied when they came up to inspect there.

Q: It was sort of a "live and let live" situation between the local populace and the Viet Cong?

KEENE: There was certainly a large element of that. There were clashes every now and then, or our PRU (Provincial Reconnaissance Unit) would go out and capture somebody, but it wasn't high level. Lob mortars in every now and then. We'd do H and I—harassment and interdiction--fire every night. You knew it was a war zone, but if you weren't stupid about it you could get around and go to hamlets and villages and talk to people and do projects.

Q: Well having been there two years, it made you one of the old hands.

KEENE: Yes, I guess so.

Q: How did you feel about the war? Did you feel we were making progress?

KEENE: Actually, yes, on a local level. I wasn't so sure about the national level. I remember thinking, for example, that the invasion of Cambodia was a huge mistake... things like that. But you wondered about how they went about trying to fight the war; I thought a lot of that was really misguided. But locally we did okay; I thought we were trying to do the right thing.

Q: You left there in 1970. How did you feel? Whither South Vietnam from your perspective at that time?

KEENE: I guess I thought it was a toss-up. I wasn't quite sure which way it would go, but it was certainly no sure thing that we were going to win. We never understood what we were doing.

Q: Who were some of your colleagues you dealt with there—the corps people? Were they sort of with the program or were you all a bit bemused, or how would you describe it?

KEENE: Well, I don't know. I dealt more often with the people on my district team than I did

with... We'd go in once a week into the capital and go talk to the people in charge there and say "This is what we need. Can you give us some resources?" And that was okay; they were fairly responsive. The place was awash in money, so if you needed some extra cement or rebar, or whatever, you could usually get it. We had a couple of sergeants with us, they knew how to get anything. You wanted a jeep? They'd go get it.

Q: In my era we used to call them "midnight requisitions"

KEENE: They did a lot of that.

Q: The sergeants are of course the people who run the army anyway. Who were the people you were dealing with in these villages? Pretty much peasants?

KEENE: These were peasants, but some were elected or appointed as village chief or hamlet chief. Usually we'd talk to them. Sometimes it would be, after we got that up and going, the People's Self Defense Force chief. Then there were district officials: they had a health chief, and an education chief, sometimes military, sometimes civilian. We also did a lot with the RD (Revolutionary Development) Cadre. The district cadre chief was a dynamic, resourceful guy, who really had a good feel for what was going on in the area.

Q: Were you able to get reasonable teachers, doctors or medical attendants down into your level?

KEENE: Yes, we were. Teachers. The medical people weren't doctors, mostly; there were a couple of doctors around, but they were, you know, technicians. That's basically what we had to offer, too; we had medics who would help them set up, try to teach them.

Q: Well then, where was your wife? Did she locate in Bangkok, or somewhere else?

KEENE: She went to Taipei.

Q: Taipei. How did she find that?

KEENE: She liked it very much. They had a group of people in the same situation, and they were in pretty nice housing. It was formerly AID (Agency for International Development) housing—AID had begun to phase out of Taipei, and they took that over. It wasn't a bad life. She studied Chinese scroll painting, Chinese, Chinese cooking, and God knows what else.

MELVIN R. CHATMAN
199th Infantry Brigade
Vietnam (1967-1970)

Mr. Chatman was born in Oklahoma and raised in California and Michigan. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he pursued theater interests

before serving in the US Army in Korea and Vietnam. In 1970 he joined AID and spent the rest of his career with that agency. His overseas postings include Vietnam, Malaysia, Bangladesh and San Salvador. He also had assignments with AID in Washington and New York City dealing with refugee, rice imports and training issues. Mr. Chatman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.

Q: But you went to Korea for three years and then how did you...did you go with the First Calvary to...?

CHATMAN: No, I volunteered for Vietnam.

Q: So you went there in what '67?

CHATMAN: '67.

Q: Where did you go?

CHATMAN: I was around Saigon, 199th infantry brigade. I was first there with the civil affairs unit, no excuse me I was first there with the liaison office with the ROK army, from there I went to a civil affairs unit for the city of Saigon, then from that position I went to the 199th infantry brigade as the company commander and then as the S-5 you know what the S-5? Civil affairs.

Q: Well this is taking place when '67 to?

CHATMAN: '70.

Q: '70. So you were there during Tet?

CHATMAN: Yes.

Q: What were you doing when Tet happened? This was '68, what were you doing?

CHATMAN: I was about two blocks from the presidential palace in a BOQ when I happened. We were shifted around sort of put in different holes to fill in officer responsibilities while the fighting was going on. I never got in any kind of real combat. I was there but there were a lot of people who never had to fire anything during Tet. I was one of those people but I was there and I could hear everything. But then I transferred to the 199th and became involved with what was left of, you know it took about a year for the whole Tet thing to get cleared up, I went to the 199th I was part of that clearing up operation.

Q: It was the second Tet or whatever it was...

CHATMAN: The next year it was a mini-Tet.

Q: A mini-Tet in and around Choowang wasn't it? What was your impression or having been in

Korea and then coming to Vietnam? What was your, did you see a real difference between the Vietnamese and the Koreans you were dealing with?

CHATMAN: Yeah but it is an unfair comparison because I was dealing totally with the military in Korea where I was dealing with the military and civilians in Vietnam and there it was a different ball game.

Q: What were the sort of things you were dealing with in with the civilians with in Vietnam?

CHATMAN: The last year, okay first of all as S-5 you deal with civilians. You are a military representative but your job is to deal with the civilians the military has to be friendly with in order for operations to be successful. But then, I got into the organization that was an advisory system. As a military person I was assigned to an organization that was the advisory system to the mayor of Saigon. So I was in charge of three districts in Saigon of dealing as a civilian, because we wore civilian clothes. I was a military person but I dealt strictly with civilian issues and for the districts of Saigon.

Q: What districts are these?

CHATMAN: District three, district two, district four, maybe it was three districts, let me see, district 7. There were four districts.

Q: What area does that encompass?

CHATMAN: Cholon, one part of Cholon was district seven; district four was down there by the port, district two was in the middle of Saigon and district one, I can't remember oh the racetrack. One of them was near the racetrack. So they had the big fighting during the Tet.

Q: Well how did you...the civilian government was mainly a military government wasn't it? The Vietnamese...

CHATMAN: Not in Saigon.

Q: Not in Saigon.

CHATMAN: They were all civilian. They didn't have military; if you went in the provinces the district chiefs were all military but not in Saigon.

Q: How did you find dealing with them?

CHATMAN: I didn't have any problem but I spoke Vietnamese, I could read so it made it really one might say it facilitated my official life and it facilitated my private life.

Q: I must say the Vietnamese young ladies are certainly attractive. Did you get at all involved in the problem of the GIs in Saigon, people going AWOL (absent without leave), going out on Toudoo Street getting drunk and you know what have you? There were a lot of young men sort of

running wild.

CHATMAN: I did but I didn't in an official capacity. I did what I thought I could do as an individual but my job was...that was not my job. My job was to help them establish a democratic type of mockery of the U.S. governments that is what my job was.

Q: What was your impression about the government of really of Saigon and how well it was sort of representative?

CHATMAN: It was representative in terms of an American thing?

Q: Yeah.

CHATMAN: It was corrupt it was totally corrupt. It didn't represent anything but what people were afraid of. People voted for the government because they were scared to death of the Communist. They weren't voting for the government because they thought the government was that much better, they were scared to death of the Communists at least that was my thoughts. We never ever had the kind of government system that we thought we had and we set up there for years and years and lied to ourselves as to how well we were doing. That was our fault.

Q: Did you find...?

CHATMAN: The caste system and all of that was bullshit we had. Remember the annual evaluation system and all of that stuff to rank the security level of each of the hamlets and stuff like that.

Q: Oh yeah. Did you sleep at night in a village and how many bodies...?

CHATMAN: Yeah right, right, right class one or I can't remember what the level was but there were three or four different levels of villages based on security.

Q: Well Saigon itself during the time you were there was not a particularly I mean the Viet Cong weren't in I mean they might have been undercover but they weren't much of a overt presence of Saigon or anything like that were they?

CHATMAN: No, except they assassinated people. I personally saw several assassinations. They were there and it that happened, but they were not like in Iraq or anything like that but the same type of thing but they were more directed towards individuals not groups of people like that kind of stuff that goes on in Iraq. They were very, very specifically person-oriented person's position type of thing.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the embassy there?

CHATMAN: We were the major primary advisors to the mayor so that became a very sensitive issue with the embassy. It was above me that dealt directly with the embassy, I was in one of the worker bees, the queen bees dealt with the embassy, I never really got...except I did an

evacuation. I was basically almost on the embassy staff during an evacuation.

Q: You were there until when?

CHATMAN: The 29th of April of '75.

Q: Of '75. Did you spend your entire time in Vietnam? Or did you have any tours elsewhere or anywhere else?

CHATMAN: Yes, I was in Malaysia for two years I was in Bangladesh for six years.

Q: I know but during, between... you went to Vietnam in '67 and you were the first tour in Vietnam, how long were you there?

CHATMAN: You know we really didn't have tours. AID (Agency for International Development) just sent you there and you were there until you were sent somewhere else. Oh, in military.

Q: In the military.

CHATMAN: I extended like two or three times.

Q: So you were there with the military for how long?

CHATMAN: Three years.

Q: So this would take you to...

CHATMAN: '70.

Q: At that point you decided to get out of the military?

CHATMAN: Yeah, because the handwriting was on the wall about the future of non- West Point graduates.

THOMAS PARKER, JR.
Deputy District Senior Advisor
Saigon (1967-1970)

Mr. Parker was born and raised in South Carolina and was educated at Davidson College, the University of Michigan and Duke University Law School. After service in the US Army, he joined the State Department in 1967 and was posted to South Vietnam, where he worked in the CORDS program. Mr. Parker subsequently served in Japan and Uruguay as well as in the State Department in Washington. His assignments were primarily in the economic development and

management fields. Mr. Parker was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2009.

Q: Yes. But that was the language on which you got off probation, Vietnamese?

PARKER: Yes.

Q: That's great. So you finally went to South Vietnam?

PARKER: Yes, I went to South Vietnam.

Q: To Saigon or-?

PARKER: No, I was assigned to a province south of Saigon. I guess when we arrived we were given a tour, a day or two tour of the country, flying here and there and popping into places and popping out. In any event the dice were cast and I was assigned to Go Cong Province which is, I believe, the second province due south of Saigon. It was at the, I forget the corps designation; I think it was at the top, the tiptop of the fourth corps, which was the southernmost corps area in Vietnam. So I was at the province headquarters just for a few weeks or so and then went out to one of the district towns, lived in a district headquarters. I think the team leader, an Army major, Manuel Citroen, a nice guy, a little reluctant to have me because his hooch was already crowded and he didn't want to squeeze one more fellow in but I think he got used to me. There was no problem getting along with all my Army buddies.

It was a fascinating experience. I did have my own SUV before they were called SUVs, an International Harvester Scout, and so typically on any given day I'd check in with my counterpart, who was the deputy district chief, a nice young man.

Q: Vietnamese.

PARKER: Vietnamese, and chat for a bit and see what he was up to, see if he wanted to go out and see anything using my transportation because he had no transportation so many days we'd go out someplace together and if he didn't want to go out then I'd probably go out someplace, basically observe what was going on. I found pretty quickly that my effectiveness as an advisor was pretty limited because all of the Vietnamese government officials I was dealing with were educated and commissioned officers, competent and hard working and patriotic and it was their country, after all, which they knew a lot better than I did. They knew their local situation better than I did. So, I mean, maybe I would be surprised to the extent that I had some influence but it wasn't as if I was giving them the stone tablets from on high which they were gratefully accepting and then immediately adapting their programs to my advice.

So anyway, I traveled around my district and just to leap ahead to give you the chronology, I ultimately was transferred to the second district and in the second district I was district senior advisor, so that was nice, I suppose, in terms of having a little more responsibility and looking a little better on some résumé. One incident early in my career in the first district involved the HES; Hamlet Evaluation System. For every teeny tiny hamlet, a hamlet being the very smallest aggregation of dwelling units and barnyards in the country, a system had been devised

presumably primarily by the Americans with perhaps some input from the Vietnamese; I don't know the extent of the influence of the two parties. But it's a system for rating every single hamlet and some of the questions were quite objective: Is there a school in this hamlet, a primary school in this hamlet? Others were somewhat subjective, what is the overall level of security? In any event I went through my district's hamlets -- there were, let's say twenty-five of them -- just as carefully as I could using the HES and in my opinion the typical hamlet was overrated by at least one, maybe two letter grades; I think there were five letter grades but in any event they were all overrated and I proposed to downgrade them all and that proposal did not prosper. What I was told was that with the passage of time, if I wanted to downgrade a hamlet or two now and then that would be acceptable, we wanted accurate assessments of the situation but it simply would not be acceptable to have this wholesale downgrading across the district.

Q: That's very interesting. But when you say "downgrade," in your judgment they should be downgraded, that meant that their security was more- was less an issue or more an issue?

PARKER: It was probably more an issue and not just security but educational level, the condition of the roads. I mean, I forget the various things that were taken into account in the HES but some were, let's say, economic kinds of indicators that would clearly affect the wellbeing and lifestyles of the individuals or social indicators, the extent to which the government was supportive and never showed its face in the hamlet.

Q: So if the overall level of these 25 or so hamlets was downgraded that would show a more difficult security situation, also that other aspects of the various communities were not, perhaps as high as the local officials were claiming they were.

PARKER: I'm sorry; what was the last thing you said?

Q: They were claiming that they were higher than you thought they actually were.

PARKER: Yes, exactly. And I had no ax to grind; I was just going through this list of factors for each hamlet as best I could, based on what I knew, and trying to be factual and accurate and I came up with a different result. So that-downgrading, the wholesale downgrading did not take place. However, I always, I did think and I still think that if I were President Johnson back in Washington or General Westmoreland or the province senior advisor or anybody along the spectrum with political or military leadership I would want my decisions to be based on the best factual information that could be had coming out of, in this case, Vietnam. So, I felt it was my duty to provide the best factual information but at least in this instance that initiative did not advance.

Q: And was the resistance to that initiative more on the Vietnamese side or the American side or-?

PARKER: Well I only heard of it from the American side but, I mean, the province senior advisor made clear that that was just not acceptable, my downgrading of twenty-three out of twenty-five hamlets.

Q: So you had to relate to and act as an advisor in the first instance to the deputy district chief and also to the U.S. Army major; what was his position?

PARKER: District senior advisor.

Q: District senior advisor, and then you were- so you were sort of supervised by those two?

PARKER: Yes.

Q: And then you, in the second instance you became the district senior advisor in a different district yourself?

PARKER: Yes. Excuse me, but let me back up. In the first case, where I was the deputy district senior advisor, I advised the Vietnamese deputy district chief; he did not supervise me if that's what you said.

Q: Okay.

PARKER: He did not supervise me.

Q: So who did supervise you?

PARKER: The major who was the American district senior advisor. And similarly in the second place, in the second district, where I was senior advisor and my counterpart was a Vietnamese Army captain, who was the district chief, I advised him for whatever it was worth; he did not supervise me in any way.

Q: Okay.

PARKER: He accepted me graciously and I hope he took some of my advice.

Q: And who did supervise you in the second district?

PARKER: The province senior advisor.

Q: Okay. Who was an Army or diplomat?

PARKER: He was a- I had two; the one rotated out and the new one rotated in. They were both civilians; I think one of them was a retired military and the second was maybe retired USAID (United States Agency for International Development). They were both civilians; but, obviously on the provincial team there'd be a lot of military guys there with civilians as well.

Q: And in a province typically there were three or four districts or more?

PARKER: Well this was a small province so we had just four districts, probably very small, so I can't state it as a fact but I would think that the typical province had more districts.

Q: Okay. And as a, well in the first district or the second district did you go to the provinces regularly or there was interchange with them?

PARKER: Yes. Well, regularly is probably an acceptable word; that doesn't mean that I went every day. I probably went at least weekly, sometimes on my own initiative, sometimes there would be a meeting of all the American advisors. Occasionally the province senior advisor and an entourage would come out to the district for some purpose, generally not just only to meet with me but there'd be a ceremony, a school to be opened or a road to be dedicated, something like that.

Q: And to what extent or to what degree did you have contact relations with the embassy in Saigon or the military headquarters or both?

PARKER: Well military headquarters not at all; with the- I mean, in the province I certainly knew all the American military men on perfectly friendly terms but didn't really interact professionally with them to any significant extent except that I lived with them on the district teams. So far as the embassy went the only interaction I had was with a woman whose name I now forget who had something to do with travel and she'd made it kind of her mission in life to make travel arrangements for all the FSOs (Foreign Service Officers) who were serving in CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) out in the districts.

Q: And while you were there they established the CORDS system or-?

PARKER: It was there when I got there so-

Q: You were part of it?

PARKER: We knew we were going to CORDS.

Q: Okay. Which stood for?

PARKER: Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support.

Q: How long were you in South Vietnam in total then?

PARKER: Eighteen months; that was a standard tour after one year of language training, which struck me as a rather short period of time but there was a war going on and you know; I heard some bullets go by and mortar rounds exploding very near by. However, here's something that surprised me greatly, given the year of language training, given the presumably successful 18 months in the country; as my tour approached its end I anticipated that somebody would come up to me and say "Parker, are you willing to extend?" No one ever did. I didn't volunteer so I left after 18 months. I was really very surprised by that; I'd think that would be on somebody's checklist, for heaven's sake, to see if-

Q: Well they were bringing in all these new Foreign Service officers.

PARKER: Well, that's true.

Q: The pipeline was being replenished, I guess.

Would you talk a little bit more, Tom, about the security situation as you experienced it? You mentioned you saw some- heard some bullets fly but you also mentioned that you would have this vehicle that you would go out in. Did you have a, you know, a security battalion that went along with you or how did all that work? Did you go by helicopter sometimes?

PARKER: I probably flew in a helicopter once or twice. Well, in both districts I lived in the little district compound which housed the Vietnamese district government and also the American advisory team so we were all there in the center of the district town, you know, a modest little town, and this compound was surrounded by barbed wire and had lots of- I forget all the designations but there was the regular Vietnamese army, the Army of Vietnam, there were the regional forces, there were the popular forces--I'm very shaky here--and I think there was yet a lower grade of militia so these people had various levels of training and proficiency so the people providing our security worked in the bottom couple of those four or five levels but I think they were adequate to the purpose. So anyway, we slept and took most of our meals in this guarded, fortified compound, notwithstanding which, in the first district, in particular, we were periodically subject to mortar attacks. There was an area nearby called the Coconut Grove, which is where the VC (Viet Cong) hung out, the Vietcong hung out, so every so often- and this would vary so sometimes this would happen on consecutive nights or several consecutive nights and other times there'd be weeks between such an episode. They'd fire a few mortar rounds; they didn't have anything other than small mortars and so the rounds would come in and we'd all run and hop into our two large bunkers. There was one occasion I remember and cut me off if this is boring, but I was sitting back in the back of our little team hooch, the rest of the team was watching some forgettable movie, there were movies every night, so I was sitting back in the back reading Edwin Reischauer's book, a small book about Japan because that's where I wanted to go on my next assignment, and Mrs. Jordan, who we lovingly called "Ba" Jordan, "Ba" is the Vietnamese term for "Mrs.", Ba Jordan, in light of my performance in Vietnamese had allowed as how I could probably study Japanese next if I really wanted to, so I was reading up on Japan, and heard these mortar rounds go off. The problem was that we also had the district's two or three, 105 millimeter howitzers right there in the same compound that I described and they were always firing out- they were firing outgoing, H&A (harassment & interdiction) fire to harass and interdict the enemy during the night, keep them from getting their sleep. And although you can distinguish incoming from outgoing, at least in my case as a civilian who's reading a book, with a movie soundtrack going on, I wasn't paying much attention but it did finally register on me that I heard lots of chairs scraping and the running of feet and a bunch of the Vietnamese kids had their faces glued to the window screen looking in so they could watch the movie and they all disappeared. I kept hearing these bang bangs and finally realized that it was incoming. So I ran out the back screen door, which was latched, and maybe I didn't realize it, I just sort of broke it open, getting a scratch in the process which sent forth a drop of blood and so I wondered if maybe I might be eligible for a Purple Heart but I guess that was a military decoration and I never pursued that. I went to the back bunker and it was so absolutely, positively full of these Vietnamese children that I could not get in, I couldn't get the slightest bit of shelter from that

bunker so I turned around and retraced my steps through the hooch to the front bunker, which was occupied only by the Americans or maybe there were a few Vietnamese officers who had been watching the movie with us so I was welcomed with open arms and relief into that place. So that's an example of one security threat.

On another occasion I was driving down this particular long, straight dirt road, I think paved with this red crushed rock called laterite, it's all over Vietnam, and without incident I got to the, probably, the village headquarters at the end of this road and parked and went in. I had in my briefcase a 22 caliber revolver, which was my personal security since I was a civilian. So I walked in and was sitting there chatting with the village chief, and as I had been pulling in a convoy of South Vietnamese army trucks was loading the troops who had been out sweeping the area, had finished, were getting into the trucks, and they piled into their trucks and left and there was a loud explosion and then this enormous outburst of gunfire from the Vietnamese troops in the trucks towards the tree line over yonder, a hundred yards or so. Well, there had been a command-detonated mine in the road which they had detonated near one of the trucks. They didn't do a very good job; a couple of Vietnamese soldiers had light wounds but no serious harm was done. But the point is that I myself, in my little International Harvester Scout had just driven over that very same piece of roadway 15, 20 minutes, 30 minutes before and, thanks, be to God, I guess the guy with his finger on the plunger felt that an army truck full of troops was a more valuable target than me. Maybe they didn't know my importance. In any event, that was a sobering experience.

Occasionally we'd be out doing something, maybe with my American district senior advisor, maybe with my Vietnamese counterpart, maybe with two or three people, looking at a school, looking at a road, talking to people, and there'd be a sniper off somewhere and we'd hear the bullets go by. "Pssssss". An interesting noise, especially if it hasn't hit you. So that was about the extent of the security threats that I faced; nothing dramatic. But of course, I knew that I had to be careful so I was never driving my Jeep around after hours of darkness and I never took a tour of the Coconut Grove that I mentioned; I knew where I could go and where I could not go, where it would be ill advised to go.

Q: But you would drive yourself, you wouldn't have a-

PARKER: Yes, I would drive myself.

Q: -Vietnamese driver. Yes.

How- at the end of your time there, and looking back, knowing all that's happened and happened in the next, say 10 years or even less than that, you know, did you sort of see what was likely to happen or did you think that things were getting better or, you know, you had one perspective from kind of the district level.

PARKER: I did not foresee what would happen. I didn't think that was likely to happen. I saw progress; I saw the performance of the Vietnamese military on various levels that I witnessed. I'm not even sure that I ever saw a regular Vietnamese army unit; they were always provincial and local troops and militia. But they were more effective in their operations; the hamlets even

after my initial mental downgrading were more secure. The roads were better; the schools were functioning better with more teachers so things seemed to be moving in the right direction. But as I explained it, I think that some visiting American senior officer on one occasion, I guess he had a question. He didn't ask what I foresaw but he said how are they doing, and I said something to the effect well, they're not doing as good a job as we would do, you know, my hubris--I never used that word before--they're not doing as good a job as we would like them to do but they are doing a better job, they are doing a job and they are making progress. So the general took note of that. So that was about the way I saw it.

So I was there in 1969 and 1970 so obviously that was before- no, that was after Nixon's first election in '68 and of course he had a "plan" to get us out and I suppose our withdrawals had begun. I'm sure they had; at least during my tour they had begun.

I've lost my train of thought.

Q: Well besides the military advisor team that you were kind of a part of as a civilian in the district, the two different districts, was there much other American combat forces there or military presence?

PARKER: No, there were no American combat forces. I don't think the American forces ever came through my province. Now, they may have been in the big province across the Mekong River but never in my province.

Q: Because it was relatively secure, compared with some other-

PARKER: Relatively. It was reported to be the birthplace of the Vietcong but it was relatively secure. There were no B-52 strikes. There was one lone bomb crater on the outskirts of the province capital, which I laid eyes on one occasion. Apparently an Australian bomber had come over one evening and read the map wrong and was off 100,000 meters or 10,000 meters, you know, the units that the maps use, and they put the bomb in the wrong place. I don't think were any casualties but this unhappy episode was immediately followed by a cornucopia of compensation and aid from the province headquarters, the American province headquarters to assuage hurt feelings and repair damages, but no, there were no American troops.

I mean, we did have, as I said, the American military personnel on our provincial advisory team so when the local Vietnamese forces went on operations there'd be a few Americans tagging along with them, if it was a big operation, with the headquarters. Down at the district level, for instance, Americans, two or three, might go out with one of the local Vietnamese units that was conducting an ambush that night or conducting an operation of some sort that night. But there were no American units coming through the province.

Q: This was also a period in the United States where there was a lot of anti-war feeling and to some extent that's still with us today. How much of that did you think about, talk about, remember?

PARKER: Well I was certainly aware of the fact that it was going on; it was going on before I

joined the State Department, before I got to Vietnam. One thing that- Here is something that did impress me, I must say. I don't want to overstate this but there were certainly members of our entering Foreign Service class, I hesitate to say so many years later if it was everybody but me or a majority or what, but certainly some members were so strongly against the U.S. Government position in Vietnam I just found myself wondering why on earth they wanted to work for the State Department, why on earth does the State Department want them working for it if they can't wholeheartedly in good faith support what is the major foreign affairs undertaking of their government and their country at this time. So that was certainly food for thought. I don't think I myself found the ongoing demonstrations, you know, what I would read in "Time" magazine or "Stars and Stripes" especially upsetting. Maybe one reason was that I thought the demonstrators were wrong and I thought the U.S. Government was right. I was certainly aware of it, no question about that, and I think it worried, to a certain extent, the Vietnamese.

I was going to say a minute ago, I'll say it now, but I knew American troops were withdrawing because I was getting a haircut at some barbershop on one of the American military bases that I found myself visiting on one occasion for some reason, and some man was cutting my hair but there was a pretty girl around the shop, I forget if she was a barber or what have you, but I was in the barber's chair and she came over and sort of leaned over, both her hands here on my upper leg, looking up at me, and asked in Vietnamese, which I understood perfectly well, questions about whether the United States would "throw away," that was the translation I had been taught for the word she was using, whether the United States was going to throw away Vietnam. I did my best to reassure her that would not be the case.

Q: You mentioned that you had visits from, I think you mentioned one senior officer; were there visiting VIPs (Very Important Persons) coming through all the time to sort of see, either members of Congress or people from Washington or mostly from in-country, they would come around the district occasionally?

PARKER: Certainly not all the time. I don't remember ever seeing anybody from Congress. I remember William Colby coming through on one occasion and I spent several hours talking with him until he fell asleep sitting on the sofa in the house that I was living in at the time. I was there with him and my province senior advisor and we were going back and forth; they had questions and I tried to answer them. I don't blame the guy for falling asleep with the load he had to carry. It was 9:00, 9:30 p.m., something like that, so it wasn't that late, but he was tired so he fell asleep.

Then a four star general came through, and I can't remember his name, I'm surprised to say. I think this was after Westmoreland left and Abrams became the top guy, maybe the visiting general was Abrams's deputy; I don't know. But he was a four star general and he was a very astute guy, very concerned and sensitive to local concerns and I was very happy to be assigned as his interpreter for the occasion so I accompanied him for, I don't know, a number of hours I guess, interpreted for him with village chiefs and local people and he asked caring questions and insightful questions so I hope I understood and interpreted correctly.

Q: So you used Vietnamese quite a bit and your level probably improved in the 18 months?

PARKER: I would think so. I forget what I was tested for when I came back. Whatever the test results might have shown I certainly believe I improved.

Q: Well this is the- on the 6th of July, 2009, today, I heard on the news this morning that Robert McNamara died this morning.

PARKER: Oh for heaven's sake. Well-

Q: So I thought we should note that.

PARKER: Yes, sure.

Q: Is there anything else about your assignment to Vietnam that we should talk about that we haven't covered yet?

PARKER: Well there was one really memorable experience which I think shows what the people were experiencing. This was in my second district so I was out with my then-counterpart, the military man, the Vietnamese district chief, an army captain, and it was the rainy season and we found ourselves in a building, it must have been a community structure of some sort; it had thatched walls and screen netting above that and then a tin roof; it was pouring rain so you could hear the racket on the roof, and a lot of people from the hamlet had jammed into this building. I'm sure they were summoned, come hear the district chief, and the district chief was giving them a pep talk about, you know, you've got to support the government and your militia has to be alert at night and take its duties seriously and that's to protect the people and you've got to do this and you're going to do that and we are doing this and rah, rah. There was a young Vietnamese woman with a baby on her hip and she responded and again, what a blessing to have studied the language because I understood her perfectly, she said, in Vietnamese, "Captain, you come in here in the daytime and you tell us what you've just told us. The Vietcong come in here at night and tell us just the opposite and they kill us. What are we supposed to do?" and the tears are streaming down her cheeks and everybody around her was agreeing with her. So, that was very moving and I think illustrated how the people suffered, caught in the middle.

Q: What was the main source of livelihood? Were these mostly farmers?

PARKER: Yes, rice farmers.

Q: Was this- Would you call this the delta?

PARKER: Yes.

Q: Okay. South of Saigon.

PARKER: Yes, the northern tier of the delta.

Q: Okay. Alright. Well, it was an unusual first assignment.

PARKER: Yes it was.

Q: I know there were many of your classmates, counterparts in that era who did the same thing.

PARKER: Yes.

Q: Before, well, before and to some extent after you. So many of us, many of you had that experience and you really- Let me just ask again; you didn't really have much to do with the embassy at all during that period.

PARKER: No, that's correct.

Q: Did you, on R&R (rest and recreation) or otherwise travel in the region or were you pretty much just in the district?

PARKER: Well we had two R&Rs; I used my R&R's to go first to Thailand and second to Australia. I probably went to Saigon half a dozen times during my 18 months. I went once because I had a very bad sore throat and I went to an American military hospital; this nice young doctor treated me. I felt so guilty for even being there, knowing who all the other patients were; the wounded soldiers. I infrequently went to Saigon and I don't recall what took me there except to transit there on my R&Rs, perhaps. I had no reporting requirement to the embassy and the embassy never checked on anyone because after all I had been seconded first of all to USAID; USAID seconded me to the hybrid organization CORDS, which was half USAID, half U.S. Army, if you don't recall. So I was, it might have breached some written agreement for the embassy to talk to me. I don't know; anyway, no contact with the embassy.

Q: So did you, you know, you formed all these impressions as you went around and you advised the- you were in contact with the army, senior advisor and so on, did you write reports and if so, to whom?

PARKER: I wrote a lot of reports to my Department of State- my Department of State superior at the province level. He left maybe halfway through my assignment and whether I kept doing it after he left I really don't recall. I just basically sat down at the end of the day and typed a page or two of an account of what I had done during the day and send those on up to him and he seemed to value them highly. What he did with them I have no earthly idea. I think towards the end of my tour I was asked to write a report- there was an initiative of some sort by the Americans, maybe a joint Vietnamese initiative, a joint Vietnamese-American initiative, I don't know, but I was asked to assess my district chief, this would be in the second district, for evidence of corruption, both pro and con. So I came up with the best report I possibly could and tried to be conscientious. I actually touched on a couple of things which, you know, suggested maybe there was a little minor leakage here and there. I don't even remember what it was; I mean, certainly nothing major. Well, I got, just as I will get the transcript of this conversation in due course, I got to look at my report in due course and even these mild references on the pro corruption side had been taken out of the report. You know, they asked for both sides and they asked for my report so I did the best I could but the negative material came out. I thought very highly of this young man, but nevertheless the assignment was to assess everything; there were a

couple of little things which might have suggested something slightly out of order so I touched on those, but that didn't survive.

Q: Alright. Anything else about Vietnam?

PARKER: It was a lovely country. I was always fascinated by the sky, and the clouds, especially during the rainy season. The colors in the rice paddies, the different varieties of rice, different times of year, and the different stages of the growth of the rice crop were just fascinating. I lugged a camera around with me essentially every waking moment in Vietnam and came back with 4,000 color slides, so I had fun taking pictures. I guess that is illustrative of the fact that I was very lucky to be serving as a civilian advisor in a relatively peaceful province, so with just some care as to where I was and what I was doing I had the luxury of being able to take a lot of pictures.

Q: Was there interest on the part of anybody in such, you know, mundane subjects as the state of the rice harvest or, you know, whether- sort of more commercial economic things like that, markers of-?

PARKER: I have the vague impression that occasionally agricultural attachés or experts from the embassy or from USAID would at least come through the province. I'm not sure that I ever laid eyes on them but they were interested, certainly, in the agricultural side of things. So far as the economy goes, I'm thinking there was a report of some sort, which wasn't my responsibility but somebody was working on it, probably at the province level and since I was at the district level I wouldn't have been involved.

WALTER L. CUTLER
Political Officer
Saigon (1969-1971)

Ambassador Walter L. Cutler was born in Massachusetts in 1931 and entered the Foreign Service in 1956. He served in Africa and Korea and was ambassador to Zaire and Tunisia. He was interviewed in 1990 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

CUTLER: When I sort of offered myself up for reassignment and the Ambassador was fully supportive, there was one logical place for me to go at that time and that was Vietnam.

And, indeed, it wasn't too long thereafter that I received a message of congratulations that I had been selected for a "high priority" position in the American Embassy in Saigon, and did I have in any problems in going there, of course without family and all the rest.

Oddly, I really hadn't thought too much about going to Vietnam. But when I was asked to go there, I figured: Well, this is going to be a personal hardship (I had children at very tender ages in terms of development, 8 and 10, something like that), and yet I figured that there was a need and I had a duty to go. And I figured, perhaps naively, that all Foreign Service officers were

going to end up in Vietnam at one point or another during the course of their careers, so I might as well go now.

So I agreed to go to replace Roger Kirk as the Chief of the External Affairs Unit within the Political Section. That in itself gives you a little idea of the complexity of the operation there. Because we had not only a Chief of Political Section, but we also had a Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs.

We had a very, very large operation. And as Chief of the External Affairs Unit I had two principal responsibilities: One was to coordinate, working closely with the CIA Station Chief and other Embassy elements, information regarding North Vietnam. We were the Hanoi and Viet Cong watchers, if you will. And the other, which perhaps was more substantively important although somewhat latent, was working within our government and with the South Vietnamese government in planning for a peace settlement: what we called "contingency planning".

So I went to Saigon in May of 1969, as I recall. My family was to be safe-havened in England, and I took them as far as Beirut, where we had a brief holiday, back in the days when Beirut...

Q: You could have a holiday in Beirut.

CUTLER: Right, right. Can you imagine that? This was 1969, and the reason I remember is that that was the moon walk. I remember going to the embassy in Beirut, where we all watched on television the first men on the moon. So after that, it was off to Saigon.

Q: Sometimes it's interesting to get one's initial impression. What did you think about the situation in Vietnam? Before, you said you'd been dealing with other matters, so this wasn't high on your list of priorities. How did you feel about the situation there?

CUTLER: Well, that was 1969, when I guess we still felt that there was something to be gained by our involvement in Vietnam, and I had no reason to question that.

I had had a peripheral involvement in the matter. When I was in Seoul, in a Political-Military position there in the embassy, I did get involved with the questions of the South Korean troops in Vietnam. This was a very important part of the "many flags" that we were trying to show to the free world in South Vietnam, and so I was perhaps a little more conscious of what was going on in Vietnam than I would have been had I been still in Iran or elsewhere, like Ulaanbaatar! I didn't question too much the wisdom of our being there.

But very soon after I got there I realized that the situation was not going well and was not likely to go well, even in the long term. And that it was a question of working out an honorable disengagement on our part, including getting our prisoners back, and trying to leave something in the wake of our disengagement that was viable. That is, trying to leave a government in South Vietnam that could cope for itself. I thought there was a chance of doing that. I didn't think it was likely, but I thought it was possible. So we were working for that.

During the period I was there, 1969 to 1971, the war was pretty much on the borders. It was not a

period of heavy armed conflict throughout the country. And, as you may recall, the incursion into Cambodia occurred in 1970, while I was there in Vietnam. So one did not have the sense of a country about to go down the tubes. The military situation looked somewhat improved, but it was hard to imagine, over the long term, how we could get out without leaving a dubious situation at best. But it was worth the chance. And we had put so much into it by then, you just couldn't stop.

Q: You talk about a dubious situation. What was dubious?

CUTLER: Dubious was the quality of leadership in South Vietnam and the dedication and support of the people in the countryside of a central government in South Vietnam.

Q: Well how were we reading the support of the people? We were there most of the same time. But what were the modes of trying to figure out how the people felt about the government?

CUTLER: That was very difficult for me to assess. I was in a very particular part of our operations there. I was external, therefore I was quite consumed by the political situation in North Vietnam -- that's what we tried to watch -- and consumed by seemingly endless preparation and vetting of contingency planning for regroupment and withdrawal of our forces.

Q: This was the time Nixon was coming in, after you arrived there, and this caused much of the planning for the Vietnamization, didn't it?

CUTLER: Yes, but what I did, Roger Kirk had been doing for the two years prior to that. In other words, even back in the 1960s (Roger was there from '67 to '69), we were trying to get the South Vietnamese government to think ahead to what a solution would look like. Some of this was based upon the assumption that, militarily, we would come out on top, and that at some point the Viet Cong and Hanoi would come to the South Vietnamese government and say: "Look, OK, uncle." Or at least, "Let's talk about a cease-fire."

More and more as I was there, we began to think in terms of having to seek a cease-fire and to try to persuade the other side that there was something to be gained from less than total victory. But, initially, what we were talking about was an ending of the fighting, based upon either a stalemate or the North Vietnamese suing for a cease-fire because they couldn't take any more pressure. If that should happen, we didn't want suddenly to be there unprepared.

So we wanted, in-house, to be sure that we were looking at these various options, how it would be done and so forth. We had dozens, literally dozens of contingency papers covering various aspects of an end to the fighting.

Then, from time to time, we would consult with the South Vietnamese government. We would take our papers to them, and, together, we would go over these papers and get their input.

Now on that score, quite frankly, it was always difficult to interest the South Vietnamese leadership in this kind of longer-term thinking. Understandably, they were very preoccupied with the war. The thought of what would happen when a cease-fire came and after, was something

which seemed rather remote to them. It didn't seem terribly relevant to the issues, the priorities of the day.

Nevertheless, every two or three months or so, Ellsworth Bunker would go over, and I'd go along beside him, along with Martin Herz, the Political Minister. We would go and see Thieu and Ky, the top leadership of the South Vietnamese, and we would discuss these contingency plans. These sessions were necessary; I don't know how useful they were. At times I felt, quite frankly, that the eyes of the South Vietnamese would start to glaze over a bit, because none of this was very exciting. It seemed, frankly, rather remote, even sometimes to me.

Q: What was your personal impression of the leadership, not only the top, but in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the people you dealt with in the South Vietnamese government?

CUTLER: They had some good people, but it was thin. By that I mean you go down below the Foreign Minister and perhaps his deputy and, quite frankly, at the middle to lower levels of the government I thought the quality was very uneven at best and lacking in really dedicated, competent officials.

One thing that always amazed me: Here we are in the middle of a war, the American Embassy working around the clock (as we tend to do around the world, but particularly in Saigon during that time), you'd try to raise somebody in the Foreign Ministry after five at night, and often it was difficult. They would take their regular holidays and so forth, and it's marvelous, but in a war situation, I thought it was rather extraordinary.

Q: I can remember on a Vietnamese holiday we would run the consular section, but we would run it purely with Americans, working twice as hard, because our Vietnamese staff, who were, of course, essential to our work, were on holiday. We were doing all the visa, passport, protection and welfare work while our Vietnamese staff had the day off. We hated Vietnamese holidays needless to say.

CUTLER: In retrospect, perhaps the Vietnamese knew what they were doing. They had lived with foreign invasions over the centuries, and this was the era of the American presence. Maybe their more laid-back approach to life reflected a sense of perspective in history, whereas we were rather frenetic in what we were doing.

Q: We tend to charge in.

CUTLER: That's right.

Q: Well now, looking at the embassy, how did you feel, can you talk about how the more junior officers felt about the war situation? It was a time of war protests and all this, and we were going through our own sort of '60s movement of young officers, who were sort of bringing some of the campus rebellion with them and all, and here you were in the middle of this with junior officers. How did they react to the war?

CUTLER: Well, I don't know, maybe you saw more of that than I did. I had a couple of younger

officers working for me in my unit of the Political Section, and I didn't sense at the time any great disaffection or disillusionment with what we were doing.

Quite frankly, I don't think anybody had time to even think about what we were doing. There was so much work, the pressures were so heavy, and we were all just trying to get it done. I don't recall any major problems with respect to the attitudes, the dedication of those working in the embassy.

Remind you, it was a big place, and I never had time to sit around and chew the fat much with younger people, or with anybody for that matter. As you recall, it was sort of a six-and-a-half-day operation.

But on Sunday afternoons we used to go over to Martin Herz's swimming pool and engage in a literally bloody game of water polo. All of the frustrations and all that other lack of [physical] activity throughout the week would come out in this incredibly aggressive game of water polo. But we used to love it -- blood and all.

Q: Within the embassy did you have the feeling that Ambassador Bunker or Deputy Ambassador Berger had any qualifications about what was going on? How did they feel about the situation at the time, from your point of view?

CUTLER: I didn't have very much of a feel for that, as far as their inner thoughts were concerned. Again, it was a big operation.

E. ALLAN WENDT
Economic Officer, USAID
Saigon (1967-1971)

Ambassador Wendt was born and raised in Illinois. He was educated at Yale University, Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Paris) and Harvard University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1959, he specialized in international energy, Economic and Commercial Affairs at his various assignments in Washington DC and abroad. His foreign posts include Saigon, Brussels, Cairo and Ljubljana, where he served as the United States Ambassador to Slovenia from 1992 to 1995. The Ambassador was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

WENDT: I arrived in Saigon for the second time in August of 1967. As I said previously, I had been out there briefly in August of 1965 with Henry Cabot Lodge. I went back in August of 1967 and stayed until July of 1971 -- so, four years, even though the tour of duty was officially only 18 months.

Q: When you initially went out, what was your job?

WENDT: On paper I was assigned to the embassy Economic Section, but in actuality, I was in

USAID. It was a joint State-AID economic section. But the embassy involvement was a fiction. It was one big economic section located in one of the USAID buildings. I had a job that involved markets. I was analyzing commodity markets in Vietnam, particularly rice. Rice was a critical commodity in Vietnam. Because of the war and the insecurity in the countryside, rice production in Vietnam had fallen off greatly. To make up for that, we instituted a PL480 (Public Law 480) program. Public Law 480 provides for the sale of agricultural commodities, surplus to the US, to foreign countries in need. It wasn't a commercial sale. We were paid the price of the rice in local currency. So, it was an assistance program. We got what was called "counterpart funds" in local currency, which we could use to pay a lot of our local expenses.

Q: In some countries, you face a real problem because they go for mushy rice and we don't. I mean, there are different types of rice. What was America producing?

WENDT: Our rice was considered by the Vietnamese to be rather low grade rice. As you imply, for Americans, rice is rice. For the Vietnamese, this is not so. There are many different grades of rice and ours was not near the top of their list in terms of quality. But nonetheless, they were a country in need and so they took our rice. We imported vast quantities of it into the country. My job was to help organize this trade, and in particular to learn enough about rice production and trade in Vietnam to be able to project what their needs would be for imported rice. It was a massive program. A lot of money was involved.

Q: This was the major agricultural program, wasn't it?

WENDT: Yes. We were importing at the peak of the program something like 750,000 metric tons of rice a year -- millions and millions of dollars worth of rice. So, finding out what was happening in Vietnam, not only with regard to how much rice they were producing themselves but also conditions in the countryside, was important. How big was the crop and what was the market outlook for the future? As areas became pacified, more rice would be grown. The job meant keeping your fingers on the pulse of Vietnam's agricultural markets and monitoring the security situation in the countryside, keeping a watch on such oddities as illegal exports. A lot of people said, "Well, there's really plenty of rice in Vietnam. The problem is it's all being illegally exported to Cambodia because the government in Vietnam has pegged the official price at too low a level, so that farmers don't find it worthwhile to sell their rice locally." That led almost to a mythology of oceangoing junks loaded with Vietnamese rice wafting across the Gulf of Siam and being sold illegally outside the country. In fact, this was a lot of nonsense. There was no evidence that any such thing was happening on a significant scale.

Q: Did you get involved with the so-called "miracle rice" program at all?

WENDT: Yes, I did.

Q: Could you explain what this was?

WENDT: This was a high yield rice. "IR-8" it was called. This was a rice variety that we thought would help cover the deficit in rice production in Vietnam. But it didn't work that easily. It was not that easy to grow. It needed a lot of fertilizer and other inputs that also cost money. The taste

of the rice was maybe not as good as some other varieties. Still, the program was making some progress. But it was not a miracle solution to the rice problem in Vietnam. Remember, this was a country that was a net exporter of rice before the war. So, it really was rather sad, but it was a direct result of the lack of security in the countryside that a country that had been a net exporter had become very dependent on rice imported from the United States. Occasionally, Vietnam would buy rice in commercial markets from Thailand. We didn't much like that because we had ample rice available under the PL 480 program and our market, the US market, had adjusted to Vietnam's requirements. Also, the Vietnamese didn't have to pay precious foreign exchange for American rice. They could pay for it in local currency, whereas when they bought rice from Thailand, it was a straight commercial sale involving scarce foreign exchange. I think the PL 480 program actually was quite successful. It did what it was designed to do.

Q: Did you feel the hand of Senator Ellender from Louisiana at all, whose state was a major rice producer? Ellender was very much into sugar and rice, I think.

WENDT: Indirectly, yes, because every time the Vietnamese would go offshore and buy rice commercially -- say, from Thailand -- there would be screams from the rice trade in the United States. Of course, we had to analyze whether these purchases were justified or not. That was part of my responsibility. So, I became a kind of rice expert. I don't still have that expertise, but at the time, I probably knew as much about the rice market in Vietnam as any non-specialist around. It was interesting for me because I had to get to know a lot about how the trade was conducted. I met the Chinese rice merchants who conducted the trade. I traveled all over the rice producing areas in the Mekong Delta. It was an interesting job.

Q: Were you getting good reports from the field on rice production? We had all these officers out on the CORDS program at the time.

WENDT: I would not say that the information we got from American sources was all that useful. You could find out far more by talking to the Chinese merchants who were conducting the trade.

Q: We're talking about indigenous Chinese, too. Were these Chinese who lived in Vietnam?

WENDT: Yes, these were Chinese who lived in Vietnam. As you know, there was a big Chinese community there. But the Chinese were not newcomers. They had emigrated there from the southern part of China back in the Ming dynasty. They had been around for 300 years. But they remained Chinese.

Q: I know, when I was there, I used to see them coming out of government buildings on bicycles, coming out with huge sacks of rice, which I'm told were part of their pay. Were you looking at rice as being a currency, too?

WENDT: Well, not really, because we were not interested in promoting a barter economy. Matters like that were conducted outside of official channels. All of that was probably illegal. Inevitably, there was theft. We were bringing in such a huge supply of commodities, materials of all sorts, that inevitably in a period of wartime scarcity, a certain amount would be siphoned off. At the time, the Vietnamese were blamed for it -- to some extent, rightly so, but there was a lot

of American collusion. Even in our own military, the GI drivers would occasionally sell on the black market an entire truckload of goods destined for the PX. So, there was corruption. There was corruption among the Thai and the Filipinos who were stationed there. I sometimes had to laugh a bit about it. Whenever there was a shipment of electric fans to the PX, the Royal Thai Cobra troops would find out about it before any of the rest of us and be in line outside of the PX when the fans were put on sale.

Q: I would see them being actually marched through. They would all buy the same things.

WENDT: Yes. And then the next day, if you wanted an electric fan, you couldn't get one in the PX, but you could get it at the street market. I'll never forget the French Consul General Jacques de Folin at the time coming to me—I had come to know him quite well. He said, "Allan, you know, now when I really need a stereo set, I know I can get one in Hong Kong or I can send out for it through the Peter Matheson diplomatic supply catalogue and what not. But all this takes time.

Could you possibly get one for me at the PX? That would be a lot simpler." I said, "Well, Jacques, I could, but it's a bit tricky for me to do that. It's against the regulations. I would feel a little uncomfortable violating our own regulations. I would have to sign for it." I think we had ration cards. I said, "I've got a better way for you to do it. You buy it on the street. I don't know how they get the goods, but they get them. You just find one of these ladies squatting on the side of the curb hawking various merchandise. She'll have the PX catalogue. You tell her what you want, and I guarantee she'll have it delivered to your residence the next day." And that's exactly what he did. Of course, he had no difficulty acquiring foreign currency on the black market, like virtually the entire foreign community except the Americans. The Vietnamese were maintaining the piaster with our approval and support at an entirely unrealistic and overvalued exchange rate. But for Americans, it was strictly forbidden to change money on the black market. Not all Americans observed those rules, of course, but I think a lot of them did.

Q: A lot did, and those who didn't ended up coming before the Irregular Practice Authority, which I chaired.

WENDT: Exactly. You know all about it.

Q: For this recording, we would take people... It boiled down to a civilian court martial. You would take away their PX privileges. This was for people who were not in government, but working for the government, which essentially killed them as far as operating in the Vietnamese economy was concerned. It was sort of annoying because almost all the other countries were living off the black market. In fact, we used to call it "The Bank of India" because of all the Indian money changers in downtown Saigon. We used to go after them.

WENDT: At the time, I thought that Americans should not have been put in this situation. I felt then, and I still do feel, that if the United States wanted to subsidize the government of Vietnam, we shouldn't do it through the exchange rate mechanism. We should just say, "Okay, we're going to subsidize you so that you will have enough foreign exchange," but not take it out of the pockets of the individual Americans who lived there by forcing them to acquire everything they

might need locally at a very unrealistic exchange rate. There was no cost of living allowance to compensate for it, as I recall. There was a hardship differential, but it was not strictly speaking a cost of living allowance. It was just designed to compensate people for being in a tropical, developing country and a war zone. Anyway, that's the way it was. But only the Americans observed this restriction.

Q: Also, I think, it was a little unfair, too, because the military had no real need, you might say, for money. I mean, they had no need for anything because they could get everything through the PX and all. So, they had no appreciation of the civilians who were trying to live mostly by the rules. Very difficult.

WENDT: A lot of official civilians lived on the economy. You did need to acquire a certain amount of goods on the local economy, particularly to pay housekeepers and buy food. You couldn't buy all your food at the PX or commissary. It wasn't practical. I think that was unfortunate. I was not in a sufficiently high ranking position to be able to argue the case at the time. Even if I had been, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere.

Q: I'm interested in your reaction looking at how we were doing this. I mean, you came out of the FSI economic course and Harvard and all this. You've got economic models, how you do economic analysis, and all of a sudden, you're in a place where it looked like we were controlling all the levers. What do you think was right? What do you think was wrong from your observations at that time?

WENDT: I thought, on the whole, that what we were doing in the economic area was sensible. We had a commercial import program designed to supply needed goods to the Vietnamese, the sale of which would absorb a lot of local currency and thus keep down the rate of inflation. We paid for the foreign exchange part of it. Some people didn't like this program, which involved among other goods an influx of Honda motor cycles, you remember. The streets of Saigon were a relative sea of motorcycles.

Q: I was told this was something to absorb --

WENDT: Yes -- absorb local currency. That was the idea at the time, but it annoyed people because they saw the pollution, the traffic jams, all these young men -- we called them cowboys -- who should have been in the army rather than roaring around the streets of Saigon on their Hondas. But remember, this was a country that didn't have the kinds of transportation we're accustomed to in the United States. From a purely economic point of view, enabling people to go from one place to another is fundamental. You can't develop an economy if people can't move around. So, the program served that purpose as well. Maybe we allowed too many consumer goods to be imported. But we were trying to keep the lid on inflation and enable the Vietnamese to maintain a reasonable standard of living. If you don't bring in enough commodities, all you do is drive up prices. You don't want an economy of scarcity. So, we tried to bring in enough, not only to absorb the excess purchasing power that was generated in a wartime inflationary economy, but also to provide basic infrastructure needs, and transportation is infrastructure, even if it takes the form of Hondas.

So, I thought, basically, by the beginning of the 1970's we were on the right track in terms of the economy. I think the evidence justifies that view. I remember in 1970 the rate of inflation of the Vietnamese economy was less than two percent. This was at the height of the war, in an underdeveloped country with a rather primitive economy fighting for its survival, and yet the rate of inflation was only two percent. That was remarkable. To me, that as much as anything signified that we were on the right track. Domestic production was picking up. The domestic economy was producing more and more rice. Goods were moving in the countryside. Things were going in the right direction. I thought it was a vindication of our policies. Whether we could have done as much with fewer Americans in the country and with less money is always open to debate. As I said earlier, I do think at times we tended to overwhelm the situation. We might have achieved a comparable result with less of an American presence. I thought the American presence had become so large that it was itself a liability. We needed to get the Vietnamese to do more things for themselves. The problem was that if they saw that the Americans were going to do everything for them, they didn't have the incentive to take on all these responsibilities themselves.

Q: Which included not just the economic side, but also the military side. We tended to brush them aside and say, "Here, we'll take care of it."

WENDT: That's right. Well, eventually, we moved away from that with the Vietnamization program.

Q: I think that was what Nixon started.

WENDT: Yes.

Q: You started in Vietnam in early '68, was this right?

WENDT: I got there in August of 1967.

Q: In a way, everything sort of goes up to Tet and is post Tet. Tet was January 31, 1968. How did you see the situation on the ground, what you were getting from your colleagues and from being a member of the team and all? What was the military and political situation?

WENDT: We didn't have any advance indication of the Tet offensive. We were caught completely unaware. I know there was some intelligence indicating possible trouble, but I was not privy to that information.

Q: I'm not really talking about that. I'm talking about how it was going in general, both on the political side in Vietnam -- we've already talked about the economic side -- and also on the military side as you saw it up to Tet?

WENDT: To me, it seemed like a stalemate. I did not have the impression we were making great progress. I thought, at best, maybe we were holding our own. I did detect at the time what I thought was a lack of motivation on the part of some South Vietnamese to make the sacrifices necessary to prevail in the struggle. That may have been a shortsighted view, like all

generalizations -- failing to take into account that there were lots of very highly motivated, dedicated Vietnamese people. Remember, this was at the peak of the American presence, the big buildup. I was worried that we were simply overwhelming the situation, kind of pushing the Vietnamese aside, and that ultimately, that approach was not going to work, and that we needed to find a way to motivate more Vietnamese to assume greater responsibility themselves for what was happening in the country, but that's not the way we went about it.

Q: President Thieu wasn't present by the time you arrived there, was he?

WENDT: Yes, he was.

Q: Did you have the feeling that there was at least a stable government?

WENDT: Not stable enough, I thought at the time. I have to back track a little here and say that I was skeptical at the time and I'm even more skeptical in hindsight about the wisdom of getting rid of Ngo Dinh Diem. What came after Diem was much worse. The Thieu government, at least in 1967, seemed to me to be not as effective as I would have thought necessary in order for us to prevail in this struggle for us, for the Vietnamese, for the West. There was a lot of backing and filling and signs of real progress were hard to find. Those signs did come later, but not in the way people anticipated. It was a difficult period. I was concerned and skeptical about whether we were on the right track. To me, it seemed more like a stalemate.

Q: Did you yourself deal with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Trade, etc.?

WENDT: Sure.

Q: How did you find their level of efficiency and all?

WENDT: There were a few dedicated individuals, usually harassed and overworked, and a lot of people who didn't seem to be doing very much -- this was a common problem in developing country economies. They're not paid much and are almost driven into some form of corruption. Some people in very high places were quite corrupt. That's a theme I want to come back to in view of what happened to Vietnam after it fell to the communists. At the time, you judge by the evidence before you. Although we had good working relationships with the ministries, their top people were very hard-pressed. One might have wished for more people we could work with fruitfully. They were overwhelmed. I don't want to paint a negative picture -- not at all. As I said, there were dedicated, able individuals who I thought were doing their best in difficult circumstances. Yet some of my foreign colleagues would say I wasn't cynical enough. I can remember later when I would say something favorable about some particular individual -- and people would say, "Oh, you've got to be kidding. That guy was so corrupt. He's stashed huge amounts of money in bank accounts in France and the United States" and so on and so forth.

Q: Of course, one never knows... Sometimes, these are just plain stories.

WENDT: I know.

Q: It's easy to say.

WENDT: There was a lot of back biting. And the Vietnamese were pretty tough on each other. I think it's almost a national trait. They don't help each other that much. At times I had the impression they seemed to like carving each other up. But this was a particularly difficult period we were going through. We took a number of actions that were well-intentioned but perhaps in retrospect were misguided. They were more a reflection of our own circumstances and our own predilections than they were a realistic assessment of what was feasible and desirable in a wartime situation in Vietnam. This was sometimes true even in our assistance programs. There's a story I always like to tell about our effort to sell surplus commodities to the Vietnamese. You know, one of those commodities was bulgur wheat, a widespread product in the United States, but not evidently to the Vietnamese taste. We tried very hard to convince the Vietnamese that this was a useful product, that they should eat it, that it was nutritional and easy to cook, and so on. But they didn't want any part of it. So, we were getting nowhere.

One day in a province in the Mekong Delta, one of our USAID rural affairs people was touring a village and came across a farmer and his wife, and out in front of their hut a large caldron was on the fire. The woman was preparing a whole vat of bulgur wheat. The American was absolutely thrilled. This was the first example he had seen of the Vietnamese being willing to use this commodity. So, he took out paper and pencil and started making notes about this remarkable breakthrough and got an interpreter over to talk to the woman. But before he could pursue the matter, she came along and picked up the caldron, took it out back behind her hut and poured it into a trough for the pigs. So, the poor chap, thinking that he had discovered at last a great breakthrough on bulgur wheat -- he was crestfallen. Through his interpreter, he said to her, "I am absolutely dumbfounded. If all you're going to do is feed it to the pigs, why on earth did you bother to cook it?" And she said, "Well, that's the only way they'll eat it." So, that's just a vignette about some of the frustrations we encountered in our aid program.

Q: Let's stop at this point. We'll pick it up at the end of Tet. We haven't really discussed what you were doing, what happened, and all that. I think that's what should guide our discussion.

-- -

Q: This is the 10th of July, 1996. Let's pick up at Tet -- January, 1968. Where were you, how did it hit? Can you tell us your role in Tet?

WENDT: I had been in the country only about four or five months. As at most large embassies, there was a duty roster. Periodically, your name came up and you pulled duty. It was for a week at a time. Shortly before my turn in January of 1968, the Embassy instituted a new procedure, requiring that duty officers sleep in the building at night, instead of just being there until a certain hour and then going home. I suppose they thought that would provide more security in the event of a problem, that it would give you access to all the facilities of the embassy. It makes a certain amount of sense in a situation like that where there was a war going on. So, that was my first stint as Duty Officer. It wasn't the first night. I honestly don't remember which night it was, maybe the second.

I was sleeping in a small office on the fourth floor near the communications area. These were the quarters of the duty officer, very spartan, nothing much there but a cot and a chair. I had a manual of instructions. I had looked at that, of course, and one thing I noted right away was that most of the information in the duty officer's manual was out of date. So, I didn't pay a great deal of attention to it. Well, about 2:30 in the morning, I was half asleep. The sleeping conditions weren't ideal. Maybe I was dozing rather than sleeping. All of a sudden there was a loud explosion that really shook the building. I didn't know what was happening, whether rockets were being fired at the building or what. Anyway, we had been instructed in the event of an explosion to take cover immediately. So, recalling that instruction, I dove under the bed. A lot of people years later thought that was very amusing as a first reaction. I had difficulty explaining that I was simply following the precautions that had been given to us. When you're under a bed, this is a good shelter from falling masonry and debris and whatever. Anyway, it didn't take long for me to grasp what was really going on -- that we were being attacked. I then called the phone extension of the Marine guard down on the ground floor. He told me there was a Vietcong commando squad trying to break into the building. They had blown open a hole in the wall surrounding the compound, the outer perimeter, and rushed immediately into the compound, and surrounded the embassy building itself. They were firing everything they had at us.

In the beginning, of course, being inside the building, I couldn't really know what was going on - - and I was not foolhardy enough to go up to a window and look out, where I would have been in the line of fire. Actually, you couldn't look out that easily anyway because the building itself was surrounded by a concrete lattice work shell, sort of an outer wall with a space between the wall and the building itself -- and the shell looked like it was part of the building.

Q: Which was designed in some ways to deflect rocket propelled grenades (RPGs).

WENDT: Exactly. It was designed to deflect whatever they could fire at us, RPGs, B-40 rockets, AK 47's. I don't think they had any B-40 rockets, this commando squad. Anyway, the architect of the building was a foresighted fellow because he evidently anticipated what could conceivably happen, and it came to pass. I really thought I was living my last moments because I knew there was almost nothing in the embassy that could protect us. The Marine guard had told me that one Marine had already been killed. I think he also told me that several MPs had been killed -- four as it turned out. On top of all that he had a wounded Marine on his hands -- and there he was, all by himself. So, the situation looked bleak. I really thought it was only a matter of moments before the VC came crashing into the building. For all practical purposes, we were defenseless. We had no weapons.

As it turned out, there was another military man in the building, an Army communications man, who had a rifle. He was in uniform. Then I found out much later that there was another Marine guard somewhere in the building. But for a long time he never appeared -- he never materialized. I happened to see him only a couple of hours later when I went up to the roof. I didn't even see him on my first trip to the roof. It was a subsequent trip. He was crawling around on his belly just below and on the side of the roof. I couldn't figure out what he was doing or how long he had been there. I suppose he had been there from the beginning.

The next thing I knew that same Marine and the Army communications man climbed on board

the first helicopter that was able to land on the roof of the embassy and took off, leaving me and a couple of other civilians alone in the building. I heard later they took off supposedly to provide additional fire power for the helicopter as it lifted off the roof of the building with the wounded Marine. We had gone down to the ground floor to pick up the wounded Marine and take him up to the fourth floor duty officer's quarters where we put him in the cot I had been sleeping in. Then, when we found out there was going to be an attempt to land a helicopter on the roof --

Q: How did you find that out?

WENDT: I was in regular contact with MACV headquarters near Tan Son Nhut Airport, the US military command center (Military Assistance Command Vietnam). Our communications held up very well -- so, I was able to talk to them. That was one thing I spent a lot of time doing -- talking on the phone. Anyway, the military had tried earlier to land helicopters on the roof of the embassy, but they were drawing too much ground fire from the guerrillas in the compound. Eventually, they did get a chopper in. They offloaded a couple of cases of M-16 tracer ammunition, which might have been useful if we had had any M-16s, but there were no M-16s in the building.

Q: M-16 being the standard rifle of the time.

WENDT: Right. But at that time, in 1968, the M-16 rifle had not been issued to the Marine security guards. I'm not even sure all our troops in the field had the M-16.

Q: The Marines probably had the M-14 at that time, which is a NATO weapon.

WENDT: Right. So, there were no M-16s and, therefore, this ammunition was useless.

Q: Before we move on here, you had this Viet Cong sapper unit around the embassy. Why didn't they get in?

WENDT: No one knows for sure why they didn't get in. The presumption is that they lost their leader early on and therefore were a little uncertain what they were supposed to do, or that whenever they tried to get close enough to the doors to plant satchel charges to blow them open, they got caught in a crossfire. You see, after a while, we had people on the rooftops of adjoining buildings firing down into the compound at the sappers. When I say "we," I mean mostly MPs, some American civilians responsible for security and presumably also some Vietnamese police or soldiers, although I don't know that for sure.

Q: This was a period when one took great exception to the fact that we had these planters in the compound which had lips that you could duck under, which they got rid of afterwards.

WENDT: The sappers did duck under the planters, that's right. They took shelter under them. But they should have been able to blow open the doors anyway. I often thought that a really professional group of commandos like the kind the British used in the Second World War would have been in the building in a matter of minutes, but these fellows never quite made it. There were various presumptions about why they didn't get into the building. I should note that at the

beginning, the doors to the embassy were open. They were not routinely closed, particularly in the winter months at night when it wasn't so hot.

In any event, when the incident began, a quick thinking Marine on duty in another building across the compound saw what was going on, raced across the courtyard, and got the doors closed in the nick of time. So, interestingly, the one functioning Marine guard on the ground floor of the embassy was not even assigned to the embassy. He had been assigned to a different building. There were two other Marines, not counting the mystery one on the roof. As I said one was killed and one was wounded right off the bat. We were very lucky that this Marine, Sgt. Harper, saw what was going on, raced over, got inside and closed the doors. They were very thick doors made of teak, splinter proof wood. They stood up well to the pounding they received. A number of rockets were fired into the building and did a certain amount of visible damage, but it turned out to be relatively superficial and easily repaired.

Surprisingly, I was able to stay in touch with just about everybody I needed to talk to, including people who were responsible for the ambassador. They moved the ambassador to a safe house very quickly and set up a command post there. I spoke to those people by phone. I spoke frequently to the State Department Operations Center and to the White House Situation Room. Once I held up the phone so that the caller in Washington could hear rockets thudding into the building. All of these communications held up very well despite the siege we were under. But it wasn't always easy to call people locally in Saigon.

Q: In a way, I suppose people must have been really caught off balance if you couldn't have brought a significant number of American forces from Tan Son Nhut or someplace like that to the embassy.

WENDT: That's, of course, one of the points I kept making when I was speaking to our military headquarters out near Tan Son Nhut airport. They kept promising relief. But the relief never came. Well, it did eventually, but it didn't accomplish much. Six hours after the attack began, the military actually landed a platoon of airborne infantry onto the roof of the embassy.

Q: For the record, Tan Son Nhut is about a 20 minute drive from the Embassy --particularly at night when traffic is light.

WENDT: Right. You can imagine that I pleaded frequently for relief. I had to point out occasionally that the Embassy in the heart of Saigon was the symbol of the American presence in Vietnam. The fact that we had lost control of it was quite serious. I think the same word was coming out from Washington. The military explained later they were under attack all over the area and that the embassy was only one of their problems, albeit a major one. At one point they promised me that an armored column was on its way through the city to relieve the Embassy. I don't know whether such a column existed in reality. Anyway, it never arrived.

Q: Correct me if I'm wrong. I wasn't there at the time. I came a year later. While there were attacks on other places, this was sort of the only real attack in this particular section of town, wasn't it? Or were there also attacks against other buildings? I don't know about the presidential palace.

WENDT: I believe the Presidential palace was also attacked, and that fighting was going on at Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa Air Base. But I think the Embassy was the focal point of the attack, and it was truly a harrowing experience. I'm amazed in retrospect that I lived through it. After about the first hour or two when I realized I was still alive and that the worst fate had not befallen us, I began to think, "Well, maybe we're going to get out of here alive somehow." Of course, that does concentrate the mind a bit as well, the notion that you've got a chance at survival. But I was prepared for the worst. As I said, we had no weapons, though I did end up with a .38 revolver that I had taken from the wounded Marine whom we evacuated.

Q: I suppose afterwards, you could have had a whole arsenal.

WENDT: Yes, later I could and did have a whole arsenal in my bedroom in the small villa I lived in. I officially drew two weapons from the embassy, a Colt 45 automatic and an M-1 carbine -- both World War Two vintage weapons.

Q: What about the surviving Marine?

WENDT: I wrote a citation for an award for him and he did get an award -- I believe it was the Bronze Star. I thought he handled himself superbly in an extremely difficult situation, where for all he knew, the enemy could have come bursting into the Embassy at any moment, which is, as I said, what we all thought was going to happen. Miraculously, thankfully, it didn't happen.

Q: What were you getting from the embassy, the ambassador's security guard and otherwise? Did they say, "Stiff upper lip" or "We're trying to do something?"

WENDT: They were all kind of besieged themselves. They were on the outside trying to organize the armed reaction that we hoped would be mounted to retake the Embassy. I know some of our civilian security personnel participated directly in the action. Leo Crampsey was one, the Embassy Security Officer, and Bob Furey was another.

Q: And there was another one. A colonel who became...

WENDT: George Jacobson?

Q: Yes, Jacobson. I remember later seeing a picture of him on TV being handed a .45. Somebody was passing it off to him.

WENDT: That was at the very end. Jake as we called him was in a little house in the compound behind the embassy, very vulnerable. Somebody apparently threw a .45 up to him when he saw that one of the VC guerrillas was going up the staircase after him. But I was told subsequently that Jake actually finished this VC off with his bare hands. Apparently, he had been gassed, you see, and probably couldn't put up much of a fight. Eventually, we did use gas -- tear gas I assume -- in the compound. But I was nervous about that because by that time, we had some of our own men in the compound, and we might be gassing our own men.

Eventually, our people got over the wall and stormed the compound and finished off all but two of the Vietcong, who were taken prisoner. You see, gradually, the Vietcong got picked off one by one by our people shooting down into the compound from the rooftops of adjoining buildings. I was still communicating with the Marine guard, and I knew that by the time the platoon of Airborne infantry landed on the roof of the Embassy building in a helicopter, most if not all of the guerrillas had been killed or captured. So, I tried to explain this state of affairs when I greeted these troops, who were armed to the teeth with M-16's, grenades, knives, you name it, they had it. I was there when they got out of the helicopter -- this was around 6 or 6:30 in the morning, more than four hours after the attack had begun.

The platoon leader was a major -- Major Hillel Schwartz. I said to him, "The action is over. You might as well just go right down to the ground floor and take stock of the situation, but the fighting is over." He said, "Well, you may think it's over, but I can't take any chances and I have my orders." So, they insisted on deploying through the building floor by floor, beginning at the top.

The only problem with that, of course, was how they were going to get out onto each floor. Well, they could go down the stairwell. But each stairwell had a fire door which you could open only from the corridor -- that is, you could go into the stairwell from the corridor, but you could not go from the stairwell into the corridor. This was a security measure, of course. An alternative would have been to go down the elevator floor by floor and then out into the corridor, but the troops didn't want to do that. So, I said, "Okay, just to show you how confident I am that there are no VC in the building, I will myself take the elevator down floor by floor, go down the corridor, and open the fire door for you so that you can come out from the stairwell and deploy." And that's exactly what we did. You can imagine that I certainly wouldn't have risked my life doing that if I had had the slightest reason to believe there were Vietcong in the building.

Q: Basically, you knew the entrance had not been breached.

WENDT: That's right. I knew the entrance had not been breached -- and I knew from communicating with the Marine guard on the ground floor, Sgt. Harper, that the VC had not gotten into the building and therefore deploying through the embassy and securing it floor by floor was a waste of time. Yet that's what the airborne platoon did. By the time they got down to the ground floor, all the action was over, and I don't think they ever fired a shot.

Q: What happened thereafter?

WENDT: Well, that's rather amusing. I eventually went home but not before Noon. General Westmoreland, commander of all our forces in Vietnam, came to the compound. I greeted him. I explained to him that I was the duty officer. The compound was a mess. There were bodies all over the place and shattered glass and masonry. He said, "Well, I suggest you get this place cleaned up and get people back to work by Noon." That was certainly an unrealistic suggestion under the circumstances. There was serious fighting going on in many parts of the city and people were at risk. So, it was hardly something we could have recommended to the staff. Yet actually we did get things back up and going pretty quickly. I was kind of a mess myself, not because I had been wounded, but I had blood all over my shirt from the wounded Marine I had

helped carry up to the roof.

I eventually went home towards the end of the morning. My housekeeper insisted that I get rid of the shirt right away because with all the blood on it, she thought it would bring bad luck. So, I took the shirt off and she burned it.

What intrigued me at the time was the question of whether or not I was going to be expected to continue my duty responsibilities that night. Now that I recall, that was only the second night of my duty obligation, and I had another five to go. So, once home I tried to take a nap. I was so wound up I couldn't really sleep, but I did try to get some rest. About five in the afternoon, I got a call from somebody saying...well, under the circumstances, I would be relieved of my obligation to take the duty that night and, indeed, for the remainder of the week. I wasn't really surprised -- I half expected the call, but I did breathe a sigh of relief.

To me the attack on the Embassy was an unbelievable incident. It's very hard to imagine in retrospect that we got through it alive. I consider myself extraordinarily lucky. My car, which was parked in back of the embassy, was all shot up in the course of the fighting. Of course, that was mere material damage -- not important. But I was driving around in a car with no windshield for a while until I could get the car repaired. Fortunately, it was the dry season. This was the end of January, and it didn't rain at that time of year. I had the car repaired and kept it for three and a half more years, selling it to a Frenchman when I finally left Vietnam three and a half years later in the summer of 1971.

Q. Did you get any kind of special recognition or award from the State Department after all this?

WENDT. Yes. In fact, both Griffin and I received the State Department's Award for Heroism. We were called back to Washington in December, 1968, for the ceremony, and Dean Rusk personally handed out the awards. They were given to several people -- I can't remember who else but I think one or more of the Security Officers, Leo Crampsey and Bob Furey, must have also received the award. My mother even flew to Washington from Chicago for the event.

The award reads as follows:

In recognition of your courage, resourcefulness, and effective leadership at U.S. Embassy Saigon during enemy attack on January 31, 1968.

Q: Here you were, basically the new boy on the block. I always think one's receptors are a bit more sensitive than at home. This was when you first arrived. Of course, you got quite a welcome. What was your impression when the embassy started to go back to work? What was the feeling? What were they doing?

WENDT: I thought at the time that we had seriously misjudged the situation. Our intelligence obviously left a great deal to be desired. We had perhaps overestimated the extent to which we were making progress in winning the war. That's what I thought at the time. I learned afterwards that in fact we had had some advance indication of trouble during Têt, the Vietnamese lunar New Year. They had indeed increased the embassy security guard by 50 per cent, as I later noted somewhat jokingly, from two to three. Thus, we had one more Marine guard than we might

normally have had. So, some people in the chain of command must have suspected something was going on. But the preparations and reaction, obviously, were not commensurate with the danger at hand. But I don't know for sure. Somebody must know. It must be in the classified files somewhere what kind of intelligence we did have. I think there was some evidence of unusual VC troop movements but far from Saigon. So far as I know, no one anticipated any military activity in the Saigon area -- and certainly not downtown where the Embassy was. And remember this was Tet, a sacred occasion all Vietnamese were presumed to observe, including, some may have naively thought, the Vietcong.

Q: Of course, it's always after the fact that you can see the clues that tell us what was going to happen, but it's always lost in masses of other information. I mean, this is a classic case.

WENDT: That's right. Presumably, we had nothing very specific. Anyway, it's indisputable that the Tet offensive resulted in a military setback for the communists and their attempted uprising. The Vietcong as a military force were crushed. But it's also true that we underestimated their strength, their ability to mount the offensive -- and politically, therefore, it was a jolt, as everybody knows. We paid the price. Lyndon Johnson actually started withdrawing American troops that year. Then Nixon was elected towards the end of the year and the withdrawals continued. I think most historians and political analysts agree that, while the uprising was a military defeat for the Vietcong, it was politically successful. It certainly shocked the American people and it contributed to the debacle that took place at the Democratic Convention in Chicago later that year, 1968. It polarized the country.

The mere fact that the Viet Cong were able to mount an offensive, even if it was crushed, even if militarily it was a failure, suggested that somehow our grip on the situation was not as firm as we had thought. Of course, people had been saying something like this all along -- the critics of the war, that is. But this was a concrete example of how we misjudged the situation. I am not one who believed at the time that we should never have been in Vietnam in the first place. I thought the objectives for which we fought the war were legitimate. I just don't think we went about fighting the war in the right way -- at least at that time.

Q: I join you on that.

WENDT: The problem was incremental escalation. It was always too little and too late. But I think the objective was a valid one. I know a lot of people would disagree. But they disagree primarily based on the hindsight of the result that we obtained, which of course was a big disappointment -- clearly, a failure to achieve our objectives.

One thing I always felt very strongly about was that it was not a military defeat for the US, even though the press and people who ought to know better continue to depict it that way when they talk about our "defeat" in Vietnam. The American military was never defeated on the field of battle in Vietnam. We withdrew of our own volition. We could have garrisoned the country and stayed there indefinitely if we had wanted to. But a political decision was made to pull our forces out and abandon the military effort. You won't find one person in a hundred who knows that that famous picture, I think taken on the 30th of April, 1975, of the helicopter lifting off the roof of the American embassy -- actually it was a USAID building, not the Embassy -- had nothing to do

with the American military effort. Our military had left Vietnam two years previously in early 1973. That photo showed an evacuation of civilians from a USAID building as the communists were coming into Saigon. But I'll bet you can't find one person today, even in the State Department, who realizes that.

Q: I think you're right.

WENDT: It's shocking. Every time I read a seemingly authoritative, responsible article, I read about the "defeat" of the American military in Vietnam -- it really appalls me, and I'm not military. I never served in the military. I think we need to be clear about what actually happened. I also think that South Vietnam was doing relatively well, considering that the war was still going on in the early 1970s when I was there. In the economic area, we were making real progress.

Q: I certainly had that feeling from '69 to '70, the 18 months I was there. I thought things were going pretty well.

WENDT: Signs of prosperity were all around. The economy was emerging from a wartime situation. Economic activity in the provinces was growing. Security was returning to a lot of the rural areas. Rice production was up. American companies were contemplating serious investments. The rate of inflation had come way down. I think in the year 1970, it was only one or two percent, which is remarkable for a relatively small, developing country at war. I believe that if Vietnam had not been forcibly taken over by the communists, it would be as far along as the so-called Southeast Asian "tigers" are today.

Q: Oh, yes.

WENDT: We need to remember that the main reason we went into Vietnam was to prevent South Vietnam from being forcibly overrun by North Vietnam -- and the North's aggression against the South was materially supported on a large scale by Communist China and the Soviet Union.

Q. And wasn't China's support of the North much greater than we thought at the time?

A. Yes, indeed. Long after the Vietnam War, we learned from intelligence sources that China had several hundred thousand -- I have seen a figure as high as 600,000 -- military personnel in the North focused primarily on logistics, rebuilding highways, bridges and port facilities damaged by bombing. This was more than our entire expeditionary force. Of course, there was historical distrust between China and Vietnam, which escaped from Chinese suzerainty over 1,000 years ago, but they were close allies throughout the Vietnam War.

You know, many Americans believe to this day that the conflict was seen by most Vietnamese as a "war of liberation." This is nonsense. It doesn't correspond in any way to the realities I observed on the ground in South Vietnam. Liberation from whom? The French were long gone, and the vast majority of South Vietnamese knew very well that the US had no intention of staying in Vietnam any longer than was necessary to prevent the country from being invaded and

overrun by the armed forces of the North.

Q. That was certainly true in the South.

A. Yes. Anybody who served in Vietnam knows full well that the South Vietnamese did not want to be forcibly taken over by the North. Even the communists failed to understand this -- I suppose they believed their own propaganda about "liberating" the South. In their 1968 Tet offensive, the communists believed the South would "rise up" against the "puppet" government and the Americans. Of course, nothing of the sort happened -- quite the contrary. The offensive was a huge military defeat for the communists -- though a propaganda success in the US -- and the Viet Cong infrastructure in the South, such as it was, was decimated and never recovered. After that, the war was fought by main force North Vietnamese units infiltrated down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Q Can you describe the situation as you saw it, say, from 1970 on?

A. Well, by 1970 South Vietnam and the Americans were beginning to prevail in the conflict. As I said before, the Southern economy was gaining strength, US assistance was increasingly effective, the rice trade was restored, and commerce was starting to flourish as more and more areas were pacified and communist control eliminated. I remember that the rate of inflation in 1970 was one per cent, which is quite extraordinary for an underdeveloped country at war. Militarily, the tide had turned. The South Vietnamese armed forces were increasingly effective and won some major battles in 1972 and again in the spring of 1973, in the latter case without US assistance. Remember that by then US armed forces had been withdrawn following the agreement signed with the North in January of that year.

General Creighton Abrams, who replaced Westmoreland as Commander of US forces, said in his memoirs that the South Vietnamese General Ngo Quang Truong was the ablest tactical commander he had ever encountered. Abrams was a tank commander in World War Two. Unfortunately, it was too late. The US Congress had turned irrevocably against the war in spite of all the evidence that the conflict was turning in our favor.

The agreement signed with the North allowed us to replace war materiel lost by the South on a one for one basis and to respond with air strikes if the North violated the agreement, which they promptly did by continuing to infiltrate troops and artillery across the 17th parallel. But we were unable to live up to this agreement because Congress cut off all funding for the war while the Soviets and Chinese continued their massive assistance to the North.

Q. All this is very poorly understood.

A. Absolutely right. Too many Americans forget or never realized that after the US withdrawal in early 1973, the war continued for two more years. As I said, the South won some major engagements but in the end was unable to sustain the conflict without US assistance. In that respect, I think it's not unfair to say that we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

Q. What do you think would have happened if we had been able to continue our assistance?

A. Of course, that's a matter of conjecture. At the very least, the war would have been prolonged -- perhaps with a better outcome for the South even in a unified Vietnam. I realize that's hindsight, but I think we could have exploited the growing Sino-Soviet conflict more skillfully. We know now that both the Soviets and the Chinese were fed up with the war -- they had more important issues at stake with the US. They were actually pressing the North to reach agreement with us. I also wonder if we could have found a way to take advantage of the historical enmity between the Chinese and Vietnamese. In any event, I do believe that, left alone, South Vietnam could have become another Southeast Asian tiger. But that was not to be. And note that the communists turned a potentially rich country into a poor country. Remember, we fought the war to prevent that from happening and, of course, to prevent the South from being forcibly overrun by the North.

Q: I also feel that, though it may seem peripheral, if Vietnam had gone down the tubes earlier on, Indonesia certainly would not have gone the way it did, and other things would have turned out worse. It's on the margins, but it's a matter of will, and we stopped a hemorrhage from hemorrhaging.

WENDT: I think that's absolutely right -- we bought time. The Vietnam War -- I mean the American part of the war -- went on from 1965, when the big buildup of American forces began, until 1973. So, eight years -- and don't forget the war continued two more years without us. Actually, you could say the war started earlier. Under the Kennedy Administration, we had 16,000 armed military advisers. In the end we bought time for other countries in Southeast Asia to secure their future -- at least to a takeoff point. People forget all this.

Q. What about Vietnam today?

A. The economy is ostensibly booming following the decision of the ruling Communist party to open it up as the Chinese did. The US has become one of the country's major trading partners. Foreign investment in Vietnam is growing. And the Communist leadership wants good relations with the US -- if only as a hedge against China. There are growing examples of cooperation between the two countries -- even in the military area. And yet the country remains a police state that tolerates no political dissent and routinely jails even Catholic priests who dare to speak out. Corruption is rampant and affects the everyday life of those without connections to the Communist Party. Bribes are a way of life -- far more pervasive than in the Republic of Vietnam. Those who prosper are those who cooperate with the regime and reward their collaborators in the Communist hierarchy.

Q. You certainly see signs of prosperity today.

A. True, but the bulk of the population remains poor and faces real hardship with a high rate of inflation. Tourists don't see this. I think the Vietnamese have been clever to develop the tourist industry in Vietnam. Tourists generally get a quite favorable impression of the country, which has a lot to offer. They don't see the political oppression behind the scenes -- and they are largely immune from the bribery and corruption that most Vietnamese face in their daily lives. Real economic reform has stagnated. One hears constantly of scandals, bad management, inefficient

state-owned enterprises, the very slow pace of privatization -- it's a long list.

Q. Do you think the US should have entered the conflict in the first place?

A. Of course, that is a key question for historians. Americans have little patience for indecisiveness and stalemate. The US fought the war with serious limitations such as not invading the North -- in contrast to what we did in Korea -- and we refrained from strategic bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong until December, 1972, just a few months before we withdrew our troops. Of course, this restraint stemmed from our fear of escalation -- bringing in China and the Soviet Union, whose intentions we misread.

Yet there are historians who contend today that fighting the war in South Vietnam bought time for other countries in the region to achieve a degree of stability and prosperity that is evident today -- I'm sure you've heard this notion. In any event, I do believe that, left alone, South Vietnam could have become another Southeast Asian tiger or something close to that.

Was it worth 58,000 thousand American lives? Given the outcome, I think one would have to say no. But that's hindsight, which doesn't really get us anywhere. What I do believe -- and I think many historians would agree -- is that we could have gotten a better outcome. The war was lost at home, not on the battlefield in Vietnam.

Q: Oh, yes. So, Tet is over. Did you go back about your business on the economic front?

WENDT: Yes, I did. I went back to the joint State-AID Economic Section. I did that for about two years. And then I became Commercial Attaché and also a kind of informal troubleshooter for Ellsworth Bunker and Deputy Ambassador Samuel Berger, who, as you may recall, was the first person to occupy the position of deputy ambassador, a position that had never existed until then and I don't think has existed since. He prevailed upon me to stay a fourth year. One advantage I had was my fluent knowledge of French. So, I would sometimes be sent on special missions -- dealing with high ranking Vietnamese whose English was limited or non-existent -- on specific, sensitive problems, for example, corruption in the port of Da Nang.

Q: Let's talk about this time. It's not just the excitement of Tet. Talk about how you saw things moving during this time. We're talking about, what, '68 to '72?

WENDT: Actually, I left Vietnam in July of '71. In a few days, it will be the 25th anniversary of my departure from Vietnam, even though I went back briefly in January of 1973. I would say this period -- from 1968 to 1971 -- this was a period of consolidation and recovery from the devastation of the Tet Offensive. I thought things were moving along quite nicely, in particular in the economic area, which was the area I was working in. I thought a lot of progress was being made. As I said earlier, I think that had we not abandoned South Vietnam, had the country not been taken over forcibly by the communists from the North, the South would have done quite well. It's basically a rich country. You drop something in the soil and it grows. It has a benign climate. It has a rich agriculture. The seas and the coast are rich in marine life. And the country has a natural vocation for tourism.

Q: Were there other commodities besides rice that you worked on?

WENDT: Yes. One particularly interesting example was natural rubber. There were at least three major French-owned rubber plantations not too far from Saigon -- Michelin (like the tire company), Terres Rouges, and SIPH, which stands for Société Indochinoise de Plantations d'Hévéas – Rubber Planters Company of Indochina. All the plantations were within a relative short drive into the countryside around Saigon. I had met some of the planters socially in the French community in Saigon, and they told me a tale of woe. It seemed that the American military was destroying their rubber trees on a large scale on the grounds that the Vietcong were hiding among them and then springing surprise attacks on American military convoys. So, the military cut down large numbers of trees along the roads to get rid of this alleged sanctuary.

The French told me they understood the need to deprive the VC of shelter but that far more trees were being cut down than necessary for that purpose. We looked into the matter and concluded that this was indeed true, and that it wasn't necessary to cut down huge swaths of trees. We then went to our own military and persuaded them to limit their tree-cutting operations to what was strictly necessary to protect our troops. Happily, they cooperated, and the French planters were pleased with the outcome, which seemed to everybody to be a reasonable compromise. We also sought to persuade the Vietnamese Ministry of Economy that they should support the plantations or at least not interfere with them. We argued that, with a war for survival going on, natural rubber was one of the very few commodities South Vietnam could export for foreign exchange. Of course, as a matter of policy, it was in the US interest for Vietnam to be able to earn foreign exchange on its own.

The very able Vietnamese Minister of Economy, Pham Kim Ngoc, who had studied at Oxford and spoke quite good English, bought these arguments. The result was that the plantations got a new lease on life. The only problem was that the foreign exchange they earned from exports was based on the official exchange rate of 116 piasters to the US dollar, whereas on the free market, the dollar was worth over 400. Still, the plantations were back in business up to a point, despite the war.

One of the French planters I got to know was Denis Brochard at the Michelin plantation. He told me he had been a French prisoner of war after the fall of France in 1940. He was sent to a POW camp in the western part of Germany and while there he was allowed to import law books from France and managed to put himself through law school while a POW. I never got around to asking him how and why he went from the law to managing the Michelin rubber plantation in South Vietnam.

As we got to know the French planters, they often invited us to visit them on Sundays. They were very hospitable and somehow were able to produce a bountiful lunch for their guests, with cheese flown in from Paris. We tried to reciprocate by bringing them wine we bought either at the Commissary or through diplomatic supply companies.

Q. With a war going on, you were fortunate to find this form of recreation.

WENDT: Yes, indeed. I should mention that these were only day long excursions and that we

had to get back to Saigon well before dark because there were Vietcong in the area at night. Somehow, the plantations had managed to persuade the VC to leave them alone. We wondered how this accommodation was reached but decided it was best not to ask too many questions and leave well enough alone.

I should mention an unfortunate incident that occurred on the way back to Saigon from a visit to, I believe it was SIPH. Bob Starr, Robert Starr, was the Legal Adviser at the Embassy, and he and I invited two young Vietnamese women to accompany us on the day long excursion. Both were junior diplomats -- Third Secretaries -- at the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry being groomed for service at South Vietnamese diplomatic missions abroad. One of them had a part time job with a Hong Kong company providing wine and spirits to the diplomatic corps in Saigon. That's how I met her -- I had to send back a case of wine that had evidently sat too long in the sun on a dock somewhere.

On the way back from the plantation -- I was driving my small Toyota sedan -- we were rammed by a US Army truck careening out of control back forth on the road. I swerved as far as I could off to the side of the road, but the truck still hit us on my side at about a 45 degree angle. I looked pretty bad -- my face was covered with blood -- but the wounds were just superficial face wounds that bled a lot but quickly healed. The two others who were on the right side of the care were unhurt. The young Vietnamese seated in the back seat behind me bore the brunt of the collision. The car was badly smashed up. She was hauled out of the car by Vietnamese from a nearby village who quickly gathered around the scene, saying "chet roi, chet roi," she's dead, she's dead. Well, as turned out, she was badly injured but very definitely alive. Miraculously -- and I think maybe it really was a miracle -- before long we saw a US Army red cross vehicle coming down the road. We flagged it down, and they took us all to the U.S. 24th Evacuation Hospital, where they operated on war wounded. She was operated on by a US Army neurosurgeon, who saved her life. She was later sent as a diplomat to the Vietnamese Embassy in Manila and was stuck there when Saigon fell to the communists in 1975. Happily, she got a job with the Asian Development Bank in Manila and a number of years later immigrated to the US -- Orange County, California, to be precise, where as you know there is a large Vietnamese community.

Q. What a tale -- only in a war zone like Vietnam could one imagine such a sequence of events. Now, let's go back to the main narrative.

WENDT: OK -- sorry for the digression, but I thought you would find it interesting. Oh, I just remembered another activity I got involved in, the herbicide program. I'm sure you have heard of Agent Orange. Well, one of my responsibilities in the Economic Section was to adjudicate US military proposals for herbicide missions -- basically, large scale defoliation of areas judged to be under Vietcong control. The military brought proposed herbicide missions to us for analysis of whether or not the missions would adversely affect friendly Vietnamese as distinct from Vietcong. I had a very able assistant in my office named Elliot Rothenberg, who was in fact a lawyer by profession. He was careful but zealous in analyzing the missions, and in fact we stopped a number of them where we had evidence that friendly Vietnamese would be affected.

The military often asked me if I wanted to go up on one of the missions. I must say I was

tempted, but something -- and to this day I am not sure what -- always held me back. Needless to say, after all the news about the medical problems that arose after exposure to Agent Orange, my instincts served me well in this instance. Unofficial visitors from Washington would sometimes complain about the program. I always told them that the existence of the program was above my pay grade but that we did study the proposed missions carefully to ensure they were only carried out in Vietcong-held areas.

Q. Fascinating -- your office was really a jack of all trades.

Yes indeed. Anyway -- back to the main narrative, towards the end of my tour, I noted that American businessmen were expressing interest in South Vietnam as a place for investment. This might sound silly to a lot of people looking back at that period, but it's true -- I know. I dealt with a lot of American companies that were looking seriously at Vietnam, even with the war still going on -- though by that time the southern part of the country was largely pacified. I think one can say that South Vietnam was doing well, that we were making progress, particularly in the economic area, and we were achieving our objectives.

Of course, the North was still building up its armed forces and they were still getting aid and comfort from China and the Soviet Union, although there was already tension between China and the Soviet Union, even to the point where the Chinese were holding up war materiel that was being shipped from the Soviet Union to North Vietnam via China. But setting aside for a moment what was going on in the North, I think in the South, we were making real progress. The Tet Offensive in 1968 had rendered the Viet Cong ineffectual as a separate fighting force. They were no longer a significant military threat. They were not much more than a nuisance. Security was coming back. I think had we been allowed to continue in the path we were following then, we would have done reasonably well. We were beginning to get a grip on lots of issues. I remember some of the areas I worked on involving corrupt practices in Vietnam, for example, as I mentioned earlier, cleaning up the situation at the Port of Da Nang, which was creating problems for us in the logistical area.

One such problem was the illegal export of brass scrap. The Vietnamese in their entrepreneurial spirit were scavenging and collecting brass scrap from the battlefields and exporting it illegally. The scrap belonged to the United States. We surmised it was going to Hong Kong and then into communist China, where it was being manufactured into shell casings or bullets that came back to Vietnam and killed our soldiers. So, we wanted to prevent the illegal export of brass scrap and we wanted to collect it for our own purposes.

First, we had to convince the American military that it was not sufficient just to lay claim to the scrap and assert that it was ours. You could do that and you could be right, but that wouldn't prevent the brass scrap from being collected by entrepreneurial Vietnamese and then illegally exported. What you had to do was create economic incentives for the Vietnamese to collect the brass scrap and bring it back to the American military, and that would mean spending some money. At first, the military didn't want to do that. They said, "It's ours. Why should we spend money on it?" I said, "Well, it may be yours, but it's out on the battlefield. If you want it back, you may need to pay somebody to go out and collect it." Eventually, that's what our military did. A system was set up whereby some reliable Vietnamese were paid to go out and collect the scrap

and return it to our military. I just cite that as an example of one of the many problems I worked on. But it all came to naught because of the political situation back in the United States.

I know that the political leadership in Vietnam may have left much to be desired and was certainly not all that we had hoped for. But even so, progress was being made -- I note particularly in the economic area. That's very important. That determines whether or not people are going to live decently, whether or not they're going to be able to feed, clothe, and house their families. If you can get a grip on basic economic conditions and improve them, then you can create a powerful economic incentive to support the political system that prevails at the time. Yes, I know, there were abuses. Yes, there was corruption. We know all this. But you know, it's much worse in communist Vietnam today.

Q: Oh, undoubtedly. And certainly in China.

WENDT: Remember all the people at home in the US who said "Anything has got to be better than the government of Nguyen van Thieu." I didn't think that was true at the time and in retrospect, of course, we know that it was absolutely false. What Vietnam got under the communist regime was far worse than the South Vietnamese government at its worst. Decades after the Communist takeover, on a per capita basis Vietnam remains a poor country.

Q: In the 18 months I was there, which paralleled yours, my sense was that in the middle of a major civil war, the government worked pretty well. I mean, there were things I didn't go along with and there were certainly problems, but positive things seemed to be happening, and there was definitely progress. I was a student of the Civil War. I couldn't say that during our Civil War period, we were much more pristine than the Vietnamese were during their civil war.

WENDT: Yes, that's absolutely right. At the time, it was obvious to anybody in Vietnam that some well to do families managed to prevent their sons and brothers and husbands from serving in the military, in combat. These young men, sometimes they were sent abroad to school or they got civilian jobs or something equivalent. No doubt that had a divisive effect. If you have an army where it seems that mostly poor people are being sacrificed, it doesn't work well. That was a problem in South Vietnam, but it shouldn't be exaggerated, as it often was by American commentators on the war. We're talking about a very small number of people. And as you say quite rightly, we conveniently forget the strains that exist when a country is at war. In a relatively poor country, a relatively underdeveloped country, the strains are greater than any we can imagine. The Vietnamese had been at war for many years, and I suppose that many of them had a hard time convincing themselves that further sacrifice of their men folk would make a difference. Remember that during our own Civil War, there were a lot of people with money who bought their way out.

Q: Oh, in fact, it was built into the system.

WENDT: It was built into the system. Not everybody served.

Q: You could buy a substitute.

WENDT: Yes, you could buy a substitute. We conveniently forget such things in our own history.

Q: Lots of shoddy material. Lots of corruption.

WENDT: Sure. We even repealed the writ of habeas corpus during the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln did that because he believed the fate of the Union depended on it. So, I think we need to temper our criticism and at least not apply to the Vietnamese, which we very often did, standards that were unrealistic, that simply couldn't be met and were not met anywhere.

Q: I had problems with some Congressmen who came out from Massachusetts decrying the corruption there at the time. I don't know how it is today, but Massachusetts was a very corrupt state government. Boston? Good God!

WENDT: You're absolutely right. We let the anti-war movement take hold of these issues.

Q: Also, we didn't have our act together. We didn't have an end game. We didn't have a firm grip on where we were going. This was obviously a major problem.

WENDT: I think that's right. When you consider that we started pulling troops out in 1968 and yet the war, our part of it, went on until 1973, ask yourself how you would feel as a soldier going into battle when you know your country is already winding down the war. That's a tough assignment. I think that had a very divisive effect in the United States. I believe we should have done much sooner what we in fact ended up doing, and which brought about the final cease fire - namely, the mining of the Port of Haiphong and the strategic bombing of the Hanoi area. Nixon finally did that in December of 1972, the famous Christmas bombing, when it looked like the North Vietnamese were reneging on a cease fire deal that the US side thought had already been reached the previous October.

I remember years later when I just happened to have my television set on. I think it was public television, and somebody -- it might have been David Frost, or some other well known TV interviewer -- was asking Nixon about foreign policy. It went something like this: "Mr. President, quite aside from the Watergate affair and all that, you are known as having been very skilled and successful in the area of foreign policy. Is there anything in that area you regret, anything that you wish you had done differently?" He thought for a moment and he said, "Yes, I made one very serious mistake, and that is I waited until December 1972 to do what I should have done as soon as I took office in January of 1969, namely send the B-52 strategic bombers against Hanoi and Haiphong."

I think that's absolutely right. It was a mistake -- if we were ever going to do it, then the sooner the better. That was the whole problem -- incrementalism -- the incremental approach to the war -- gradual escalation. It was fatal politically and it was not effective militarily.

Q: On the economic side, did you get involved in any of the debates or concerns about the use of what were known as TCN's, third country nationals?

WENDT: Not too much, really. I'm well aware that we had a lot of them and we relied on them. I suppose we thought we knew them better and they would, in many instances, meet our requirements better than the Vietnamese would.

Q: Yes. The Vietnamese were obviously unhappy about having this alien group come in who were more likely to stay around. The Americans they knew would leave.

WENDT: That's right. I suppose that's a problem in many countries. Perhaps because of the very rapid buildup, we had to rely on a certain number of third country nationals. I must say, I did feel at the time that the sheer size of the American presence was a liability. I thought we were overly engaged, that there was too much micromanagement of the war effort and that we tended to overwhelm the Vietnamese. We probably could have pursued the war effort more effectively if we had had fewer Americans and relied more on working through the Vietnamese. Of course, that's what we eventually tried to do with the so-called "Vietnamization" program, but that was, I think, although well-intentioned, somewhat misguided and a bit patronizing towards the Vietnamese. We should have been "Vietnamizing" the conflict from the very beginning, but we didn't want to do that. I never did understand what a lot of the Americans in South Vietnam were actually doing that couldn't have been done by the Vietnamese themselves.

Q: The whole effort was... We just got into everything.

WENDT: We got into everything. I think we could have streamlined our functions a lot more and not relied on so many Americans running around trying to handle everything themselves. Ultimately, you had to work through the Vietnamese. One of the things I really did enjoy about my tenure in Vietnam was the very good relationships we had with so many Vietnamese. I found it both professionally and personally very gratifying -- there was a lot of job satisfaction there, I felt.

Q: You left there in '71, is that it?

WENDT: I almost stayed a fourth year. In fact, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker did ask me to stay in a very nice way, so that if my response wasn't positive, I wouldn't feel he thought I was being uncooperative, but he did ask if they could persuade me to stay a fifth year. But at that point, I really had more or less burned my bridges, and I thought professionally, even four years was a long time, considering that the official tour of duty was only 18 months, and that in my own interest I probably should move on to something else. But I felt flattered that he even asked. That brief exchange took place at the Fourth of July reception in 1971 at Ambassador Bunker's residence in Saigon. I remember it well because Henry Kissinger was there. Although I didn't know it at the time, he was on his way to China. I think from Saigon, he flew back to Pakistan. There, the story was concocted that he had been taken ill or something like that. In fact, he was on his way to China from Pakistan. All that was brewing as we were standing around sipping drinks on the terrace of Ambassador Bunker's residence in Saigon. It was the first contact I had with Henry Kissinger.

ARTHUR A. HARTMAN
Staff Officer, Planning and Coordination
Washington, DC (1967-1972)

Ambassador Arthur A. Hartman was born in New York in 1926. He entered the Foreign Service in 1948 under the Wristonization program. His career included assignments in Paris, Vietnam, London, and Brussels, where he served as DCM. Hartman was ambassador to France from 1977 to 1981 and ambassador to the USSR from 1981 to 1984. He was interviewed by William Miller in 1987.

Q: Let me take you back to Washington. You've been in London for four years and how does this next assignment take place?

HARTMAN: It takes place when somebody goes to Nick Katzenback and he's looking around for somebody. Basically, the Johnson administration decides that they want to have a more formal process to coordinate things and they decide to create this coordination staff under the planning staff. I was Deputy Director for Planning and Coordination, but there was a Director for Planning entirely and another staff entirely, including Henry Owen and others who were primarily on the planning side of the job. I had the coordination side which meant that I brought inter-departmental groups together, first at the senior level under Nick Katzenback; and then geographically kind of running those. I made sure that policy issues were brought up in terms of policy making, and that then the implementation of those policies was reviewed inter-departmentally by these groups. It was a very, Max Taylor was very much in favor of this, it had a kind of a military ring to it, it was sort of orderly and to a certain extent it worked mainly on the peripheral issues where you had to make a policy on a new issue that had come up before a conference or a regional policy. You got people together and at least you got option presented. On the implementation side of it, at least you were able to call people into account and say "Alright now, is this really working?" I don't think it was, it's not the panacea and it's often used I think, the structure is often used to substitute for something that's more basic, basically in difficulty. What was in difficulty at the end of the Johnson administration was the overall policy. No amount of bureaucratic tinkering was going to solve the problem that he faced of lessening opinion in favor of major policy, namely the involvement in Vietnam.

I think we did manage in some peripheral areas to make an improvement in terms of American policy and the presentation of that policy, in the coordination of it, and in the presentation to Congress of some sensible ideas on development assistance and how it ought to be organized. When the Nixon administration came in Henry was the NSC Chief and he and Elliot Richardson sat down and really developed from this older system in a sense, although they said it was brand new and they gave it a lot of kudos for being innovative as every administration has to as it comes in. It was really an outgrowth of this previous practice. When Elliot was Under Secretary of State, I was brought in. I was no longer running the planning staff, it was a pure coordination job directly under Elliot who was the Head of an overall under secretaries committee that did the coordination and what not, he drew on the planning staff for other things.

Q: So with Elliot at that point was Jonathan Moore?

HARTMAN: Jonathan and a lawyer at various times, different lawyers. Elliot of course was a great intellect and fun to work with and indeed he again was the bridge with the White House. This was because William Rogers and Kissinger were just not two minds that kind of linked up and worked well together, and Nixon really didn't want it to work that way. He was a very manipulative fellow and so basically what Kissinger did was to build up a staff and then he used this link with Elliot and this coordination staff to get some of the policy matters ironed out. William Rogers kept rather aloof from this whole process.

Q: Did he lose power and influence as a result?

HARTMAN: Well not because he was aloof from that process. I think this is the way Nixon wanted it and he was basically wanting to run the policy out of the White House, and this was just a way of kind of keeping control of the bureaucracy.

Q: So the big issues at that point were Vietnam?

HARTMAN: Vietnam certainly, but again in its sensitive aspects it never touched that group. In it's gory details we were there, we had all kinds of studies prepared and the money thing was reviewed, and the military thing was reviewed, but when it came to a particular policy of what you were going to do in Cambodia, or what you were going to do somewhere else it was Kissinger, Laird and Nixon. Elliot because of his intellectual interests also found time to pull out particular policy issues.

STEPHEN T. JOHNSON
Political Officer
Saigon (1967-1970)

Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1970-1973)

International Control Commission
Saigon (1973)

Political Officer, Nha Trang (1973)

Stephen T. Johnson was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1936. After serving in the US Army from 1956-1957 he received his bachelor's degree from Occidental College in 1960. He entered his Foreign Service in 1961 and his career included positions in Canada, Paris, Vietnam, Laos, Romania, and Kenya. Mr. Johnson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in January 1997.

Q: Well, in 1967 you left.

JOHNSON: Yes. I went back to Washington for training for Vietnam.

Q: Did you volunteer?

JOHNSON: I volunteered. It seemed the most exciting thing going on at the time. I asked not to be assigned to Vietnamese language training. I mean, I volunteered, but I didn't volunteer that much. I didn't want to spend all that much time. So I went back and took what they had, core training, [at that time]. I didn't take the language, but we did do the training for CORDS in which we learned about Vietnamese things and the like. Then I was sent out to Vietnam and arrived in early October of 1967.

Q: You were there on this tour from 1967 until when?

JOHNSON: Until I guess it was July of 1970.

Q: In the first place, had your father talked to you about Vietnam at that time?

JOHNSON: A little bit. We hadn't seen very much of each other. He had been in Vietnam and been also back in the Department as deputy under secretary again. Then he had been assigned in 1966 as ambassador to Japan. I hadn't really seen my parents very much for quite some time. We had talked a little bit about it. He was there, and he was wounded in the embassy bombing and stuff. But not that much. I stopped off and saw them in Tokyo on my way out to Vietnam in October of 1967.

When I arrived, I was assigned to the external affairs unit of the political section, which, in those days, was a section of about 25 people under a minister-counselor, Arch Calhoun. It had different parts. The internal-political sub-section had reporting, four or five fellows. Provincial reporting sub-section had nine - I think - two for each of the CORDS areas and one boss. Then there was political-military and, seems to me, there was some other part to it.

But in any case external affairs was three officers, one of whom did the French community in Cambodia, and I was basically the "Communist" guy. I did the North Vietnamese, and the Viet Cong was my job. I relied a lot on the old FBIS.

Q: The FBIS is what?

JOHNSON: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which put out reams of stuff and also captured documents. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were almost as bureaucratic as we are and put out lots of paper. Our folks kept capturing this and there was an establishment out by an air base which translated it all. So almost every day I would get a kind of mound of this stuff. A lot of it from my point of view, from the point of view of a military analyst, you know the laundry list of some battalion probably told them volumes, but it wasn't so interesting to me.

But there things that were of interest politically that you would get. You would also get interrogation reports. There was a Joint Interrogation Center where folks would tell their story. I was the only person in the political section who worked on those subjects. You know, kind of did little telegrams and gave advice and otherwise tried to follow things. I wasn't so much involved

as some other people in the political section in analyzing South Vietnam, which is what most of the other people were doing. They were following South Vietnamese politics and the kind of political-military situation and corruption and all those other issues which were very controversial and difficult.

I had my own little bailiwick and briefed the press on things when negotiations got started, in Paris. On the whole subject of negotiations and the sort of the pre-negotiation negotiations, it was our little section that provided the support to the ambassador and the deputy ambassador, as the number two person in the embassy, and the minister counselor of political affairs. So we did a lot of paperwork there on writing up suggestions and ideas and doing telegrams.

While the Paris negotiations were going on, and even before, there was kind of a negotiation that took place in Saigon with President Thieu and Vice President Ki and their foreign minister and national security advisor. On our side were Ambassador Bunker and the deputy ambassador and the political counselor and one flunky, often me and sometimes my - well, more often than not - my boss. During that period, my bosses were Roger Kirk and Walt Cutler. Kirk was later ambassador to Romania and some other places. Cutler was ambassador to Saudi Arabia for a while.

Q: And Zaire.

JOHNSON: And Zaire, you are right. I always thought that Foreign Service officers should learn shorthand, which I didn't. I made some stabs at it.

Q: Was Martin Herz there at the time?

JOHNSON: Martin Herz was there, and he would take shorthand notes sometime, while I would laboriously be writing out longhand. They pretty much wanted a verbatim, so telegrams would get very, very long. Then they would always say don't worry about getting it out as long as we do it before 10:00 this evening, no problem. So you would find yourself bouncing around between Mr. Herz and Mr. Sam Berger, the deputy ambassador, and Ambassador Bunker about various versions of what had been said.

Again, it was the pre-word processing days. So when you came back to bring in your secretary to re-type it for the fifth time, she was getting a little bit testy. But we would do those negotiations.

Q: What were the negotiations about that you were observing with [Nguyen Van] Thieu and [Nguyen Cao] Ky?

JOHNSON: Well, in the main it was to get the Vietnamese to come along with us on what we were doing in Paris. Ky wasn't really very important; he was a fighter pilot kind of guy. He certainly was more likeable than Thieu. But not as smart. Thieu could see that from his point of view, this process was not leading to any place very good, that we were withdrawing. Any kind of a deal with the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese was not going to be one that he liked.

On the other hand he couldn't flatly refuse to go along with all this, so they would question, and

they would suggest, and we would go back and forth. But basically it was this process of bringing them along so they would sign on the dotted line when that agreement was finally made. It was 1972 by the time we did it.

But when I was there in Saigon, it was the beginning of that process. You know, would you actually sit at the table with the Viet Cong? Well, no. They would rather not. Of course, we had the whole problem of the shape of the table which became very famous. I found it very hard to describe table shapes in telegrams. We didn't have fax machines in those days and we had to kind of reduce whatever was decided upon in words. But they were obviously very suspicious, very reluctant about the whole process, understandably so, from their point of view.

Q: What were you getting concerning the attitude of Ambassador Bunker and Deputy Ambassador Sam Berger? Was it great frustration or was it just that they saw this as a long process?

JOHNSON: I think they saw it as a long process. It was very hard to know what Ambassador Bunker was thinking. He was a fellow that you would want to back in a poker game. He never seemed to sweat like the rest of us. His clothes never got wrinkled. He was in his 70s at the time. He was carrying out his instructions, whatever they were. Once in a while, after a particularly long or difficult session, he would privately complain about that a little bit. But I think he just saw it as a long process, and his job was to move it along as best he could.

I was the scribe. I'd take telegrams and turn them into talking points when they came in. I didn't do this all the time because my boss, Roger Kirk or Walt Cutler, would be doing it sometimes, and I would be helping them out. They obviously weren't there all the time. We were not the movers of policy. About the only time I ever had any impact on what you might call policy, was when we were going to make a statement in Paris in which we equated our pulling out of Vietnam with the end of the war. I did a telegram saying, "No. It wasn't the end of the war." South Vietnam would still be fighting after we withdrew. We did send that in and that caused some consternation. I don't know why. This would become, I don't know, one of those articles of theology where in Washington they would equate our pull out with the end of the war. Of course, from the American point of view, it was. But it was kind of [like] saying the emperor isn't wearing any clothes [i.e., left to themselves the Vietnamese couldn't fight].

Q: While you were doing this, you were also doing the analysis of the Viet Cong and North Vietnam. I guess everything there would be before and after Tet in 1968. Let's do it before 1968. You went in 1967?

JOHNSON: I got there in October 1967. The Tet Offensive in 1968 was at the end of January, so I was pretty much a new boy when it happened.

Q: What were you getting before Tet as far as the state of the Viet Cong particularly?

JOHNSON: They weren't doing too much, but there were indications that something was up, when you read the captured documents and all the other things that I was reading. We did get one kind of proclamation of a general offensive. But people tended not to believe it because it

was a pretty stupid thing to do. I guess the basic feeling, and it is hard to say because I was so new, was that things were going along. We were still a pretty large force in country.

Then the attack took place during Tet, which is the Vietnamese holiday that lasts a week or so. This was supposed to be a time of a truce. I got the impression from reading afterwards of various analysis by the Vietnamese communists of their own conduct, that basically they held back word back from their own people to the very last minute, in order to preserve security.

Of course, that meant that the units that were going to attack weren't able to do what they normally did. Before attacks normally the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese very carefully mapped out what they were going to do and practiced it. Everybody knew what his task was. They were quite meticulous. But by holding back the word until the very last moment, they weren't able to do that and so lots of the attacks were misdirected or got mixed up.

The squad that was supposed to get the American ambassador went to the wrong house. Some poor Vietnamese doctor was "done." The American ambassador was not a mystery in Saigon. Any rickshaw driver could have told you where that was. There were other kinds of screw-ups, but at the same time...

Q: The attack on the embassy. I had an interview with Allan Wendt, who was in there, saying that it was essentially a screwed up attack because they could have gotten in.

JOHNSON: Allan is right.

Q: But it wasn't done well. Or at least the theory being that maybe the squad leader was killed and rest of them sort of were milling around.

JOHNSON: Yes. I agree with Allan. When they made the attack that night, and I lived right across the street from the embassy in [an] apartment. My roommate was David G. Brown, as opposed to David E. Brown; we had two David Browns in the political section. Peter Collins was staying with us. He was one of the provincial reporters from the Delta. But when the attack took place, I have had the same theory that Allan Wendt has. Apparently, they blew a hole in the embassy wall, and some fellows came through that hole. The two military policeman, they weren't Marines at the time, at the gate shot it out with these fellows. The military policemen were killed, but they killed the first two or three people through the hole.

I think that must have been the leadership. Because basically for the rest of the night, these fellows milled around and hid behind decorative pots there in the embassy yard. As the Americans responded, the Marines and other people, the firefight went on the rest of the night. They also killed a couple of other military policemen who happened to drive up at just the wrong moment. As I understand it, one of the drivers of the embassy, who was in cahoots with the Viet Cong, smuggled in a fellow who then in his account went to sleep in one of the outer buildings of the embassy and performed no useful function.

Obviously, if they had done it right, they would have been in the lobby before we knew what was happening.

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: Allan wouldn't have gone on to fame and fortune as he did. But, they fired some rocket grenades at the embassy from across the street, and they did other things. But, yes, it did not go well for them.

Q: Can you say what you were doing when the attack began. I always like to catch people when... I assume you were asleep.

JOHNSON: I was asleep. It was about 3:00 a.m. There were loud explosions and all kind of shots. We kind of peeked out and thought, "Well, this is very bad." But we couldn't do anything so after awhile we just went back to bed. We figured the apartment didn't have any back door and apparently the Viet Cong were out the front door. So we figured if they come in we're done, and if they don't come in it won't matter. So we went back to bed. Our only weapons were... I had a very blunt saber that a friend of mine had given me when I was in high school. David Brown had a Montagnard crossbow. He did province reporting in the highlands and the crossbow was, in fact, a lethal weapon but probably for only one shot.

We got up 7:00-ish, I guess, when there was another big explosion. We started to go to work. I think work started at 8:00. But there was just so much shooting we thought, "Well, we'll just go a little late today." So I think about 8:30 or 9:00 we got across the street to the embassy. There were bodies everywhere, and we crunched over the glass and went to our offices. My boss, who was I guess Roger Kirk at the time, his office had taken a direct [hit]. You remember the embassy.

Q: It had an outer screen.

JOHNSON: And that outer screen really did work. So it was a good idea. The outer screen had taken a hit and had gone through into his office. But they had that really good plastic stuff there. Anyway his office was beat up a little bit but not badly. I think the windows were all kind of ajar at the time. So anyway, we went to work. Then General Westmoreland came. The ambassador and we kind of followed them around as they looked at things out of curiosity.

Colonel Jacobson, the mission coordinator, who lived in the house in the compound, had a very close call. One of the Viet Cong group had gotten into his house and had been driven upstairs by tear gas, and Jacobson at the time didn't have any weapon. But at the last moment they tossed him a pistol, and he shot the fellow.

Q: I remember seeing that on T.V.

JOHNSON: He came up to me and in a jocular way said that because I was seen as the communist guy in the political section I should control my people better and not send them under his house and stuff. Of course, all of these reports are coming in from all over the country. The embassy itself was just a part of it. There was a big fight going on in Cholon. There had been an attack on the presidential palace, which had [failed]. There was other shooting going on all

around town. I remember driving someplace or other, and there were roadblocks. Somebody, a Vietnamese gentleman, I think, hadn't stopped quickly enough at a roadblock and was shot.

Everybody was on the TV. Everybody was coming in with their own particular stories. There had been attacks on houses and on some of the CIA hotels and other kind of things. All very exciting. Political section people straggled in. I remember lunchtime. Because David and I lived across the street, we were the closest around, and we basically had a whole bunch of people to lunch. We had our rations and we fed them all.

Then that night, Allan Wendt having done his duty - normally you did the duty there for a week, but it was felt I guess that he had enough pressure put on him, so David and I had the duty the next night. The night after the attack. We sat up there, and we cooked some canned food. The Ambassador had some sort of little hotplate and we cooked ourselves some beans. Then we went downstairs, and there was a platoon of the 101st Airborne Division which had landed on the roof of the embassy at the end of the battle and kind of come down through the embassy. I don't think they actually had to fight anybody as it turned out.

But they were still there and were manning the perimeter and things, but a bunch of them were inside the lobby. For some reason we had the movie, "Barbarella."

Q: With Jane Fonda!

JOHNSON: So we put it on in the lobby of the embassy for the 101st Airborne Division and some drivers and odds and ends, and David and I watched "Barbarella." One problem with movies in Vietnam, which you may recall, was that whenever you got to really sexy bits, they would go off the sprockets because the units before you would always have run those parts through [many times]. "Barbarella" did have some sexy parts and would keep going off the sprockets and the guys from 101st were very unhappy about that. But we got through the night and nothing happened. There was a tank sitting in the intersection in front of the embassy which would shoot if anything moved. We hoped they wouldn't. It was a very confused time. [We were trying to figure out] what was going on in all these towns. There were big battles all over the delta and we were trying to keep track of it all. My job was [to follow] the communists. People were trying to put this jigsaw together to try to figure out what was going on.

People that you knew had been captured or killed. Hugh Lobet, my old buddy who was in the Operations Center with me, got killed down in the delta some days later. All this was going on at one time. It took awhile to kind of settle down. Then in May, this was the end of January, at the end of May there was, what some people called the "mini-Tet" in which we had another real rush at Saigon. Big battles out in Cholon. A German diplomatic friend of mine got captured and killed in that. He and I were supposed to meet for tennis. He decided to swing through Cholon to see what was going on and didn't make it.

During the first part of Tet, one of our problems was because everybody was going to our apartment to eat, David G. and I very soon ran out of food. We decided to go to the commissary which was in Cholon to get more food. The Viet Cong, the communists, were kind of between us and that part of Cholon. So we had to go around them to get to the commissary. We were among

the first people there. We were kind of surprised. Anyway, we went in and loaded up. I had a Triumph convertible car. We loaded up as much as we could and started to come back. We decided for some reason to go around the other side of them coming back. We went up a street and all the refugees were going that way and turned out to be a bad idea. Anyway somebody opened up on us with a machine gun. We showed what a great U-turn you could do in a Triumph Herald and made it back with our stuff, unscathed.

Q: Were you getting, obviously this was more sort of the CIA province but well, were people saying to you, "Well, why the hell didn't you tell us this was going to happen?" I mean, this is like miscalling an election or something.

JOHNSON: No. No one said that to me. That really wasn't my job. But there were indications. I think I mentioned before in the northern part of the country they jumped off a day earlier. It always was a mystery to me as to why. It is hard to remember the Vietnamese communist organization of South Vietnam, of course, which was different than our side's organization of South Vietnam.

But in any case, the commands in the North, which dealt directly with Hanoi, jumped off a day ahead of the commands in the South, which dealt with Hanoi through the Central Office for South Vietnam [COSVN]. So that kind of discombobulated everybody. At least in my case, no, they didn't ask me why I hadn't predicted it.

Q: After this was over, the big Tet and all this, what were you getting from what you were seeing from the Viet Cong?

JOHNSON: Golly. Well, there were lots of after action reports on their parts. The battles had been mostly disastrous from their point of view. They had lost lots of leadership. They had lost lots of their soldiers. It had really hurt them. A lot of them were unhappy about what happened. Obviously, from the macro-political point of view, it was a success and the government of Hanoi was certainly trumpeting it as such. But in the South, on the Viet Cong side, they had a lot of unhappy campers about what had happened.

I think it came as a surprise to a lot of them. We think of this as being entirely propaganda but a lot of them really did believe that there was going to be the general uprising, that when they came into these cities and towns that the rest of the population of South Vietnam was going to rise up and join them. That didn't happen anywhere. That was disillusioning to a lot of their folks.

It meant, of course, over time that the North Vietnamese role became even greater for if no other reason than the elimination of so many South Vietnamese cadres. Then the North Vietnamese Army had to take a larger role as well. But it was hard on them.

Q: What were you getting before and after Tet in North Vietnam about our feeling about the leadership there and what they were after?

JOHNSON: Well, it was very hard to know anything about what the leadership was about. There

were various people that had theories about hard-liners and soft-liners and rivalries and the position of Ho Chi Minh, who was still alive at the time. Ho Chi Minh died, I guess, in September of 1968.

Q: 1969.

JOHNSON: 1969, you are right.

Q: I was on home leave. My wife woke me up and said that he died. I think before I rolled over and went back to sleep I said, "May he rot in hell."

JOHNSON: I remember it was September because it was just at Vietnamese National Day. But you are probably right that it was 1969. So he was still around. Nobody really knew very much, really, about [the leaders'] relationships [to each other] or what difference it made if one succeeded and the other didn't.

Q: Because this is all much newer, we didn't have the equivalent of our criminologist who really watched who was where.

JOHNSON: There was really a very small community of people who followed North Vietnam. When I got sort of pitchforked into it, I looked around for the literature and stuff. There really was very little on them. There didn't seem to be that many people in Washington or in Vietnam or in Saigon actually following them from a political point of view. I was always a little bit shocked by that. That even after a few months I was the authority mainly because I had memorized the names of the people in the Politburo.

The CIA wasn't getting anything from the inner circles of the North Vietnamese leadership. We did get some political reporting from Hanoi from the French and the British. The French had a delegation general there, [headed by] quite a good man. We managed to kill him by dropping a bomb on the delegation general building or his residence. I'm not too sure exactly the timing of that, his mistress and him. The British had a little consulate and did reporting which they often shared with us. So we got some flavor of things up in Hanoi from that.

Obviously, we also had interrogation reports of North Vietnamese soldiers. It wasn't all "Name, rank, serial number, and date of birth." It was also, "How are things at home? How did the conscription process work? How was everybody eating?" and all those kind of questions. They always seemed to be having problems up there in North Vietnam. Things were not great, but [there was] nothing to suggest that they were going to break up or give up the struggle.

You would get defectors as well. My favorite defector was an Esperantist who was drafted into the North Vietnamese Army. They wouldn't let him correspond with other Esperantists, which I guess is the major activity of other Esperantists. So, immediately upon arriving in the south, he defected. I guess the interrogator asked him what he planned to do now that he was in the south, and he explained that he planned to teach Esperanto. I don't know how that worked out for him.

Q: Well, for somebody who might not be familiar with this, Esperanto was touted at least in the

1920s as a world language based on sort of Latin, Spanish in a way.

JOHNSON: We would have these odd people that would come down. I guess the vacuum cleaner parts of the draft. Certainly when you read the accounts of the soldiers, when you read the captured documents and the interrogation reports about how very difficult it was on the other side, how many people got killed and what their lives were like. One of their strengths was that they basically, as is the nature of guerilla warfare, got to chose when they were going to fight. That they could be at 50% of efficiency for five months but on "the" day they would be at 95 but the fellows on the other side would maybe be at 75.

For most of them, if you really looked at the timeline, they didn't fight that much. There were long periods in between which were not easy. [There] were periods of subsisting and that kind of thing. Then [there were] these occasional clashes, and you read about their terror of things like B-52s. They seemed to get advance word on B-52s most of the time. I guess the Russians had trawlers off Guam where they were taking off. Somehow or another, they usually had a pretty good idea of where the bombs were going to land. Quite frequently, you would read an interrogation report where the fellows would all be sitting around the camp and suddenly the word would come to get up and march as quickly as you can in this direction. Half an hour later, the place would get blasted. They weren't always successful of course, in that. They did suffer horribly from it.

But in the North, there were politics; there were rivalries. Obviously, we knew very little about them. I think it was kind of like watching shadows on the wall. We really didn't know that much about what was going on in the inner circles of their government. But they obviously were committed to the struggle.

Q: How about the information that you were getting from the CIA during this time that you were doing this?

JOHNSON: I don't think it told me too much. I don't know. I'm not too sure who was responsible for all these things. You know, a hand in the interrogations and things which was certainly useful of soldiers and other people of cadres that were caught. But just plain old CIA reports, well, at this distance, it is now 25-30 years, it doesn't make much of an impression on me. FBIS on the other hand was very useful all the time. We always went over that in a criminological kind of way trying to track who was hot and who was not for whatever reason.

Q: I mean, did you learn to read "Communis," the communist language newspaper?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. [This was] what the French call, "Langue du bois," kind of turgid, turgid stuff. You really paid your dues. They would give long and interminable speeches. I always wondered about them as communications tools because General Giap, for instance, would give a speech that would be three hours long. This was an instruction to the lads. Then [about] 10 Americans who followed Vietnamese affairs very closely would get together, and everybody would argue about what he meant. It always seemed to me that if people who were relatively knowledgeable about what was going on couldn't agree on what he meant, how was this being used as a tool for communicating with the lower echelons of the communist structure.

Those kind of speeches would be analyzed on their side, and they would have classes and stuff in which I guess perhaps somebody would say "What Comrade Giap really meant was that we are supposed to work in the jungle for the next six months rather than throw ourselves on the wire." I don't know. But it was murky stuff. It was turgid stuff. You read and read and read and look for those little changes in really criminological kind of stuff.

The North Vietnamese were never as precise I guess, as the apparently the Soviets were. Sometimes you would get kind of false leads where you would get excited about some change that really wasn't that significant.

Q: By the way, had Douglas Pike written his book on "Victor Charlie?"

JOHNSON: He had written that, and I had read it.

Q: So I mean, was this considered a fairly solid book? How did you feel about it?

JOHNSON: Yes. It was a good book. One problem is that Pike, tremendously knowledgeable, wrote almost as turgidly as Giap. So it was kind of hard to wade through. But it was a useful book at the time. Obviously, later events showed some of the things that he put forward weren't necessarily true.

Q: What was your impression of our military intelligence at that time?

JOHNSON: Well, I was concerned with the strategic kinds of things and obviously the military was producing things like... Of course, this was the raw stuff, the captured documents and the interrogations and that kind of thing. They were pretty good. The problem was that the people I dealt with at MACV [the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] were very intelligent folks [but] would come in and be there for six months and then go. So you got a kind of a turnover. Dumb as I was, I was there for three and a half years. Therefore accumulated a certain amount of knowledge.

Q: This was something I found. I chaired something called the "Irregular Practices" committee which was essentially a civilian court martial. We are talking about 1969-70. And I found after six months I was able to give historical perspective to the rest of the people around there. It was badly done in a way, particularly on the military side. They were using it too much as a personnel "getting your ticket punched" type operation.

JOHNSON: That was certainly - and this wasn't my subject - true on the fighting side of things. The people I was dealing with, one was Chuck Meissner, who later went on to be the Assistant Secretary of Commerce and died with Ron Brown on the plane. He was doing Cambodia and stuff. Larry Pressler, who was for a long time the Senator from South Dakota, you'd get people like that and others who were Ph.D.s and had really good education, but they weren't army/military careerists like say the fellow commanding the battalion. But that was just the way they worked. They did that for six months and they did something else for six months.

As you suggest, after about eight months you were the grand old man of whatever subject you were dealing with. It was stupid. It was stupid in my little bailiwick and it was stupid in other places as well. But I think particularly in my bailiwick because you could say about a battalion commander for instance that the demands-psychological and everything-were so great on that kind of job that maybe six months was all you really could do. That wasn't the case in MACV. Certainly a year wouldn't have been untoward or even longer. But that was a problem out there. But this was the strategic kind of stuff. It doesn't have to do with who is going to come over the wire tomorrow or what was happening in the A Shau Valley.

Q: In the political section, how did they use what you had?

JOHNSON: Mainly, I did little telegrams back to Washington which somebody must have read. I don't get the impression that I had a great effect on the way thinking was done at the top.

Q: Were there people, for example, in our political section, who would sit down and look to you for information concerning Vietnam? There is the internal politic guy and maybe somebody else. Would you all sit down and say, "Where are we going" or something like this or was it pretty much compartmentalized?

JOHNSON: Not too much. The ambassador sent in, I think it was weekly kind of personal reports to Washington which I think were probably drafted in large part by the minister-counselor for political affairs. Art Calhoun was the first minister-counselor; Martin Herz. Galen Stone was the number two in the political section. We never saw those reports. Maybe there was some of this synthesis in that. But I didn't get the impression that there was ever that great an interest, certainly in what the North Vietnamese were saying or doing. Not that much in what the Viet Cong were doing.

The embassy spent a lot of its time worrying about what the South Vietnamese were doing, that was it.

Q: You were one of the younger officers and part of the political section which had these provincial reporters who were out all the time. I understand the system was set up because we really wanted to have something other than rely on our American military advisors to take a look.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: What were you getting during this 1967-70 period?

JOHNSON: Their reports were generally much more pessimistic than what the army was saying. They were always getting themselves in trouble with the military. They went around and chatted up people, Vietnamese and Americans all over. Then wrote these reports. Invariably when the report didn't reflect credit on the United States or didn't reinforce whatever the accepted view was, the military reaction was to try to find out who had squealed rather than check the validity of the report. So they were always having a kind of rocky time of it in provincial reporting. It was never easy.

I wasn't intimately involved. My roommate at least for a long time, David Brown, and later Lars Hydle as my roommate, were both in that kind of thing. But I could see these kind of tensions going on. Andy Antippas who, in the second part of my time in Saigon, was in the external section with me and did Cambodia, and of course, Cambodia hotted up. He did some reporting which the military didn't like. That got him in trouble. I was kind of a little tranquil little island because no one knew or cared that much about what was going on with the Viet Cong. There wasn't that much analysis for me to struggle against.

Q: You left there when in 1970?

JOHNSON: I guess it was June or July of 1970.

Q: So we left at almost exactly same time. I left the first of July. What was your impression of whither South Vietnam at the time you left that time?

JOHNSON: Well, I guess it just seemed me that it was interminable. I didn't see any end. I didn't see that we were any closer to the end. I guess I had been there so long and the situation had been so long that I just saw it as kind of part of life, as something that was going on. I didn't have any end scenario. We of course had these negotiations going on - but at that time - it is a little hard for me to remember when all these things happened - but at that time, we were really just the beginnings the negotiations in Paris.

We were essentially trying to win the war by attrition. There was all the "hearts and minds" kind of stuff. But the only way you could get the North Vietnamese to stop sending those folks down was to kill enough of them, and we didn't seem to be doing that. We were obviously killing a lot of them, but their willingness to persevere didn't seem to be that much eroded, or eroded at all. So therefore the war would continue.

The other way you might have won the war was to invade the North as we invaded North Korea. But there were lots of reasons why we didn't do that. It was never really contemplated as far as I know. So it just seemed that the war was going to go on. On the other hand, I don't think that I saw the South Vietnamese as being quite as fragile as they turned out to be in the long run. Of course, the situation was really quite different in 1975, but it was a little hard to see how the war was going to end.

Q: I'd like to end this session at this point. Where did you get assigned to in summer of 1970?

JOHNSON: I was assigned to the Vietnamese Working Group in Washington at the Department of State.

Q: Today is the 21st of January, 1997. Steve, you were with the Vietnamese Working Group from when to when?

JOHNSON: I guess its proper name was the Vietnam Working Group. I was the one who used "Vietnamese" in the first place. I was there from basically from the fall or late summer of 1970 until January of 1973, when I went back to Vietnam for six months. Then I rejoined it for a period.

Q: Well, we'll just pick up this 1970-73 period. Who was running this group when you arrived?

JOHNSON: You are really catching me out here. I guess it was Jim Engle who was in charge of the Vietnam Working Group at that time. Bill Sullivan was the Deputy Assistant Secretary with whom we dealt, and Roger Kirk was kind of his special assistant working on negotiations. Negotiations were, of course, going on in Paris at the time.

Q: Did you find a different atmosphere in the Washington group, although Roger Kirk had just been out there when you had been out there and others? Did you find a different attitude, outlook, than you had when you were at the embassy?

JOHNSON: Not particularly, no. Again, I had my own little bailiwick. I was the again, the Communist guy, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, and so I wasn't so much involved in our relations with South Vietnam and their various troubles and sins and difficulties. I was kind of off to the side in a sense. I was worrying about what the Vietnamese communists were doing.

Q: In the first place, I don't think I asked but while you were doing sort of North Vietnamese watching and Viet Cong watching-I guess in 1969, Ho Chi Minh died. Were you and others watching to see if this was going to make a difference?

JOHNSON: Well, lots of people were. There was lots of speculation. My view was that it wouldn't make much of a difference. Ho Chi Minh was kind of a generation ahead of the rest of the politburo in Hanoi and had handed on most of the daily responsibility to other people. Certainly the succession went smoothly and predictably. One of the things was that everybody said was, "Who is going to succeed Ho Chi Minh?" Well, nobody succeeded Ho Chi Minh. What he did was divide it up and there wasn't another Ho Chi Minh. But the other folks who were there had same idea of unifying Vietnam and bringing it under their communist party control.

Q: You were doing this at a very active time as far as negotiations were concerned. Since our people were sitting down looking across the table or tables or whatever you want to say but conducting negotiations with the North Vietnamese. I imagine there might have been quite a lively market in who are these people, what is making them tick at this particular point?

JOHNSON: There was. People were interested. We really had a lot of the information about the attitudes of individuals. You could get that kind of curriculum vitae kind of stuff about people without too much difficulty, but Le Duc Tho was the principal interlocutor in Paris from time to time. I am not to sure about all the timing of all of this. He of course wasn't there chief delegate. He went and kind of visited and dealt with people from time to time. But what was Le Duc Tho's particular attitude, and did that differ in any way from other people in the politburo? You really were talking about speculation there.

There was always a lot of argument and a kind of intense analysis about the hawks and doves in the Vietnamese communist hierarchy, I guess with some expectation that somehow or other they would mirror our own problems. All this was based, it always seemed to me, on very little evidence. We just didn't know that much. Obviously they must have. They did differ about tactics and things. They were obviously ambitious men, and some of them were no doubt willing to sink the knife bureaucratically into the back of others. But it was mostly speculation.

Q: Did you have any close relationship to the CIA analysis people and so on?

JOHNSON: I used to see them [perhaps] monthly. We had meetings over at the White House where Bill Stearman who had been in INR and was now in the Asia part of the National Security Council staff would convene these things. There would be people from the CIA, people that very frequently I knew from Saigon and from the military and various others. As I used to say, "pooling our ignorance" about these things.

Some of it had to do with how many soldiers were coming on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and what are they up to, and [some] had to do with, as I say, speculation about the political attitudes in Hanoi.

Q: Were we able to get a pretty good feel about the role of the Viet Cong vis a vis the North Vietnamese as time went on?

JOHNSON: We had as it turned out, quite an accurate picture of the apparatus, the Communist apparatus in the South, I'd guess you'd call it. We knew their political-military organization of the South, the various commands. For the most part we knew who the individuals were that were holding commands. There was always great speculation about the number 2 man at Central Office for South Vietnam who had a number of pseudonyms. Again, we had him right, too. Lyn Van Lin, who was normally called Muy Cuc in the papers, happily went to Ho Chi Minh's funeral, which was useful.

We knew that the national liberation front was just froth, that it didn't amount to anything. It had no operational significance. Various Vietnamese communist political-military organizations took their orders from Hanoi, some of them directly from Hanoi in the northern part of South Vietnam, and others through the Central Office for South Vietnam, which was always headed by a very senior party figure. One time, Le Duc Tho and later General Nguyen Chih Tho, who was killed, and then for the balance of the war, Pham Hung, who was a politburo member. We knew what it was, and we knew pretty much how it ran.

The Viet Cong or the Vietnamese communists had a different organization of the country. Their provinces didn't necessarily correspond to South Vietnamese provinces and sometimes had different names. So that was in my job, at least, or if you were in intelligence, you had to keep these two kind of political organizations in mind in their relationships to each other.

Another one that used to crop up every now and then as anomalous attacks was that the Viet Cong operated on Hanoi time, which was an hour ahead of Saigon time. Every now and then you would have an attack that wouldn't make sense unless you thought about the fact that if it took

place an hour later it would have made sense. Like the rocketing of the national day parade in downtown Saigon which took place an hour before anything was supposed to happen there.

Q: What was the progress during this 1970-73 period on the peace talks?

JOHNSON: Well, they were going on. We on the Working Group had a very hard time knowing what was going on. Mr. Kissinger was doing the most important negotiation, and he kept his cards close to his vest. In fact, sometimes it was only through intelligence that we learned what the United States was doing in the negotiations or had some hints at what we were doing. But they were progressing.

Of course, at the end of 1972, we actually arrived at an agreement which all four parties - the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong, Saigon, and the United States - signed on to.

Q: Was there concern within this working group about the U.S. Congress and all and sort of public opinion seeing that we were beginning to lose it here?

JOHNSON: Yes. People could perceive that. I forget the timing of it, but there was the great, great big demonstration in which anti-war folks tried to kind of shut down Washington. I think that must have been 1970. But there were other demonstrations. You could certainly, anybody in the United States could see that the tide of public opinion was going against continuing the war.

At the same time, of course, the United States under President Nixon's Vietnamization program was slowly withdrawing our combat units and other units from Vietnam. So our presence there was going down considerably.

Q: Were you getting at all from the American military with whom you were dealing about their feelings about how the war was conducted or had been conducted?

JOHNSON: Most of the people I dealt with were kind of intelligence people rather than operational people. Of course I knew officers who had actually been in the war, and most of them, a lot of them regretted and thought that they could have done better if they had been left to employ more means, that they had their arms tied behind them and they had other various complaints about the way the war was being fought. Certainly a lot of them thought the system of the one year tours and the lack of unit cohesion was detrimental to the army.

Q: Did you find within this working group that there were hawks and doves?

JOHNSON: I don't remember that being the case, no. We had a little bit of hawks and doves-at least one or two doves in Saigon at least. Of course, now it is a number of years away from that. I just can't remember whom I would really characterize in the Vietnam Working Group as a dove. There were certainly pessimists and optimists. I guess increasingly, pessimists by that time. I don't remember doves, no.

Q: Was there the CIA versus the INR viewpoint or was it a pretty of how we were looking at, particularly from your perspective of how we were looking at the Viet Cong and North Vietnam?

JOHNSON: I don't recall any really great conflicts there. The community of people that followed the Vietnamese communists was pretty small. Frank Snepp, who later on wrote a book about what happened to the CIA right at the fall of 1975, was one of the fellows from the CIA. And there were certainly arguments about various data. In my perception, there really wasn't a CIA view of what was going on and an INR view.

Q: Snepps' book is called "Indecent Interlude."

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: Were you getting any readings at all at the time of the negotiations, I may be wrong, but wasn't it Christmas of 1972 or so where there was the heavy bombing of Hanoi and we upped the pressure. How was that perceived when that happened as far as its effectiveness? And after it happened, what was the analysis?

JOHNSON: Well, I think it was seen as pretty effective. Since we weren't privy to exactly what was going on in the negotiations, it was a little hard to know. But obviously the negotiations did achieve an agreement very soon afterwards. A lot of people, the more hawkish ones, wondered why we hadn't done it before. During the war there was this [protest] against the bombing of North Vietnam. Certainly there was great questions about its effectiveness in actually influencing the war.

But the bombing of North Vietnam was, as the Air Force and Navy people who ran the missions would complain, was very circumspect. There were lots of things we never targeted, one of them being Hanoi, and some of the facilities around it. So to actually go after targets in that area seemed to have a salutary effect on the minds of the North Vietnamese.

I think it was also the same time that we also mined the harbor, as mining the harbors was kind of a more passive thing to do, which nevertheless would have given the North Vietnamese... You can find mines and pick them up.

Nevertheless, it did make for difficulties, but they finally did arrive at the agreement and I guess it must have been Christmas. At the same time, just a bit before, that there had been a large Vietnamese communist offensive which was fought off. By this time the United States forces had been drawn way down. But you could still bring the B-52s to bear which were always useful when there was a large concentration of folks on the other side making attacks.

There was some very, very heavy fighting at the time in which the South Vietnamese you know, generally, did pretty well.

Q: How did you hear about the terms of the peace accords? Did you hear it the same time everybody else did?

JOHNSON: I expect it is a little hard for me to remember, but yes, I think so. We sort of got copies of them very soon afterward, and we read them. One of the things that went on that we

haven't touched on during this whole time is the "Pentagon Papers" escapade.

Q: Ah, yes. Could you explain what that was?

JOHNSON: Well, the Pentagon Papers, I forget the timing of it. But Mr. McNamara while he was Secretary of Defense asked for a study of the whole range of Vietnam [issues], what were our decisions internally and also what were our diplomatic efforts. There had been all during the war kind of different initiatives, diplomatic initiatives, sometimes private ones to try to bring about peace talks. Those were written about.

In any case, this all ended up with I think was 40 some volumes of these things. Top Secret they were. This was before I arrived back in Washington, but in any case they apparently had been sent to the Department of State. You have been in the Department of State, forty-some volumes of Top Secret-no one ever looked at it. It was sent immediately to the bowels of some deep recess of the filing system of the Department. Everybody forgot about it. I had never known about it.

So when the New York Times started publishing it, this was a complete surprise not only to those of us on the desk but to those people on the "Seventh Floor" of the Department. Those that had ever heard of them had forgotten about them long before. Most of them never heard about it. So the first thing that happened was that, of course, people wanted to know what was coming. This was coming in kind of installments. The government made an effort to have a restraint on this. There was a case that went to the Supreme Court saying that you couldn't do this. I forget exactly the basis on doing it. Presumably, it was going to hurt national security, and it was Top Secret, and it was stolen and whatever other basis.

But no one knew what was in these books. No one who was then in the top or even the working levels of the Department of State. So there was a kind of a mobilization of a whole bunch of us who had served in Vietnam or worked on the working group. We were in one of the conference rooms of the Department, and they kind of distributed all these around. Everybody got a volume or two. The volumes were not uniform in size, and you had the job of kind of going through it as quickly as possible because the court cases were going on all the time and trying to discover what was in there. Bill Macomber was the deputy under secretary for management at the time, kind of the point man for the Department in the legal case.

Obviously these were subjective judgements about what was sensitive and what might hurt national security were it revealed today. Most of the stuff of the "Pentagon Papers" was not that exciting. It was historical. Some of it was already common knowledge. But there was this effort as we went through to try to pick out what could be used in this court case. I kind of went to the Department and didn't come home for a couple of days. You went all night and we tried to put together the papers to go to the court. Now all this [was] going on, on the fly. Everybody trying to discover what was in these things.

This was before the days of computers and the like, and so getting all this typed up in a form to go to the Supreme Court was difficult. You know, when you are working at say 3:30 in the morning and tired with secretaries, it was a real physical feat. Anyway we went through all that,

and then the government lost the case and the New York Times and the Washington Post and other newspapers and then books went forward with the text from the "Pentagon Papers."

Q: What was the feeling that you got from it? Was there much in there that was a problem?

JOHNSON: Not really. Obviously the public survived. I didn't think from my point of view there weren't any revelations. All of this was a while ago now, but basically there were things on the negotiations which I guess would have been embarrassing or might have been embarrassing for the particular people involved and for the governments that had acted as intermediaries but were saying something else publically when they were doing this privately. So there were these kinds of things. In the long run of diplomacy, if you are shown not to be able to keep confidences, it will hurt you in some other way. It doesn't hurt you directly so much.

But there weren't any real surprises. Some of this, of course, I was just one of just a bunch of people reading it on the fly. Some of the history was rather interesting you know. I didn't really know some of the things that had gone on in the 1950s in those days and exactly what we were doing, and the French were pulling out and all that kind of stuff. Some of it was mildly embarrassing, but of course the people that had done it were pretty much gone from government.

Q: The people in the Vietnam working group knew Vietnam. They had been there and most had lived it for the last half decade or more. When you saw the peace accords, what was the general feeling?

JOHNSON: Well, I think the general feeling was, I guess, contradictory. On the one hand, most of us couldn't believe that it would really work, but at the same time, we kind of hoped against hope that it would, that somehow or other that because we had this agreement that maybe just maybe in spite of the kind of logic of the situation maybe peace could actually ensue. But I think that when you got away from that kind of euphoria over getting the agreement, most of us were pessimistic that it really could last.

Q: Did you find that your superiors trying were to put the best face on things? Or was that sort of the marching orders?

JOHNSON: Well, it is hard to know. I guess they were trying to say that it would be carried out, and we were going to do our best to make it work. For me personally at the time, one of the things that happened in connection with the agreement was that there was a decision by the Department to send, well it started out with 100 officers but finally got down to 45 officers who had been to Vietnam before and had some experience there, to on a six-month TDY tour of Vietnam to strengthen the reporting and other aspects of the embassy and the consulates. I was one of them.

So at the time, in Vietnam, there were... Well, I am not to sure when they were all set up. They had a consulate at Nha Trang, a consulate at Hue, one in Bien Hoa in III CORPS, and Kontum in IV CORPS. A consulate was in each of the core areas, and so all of these officers were sent back, including me. I wasn't in Washington during that time whether a spin was being put on things. I was zooming out to South Vietnam again.

Q: You arrived there in 1973?

JOHNSON: I got there towards the end of January 1973 and was there until August.

Q: Where did you go?

JOHNSON: My first job was in the embassy. There was a little group of four of us - John Helble as the chief, Vern Penner, and myself - that was established to help set up the International Control Commission. I guess the ICSC, the International Commission of Security and Control, I guess it was, which was a four nation organization of Canada, Indonesia, Hungary, and Poland which was established under the agreement to monitor compliance with the agreement.

Our job was to help these people. They came in, they were for the most part, military organizations but with diplomats as well, and they divided the country up into seven areas. They had people in the headquarters and, I guess, in the provinces. There were lots of practical problems with getting these people set up. The way they did it was Helble spoke Indonesian. Shepard spoke Hungarian. Penner spoke Polish, and as I say, I spoke "Canadian."

The Canadians were the easiest because, practically speaking, they... The American army was doing its final pullout. The American military left except for a military attaché of a sort of military assistance group, in March of 1973. They were turning over equipment to this organization. The Canadian sergeants got together with the American sergeants and somehow the typewriters and jeeps and air conditioners that worked ended up largely in Canadian hands. The Poles and Indonesians and others-the Hungarians kind of wondered why theirs didn't work so well. They really didn't understand the schmoozing aspect of it all. So the other guys had a harder job because they had to try to make sure or try to see that justice was done towards this or these other folks.

Q: One has to know that the sergeants run the army in any country and the Canadians and the American sergeants knew how to put this thing together.

JOHNSON: They did. I got around the country that time much more than I did my previous three years because my duties required me to visit a lot of these places. The Canadians had grown old and cynical in the previous ICC, which continued to exist in Laos and I don't know about North Vietnam or Cambodia. I guess it had disappeared in Cambodia, but did exist in Laos. Anyway, they had a bunch of veterans from the ICC in their organization. So they made a real college try to make this thing work and actually investigate cease fire violations and other violations of the accord.

But it was soon brought to a halt by the Hungarians and the Poles and ended up being rather so inert that the Canadians withdrew after awhile. Their places were taken by the Iranians. Much to Marshall Green's pleasure because then he was able to say that they were "Kurds in Hue." But any case that was very interesting-that three months that I worked on that.

One of the other things that was going on at the time once this control commission had kind of settled down there wasn't a need for a group of four of us to work on it anymore. Particularly

since the Canadians could take care of themselves, I was transferred to the consulate general, I guess it was in Nha Trang, and my basic job there was to be the head of the political section.

Jim Engle was the consul general, but he had gone back to Washington in anticipation of going to Phnom Penh as chargé d'affaires, so Dick Teare effectively ran the consulate. We had in each of the 12 provinces of Two CORPS a reporting officer, and every one of these reporting officers spoke Vietnamese and had spent two, three, four years or even more in Vietnam before. They were people that had gone back as I had.

There were similar establishments in the other three consulates, and all of these officers had been guaranteed for the Department before they went out that their reporting would not be messed with in any way by the consulates or embassy. In other words, whatever they wanted to send in would go in without any expurgations or other [changes]. We would correct their spelling, but that was it. So there was an incredible amount of reporting that was done by really experienced officers. I don't know who was reading all this back in Washington, but it mostly went in the form of Airgrams.

But each one of these little provinces had a full-time political reporter that was basically able to send in what ever he wanted. The consulate in Nha Trang put out an incredible amount of reporting, and we really did have a pretty good picture of what was going on in the country. What was going on was an erosion of the cease fire, a kind of pushing forward by the communists, and a little bit of pushing forward by the Saigon government as well.

Of course, there was the usual reporting on the fecklessness of the civil administration of South Vietnam. There were other problems and the corruption and the like, but the most important part was that the communists were obviously using the cease fire to kind of prepare the way to continue their effort to take over South Vietnam.

Q: When you left, were you talking to Vietnamese officials as you went around?

JOHNSON: I didn't do much of that myself. My job was basically kind of an editorial one; as I mentioned earlier, I didn't speak Vietnamese. We had all these veteran officers who were doing the reporting, and my job was to funnel all these handwritten things that would come in and turn them into reports - and kind of shape them up and get them approved. As I say, you could only clean up the prose a little bit. There wasn't any real editing by the consulate. Some contact with local officials in Nha Trang, but not too much of that, since Dick Teare was doing that.

At the same time, we also were assisting [in] searching out crash sites trying to make determinations as to "missing in actions" and the like. I went on a few of those expeditions.

Q: When you left there what did you come back with I mean as far as from what you'd absorbed on this?

JOHNSON: Well, I guess that I came back with the judgement that the kind of reconciliation and peaceful evolution, if not envisaged in the peace agreement was at least hoped for in the peace agreement, was not going to happen - that most likely the war would continue. During the time I

was there, the war continued at a rather low level. There really wasn't much going on in the way of military activity. There was some. There was building of roads and other kinds of things but not the large armed clashes that took place later.

HUGH G. APPLING
Provincial Advisor
Tay Ninh Province (1967-1968)

Deputy Chief of Mission
Saigon (1973-1974)

Hugh G. Appling was born in California in 1921. He entered the Foreign Service in 1947, initially serving in Austria, the United Kingdom, and Germany. After assignments in the Washington, DC, he was deputy chief of mission in Damascus and Manila before being assigned to Vietnam in 1968-1969 as senior province advisor to Tay Ninh. He received an award for heroism. He later returned to Vietnam (1973-1974) as deputy chief of mission. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

APPLING: They needed people and it was difficult to get senior officers to go. There was a time when the Far Eastern Bureau was able to commandeer officers and I was ordered to go. One day I was going as DCM to New Zealand, and the next day that was canceled and I was going to Vietnam.

Q: *What was your job.*

APPLING: I'm glad you asked that question. Those jobs were very little understood and most unusual. We were sort of petty viceroys, pro-consuls of a province, advisors, with a great deal of weight, to the province chief who had command of the local militia and authority over all of the civil side of the government, over the refugees, hospitals, agriculture, education, transportation and other economic areas. I had a diverse and numerous staff and we had authority and responsibility in our little world but our purpose was to strengthen the Vietnamese Community.

Tay Ninh is about 35 miles northeast of Saigon on the Cambodian border. The Cao Dai religion is predominant there and its cathedral is in that province. They had a social and political structure parallel to the government. I became a very good friend with their religious hierarchy. They had a tight community and took good care of their people. Their roots reached far back into nationalist opposition to French rule.

Q: *Most Americans don't have any background for this. How did you go about it?*

APPLING: With great difficulty. I believed that the Vietnamese understood the situation better than I or better than my staff. My first effort was to hear from them. To get as far down into the society as I could, to see what this guerrilla warfare was all about. The community seemed to be

fine during the day and then at night there would be Viet Cong in the streets and propaganda lessons, troops terrorizing the farmers for food to feed their guerrilla. We had the border zones, where the Viet Cong took troops through, constant military movement.

Q: How did you find the local government?

APPLING: There were two province chiefs while I was there, one was a scholarly type, timid perhaps, not wanting to be blamed for anything. He was carried by his subordinates. He went back to Saigon pretty quickly.

The second, became a good friend and I respected him as governor and military commander. He had been raised in a tradition of nationalism and wanted very much to establish a stable society and effective government. He was a military man respected by the regular army and the U.S. advisors.

Q: Would you say something about the corruption. In some Asian societies it seems the only way things got done.

APPLING: The northern part of Tay Ninh province has extensive tropical forests, very valuable wood. The people were allowed to harvest it if they had a permit. I'm sure no one ever got a permit without kicking back some of the returns. The province chief never would say anything about it but I understood that officials in Saigon had a list of who cut timber and what happened to the wood taken out. I doubt if any business was operated without somebody getting some money for it.

The Vietnamese army would sometimes come in when the Viet Cong were especially aggressive and the command would set up at the province chief's home and the surrounding houses. They had no good lines of supply and someone had to feed them. The province chief had no choice but to get the food from the farmers. He acquired land himself, I assume at a low price, by putting the squeeze on someone. Public positions were not obtained without influence. Even so, there was much progress toward civil order and local government truly serving its people.

Q: The government of Thieu was exerting its authority through the province chief. But you thought things were working out.

APPLING: We had a good beginning. Using almost exclusively local militia, Tay Ninh produced a degree of stability, opened up a very large area for agriculture with new rice and new technology. We began to have local elections. People were willing though frightened to enter into local government positions. I was troubled that the people felt as little identity with the national government. There was little popular responsiveness to them. Little people felt that the Saigon government were just soldiers making the best of an opportunity for power and wealth. I had hoped that given time, local democracy would grow up, and with education and experience there would be greater confidence in the national government. But it was weak while I was there.

Q: What was the shock of the Tet Offensive.

APPLING: I came to Vietnam well after the Tet offensive. I think it had more repercussions outside Vietnam, than inside. It was not a military success for the Viet Cong and I didn't see any shock waves in Tay Ninh but I did not grasp adequately its effect abroad.

Q: *How was the communication with the embassy?*

APPLING: I was in the CORDS line of authority and the embassy was a fairly distant thing to us. Political officers would come out from time to time but we did not work very effectively together. The Ambassador gave me generous personal attention and I thought we were well supported in our unusual role.

Q: *Was there any attempts to make things out to be better than they were?*

APPLING: Not in the 1968-69 tour.

[Service in Australia 1970-73]

Q: *You went back to Vietnam as DCM from 1973-74. Why did you go back.*

APPLING: Previously, for personal reasons, I had turned down a request that I go somewhere, and I found that so contrary to my view of professional discipline that when the telegram came, I just went.

Q: *Who was ambassador.*

APPLING: Ellsworth Bunker was about to leave and Graham Martin had not yet arrived.

Q: *Did you know Martin before?*

APPLING: I believe we were in Paris together and he was then administrative officer. I knew him but not well. I saw him from time to time at the Department when I was there.

Q: *Did he ask for you?*

APPLING: Well, he would have had his choice of DCM, certainly I guess he didn't object.

Q: *What was the situation in Vietnam when you arrived?*

APPLING: We were just winding up the agreement on our withdrawal.

Charlie Whitehouse was chargé. In the first days there was a series of messages to iron out the last, most difficult passages with them, a lot of rushing out to the palace at midnight and crash messages back to Washington.

The agreements were then final and I was chargé for several weeks until Graham came out.

Q: *What was the attitude about these Kissinger agreements, ours and the Vietnamese.*

APPLING: The Vietnamese found them very dangerous. They repeatedly said they would have to rely on our support, not our military aid, but our support.

The embassy found the agreements acceptable. There was concern because there were lots of weak points. We hoped it would work.

Q: *Were they a way of saving face?*

APPLING: We felt that it was the best that we could do.

Q: *Graham Martin is a very controversial figure. Can you describe his arrival on the scene.*

APPLING: Ambassador Martin's relationship with me could not have been more kindly and gracious. He arrived at the airport and I met him and went to the office. There he spoke of his reputation of a hard man and denied it. He sought my opinions and I understood from him that the decisive things in Vietnam were not there but in Washington.

The next day he called me in and we talked at length again. I knew he was due at the Foreign Ministry and I led him downstairs. There was no driver ready for us, which I thought was strange but supposed it was just a mistake. We got to the Foreign Ministry and no one was at the entrance to receive him. I ran in to talk to the chief of protocol and discovered that I had the schedule wrong. The appointment was for an hour later and I had mixed it up nervously trying to please the new Ambassador. What a blunder, but the Ambassador treated it lightly.

Q: *How did he operate within the embassy.*

APPLING: Very quietly. He wanted to listen more than to speak. He was disappointed that I didn't have a firm enough hand on what was going on but then our embassy was so compartmentalized that it was not easy to manage.

Q: *I agree, byzantine is the word I use. Various powers involved, CIA, AID etc, and the military.*

APPLING: And the DCM wasn't able to tell them what to do. You asked earlier about twisted reporting. I don't think the Ambassador ever allowed that to occur, but there were lots of fragmentary reports coming in and he was reluctant to pass on an incomplete picture because of the political situation in the U.S. Where everything leaked and could be abused. He didn't want one report to be misconstrued as the entire picture, good or bad. Younger officers chafed at this because they worked hard and reported accurately the fragments of the picture.

There was an endless train of visitors. I remember his meeting with Bella Abzug.

Q: *She was from New York and very vocal about her opposition to the war.*

APPLING: His conversation with her was amiable and penetrating. Both took very opposite positions but the Ambassador was charming, full of information and not provocative. I had expected fireworks but found a mutually respectful and friendly conversation.

Q: How did he deal with the Vietnamese government?

APPLING: A tinge of MacArthur. A little bit of the imperial. Listening to them and responding to their concerns. The conversations were like "You need to do this or you will lose support." And he was able to make our concerns understood.

I can only really recall three or four conversations with Thieu and the foreign minister. With the latter the subject was usually international support for their position, how they might usefully engage with others. I have very few recollections of Ambassador Martin meeting with other ambassadors. He had great respect for the French ambassador who was our neighbor.

We were both gone a lot. He was back in Washington twice for extended periods. I was in the hospital for a couple of weeks and then went to Australia for Christmas and left the following April.

Q: How did you deal with the middle grade and more seniors officers? There is the story that Ambassador Martin was completely out of touch and so on during the last days of our embassy there. What was the problem?

APPLING: I think in any large embassy the ambassador is rather distant from the junior staff. He necessarily deals with the chiefs, but he talked and walked around a lot. He might have been a little suspicious of the station chief, because he thought he might know things he was not revealing.

I guess because of my Tay Ninh experience, I seized opportunities to visit the consulates.

Q: After the peace accords, we had this system of consulate generals established around. How did they work out?

APPLING: They worked fine. The Consuls General were in and out of Saigon frequently, and were well informed about their areas. We didn't really funnel information to them about what was going on at home.

Q: Did you feel something less than a steady hand back in Washington because of the Watergate crisis?

APPLING: I was much less sensitive to it than I should have been. I think Graham had it constantly in his mind. He worried all the time about who had things in hand when response was needed. I was not good in that role.

Q: It took more than a year for this to play out and it was impossible to predict the downfall of

the Nixon Administration because nothing like this had ever happened.

APPLING: I don't think I really estimated correctly the ineffectiveness of the governments of the U.S. and of Vietnam. We would bring up problems but neither could do much about them.

Q: *When did you leave Vietnam?*

APPLING: March of 1974.

Q: *How did you feel about the situation in South Vietnam at the time?*

APPLING: Uneasy. My gut feeling was that it was not working well and yet I cared about the country and was proud about how much good work had been done. I kept a measure of confidence that they could make a go of it. I saw defeatism, especially amongst my friends in the media. I don't think I made any sweeping judgements because I didn't feel I had a total grasp of the situation.

JOSEPH C. WALSH
Executive Officer, JUSPAO
City Unspecified, Vietnam (1967-1969)

Joseph C. Walsh graduated from college in 1933. He decided to pursue a career in Social Work, so he obtained his M.A. from the Fordham School of Social Service. In 1941, he was sworn in as an FBI Special Agent. One of his former FBI colleagues, Charles Noone asked him to come work for him at the U.S. Information Agency. He accepted the offer, which began his 20-year association with USIA. He has also served in Mexico. He was interviewed by Lew Schmidt on April 25, 1989.

Q: *What years were you in Vietnam?*

WALSH: I got there in August of '67. The infamous Tet Offensive happened a few months later, in the early days of 1968. And, perhaps of greater destruction, our JUSPAO headquarters were burned out the following August. Some correspondents, of which the town was full, pursued a concept that JUSPAO had been wrecked by enemy action. Such was not the case. The destructive fire was caused by badly installed electric circuitry along the ceilings of the ground floor.

Our office space was under a Vietnamese lease; the landlord initiated legal action insisting that the fire was caused by defective and unauthorized electric circuitry throughout the ground floor of that building and demanded all damages be repaired by JUSPAO. In Saigon those days, under contract with the U.S. Armed Forces, there were several very big U.S.-based construction companies. I sought their help but the costs they cited were way out of reach. Thus, I had to deal with local Vietnamese contractors whose work was agonizingly slow and badly done.

Meanwhile, especially with the greatly-appreciated "loan" of office furnishings from AID's Saigon/Supply Depot, we succeeded in locating and furnishing office space, albeit in several locations, with headquarters in the old bombed-out former U.S. embassy down by the river.

ROGER KIRK
Political Officer
Saigon (1967-1969)

Vietnamese Affairs
Washington, DC (1970-1971)

Ambassador Roger Kirk was born in Rhode Island in 1930. He entered the Foreign Service in 1955 and served in Italy, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Somalia as ambassador, Austria with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and Romania as ambassador. He was interviewed in 1991 by Horace Torbert.

KIRK: I was minding my own business in the political section [Moscow] , and one fine morning a telegram came in saying I had been assigned to Saigon. This without any advance word whatsoever. And I would very much have preferred not to do that since I had four small children, and was still fond of my wife. I thought they could find enough people for whom neither was true to send to Saigon. But I had really no alternative but to accept on the grounds that if you're in the Foreign Service, unless you have a really good reason, you have to go where they send you. This was in early November-late October, and I managed to get them to agree I would leave after Christmas, so I moved to Saigon the 27th of December of 1967.

Q: Then, as usual, I suppose they said, "What? You here already."

KIRK: Well, no, actually they did seem to need me at that point. There was a small unit within the political section that was responsible for North Vietnam watching, and I was heading that unit. The reason, I guess, I was sent there really was because of my experience in the communist world. One of my first impressions in Saigon was at a New Year's eve party that I went to -- this is New Year's eve of 1968 -- where I would say almost all of the top people of the embassy, and even from the provinces, were present. It was a very good party but I'd just been three days ago in New Delhi, as I mentioned, and I was really stuck by the fact that these people were going to remake Vietnam. They were going to get rid of all the corruption, they were going to win the war, we were going to make a democracy out of it with a House of Representatives, a Senate, a Supreme Court. The whole thing was going to be very neat and tidy.

Q: All was going to be democratic, I suppose.

KIRK: Exactly, and it was all very high and noble ideals, but as I mentioned, India is sort of the grave yard of men's hopes and you learn a good deal of humility in India, even as an American, about your ability to change things. I must say at that point, I had considerable doubt that we could accomplish all that, praiseworthy as it was. Of course at the time Tet a month or two later,

it became apparent that we could not. The Tet experience was interesting for me because we had a...

In those days spouses and families -- then usually referred to as wives and families -- were not allowed to be with you in Saigon, but for American holidays the spouses, not the children, were allowed to come in. The Vietnamese proposed that this should be done for Vietnamese holidays. Well, therefore, some spouses were allowed to come in for Tet, including my wife who came over from Delhi leaving our four children with their grandparents. In any case, there was a good deal of rumbling during the night, but the Vietnamese celebrate such holidays by massive explosions of firecrackers, and I told my wife that was all it was. Well, we woke up the next morning to no phone calls, no phone working, and the radio saying that Saigon was under attack. I said I obviously had to go up to the embassy so I set off in my grey pinstriped suit walking up through the center of the city, up towards the embassy. No one was on the streets, of course, and a few blocks from the embassy I saw an American tank with a bunch of soldiers around, and a major came over to me and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm going to my office at the embassy." And he said, "There are Viet Cong all over that place, go back." So I did, and returned to the embassy later that day when it became apparent that the Viet Cong had in fact been cleared out.

In Saigon, certainly, we had the impression, and in the country we had the impression that Tet was a military defeat for the Vietnamese in the sense they committed their undercover South Vietnamese National Liberation Front forces, and did not achieve a major victory, or anything like the victory they'd hoped to achieve. On the other hand it was quite clear that Tet was a tremendous victory for them in the United States, where the decisive theater of the war was as it turned out.

After Tet and the move towards the Paris peace talks, my unit of the political section was charged with backing up the Saigon side of the peace talks. What that consisted of essentially was doing the staff work for a series of meetings between Ambassador Bunker, his deputy Ambassador Berger, the political counselor, first Arch Calhoun and then Martin Herz, and President Thieu, Vice President Ky, the Foreign Minister, and a note taker on the Vietnamese side. So the four of us -- I was the note taker on the American side -- would go to these meetings once or twice a week with those four individuals to whom we were presenting the kinds of concessions that we thought the Vietnamese should at least consider to get the peace talks moving. This, of course, is a very early stage in the peace talks. The concessions were nothing like as great as the ones that eventually had to be made. But Thieu, whatever else you could say about him, was a master of diplomatic negotiation and technique, and he gave virtually nothing away. He listened with great politeness to everything Ambassador Bunker had to say, but committed himself to virtually no concessions whatsoever.

One of the interesting things to me, during this several months really of meetings, was to see how Thieu downgraded Ky's status during the process of the negotiation. At the first meetings Ky would be in Thieu's office when we came into the waiting room. When we would be ushered in to join, they were obviously talking together. A little bit later, we could see through some translucent curtains the figure of Ky going into Thieu's office just a moment before we did. Still later Ky was in the waiting room with us. Of course, in the oriental world this was a dramatic

symbol of his decreasing status in terms of the power situation in Saigon. And, of course, Thieu and Ky were very different people. Ky was a very flamboyant fighter pilot type; Thieu was much more quiet, oriental appearing, much less accessible to Americans, and much more clever at bureaucratic maneuvering.

In any case, these talks went on for some time, and we then began to get into the layers upon layers of classification, or sensitivity we had. The messages on these talks had one special classification. Then it developed there was a second series of messages that were coming in with another level of classification on the same subject. And this, as Vietnam went on, was just added to more and more. So you had circles within circles within circles that were only dimly apparent to us working in one of the circles at the time.

I guess what really struck me about the embassy operation there was that we had almost no contact with the Vietnamese. My feeling was that we knew little about what was going on, really, in Vietnam. We had this contact with Thieu and Ky, that was special, but with the people we had very little really and it was difficult to move around the countryside in many cases. It seemed to me we knew less about the Vietnamese than we had about the Indians, and knew less about the Indians than we had about the Soviets. We knew less about the Soviets than we had about Italians. As you move east somehow it becomes more and more difficult. Well, the cultural gap is greater and perhaps not unnatural.

Another thing of interest to me in that Vietnamese experience was that almost everyone had a program of action that they were following: be it pacification, military victory, economics. The tendency was very much to report successes for the program for which you were responsible. I think that was one of the reasons that the reporting got badly skewed, and it did get badly skewed, I believe, even though most people are certainly honest. There was one small unit in the political section called the provincial reporting unit which had two officers for each of the four corps areas of South Vietnam. These young men would go out, observe, and then write reports. And they had no responsibility for any program. Their reports were much more pessimistic than those of the military and the civilian -- civilians who were program administrators.

Q: Do you remember who ran that section when you were there?

KIRK: I just honestly don't. There are people who are now quite prominent in the Service who were some of these reporting officers. Dave Lambertson was one. These were all very junior officers and partly for that reason some of their reports were discounted. Partly they showed the indignation and surprise at corruption that you might expect from a junior American officer. That tended to leave people to give less weight to their reports than they might otherwise have done. It was sort of as if they were discovering the real world, that they were a little bit too idealistic. But I must say, I thought as a whole they gave a better picture of what was going on than almost anyone else. They were inconvenient, these reports, because they did vary with what was going out. That part of the political section was abolished shortly after I left, not because I left, but shortly after I left which I always thought was too bad.

I guess that's really all I need say about Saigon except that there were an awful lot of good people there.

Q: Well, they certainly had their pick of people almost, such as you.

KIRK: There was no question, you got the word and off you went.

Q: Was Bunker there most of the time? Or was he away a good deal?

KIRK: Bunker was there most of the time. He occasionally went to Nepal to visit Carol Laise, his wife. He was there almost all the time, and he, as you know, was an immensely conscientious person, always available, long hours, a wonderful person to work for, of course.

Q: I remember the Italian Foreign Office thought he was the best guy that had ever been in Italy up until the time I left anyway.

KIRK: I first met him really when I was in New Delhi in connection with the advance trip for Eisenhower's visit that I mentioned earlier on the preceding tape. I was really struck that Bunker welcomed us into his office, the eight, or ten, or twelve top people, if you will, on the advance party, along with his embassy people. He took off his coat and said, "Let's go to work," and proceeded to give the kind of personal direct attention to the Presidential visit that it required, which not all ambassadors did. And Bunker already by that time was a very distinguished ambassador. In Saigon he was always kind and thoughtful and wise.

I think it was hard for the American establishment at the embassy, and indeed later in Washington -- or at the same time in Washington -- to accept how tough the North Vietnamese were, and how determined they were. Again, our reporting of that subject was not terribly much welcomed in Washington.

After Vietnam I came back to Washington to work in Bill Sullivan's office -- right outside his door -- as a kind of special assistant, albeit not with that title. Bill was the Deputy Assistant Secretary in what was then known as FE, Far East, now EAP, for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. And I spent a couple of years, as I say, with him. Bill at that point reported in the capacity of Deputy Assistant Secretary to Secretary Rogers, and he reported as deputy head of an NSC committee on Vietnam to Henry Kissinger. And as a mark of his diplomatic skill he managed to do both without offending either. We would have meetings twice a week of people from the Pentagon, from AID, from CIA, from the White House, and from State, to coordinate the sort of senior working level activities on Vietnam. Not that we were making the policies certainly, much less myself who was sitting there as kind of factotum and note taker, and facilitator. Not that policy was being made there, but to be sure that the implementation of the policy was coordinated and was moving ahead smoothly. I knew that work quite well.

It was interesting to me to see the interplay of...

Q: This was called the Vietnam Working Group, was it?

KIRK: The Vietnam Working Group was actually the Vietnam desk. This was called something else, Vietnam Task Force, or something like that. The director of the Vietnam Working Group

was a member of this ad hoc body that coordinated things. He represented the State Department, if you will. He, unlike Bill Sullivan, did not have a NSC hat, which Bill did. For example, if a paper were wanted on various withdrawal scenarios, we would produce that as part of this group. If we had to coordinate messages of various kinds going out to Paris, or going out to Saigon, of an inter-departmental nature that didn't have to be done at the Secretary level, then we would do that. Of course the interesting thing in those meetings was the interplay between what was happening in Vietnam, what was happening in Paris, and what was happening in the United States. Different people reporting on different aspects of this and trying to keep all this in mind -- at this point it was essentially managing the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam. Nixon was already President, and it was clear that withdrawal was the name of the game. It was a question of how fast, under what circumstances, and what kinds of negotiating techniques. The negotiations, of course, the real ones, were being handled by Kissinger in the White House but John Holbrooke, his assistant for those things, used to come over. Although he did not share with us what was going on, he knew what was going on.

As I mentioned, if we were asked to do papers for the NSC, then we would coordinate the production of those. And here again in this circles within circles I remember coordinating two papers simultaneously. One paper was close to the real paper. I was involved in that. That was a small group. Then there was a larger group that was doing another paper that was not witting of much of the material that went into the first paper. And I'm sure that there was a third paper of a yet higher level that was where it really mattered. I think to some extent that was Dr. Kissinger simply keeping everybody writing papers and not getting in his way. Though to his credit I think that he absorbed more of the detailed studies than most NSC members, or Secretaries of State.

Q: He was a fantastic character, there's no question about that.

KIRK: He is a fantastic character.

Q: It is not right to speak of him in the past tense, because he's very much around.

KIRK: I must say again, as a member and sometimes chairman of those inter-departmental meetings, it was extraordinary the difference in the power of the State Department representative after Henry Kissinger moved over to the State Department then before he was there. All of a sudden the people around the table were much more deferential because at that point Kissinger also retained the title of National Security Adviser. So as a State Department representative you could say, "I will appeal it to the National Security Adviser," who also happened to be your boss. This is particularly important in dealing with the Pentagon because they were often quite difficult on some of these things. I remember being taken over there for a very long briefing about how it was absolutely physically impossible to move our men out in more than a year and a half, or something like that, even if the President ordered it immediately, something that I expressly did not believe.

Q: They hadn't heard about operation Desert Storm yet.

KIRK: That's right. Moving troops and equipment out in an orderly way is difficult. Moving them out as fast as possible is much less efficient. But there another thing that was of interest to

me was that an analyst -- who for these purposes had best remain nameless, I suppose -- in INR, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, who was writing what I thought was some pretty good stuff on the North Vietnamese, particularly how tough they were and how they weren't about to give up. He was not able to get his material out through his front office, or even through his directorate in INR because it was going contrary to regular wisdom. He used to give me copies of his drafts, and I would give them to the NSC staff. That was the only way that we got this material to at least the NSC staff. I doubt very much if they showed them to President Johnson but at least they knew what a responsible analyst thought. And he was then fired from INR. We managed to get him a job as it so happened on the NSC staff. But the willingness of people to accept information contrary to their preconceptions is very limited.

Q: Well, you must have found out about this later on when you had that INR desk.

KIRK: Yes, yes indeed.

Q: Now you finally got a little...

KIRK: A delightful year at the Senior Seminar.

Q: By this time you'd been quite a bit on...

KIRK: I'd been on Vietnam from December of '67 until July- August of '71, which was plenty.

**JOHN SYLVESTER, JR.
White House Staff
Washington, DC (1967-1968)**

**Political Advisor, Vietnamese Affairs
Chau-doc, Mekong Delta (1968)**

Binh-long (1969)

**Political Officer
Saigon (1970-1972)**

John Sylvester, Jr. graduated from Williams college in 1952. From there, he joined the Army, and fought in the Korean war. After joining the Foreign Service in 1955, he served in Japan and Vietnam. Mr. Sylvester was interviewed by Jeff Broadwater in 1993.

Q: I want to ask you some questions about Vietnam, but before we get to Vietnam, I know you spent at least one year in the White House, on the White House staff, in 1967, I think?

SYLVESTER: Yes.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about that, what your duties were and how you came to join the White House staff?

SYLVESTER: Well, I was taken over essentially as a flunky. The White House, under President Johnson, tried to make a point of being a very lean operation, a parsimonious operation. So they covered all their expenses by borrowing everything from other government departments; they'd levy a photocopier from the Pentagon or a junior officer from State. And I was brought over to help in the office of the special assistant for the Vietnam civil policy, the pacification program. It was run by a very capable, rather acerbic ex-CIA officer named Robert Komer, and he had as a deputy Ambassador William Leonhart, a very bright senior Foreign Service officer. And I just worked for Leonhart, basically shuffling his papers.

But it was interesting to watch, because what Komer and Leonhart were trying to do was make a sensible, concerted effort on the civil side in Vietnam. In Vietnam, until that period, we had both military and civilian advisors in the countryside. And all the agencies were represented, not only Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines, and so forth, but the U.S. Information Agency, or agricultural advisors under AID. It was clearly necessary to get everybody to work together, which they weren't doing very well up to that period. Komer was brought in to spearhead this, and he, working with the embassy in Saigon and the MACV authorities, finally combined the whole effort in the countryside of Vietnam as a joint effort.

For instance, the advisors, working with a Vietnamese province chief, who up to then would go in individually to present their problems or what they wanted to push on..., all worked, after that, for one person, the province senior advisor. The military advisors and the civilian advisors were wedded together. In one province, you'd have an Army lieutenant colonel be the senior advisor, and he'd have a civilian deputy, an AID guy or a Foreign Service officer on loan. In the next province, it would be the other way around; the civilian might be the senior guy.

Komer was pushing this all from the Washington end, trying to get it all to gel. And there were many, many problems, like getting supplies through the congested port of Saigon, trying to get the Vietnamese corps commanders to focus on the civilian side as well as their straight military duties.

And it was well done. Komer pushed very hard. He was an abrasive but effective man. He later went out to work as a deputy for the commander of MACV in Saigon, quite successfully.

Q: What was MACV?

SYLVESTER: The Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. And that took in, in the end, all American military activities, plus the pacification program, in Vietnam.

Q: Did you think the White House was putting enough emphasis on pacification while you were there?

SYLVESTER: Yes, well that came straight down from the president.

The only time I ever personally met a president was when Komer took us over one day, his, I think, seven or eight officers, to meet President Johnson in the Fish Room, his conference room in the White House. Johnson lived up to every story I'd ever heard about him: he was press-the-flesh; he was dominating; he was funny; he was acerbic. But he was also very interested in the particulars of the civil programs. For instance, What was the price of pork in Saigon?, an indicator of how the civilian economy was going. And he questioned Komer, I thought, intelligently and well about the issues.

There was one funny thing. Johnson hated to have his staff take vacations, but somehow Komer had persuaded Johnson to let him take a week of leave, going over to France with his family. And Johnson, in this meeting that we were in, kidded, or actually rode, Komer pretty heavily about goofing off for a week. Finally, he turned to the rest of us and said, "Now I hope you all will go home tonight, take a good long vacation, and then come back refreshed tomorrow morning."

But it was very interesting, and Komer was clearly following what the president wanted as he did this.

Q: Did your experience in Japan influence your thinking about the Vietnam War? My impression is that the Japanese generally weren't very supportive of American involvement. What did you think about that?

SYLVESTER: It probably influenced me some, but I think I was probably more influenced by my honors thesis in college on the Spanish Civil War, because there were many parallels between the war in Vietnam and the war in Spain, 1936-39. They were both cockpits for the great power conflicts of their era, yet they were also brutal civil wars. I felt strongly about the values of the war in Spain, generally favoring the republican side. And I thought one of the great lapses that led to World War II was the failure of the democracies to assist the side in Spain that to the largest extent shared their values. And I felt, in Vietnam, that we had a duty to try to help people who shared our values, to the extent that you have them in a developing country like that. And I felt the Republic of Vietnam, despite its many faults, was a semi-democracy and that we had a duty to help them.

FRANCIS TERRY MCNAMARA
Chief, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Vinh Long (1967-1968)

Deputy Senior Advisor
Quang Tri (1968-1969)

Consul General
Da Nang (1969-1971)

**Consul General
Can Tho (1974-1975)**

**Refugee Work
Guam and the U.S. (1975)**

Ambassador Francis Terry McNamara was born in Troy, New York in November, 1927 and served in the Navy during both World War II and Korea. McNamara graduated from McGill University in Montreal and then entered the Foreign Service in September 1956. His overseas posts included Salisbury, Vietnam, Dahomey (Benin), Beirut, and Cape Verde. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

MCNAMARA: At the time, my former ambassador in Dar es Salaam, Bill Leonhart, was in the White House, working on Vietnam. I told him that I'd really like to go to Vietnam. In part it had to do with getting away from South Africa, but in part also it was something that was going on, it was something happening, it was the great historic event of our time. I wanted to be part of it -- to see it up close.

Q: *Yes, this was what was known as seeing the elephant. I did the same thing.*

MCNAMARA: This was the historic event of the time, and I didn't want to be sitting in a backwater, watching it from a great distance. And at that point, Africa was fast becoming a backwater. Leonhart said, "Right, I'll fix it. We need activists in Vietnam." It was a Friday that I talked to him. On Monday morning, he said, "Report to the Vietnam Training Center at FSI." He made the necessary call to Personnel. When they heard that the White House was asking for me, my assignment was changed and I was on my way to Vietnam.

That is how it happened. I went to the Vietnam Training Center for six weeks and departed for Vietnam late in 1967.

During the training course, we went to play war games in Cacapon, West Virginia, in a State park. There was snow on the ground; it couldn't have been further from what we would encounter in Vietnam. Our instructors included a former missionary who'd been in China and Indochina in the old days. We were given a scenario for a war game. I conspired with some of my pals to subvert the thing by acting as though I were on one side, while in fact supporting the other. This screwed up the planned solution. After the war game was over, the born-again Christian gentleman accused me of lacking moral fiber. I had been "duplicitous," he indignantly accused. When I asked whether the Viet Cong might also be duplicitous who might not always tell the truth, the man of God turned his back on me. My point seemed to be beyond his understanding. Sadly, these were the kind of people that were preparing us to go to Vietnam.

Q: *That was obviously part of the problem.*

MCNAMARA: Anyway, I spent Christmas in Hawaii, with my daughters and arrived in Saigon on the last day of '67 or the first day of '68. Holiday celebrations had slowed up the processing

and assignment machinery. As a result, there were quite a few of us awaiting provincial assignments in Saigon. Our orientation began with briefings given in a theater in the Rex Hotel in central Saigon.

Q: Yes, it was an officers' billet in the Hotel Rex.

MCNAMARA: I think they also used the theater for the press briefings. During our orientation period, we were assigned rooms in hotels in the center of town that had been rented by USAID. It was interesting to see Saigon on the eve of Tet. Nguyen Hue Street, a wide boulevard in the center of town, was full of flowers and flowering trees being sold to celebrate Tet. There was a festive spirit like the before-Christmas atmosphere in the United States. One could sense a feeling of optimism.

The people who briefed us exuded optimism. They seemed to think that a corner had been turned in the war and that things were going very well. I don't remember anyone actually mentioning a light at the end of the tunnel, but Westmoreland had just done so before Congress. It did appear, from the external signs visible to a complete newcomer, that things were going well and that people were optimistic, both the Vietnamese and the Americans. Preparations for Tet were going forward and the mood seemed to be one of happy anticipation.

I went to my briefing classes and awaited my assignment. Technically, I was on loan to USAID to work in the joint field advisory program called CORDS (Civil Operations for Rural Development). CORDS was largely military, but had a serious civilian component. It had only recently been formed to take in all of the provincial advisors, both military and civilian, and was responsible to MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam). It had a directorate in MACV.

Q: MACV being the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

MCNAMARA: Right! Westmoreland was the chief of MACV, as well as being commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam. Robert Komer, who had been in the White House, had just been named as the chief of CORDS. A civilian with a CIA background, he was a deputy to Westmoreland. The top leadership was mainly civilian. At the province level the leadership was split, military-civilian. If the Province senior advisor was military, then his deputy would be civilian. If the PSA was civilian chief, his deputy would be military. The theory was that our advisory effort should speak with one voice. In any case, at the provincial level, it was not easy to separate military from civilian aspects of the war. The VC were fighting a "revolutionary war" where such fine distinctions were meaningless. Unbeknownst to most of us, disaster was about to strike while we happily visited restaurants and watched the Vietnamese middle class prepare for their great annual celebration. On the eve of Tet suddenly the atmosphere changed. Security officers came to our hotel with a warning that we were not to go out that night. The whole atmosphere changed quickly, and where the markets had been overflowing in Nguyen Hue Street and elsewhere in Saigon, suddenly there were very few people on the streets. We were told by American security officers that we should get off the streets, stay in the hotel that night, and not go out on the streets at all. There was usually a curfew at about ten o'clock, I think, but they lowered the curfew to six or seven that night, to keep people indoors.

In the middle of the night, I was awakened by explosions. Other people in the hotel told me that there had been attacks by the Viet Cong in the city. We went up to the hotel roof, where we could hear the crunch of explosions and see tracers and flares lighting up the sky. The sounds indicated that some intense fighting was taking place nearby.

The next morning, there was smoke in the air in the direction of our embassy, a few blocks north of the hotel district where we were staying. There was much military activity all around the town. Helicopter gun ships were buzzing over the town firing at targets in the town itself. We started hearing reports on the radio that the embassy had been attacked by sappers who had gotten inside the wall.

By noontime, things had quieted down in the center of town. The shooting and the fighting at the embassy had ended. That afternoon, I walked up to the embassy. Everybody was very tense. There were troops all over the place. You could see the small hole that had been blown at the base of the wall going into the embassy, where Viet Cong had gotten through. There were signs of a battle everywhere. The face of the building was pockmarked, and the wall out in front was pockmarked. My friend Bill Simmons and I walked past but were not allowed to enter the embassy.

Fighting continued in Saigon for about a week. Every day and every night we went to the hotel roof to watch the fireworks. After the first night nothing happened in the center of town, but you didn't have to go far to find action. We could see it all from the roof. The smoke and the diving airplanes, the helicopters and the rattle of small arms.

In the middle of the Tet Offensive, Bill Simmons, an FSO colleague, and I got called to come to the CORDS headquarters. We were brought out in a car as there was no public transportation operating. We were told that we were being sent down to the Mekong delta. There were two assignments: one in Vinh-long Province, and the other in Binh Xuyen. It was decided that I would go to Vinh-long, and Bill was destined for Binh Xuyen. The next morning we were taken to Tan Son Nhat Airport for a flight to Can-Tho, the mid-Delta location of the IV Corps Headquarters. From there, we would be taken to our provinces.

The next morning, we boarded an Air America aircraft for Can-Tho. The VC were still in the university at Can-Tho, just on the outskirts of town. I recall seeing American airplanes bombing them as we entered town. It wasn't really very close. We were staying in the CORDS compound and you could see the airplanes coming down, the bombs going off, and hear the shooting. At the CORDS compound itself, however, all was peaceful. The VC had never actually gotten into the center of Can-Tho.

The next day, I was taken in a helicopter up to Vinh-long, which is the province just north of Can-Tho. The town of Vinh-long, the province capital, is at the north side of the province. To get there from Can-Tho you cross Bassac River and cross the whole province before arriving at Vinh-long. At the Vinh-long airport, there was much evidence of recent fighting. The VC had gotten into the airport, and the helicopter crews, on the first morning of the offensive, had to fight for their helicopters. During this action, the airport commander was killed on the tarmac in a shootout with the VC. Once out of the airport and into the town, I found a scene of mass

destruction. Much of the center of the town had been reduced to rubble. The VC had taken over virtually all of the center of Vinh-long. Only the province chief's house, and the military headquarters compound had held out in the center of town.

I was replacing an advisor who had been killed during the offensive. His predecessor had also been killed, just before the Tet Offensive, in an ambush. My job was to be the chief of rural development (RD). Essentially, I would be in charge of all of the civilian developmental programs, plus a village pacification program. This would include armed development workers called "RD Cadres" who were supposed to live in and protect villages. Our advisory team was composed of some ten or twelve civilians and about two hundred and fifty military.

Q: These were Americans.

MCNAMARA: These were all Americans, yes. They had lost about five civilians, about half the team.

Q: Boy, that must have been about as bad as anywhere, except for Hue, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: I think so. I don't know how many members of the team were lost in Hue, but, of course, people there were also taken prisoner in Hue. In Vinh-long losses were deaths. It was really bad. The town was badly mauled. The VC were inside the town and had taken over most of it. Then, to reoccupy it, there were battles, lots of aerial bombardment and so on. There were great piles of bricks and mortar in the middle of the streets. Houses blown into the streets.

Anyway, hearing that your predecessor has just been killed, and that his predecessor was also killed was unsettling. I was the first one who had held the job to walk out alive.

When I arrived, there were hundreds of refugees huddled in the town. Some were from the countryside. Others were townspeople whose homes had been destroyed. We had a very bad situation: (1) to take care of the refugees, and (2) to take back much of the province from the VC. It was very dangerous, or at least it was perceived to be very dangerous in Vinh-long for quite some time after the Tet attacks. We didn't hold very much ground.

Q: When you say "we," how much was American, and how much was Vietnamese?

MCNAMARA: Well, there were no American troops in Vinh-long at all. In the delta, in general, there were no American troops aside from the riverine force, which was made up of only one brigade from the 9th Division. They were mainly on boats and would deploy from the boats on operations. We had the American Navy patrol boats, and some SEAL teams. But that's really all. The Vietnamese were doing virtually all the fighting. However, American advisors were serving with all of the Vietnamese units. We also had our advisory teams with the provincial forces down to district level.

When I arrived, my staff, both Vietnamese and American, were traumatized. They had gone through some very bad experiences. My job was to rebuild confidence and then get them back to work in the countryside.

Q: In the first place, when you arrived there, how did you know what you were supposed to be doing?

MCNAMARA: Well, I was not given any specific instructions. The Province Senior Advisor, an Army colonel named Roberge, was fully occupied with the military situation. Until security was reestablished we could not help the Vietnamese build roads or teach people improved farming techniques. These were the things advisors were trained to do. We were bottled up in the town. These guys had just gone through some horrendous attacks. Many had been shooting it out with the VC. They had to protect their own homes. This was very bad stuff. They didn't have any American troops around to help them; they were on their own. The civilians and the military advisors had to protect themselves. They mustered everybody who could pull a trigger. And that was that. They went through some very bad times.

And the thing wasn't over. When I arrived we were in the middle of the Tet Offensive. They had gotten the VC out of the town itself, but they were just on the outskirts of town.

First, I opened our office and got people to show up for work. We had to go out and find our Vietnamese employees and convince them that it was safe enough to go about the town. We worked like hell to feed the refugees and helping to get tents to shelter them. Initially, this was about all we could do.

Q: Where were you getting the food?

MCNAMARA: The provincial government opened storehouses of rice. Some food was brought in by river barge. But, anyway, we got it in and we fed them. The refugee problem was temporary. But, in some instance, it lasted for a couple of months.

Q: You had military advisors as part of your team, is that right?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes, yes, I had some military types.

Q: What were the professional American military thinking about this whole business? I mean, they were seeing it from a small shop. How were they taking it?

MCNAMARA: They were shocked by the suddenness of the attacks and by their unexpectedness. In Vinh-long, the VC had been infiltrating into the town for some weeks beforehand. They brought guns in coffins and buried them in a cemetery near the town center. They infiltrated in a variety of ways, and they were inside the town before anybody knew it. Then they started attacking the various Vietnamese installations, and the American advisors. The Vietnamese nationalists, the Army, never really expected this to happen. They thought that Tet was a sacred thing, and that no Vietnamese would violate a truce on Tet by mounting a massive offensive. Many soldiers had been given leave. Units were in barracks preparing to celebrate. Their guard was way down. The attacks could not have been so successful had they not been surprised.

Some two weeks after my arrival the VC mounted a second offensive in Vinh-long and again they got into the town.

At this point I was living in a little compound with most of the other civilian advisors. We were armed and ready to defend ourselves.

I was sharing a trailer with a large USAID fellow. In the middle of the night, the attack was preceded by shelling. He panicked trying to get out of the trailer while putting on a flak jacket. In his haste, he got stuck in the door of the trailer. I was inside and also wanted to get out of the trailer. My companion was a large, frightened mass of quivering flesh jammed in the door. He was incapable of helping himself. To dislodge him, I braced my back against the sink, put my feet on his ass and pushed. It was just like opening a champagne bottle. The cork popped out and shot out the door.

Outside, I helped organize the defense of our compound. We had a retired master sergeant with us, who was a civilian admin. officer. He was very useful. We had an M-60 machine gun that we mounted to cover the road outside the compound. We manned holes in the wall. We were ready for war. The VC were in the town, but had not reached our position.

At that uncomfortable time, we got a call from the team headquarters telling me to get our people out of this area as the VC had been seen close to our compound. Three Vietnamese armored "commando" vehicles arrived to escort us to a Navy compound some distance down the road. It was used to lodge SEAL teams and patrol boat crews. The place was relatively well defended -- certainly better than our little compound.

I went up on the top of the building, and it was just like a ship's bridge up there. The Navy commander of the little station was there. They had machine guns mounted on the parapet of the building. The commander was directing his defenses from the top of the building, which was probably the worst place to be. It provided a good target with only minimal protection from weapons like an RPG. In any case, I was there with him. We took the odd round, but there was no assault on us. The Navy had an awful lot of armament. Presumably, the VC decided to bypass our little fortress for there was plenty of fighting further into the city. Our place remained relatively quiet.

After three days, the second mini-Tet attack ran out of steam. We were then able to reopen the office and again encourage our Vietnamese employees to return. It was a gradual hand-holding exercise rebuilding self-confidence. I got them to begin to go out of town to our work sites. Getting them back on the roads was a major accomplishment. I led them by example. Finally, I visited all the districts regularly. At first, I had to go mainly in helicopters, but then I started driving the roads. It was six months before we really built a level of confidence where people would drive without apprehension on the main roads. All the time I was working on our Vietnamese counterparts cajoling, challenging, shaming them into venturing into the countryside where the war would be won or lost.

Tet was more of a psychological problem than it was anything else. In military terms, it failed. But psychologically, it was a great victory. Indeed, the biggest victory was won in the United

States, because of its effect on the American people. At the time, however, it traumatized people in Vietnam.

Q: What sort of leadership was there? I'm not talking about you, but the people talking to you. Were they trying to buck you up? Did you have the feeling that we knew what we were doing? I mean, once you got past the initial period of just trying to protect yourself. Were we trying to explain it to ourselves? What was the feeling?

MCNAMARA: Eventually, there was an effort to explain the offensive. It was characterized as a terrible defeat for the VC. This was, of course, true in purely military terms. However, it missed the more important point of the impact on confidence in the U.S. Indeed, it was a watershed. The USG was never again able to convince the American people that the war was winnable. After all, they had seen VC in the American Embassy compound on TV.

The Vietnamese province chief, who had arrived in Vinh-long shortly before Tet, was a good leader and a very tough guy. His name was Nghia. They used to call him the "coup man." He was a cavalry colonel, a regular Vietnamese army officer. He had commanded the APC in which the Diem brothers were killed after the 1963 coup d'etat.

Q: The brothers Diem.

MCNAMARA: The brothers Diem were killed. He played a controversial part in their assassination. It's not clear whether he participated in the actual assassination or not. But he was certainly part of the coup. Obviously, the generals who organized the coup picked his troop of APCs to go out and get them. Therefore, he must have been considered politically reliable. I've heard a variety of stories, but the one that seems to be the most reliable is that it was Big Minh's aide-de-camp who actually did the shooting. But Nghia was there and he might have pulled the trigger himself. I don't know. He was involved in several other coups, and spent some time in Cambodia cooling off after one of the coups. He was a guy who was feared and not somebody that many of the generals had great faith in. They were afraid of him because he was hot tempered and an idealist. He was also involved in Vietnamese nationalist politics. So he probably never would have been given the job as a province chief if the situation was not desperate and his predecessor had not been badly wounded. They had to put a good soldier into the job, so he was chosen. I wasn't there when he first arrived, so I can't speak to that too much. But it is obvious to me, from what I know of Vietnam now, that he would not have been a prime candidate, except in a time of extreme crisis.

Providentially, he was there, because he was a damn good soldier. He did a remarkable job in Vinh-long in fighting the war with his provincial forces. He got the troops out and got them working, and he pushed the VC away from the various towns. Gradually, he took back control of the province in about six months time. The fighting was hard but the VC were on the run by July-August of 1968.

I remember we went to one very isolated district town down on the Mantit Nicholai Canal, which is a principal canal that the rice boats take going from one arm of the Mekong to the other, north-south, on the way to the market in Saigon. It's one of the most important waterways in the delta.

It cuts right across Vinh-long. They'd had horrendous battles with the VC over control of this waterway for some years before. I remember going down there to resupply the place and bring new troops in.

I told the Province Senior Advisor that I had to go with the convoy reopening the canal after Tet. Teams of my RD cadres were young going in for the first time, and I felt I should be with them. He didn't want me to go. He said, "No, it's too dangerous. I don't want you to go."

And I said, "But that's my job."

He said, "But you're a civilian. You shouldn't be doing that."

I said, "Look, we're all in this. This isn't a question of being civilian or military. Those guys are my responsibility, and I feel that I have to go with them."

Finally, he gave me permission to go along. We went down on Vietnamese landing craft guarded by monitors, heavily armed with 40- and 20- millimeter guns. We expected to be ambushed on the way down the narrow canal, but we weren't. We got to the beleaguered district town. This was the first ground resupplies that they had in over four months. Previously, helicopters were their only communication with the outside. Our operation played a big part in opening up the canal.

During the latter part of my stay there, we actually started to really do things in terms of development. We introduced the new IR-8 miracle rice. At first, it was difficult to overcome the farmers reluctance to experiments. Peasant farmers live from harvest to harvest. They can't afford to gamble with their crop.

Q: It takes quite a bit of fertilizer, too, doesn't it?

MCNAMARA: It does, it takes fertilizer and irrigation during the dry season. We were prepared to supply fertilizers and pumps for irrigation. The farmer's uncertainty was our greatest stumbling block. We tried to convince them to try the new rice strains without success. Finally, we had to hire experimental plots in various parts of the province. Vinh-long is one of the richest rice-growing provinces in Vietnam. We hired these experimental plots in every district, and we underwrote the planting of the new rice on these plots. We said, "If you don't get a good crop, we'll pay you for your losses." I had two agricultural advisors assigned to my team. One old guy (I don't know exactly how old he was; he certainly had white hair) had been an agricultural advisor in upstate New York, a county agent. And he was really marvelous, Bill something or other, a really marvelous old man. The two of them rolled up their sleeves and helped the farmers, showing them the techniques of applying the fertilizer. The rice crop from this IR-8 rice was so much more abundant than the harvest from the traditional varieties of rice, that we didn't have to sell anything after that. The farmers were lining up in front of my door, trying to get seeds for the next planting. And so we really succeeded in the opening phases of the green revolution in the Mekong delta.

Q: Did that require outside support, or could that continue without our help?

MCNAMARA: Once they were convinced that it was a good thing, then it didn't require any outside help except for making available fertilizer and small pumps.

I'll jump forward now. I came back to Can-Tho as consul general in 1974, six years later, and by this time, the green revolution had already taken place. The farmers were on their own. They were going great guns. All they needed was fertilizer and gasoline for their pumps. They had the money to buy it, as long as those ingredients were available. They had small Japanese pumps that could draw water in and irrigate their crops during the dry period. They were getting, I think it was, three or four harvests a year this way, whereas previously they'd only gotten two. They were getting extra harvests, and each harvest was far more abundant than the previous one.

A couple of other things happened that we are responsible for.

One was the rural banks, which were very important in the green revolution. We set up provincial rural banks in each province. This got the farmers out of the hands of the Chinese moneylenders. They could go and get loans at reasonable rates to finance their crops.

The other thing we did was land distribution to the tiller. Previously, the delta was owned by large landowners, and the Vietnamese peasants in the delta were, by and large, sharecroppers. And we, the Americans (and we can certainly be proud of this), got the Vietnamese government to agree to a land redistribution in the delta. The landlords were paid for their land, and the land was redistributed to the actual tillers, the people who were working on the land and who were cultivating it.

The confluence of all of these factors resulted in a real revolution, a green revolution, in the delta. By 1975, rice production had increased to the point that Vietnam was again ready to export rice -- for the first time in over ten years. Before the war, Vietnam had been the breadbasket of Southeast Asia. They had produced large surpluses. During the war, production fell off. In fact, we were importing American rice to feed the population.

The green revolution was also having a political effect. By 1974-75, the Viet Cong had almost disappeared. Their manpower sources had dried up, because the farmers were no longer discontent. They were prosperous owners of their own land. They had no reason to go to war against the government. They were benefitting from the status quo. All they wanted was to keep their sons on the farms, because they needed their labor to produce. The supply of manpower to both the VC and the government army was drying up in the delta. The local VC was pretty much out of business in the Mekong delta. We were finding, by 1974, that the bulk of the troops opposing the Vietnamese national army, were northerners. The local boys were no longer interested.

Q: How long were you in Vinh-long?

MCNAMARA: I was in Vinh-long from February until September 1968. So I was there for about eight or nine months.

Q: What was your impression of the direction of the program from CORDS and the embassy?

MCNAMARA: Well, most of our direction came from CORDS Headquarters. Komer was very active and very dynamic. He was also a little crazy. I think a lot of his activity was silly. Nonetheless, he did get support for our program and respect from the military.

One of the most controversial aspects of our efforts was the preoccupation with quantifying everything. Some of the things we dealt in couldn't be quantified. But some of the techniques that they were using weren't bad. They tried to quantify village security. Okay, the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) was imperfect, but we didn't have any other tools, and so it was better than nothing. You can make fun of it; you can say, "How can you analyze these things statistically?" Well, you can't, perfectly. But you can use this imperfect information -- tempered with common sense -- to plan and to direct resources.

Q: "Did you spend the night in the village?" That type of thing?

MCNAMARA: For instance, Do the farmers cultivate their fields? Does the village chief spend evenings in the hamlets? Does the district chief come down and spend time? There were many indicators used to measure conditions in a hamlet. There was an economics side, and there was a social side, and there was a political side, and there was a military side to it. And they were refining it all the time. This was done by American advisors, so it wasn't cooked. The advisors were told not to fool with it, to do it as honestly as they could. If the HES didn't come out right, if it didn't show brilliant pacification, their careers weren't harmed. They didn't get bad efficiency reports if they didn't show instant results on pacification. Because, after all, they were advisors, they weren't there to lead the troops themselves.

Anyway, it may have been an imperfect tool, but it was a tool. And that's something that CORDS developed. It was useful, given those circumstances and given the kinds of people that were running the system at that time.

William Colby, who later became the head of CIA, came out as Komer's deputy. I remember Colby came to Vinh-long one weekend and stayed overnight with us. He was going out to various provinces to try to get a better feel for what was going on. He wanted to show the flag, and to prove that the top leadership was sharing some of the dangers with those of us in the trenches. He did get to know people and hear points of view that might not occur to his staff in Saigon.

After dinner, on Saturday night, we had a long philosophic bull session about the war. A liberal supply of alcohol assured that there were no holds barred. He encouraged us to be completely frank.

In any case, there was no reason not to be. For Christ's sake, we were there at the cutting edge of the war. Nobody was going to send us to Vietnam, and certainly nobody was going to send us further out into the boondocks. We were already there. Most of us, therefore, weren't too worried about saying what we had on our minds.

I remember telling him that I really felt that it was immoral for us to continue to encourage the Vietnamese to fight if we weren't willing to stay as long as it was required to stay. It was obvious to me at this point that the tactic of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong was to wait us out. They assumed that we would tire and leave. If we weren't willing to stay the whole course, which meant convincing the North that we were willing to stay and that we weren't going to walk away from Vietnam, then it was immoral for us to continue to encourage the South Vietnamese to pursue the war. It would only mean that more people would get killed, and the result would be inevitable. Eventually, our friends would fall. We had to really do what we had done in Korea, which was to provide a credible American force there that was going to stay indefinitely until the threat had disappeared. And unless we were willing to do that, then we really should get the hell out.

He didn't really have any answer to that. He fumbled around a bit with it. Ultimately, I guess, he probably agreed with me, but couldn't say so.

Anyway, I can't say that we didn't get any leadership.

Q: I wasn't asking in a pejorative way; I wanted to get a feel for the actual situation.

MCNAMARA: I don't think it was that bad. I think Komer was foolish. He didn't provide very good leadership, but he was there. Colby was much better.

Q: You left in September '68.

MCNAMARA: Yes, and went to Quang-tri.

Q: When you left, how did you feel things were going?

MCNAMARA: They were going very well. At that time, they were going very well in Vinh-long.

Q: So the shock of the Tet Offensive...

MCNAMARA: It was finally dissipated, and confidence was restored. The Americans and the Vietnamese were doing lots of things. We were moving resources into the country.

I remember one night I was in our little compound when suddenly I heard a lot of noise outside. Trucks, many trucks going towards Saigon. They were moving on the main route, Route 4, just on the outskirts of the town. I thought it was a military convoy. I remember looking out the gate to see what was making so much noise, and found that they were civilian trucks, carrying food to Saigon. They were traveling at night to arrive at the market the next morning in Saigon. They were carrying all the bounty -- the marvelous fruits, vegetables, fish, pork and rice -- that's produced in the Mekong delta in such profusion. There it was: the economy had been restored. These were civilians bringing food to the capital.

So, no, things were looking up by the time I left.

Q: *Where did you go?*

MCNAMARA: I went to Quang-tri.

Q: *Could you explain...*

MCNAMARA: Quang-tri...province...the Republic of South Vietnam. Its northern border was the 17th parallel, which was the border between the north and the south, the Communist-controlled north and the nationalist-controlled south. It was the scene of probably the heaviest fighting that took place in the war. The greatest concentration of Americans was up there. It was the site of Khe Sanh, the embattled, surrounded military base that the North Vietnamese were hoping to take. The Marines turned out to be a lot more difficult to dislodge than the French were at Dien Bien Phu.

Quang-tri is a difficult place to live. The climate is dreadful. During the winter rainy season, it's constantly enveloped in a permanent blanket of heavy mist. It's almost like being underwater, it's so damp and cold. The dampness penetrates to the bone. I found it very difficult to get warm even inside. In the dry season, it gets hot, and dry. The red clay turns to powder that is blown dust clouds by a hot wind from Laos. Quang-tri has no agreeable season. Vietnamese avoided service there. Our province chief was a sleepy Cham gentleman who was there because no Vietnamese wanted a job that was fought over in other more salubrious provinces.

Q: *You've persuaded me not to buy any real estate there.*

MCNAMARA: No, it certainly is not a vacation place. I can't think of any advantages to life in Quang-tri.

And the people are correspondingly hard. They have a reputation of being among the toughest people in Vietnam -- for obvious reasons. You couldn't live there unless you were tough. It would be survival of the fittest, and you'd have to be very fit indeed just to survive.

It also is the site of the Roman Catholic national shrine in Vietnam called La-Vang. In the 18th and 19th centuries, there were martyrs there, Catholics who were killed by the old imperial authorities in Hue. So martyrdom was a big thing. There is a little cathedral there called Our Lady of La-Vang. Mary is supposed to have appeared to people. It's a holy place for Vietnamese Catholics.

Quang-tri lies to the north of Hue, the old imperial capital. The climate in Hue, however, is much better than in Quang-tri.

Colby got me the job as deputy province senior advisor there. The province senior advisor was an Army colonel named Mooney, who was a very tough, good soldier. He'd been in Vietnam twice before, in American units. He'd been a battalion commander, and I think he was the G-3 of the 25th or the 24th Division. A well-decorated soldier. He went on to become a brigadier general. Then, he had a heart attack and was forced to retire.

Living in Quang-tri in those days was a little bit like being in Verdun in World War I. The North Vietnamese were just across the Ben-hai River, on the 17th parallel. They would shell, using artillery that they had dug into caves on the other side of the river. They'd wheel them out and fire some shells at us. Quang-tri City was just within their artillery range. Then they'd pull them back in, and the Americans would riposte.

Most of the defenders of Quang-tri were American. It had the largest concentration of American troops in the country. The commander of the American troops in I Corps was a Marine. He had two Marine divisions, the 1st and the 3rd, and a Marine air wing under his command. The Marines were also bolstered by some Army units. In Quang-tri itself, we had the 3rd Marine Division, with either a full air wing or a good portion of an air wing to support them, as well as other ancillary units like Seabees.

When I arrived, there was also an Army mechanized brigade, as well as the 1st Cavalry supporting the withdrawal from Que-son. They had a lot of action in Quang-tri and really hurt the North Vietnamese badly, but then they left and went someplace else. They were used as a highly mobile fire brigade, going around the country where a sudden shock unit was required.

Anyway, there were an awful lot of American soldiers around, Marines mainly. That was new to me coming from the Mekong delta. The climate was also different, as was the type of war. There was no such thing as a guerrilla war up there. It was heavy units, divisions, regiments and battalions against similar regular Army units from North Vietnam. One saw precious few black pajama clad country boys wandering about with a stalk of sugar cane in one hand and an AK47 in the other. They were fighting major-unit, classical-war formations. This was a different kind of war than I had known in the Mekong delta.

Q: *What were you doing?*

MCNAMARA: I was the deputy province senior advisor. I was the number two, in charge of a team of about 300 advisors who supported the province government and the province forces. Each province had certain local forces that were raised and commanded by the province chief. The province chief, in every case, was a military officer. And so he had his own small army that he could deploy locally. They were light infantry. They were regular soldiers, but they were promised that they wouldn't have to leave their own province if they joined the RF or PF (regional forces or popular forces).

The Provincial advisors in Quang-tri provided liaison between the American forces and the Vietnamese local administration. That was our most important task because of the size of American forces in the province.

Another was to deal with refugees. There were thousands of refugees. The place had been fought over for years. There'd been horrendous battles, dating back to the war with the French. The fabled "Street Without Joy" is located in Quang-tri. The people had been driven off the land and out of their villages. Also people living along the coast were bundled up and sent to refugee camps. The North Vietnamese had been landing arms and infiltrators along the coast. The local

villagers were thought to be (and probably were) sympathetic to the North had been displaced from the coast. These fishermen were just taken off the coast and sent inland and put in refugee camps.

We developed a plan to reestablish the fishermen on the coast, but under supervision, to prevent infiltration by the North. They were allowed to fish and to earn their living and to get out of the refugee camps under controlled conditions.

And so, one of the things that I did when I first got there was to develop a plan for the resettlement of these coastal fishermen.

Later, I also developed a similar program for another area. There's a river that comes down from the mountains up around Khe Sanh and empties into the sea. It comes right across the northern part of Quang-tri Province. The river valley had been populated and farmed before the people were displaced by the war. By the time I had arrived things were better. We had a lot of troops in the area. It seemed feasible to resettle these people back onto their lands and villages.

Originally, the Australians had supplied irrigation pumps in the area to be resettled. I decided to appeal to the Australian Embassy for help in getting the pumps working again. After some hemming and hawing, the Australian Ambassador did provide the needed spare parts. In any case, I spent a good deal of my time resettling refugees.

Q: When you talk about resettling refugees, how did this work? How did you advise and consult with the province chief?

MCNAMARA: Well, the province chief was half asleep most of the time. When he wasn't fully asleep, he was half asleep. He really wasn't doing very much. We really had to do it ourselves.

Q: You mean you bypassed him, basically.

MCNAMARA: We bypassed him. We'd get his okay on things, but it was really pro forma. He wasn't going to say no, because he didn't want to be bothered. To oppose us would have caused him some bother. Moreover, he was the Vietnamese token Cham. He had little real influence with his own hierarchy.

Q: Cham being...

MCNAMARA: The Cham are an ethnic group that predated the Vietnamese arrival in what's now central Vietnam. They were Muslims. They'd no doubt migrated into this area from Cambodia a couple of thousand years ago. There are lots of Cham ruins, very interesting ruins around central Vietnam. They were driven out of central Vietnam or assimilated by the ethnic Vietnamese. Nonetheless, there are small pockets of them left in Vietnam.

Q: I'm surprised, that being such a battleground, they didn't put a tough military man in there.

MCNAMARA: Well, they didn't. I'm not sure why, but I suppose it was because there really

wasn't very much for him to do. The real military decisions were taken by the American Army and Marine Corps. And there was a Vietnamese division as well, the best division of the Vietnamese Army, the 1st Division led by one of their best generals. They were also very active, working with the Americans. So there really wasn't a hell of a lot for a Province chief to do.

Q: Here you were in a really military situation. Was there much interest in or awareness of, say, the Vietnam political scene? Or were you getting sensitive to the Vietnam political scene?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes. No, I was very sensitive to it, especially when I got to Quang-tri. Central Vietnam was traditionally the most politically active part of Vietnam. Much more so than the Mekong delta. The Mekong delta was really pretty much apolitical. In the delta, most of the people didn't even take an active interest, much less participate, in politics. In central Vietnam, it was quite the opposite. People were very politicized, very interested, very active in politics. There were several political parties. Only a few years earlier, it had been the site of the Buddhist struggle movement against the Diem regime. Central Vietnam was really the place where that took place. It was put down by the army, but the feelings were still there, and the sensitivity was still there. I got to know some of the local Buddhist monks in Quang-tri. Some of them had been active in the Buddhist struggle movement.

We were plugged in politically. Colonel Mooney, the province senior advisor, was an unusual guy. He was very interested in politics. He was a super soldier, but in Quang-tri he took a far greater interest in the civilian, or quasi-civilian, side of things, political and economic, than he did in straight military affairs. We had a small inner circle there. I had my own house, with another young FSO. He was the refugee advisor.

Q: Who was that?

MCNAMARA: His name was Dick Cummin. He killed himself on a motorcycle here in Washington.

Q: He worked for me in Greece.

MCNAMARA: That's right, he was in Greece. Well, he and I were very close friends. Having spent a year there together, we became very close. In fact, I visited him in Greece.

Q: He bought that damn motorcycle. And we were telling him, as good consular officers, "These things kill you."

MCNAMARA: Well, he got drunk and took it out. Must have fallen down or gotten knocked down, hit his head, and that was that. I met his mother and took care of her in Lebanon, when I was DCM in Beirut. I got her out of East Beirut, and she lived with me for about five, six months. Then she insisted on going back. Anyway, that's another whole story.

Mooney had a USAID fellow, a guy named John Cleary, living with him. And the four of us ate our meals together. We had a little mess in Mooney's house. We all became very close friends. He relied on this small group of civilians that he had close to him more than he did on the

military members of the team. Obviously, he paid attention to them, and he was a very fine soldier, but he saw the opportunities for doing something in Quang-tri more in civilian terms than he did in military terms.

The military campaign was really under the control of the generals. We weren't going to have a great impact there. All we could do was coordinate and provide the liaison between the Vietnamese provincial officials and the big Army units. But the resettlement of refugees and things like that, which were very important to everyone, these were things that we could handle with lots of support from the American forces. Mooney was bright enough to realize that he was more likely to make a reputation in Army by doing unusual things like resettling thousands of refugees than he could in directing a rag-tag bunch of Vietnamese militiamen.

Q: Did you get any other feelings, now that you were at a different level, about how...

MCNAMARA: Oh, I was at the same level.

Q: How did you look upon Saigon, your direction from there and all?

MCNAMARA: It was very distant. We were really far more responsive to the American military command in northern I Corps. There was also something called the 24th Corps up there. At the time of the battle in Khe Sanh, Westmoreland lost faith in the Marine command at Da Nang. He imposed another command on northern I Corps, called the 24th Corps, and put an Army general in charge, a guy named Stilwell.

Q: Richard Stilwell?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: He was in command of troops in Korea when I was serving there. Was this common knowledge, how Westmoreland felt about the Marines?

MCNAMARA: Oh, it was in all the newspapers. It was a real slap in the face for the Marines for an Army general to be superimposed between one of their principal troop units and the Marine command. A Marine amphibious force, 3 MAF was what the Marines called the command in Da Nang, which was in charge of all of I Corps. They had their own air support, and their troop units are all integrated into a single team. Air and ground troops were all under the same commander in the Marines. This provided close coordination. Their doctrine and modus operandi are much different than the Army and the Air Force. The Marines, of course, are very proud of their famous Corps.

Q: What was it they had done, or not done?

MCNAMARA: Khe Sanh. I think Westmoreland felt that they had gotten themselves into a very exposed position in Khe Sanh.

Q: It became a matter of prestige to hang onto a piece of real estate that really didn't matter.

MCNAMARA: It was a little bit like the French in Dien Bien Phu. This was what people were so frightened of. It couldn't have happened to the Americans, because they had such overwhelming air power. There wasn't any way that the North Vietnamese could really mount a big, concentrated assault on Khe Sanh that could be successful in the face of this enormous air power that we could bring to bear. We were using B-52s to carpet-bomb around the Khe Sanh perimeter at one point. We also had lots of artillery. And we were never cut off; we always had support coming in. We were getting bombarded all the time. It was a difficult position. and it was one that was perhaps stupid to get tied down to, but, nonetheless, the North Vietnamese couldn't take it either, I don't believe.

Q: *And they got tied down, too.*

MCNAMARA: That's right. It was a meat grinder for them.

Q: *Did you get involved with our main line units there as far as making them more sensitive to the problems of the populous? Was this what you did?*

MCNAMARA: Yes. We talked to the officers, but we didn't talk to the men at that point. Later on, when I became the principal officer in Da Nang, I was also political advisor to the Marine general, the commander of 3 MAF; the senior commander in I Corps. The Marines had come up with the idea of...I think they were called civic action platoons (CAP). These were small units of platoon size that were put in villages, to live in the villages and to protect them. They had a training school in Da Nang for Marines who were going to go into the program. I lectured on Vietnamese politics at the training school, to sensitize the Marines to the differences in politics, the religious issues, the political issues and the ethnic issues. In Quang-tri, we talked to the commanders and to their staffs.

We would try, for instance, to serve as advocates for the Vietnamese. If the large units were doing something that was interfering with the local population, or somehow or other the local people were affected by some of their operations, we'd go and talk to the commanders to see if they would modify their operations so that they wouldn't harm the interests of the local villagers.

Also, we got a lot of resources from the American units. They would provide us with all kinds of civic-action resources, materials for instance, skilled labor. A village, for instance, might need a bridge built between two parts of a village, or they'd want to have a little market constructed, or to have something done with a road. The American forces were there in large numbers, they had lots of resources, and they did help the population a great deal in that way. They were trying to be good corporate citizens, in the American way. In the process, they did a certain amount of good.

Q: *How long were you there in Quang-tri?*

MCNAMARA: I was there from September 1968 until April 1969.

Q: *And then what did you do?*

MCNAMARA: A man named Nick Thorne, an FSO assigned to the embassy in Saigon, was in charge of a provincial reporting unit in Saigon. He had a group of young FSOs who went out and lived and worked in the provinces and would report on political events in their areas of assignment directly to the embassy. Thorne came on a visit to Quang-tri. He was going around the country. I took him out and introduced him to some of the bonzes and political figures that I'd gotten to know.

Q: A bonze is a Buddhist priest.

MCNAMARA: He was impressed with my contacts. So, when he went back to Saigon, he talked to his superiors, and they offered me the job as principal officer in Da Nang. They wished to open a consulate in Da Nang. There was no consular post in the country outside Saigon since the closing of the consulate general in Hue. It was important to have a diplomatic listening post in central Vietnam, the most politically active region in the country and the furthest from Saigon.

When the post was offered to me, I told people in Saigon I would love the job. It did mean signing on for a second prolonged tour in Vietnam -- something that many other FSOs were not keen to take on.

Q: I might add that I was consul general in Saigon at this particular time. And it was an extrusion; it was a consular unit that was, very nebulously until that time, part of the consular section in Saigon up there.

MCNAMARA: The historic background went back to the closing of the consulate general in Hue, during the Buddhist struggles in '65. It was then intended to move the consulate general to Da Nang. They acquired a building and a residence. All was prepared short of appointing a principal officer. This was benched by a former Ambassador who was serving as the Deputy for CORDS for I Corps with his headquarters in Da Nang. He was in charge of the CORDS program in all of I Corps. He did not wish to have an independent consul resident in Da Nang who might compete with him for prestige. Somehow he was able to bench the opening of the consulate as an independent post. A consular office was opened, however, that carried on many of the functions of a consulate, but without the stature of a full consulate. A junior political officer was in nominal charge -- obviously no threat to the amour propre of the former Ambassador.

To complete his hatchet job, the gentleman cooped the principal officer's residence complete with china, silver and car. The arrangement was reconsidered upon the departure of the ex-ambassador and his replacement by a man from USAID named Alexander Ferber. The embassy and the Department realized they needed an independent observer in I Corps outside the CORDS/MACV chain of command. Someone who was directly responsive to the Ambassador and the embassy.

I was offered the job, and took it. I had to get out of CORDS, of course, I was still assigned to CORDS. So I went to see Bill Colby in Saigon. He was, by this time, in charge of CORDS. I asked him to release me from the remaining months of my commitment to CORDS. Colby asked if I would not rather have a more senior post in CORDS? I remember telling him that, "I feel like

Caesar in Gaul when he said "Better to be chief in the smallest village of Gaul than number two in Rome." (That's a bad paraphrasing of what Caesar actually said, but that's the sense of it.) My weak classical reference may have seemed bizarre, but it touched something in Colby. He gave me my release from CORDS.

I became the principal officer in Da Nang in April of 1969. We didn't have the formal inauguration until the next February.

Q: You had to have a shaman or somebody come up with a proper date and all that.

MCNAMARA: Oh, I consulted a Chinese wizard-astrologer-geomancer. I brought him down from Hue. I sought him out because he had an extraordinary reputation as a seer. His name was Mr. Hong. His reputation dated from a consultation with Nguyen Van Thieu, the president of the Republic of Vietnam when Nguyen Van Thieu was a captain in the army in Hue. Hong reputedly told the young Thieu that perhaps he would be president of the republic one day. Thieu became president and Hong's reputation was made.

Before assuming my post in Da Nang, I went off on consultations in Laos for a week to see what things were like on that side of the border. My consular district comprised all of I Corps with a common border with Laos. Anyway, I spent a week in Laos to see what was going on there. I also stopped in Thailand for a week's rest in Bangkok before proceeding to Da Nang.

I remember flying up on Air Vietnam. I didn't take Air America, the CIA airline that also served most of our non-military needs in Vietnam. As a regularly assigned diplomat, I preferred to use the regular civilian Air Vietnam flight. When I landed, there was nobody to meet me. I'd expected the staff from the consulate to come out to greet their new principal officer. Instead, I had to ride the Air Vietnam bus, which was not all that great -- little old ladies with chickens and baskets full of vegetables. It was a decidedly inglorious arrival at my first post as principal officer. Traditions in the Foreign Service -- even in the most remote places -- call for a new principal officer to be met by his staff at the airport. I got myself on the bus with my bags and went into town. At the Air Vietnam office in town, I hired a cyclo to take me and my bags to the consulate.

Q: Those are pedicabs.

MCNAMARA: Yes. Cyclo is what the Vietnamese call them. I arrived at my new post as principal officer in a pedicab. To add to my discomfort the Marine guards refused to open the gate for me. The consulate was closed. They told me, "Come back tomorrow!" I tried to explain that I was the new consul. Finally, they agreed to arouse the guy in charge of administration, a very sleepy fellow, who lived at the consulate. By this time, I was mad enough to chew nails and spit tacks. When he arrived at the gate in his underwear, he told me, "Oh, yeah. We heard you were coming. Oh, isn't it nice you got here." He then remembered that I was still outside a chain link fence with my bags perched on the seat of a cyclo. "Do let the new consul in," he instructed the Marines.

After he dressed, we road over to my house. It was a small villa situated on a quiet back street

not far from the principal market in central Da Nang. The house was charming. The insides had been gutted by a previous occupant. The brick walls and beams were laid bare. A loft had been added as a second bedroom. The kitchen was modern and my bedroom was air conditioned. It would not have served as a principal officer's residence any place else, but I was quite happy with it.

Q: *I spent the night there when I came to visit you.*

MCNAMARA: In the loft. It was a nice little house.

The consulate itself was in a nice old villa on a side street next to the French lycée. At first, I thought somebody was very foresighted when they picked out this nice house, a beautiful little white house on a nice plot of ground, with grace old trees and a large lawn in front. As I got to know the place a bit better, I found out how we got the house. It turned out that the corps commander, who was a scoundrel named General Lam, a truly dreadful man...

Q: *He was a crook, wasn't he?*

MCNAMARA: Oh, a crook of the first water.

Q: *He had these warehouses.*

MCNAMARA: And he was a major drug dealer -- he and his wife. In any case, he gave us the house. I guess he thought it would be funny. No Vietnamese would live in it as they thought it was haunted.

The story, as it was told to me by a long-time neighbor, involved a French colonel who had lived there with his Vietnamese consort. His Vietnamese lady found out that he was cheating on her. She committed suicide, but her spirit is said still to haunt the house. Some neighbors swear to have seen a beautiful lady, in a white ao dai floating around the garden at night. They claimed that her feet never quite touched the ground. In fact, lawyer Song, who lived on the corner opposite the consulate, who drank a good deal of whiskey, swears that he frequently saw the lady floating around the garden. I was always suspicious that the whiskey might have contributed to his visions. I had an admin. officer, an African-American named Lou Russell, who took the odd nip as well, who claims that he was awakened a few times with his bed dancing around. He lived in an apartment in the consulate.

I was never privileged to witness any of these happenings. But the neighbors were convinced that the place was haunted.

I installed myself in Da Nang and set about opening our independent consulate in central Vietnam. It was the only post in Vietnam, aside from Saigon.

Q: *What were your duties?*

MCNAMARA: Mainly political. And one of the main targets was the non-Communist

opposition. It wasn't a target exactly, it was an audience or a clientele. I also advised the American military and the CORDS people on political affairs. Central Vietnam was the most politicized part of the country, as I said before, so it was important to have someone who was in touch with the politics of the region.

The Buddhist struggle movement, although it had been put down, was still simmering just under the surface. There were political parties, some of which had a substantial membership. And then, of course, there was the political activities of the Viet Cong to report on and to analyze. Not just their military campaign, but their political campaign. Indeed, you couldn't separate the two. They viewed military activity as an extension of their political campaign. Of course, they were absolutely right, but it was sometimes difficult to explain this to some of our military brethren. They weren't fighting a war just for the pleasure of fighting and dying. There were political purposes behind their carrying on this long and very costly war.

Anyway, those were the principal things that I was supposed to be doing.

We did have a small consular section, with one vice consul devoted to that. We had a fair-sized American community in the region. Not just soldiers (we had about 300,000 soldiers in our consular district), we also had a lot of American civilians -- American-company contractors supporting the military. There was also a sizable USAID and CORDS civilian presence.

We also did some economic analysis and reporting.

Q: What was your impression of and how did you make contact with the opposition parties in the area?

MCNAMARA: Oh, I identified leaders of these groups, and the ones I found to be useful contacts, I met with frequently. Gradually, one enlarges his circle of contacts and acquaintances. The process is now called networking. As you got to know people, they would introduce you to more people. It fed on itself, as it would in any other Foreign Service situation. Aside from the war, my activities were not essentially different from those of a principal officer with primarily political responsibilities in any country in the world.

Q: What was the impression you were getting from this group and others about the Thieu government?

MCNAMARA: They didn't care much for the Thieu government. However, after the Tet experience with the Communists, many took the view of supporting the lesser of two evils. The things that the Communists did, especially in Hue, really had a big impact on the people in I Corps. There was a healthier realism towards the real character and the real aims of the Communists after the atrocious acts that took place at that time. A lot of people who had strongly opposed the government previously and who had demonstrated against them during the Buddhist struggle movement, were ready to accept the government, if not enthusiastically support it. They didn't like the government particularly, but they were frightened of the VC. They had lost their innocence and were now reluctant to play into the VC's hands by weakening the government.

Q: How about the Buddhists, did they...

MCNAMARA: These were principally the Buddhists that I'm talking about. Many Buddhist monks expressed these sentiments privately to me. There were many who had been leaders in the struggle movement.

Q: How did your role as political advisor to I Corps work out?

MCNAMARA: With difficulty. I can give you two instances.

I wasn't taken terribly seriously by the Marine general who was there when I first got there, named Nickerson. I would brief him once a week. He had me briefing the CAP platoons, but he wasn't too interested in politics.

One of my vice consuls developed a dossier on the Korean Marines who were under his command. They had a base south of Da Nang at a place called Hai An. The vice consul...

Q: Who was this, Don Westmore?

MCNAMARA: No, it wasn't Westmore. It was Jim Mack. He found that the Korean Marines weren't really very effective militarily. In fact, they were often guilty of brutalizing the population. He found that they stayed on their base, except to carry on a very active black market. Their reputation as aggressive soldiers had been built by careful attention to public relations rather than by any real participation in an active combat role. They had become more a negative factor than a positive one, because of the things that they were doing to the people.

For instance, if somebody fired one shot at a Korean from a village, they would level the village. Of course, the VC saw the political gain to be had in provoking them. The Korean's reaction was predictable, spreading further animosity among the people toward the government that was allied with such brutes.

Jim Mack wrote a well documented report on the Koreans that included an eye witness account of a Korean senior officer threatening to shoot a Vietnamese district chief when he complained about some of the things that the Koreans were doing in his district. Mack was there during the altercation. His presence may well have saved the Vietnamese officer's life.

When I showed General Nickerson Jim Mack's report, he became defensive refusing to accept what Mack reported was true. When I pressed him to use his authority to bring the Koreans under control, he tried to get me removed. He asked MACV to get me removed. But Ambassador Bunker told General Westmoreland that I was his man there and that he found what I was reporting accurate and useful.

Another time, I raised the subject of corruption by Vietnamese generals with Nickerson. At the time, there was a general Thuan who was the commander of the 2nd Division in southern I Corps. He was accused of implication in illegal exporting of cinnamon. No doubt, he was taking bribes in return for his assistance in the affair. At about the same time, he was accused of raping

a 12-year-old. He really had a very unsavory reputation. People in Saigon were trying to remove him. This was the first time that the Vietnamese government had moved against a general for corruption. In my briefing of Nickerson I said, "It's a very good thing. People see this as a positive sign, that even generals are not above the law, that the government is willing to take action against a general when he's caught with his hand in the cookie jar."

Nickerson got very angry, and he said, "I'll bet you'd like to get rid of General Lam, too."

And I said, "You're right, I would. He's a crook, and he's poisoning your Marines. He and his wife are at the center of the drug trafficking in I Corps, and they're selling drugs to your men. You are quite right, Sir. I would like to get rid of him."

Nickerson almost came across the desk after me, he was so mad. With evident difficulty he controlled himself.

Q: Why was he being protective like this?

MCNAMARA: Well, he didn't want to make any waves with the Vietnamese.

Q: Politically...

MCNAMARA: Most American officers wanted to be known as having good relations with their Vietnamese counterparts. It looked good on their efficiency reports.

Q: Nobody wanted to make waves with them?

MCNAMARA: Actually it was more basic than that with Lam. I reckon that Nickerson felt he had a tacit agreement with Lam. At least this is the way I saw it. Nothing was publicly ever said, I'm sure, and maybe Nickerson didn't consciously realize that he was shielding Lam in return for the latter's acquiescence to any kind of military operation that Nickerson proposed. His ability to gain Lam's cooperation made Nickerson look good to his superiors. He had good counterpart relations. This was something that they emphasized in MACV: "You've got to have good relations with your Vietnamese military counterparts." If the American commander wanted to propose an operation someplace or other, Lam always said, "Oh, marvelous operation. Yes, you have my full cooperation." So Nickerson never had any problems with the Vietnamese as a result. And this was worth a great deal to him in career terms, because it made him look as though he was a very effective commander, one who could deal with an ally and get him to do the things that he wanted him to do. So it made him look good, and he didn't have the problems that some of the other American commanders were having with Vietnamese generals who weren't quite as cooperative as Lam was. Anyway, I'm sure that that was Nickerson's interest. Lam's interest was, of course, his business. Jesus, he'd sign any goddamn thing for any kind of an operation that Nickerson wanted as long as they left his and his wife's business interests alone. These interests included drugs.

Q: Were you reporting back to Saigon on all this?

MCNAMARA: Oh, yes.

Q: Well, how did Nickerson respond on Lam, other than restraining himself from hitting you? Did you keep meeting him?

MCNAMARA: Yes, I used to keep seeing him once a week in his office, but it was pretty cool. He paid scant attention to what I told him. But then, ultimately, he left. The military didn't stay around all that long.

For a while, we had a very good Marine general. He was an aviator. Not that that makes any difference. There were some first-class Marine generals. Nickerson was hard headed and not politically sensitive, but there were others who were very sensitive and sound military commanders. Nickerson's replacement was Keith McCutcheon. Unfortunately, he died of cancer after only a short time as III MAF commander. Too bad. He was a very good man.

At about this point, the American military withdrawal began. Most of the Marines left Vietnam in 1970. Only the 1st Regiment with PX Kelly commanding remained for a time. Command in Da Nang was transferred to an Army general command 24th Corps.

Q: Would you tell me the story, if I recall it, about your dealings with the Marine general and some Chinese fishermen. Do you recall that? At least you told me they had picked up some Chinese fishermen from mainland China, which at that time was a Communist country, and as I recall it, maybe I'm wrong, the Marines had put them in the stockade and treated them as prisoners of war.

MCNAMARA: Probably, but I don't remember now. But there were all sorts of bizarre happenings during my tour.

Q: What was your impression of the reporting system, now that you were a reporting officer, among other things, that you were getting from other places at that particular time? Nixon had come in. We were beginning the scaling down. It was just the beginning. In fact, rather quickly we were moving down.

MCNAMARA: One of the big problems that I had, I felt, was that my reports went to Saigon and people in Saigon decided what to do with them. They might send them on to Washington or they might not. More often than not, they would not. That was a problem for me. I felt this was wrong. It smacked of censorship. Maybe it wasn't conscious, but it was there. The reports should have been sent on routinely; they were not. Later on, when the four consulates general were set up, the reports went automatically to Washington. At that point, when we started talking about the withdrawal and scaling things down, I suggested (it was really my suggestion) that we set up four independent consulates general, one in each corps area. Being consul in Da Nang, it occurred to me, where it probably wouldn't have occurred to anybody else, simply because I was in that kind of position. They were saying the military had to leave. Under the kinds of agreements being negotiated we would not be able to have a military presence outside Saigon. I suggested that we put all of our residual activities under an umbrella consulate general in each corps area, and civilianize the whole operation that way. Ultimately, that's what they did. Bunker

remembered my suggestion and implemented it.

As they were drawing down troop levels, they were putting people out of work. An awful lot of Vietnamese were working for various American activities, either directly or in a secondary way. I could see that we were going to have a really serious unemployment problem and, as a result, a political problem. We had mountains of piasters in our local currency accounts that we couldn't use for anything outside the country, and we couldn't find very much to use them for in the country that wasn't highly inflationary. You had to be very careful.

Well, I pointed out that unemployment was going to become a real problem during a transition period. I documented it by going around to all of the employers in Da Nang, using them as a sample and showing how the drawdown would affect employment. I then suggested that we could alleviate the unemployment problem by developing a program of labor-intensive public works projects. Cleaning sewers, paving roads, and many other public work could sop-up a large portion of the unemployed in labor intensive projects. At the same time money would be pumped into the economy from our piaster account.

There was a lot of resistance from USAID. A lady economist at USAID insisted that there would be no problem. The Vietnamese extended family, she claimed, will take care of unemployed members. I pointed out that in many families all the bread earners might be out of work.

My suggestion did get to Washington. Moreover, it aroused the interest of the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bill Sullivan.

Q: *William Sullivan.*

MCNAMARA: Yes. He took it up with me when I arrived in Washington. Ultimately, my plan was implemented. When I came back in 1974, it was functioning in all of the main cities.

Q: *When did you leave Vietnam?*

MCNAMARA: I left in August 1971.

Q: *What was the feeling at that time from your Vietnamese contacts? There had been a sizable drawdown of troops. We had gone from almost half a million down to, what, 30,000 or something.*

MCNAMARA: No, it wasn't that small by that time.

Q: *But it was way down.*

MCNAMARA: It was going down. By that time, it probably wasn't any more than 200,000. Maybe less than that.

Q: *What was the feeling?*

MCNAMARA: The Vietnamese were very nervous. They lacked self-confidence. I had little faith in Vietnamization myself. I didn't think that they would be capable, alone, of dealing with the northerners.

By this time, the country was pacified, by and large. In 1970, I went to Saigon where I picked up a Ford Scout vehicle. I then drove down to the Mekong delta, all the way down to the southern most point at Ca Mau. From Ca Mau I then headed north all the length of the Republic to Quang-tri and the DMZ.

Q: *Quang-tri, my God. Really from one end to the other.*

MCNAMARA: Yes, I went right from one end of the country, as it was then, to the other. It was the first time that an American civilian had done it since before Tet. I took two reporters with me, one guy from Time and another from The Washington Post. We didn't hear a shot fired in anger the whole way. We even visited Da-lat. We then went down the mountains from Da-lat to Phan-rang, and then up to Nha-Trang. All along the way we heard, from all sorts of people, even American and Vietnamese, that, "security was fine in my district, but the one just to the north is bad news. You're going to have trouble there." The populated parts of the country were pacified. Tet and the Phoenix program had destroyed the indigenous VC. The sanctuaries in Cambodia had been over run and the North Vietnamese had withdrawn, to a large extent back to North Vietnam. They were biding their time waiting for the Americans to complete their withdrawal. They knew that they could not handle the American heavy fire power. They launched their next offensive in 1972 when the Americans had virtually completed the withdrawal of their ground combat units. American air power coupled with Vietnamese elite units like the Airborne and the Marine stopped them in Quang-tri.

Q: *Where did you go from Vietnam?*

MCNAMARA: I went to the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

The Sahelian crisis ended for us in Cotonou just as I was coming up for reassignment at the end of my two year tour. A personnel officer from Washington named Don Norland called me.

Q: *Who?*

MCNAMARA: His name was Don Norland.

Q: *Oh, yes, I've interviewed him.*

MCNAMARA: At the time, I was an FSO-3, in the old system.

Q: *Sort of the equivalent of a colonel.*

MCNAMARA: Yes. In the new system the old class 3 is an FS-1. It is at the top of the middle

grades. Norland offered me a posting as the minerals attaché in Johannesburg.

I was stunned. I told him that I knew nothing of geology.

He reassured me that the Department of the Interior would give me a crash 3-4 month course in geology and mining.

I asked, "Why me?"

Norland replied that I was "an economist."

"Well, I'm not really an economist," I countered, "I've been an economic officer. That is not the same thing."

In any case, he insisted, "We want you to be the minerals attaché."

I told him I was not interested and asked what other assignments might be available. Norland never gave me any alternative. He intensified his hard sell with descriptions of the marvelous opportunity I would have. I might even become Acting Consul General in Johannesburg when the consul general was out of town, he offered as the ultimate enticement. In the meantime, the country director for West Africa called me and asked if I would be interested in going back to Vietnam as consul general in Can-tho. He said that Graham Martin was looking for a suitable person to take the job as consul general in Can-Tho. He had been looking for some six months without success. The job was rated as an FSO-1 (Minister Counselor) which was two grades above my own grade at the time. The people that the Department suggested to him, he wouldn't have, and the people he wanted, he couldn't get. As you will recall, I had been a principal officer in Da Nang. Although I may have been junior in terms of my grade, I had much pertinent experience for the job as principal officer in another post in Vietnam.

The country director, knew Martin. He had served under him in Italy. He offered to speak to Martin on my behalf, if I wished to have the job. I assured John that I would be happy to go to Can-Tho, especially to a job with a two grade stretch. Such a stretch, at a senior level, almost never happens. It would be a great boost for my career. Moreover, I viewed the alternative being offered in Johannesburg as a definite career side track.

I told Norland that I wanted to see whether the job in Vietnam would be offered before deciding on any other possibilities. He assured me that I was not going to get that job. "You're only an FSO-3. That's a class one job. We are going to put a senior officer in that job. You're not going to get it, so you may as well take the job in Johannesburg and be happy with it." I continued to demur. My friend continued to speak to Graham Martin on my behalf. Graham Martin, at this point, was in Washington defending the AID program with Congress. After a week or so of indecision, I suddenly received orders to leave immediately for Vietnam. I was told to be in Vietnam in a week's time. At the time I was chargé d'affaires in Cotonou. There was nobody at the embassy that I could easily turn over the post to. I called personnel in Washington to tell them that I could not go right away. The new ambassador was not coming until the following month. The person next in seniority to me at post was a newly arrived administrative officer.

The personnel officer told me flatly, "We don't care what you do, just get out of there."

I replied lamely that, "The next person in line is the admin officer, who has just arrived. He's never been in Africa before."

The reply was, "Make him the chargé d'affaires, and just get out of there. You've got to pass through the Department, talk to Graham Martin, and then get to Saigon all in a week's time."

"Yes sir," I answered. With some concern I turned over the post to the admin. officer, who was in shock. I packed all my gear and sent it to Vietnam, including a collection of African artifacts which was later lost in the evacuation.

Before leaving I had a great party in the house that Anderson's wife built. She was a great woman. I loved her. She was a fine woman. Anyway, she had built a beautiful residence. It was her project, and she did a great job. I had many African friends including musicians from some of the local nightclubs. They also came and played free of charge as a going away present. Some of the more traditional members of the diplomat corps were shocked. The French ambassador just couldn't believe what he was seeing; all those young black bodies gyrating around a formal residence. Nothing like that had ever happened in Cotonou before.

I then left and drove in the ambassadorial sedan to Nigeria. My friend, Earl Bellinger, who was the admin. counselor poured me on board a Swissair flight after I spent a day celebrating with my Nigerian friends.

I came directly to Washington to talk to Graham Martin. We spoke for about a half an hour. He looked over my record. He'd already seen it and knew that I'd been a principal officer in Da Nang. He talked to me and approved of me.

Q: Did he ask you any questions about your impressions of whither Vietnam?

MCNAMARA: No, he didn't ask me questions like that. He just made it absolutely clear that I wasn't to interfere with the CIA's operation in Can-Tho.

After my assignment was blessed by Martin, I went on my way with a brief stop in Hawaii. My children were living there, and I saw them. I also had briefings at CINCPAC before leaving for Saigon. Amazingly, I made it in a week's time, from Cotonou to Saigon. The reason they wanted me there so quickly was that they were having a meeting in Saigon of the four consuls general from the four corps. It was supposed to be a big confab, a mission conference to brief the consuls general (who were a little bit like feudal barons). In turn, they briefed the embassy on what was going on in their areas. We were also meant to discuss the problems.

When I arrived Lacey Wright, an old friend from my previous tours in Vietnam, was the acting consul general in Can-Tho. Wolfgang Lehmann, whom you might know, was the DCM in Saigon. He had been consul general in Can-Tho. Martin brought him up to Saigon, and then was never able to find anybody that suited him to replace Wolfgang in Can-Tho until he found me.

The conference was interesting. We had briefings, which I thought were incredibly naive, especially one by Frank Snepp of the CIA, on the political situation.

Q: He wrote a book later.

MCNAMARA: Not much of a book. Anyway, I'll talk to you about that at a later time.

Martin, of course, was still in the United States, as he was through most of that period. He was in the unhappy position of having to defend the administration's policy of supporting the Vietnamese. Henry Kissinger, who at that time was Secretary of State, was avoiding association with a situation he saw as a loser. Nor was anyone else prepared to stick their necks out. So they left the defense of support for Vietnam in the hands of the ambassador, who should have been in Saigon, but wasn't. Martin spent much of his time in 1974-'75 in Washington, fighting the bureaucratic fight on the Hill.

Before I left Washington, I had talked to Jim Bullington, who was serving on the Vietnam desk. We had known each other in Vietnam. Jim was almost captured in Hue during the Tet attacks. He was hidden by a Vietnamese priest. At this time, Jim was working on the Vietnam Desk. As a friend and fellow old Vietnam hand, he told me: "It's all finished. They're not going to be able to hold out. The regime is going to collapse, and the North is going to take over." He was very pessimistic. And, of course, he was right. Most others I talked to in Washington and even in Saigon were more optimistic. No one predicted that the end would come as quickly as it did in 1975.

I remember Ken Quinn, who's now the deputy assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, was in the White House working for the NSC. We were also old friends from Vietnam. Just before coming back to Washington, he had served in the Consulate General in Can-Tho. He congratulated me on getting such a marvelous job. We did not talk much about politics. Rather, he told me what a great job I was going to have as consul general. He said, "You've got a huge territory, with much autonomy and great power as Consul General. It will be a great job for you." And it was; he was absolutely right. Quinn also briefed me on social delights that were in store for me as a bachelor. This was my White House briefing.

My briefing in Saigon was disappointing

My first impression of Lehmann was bad. He appeared to be pompous, opinionated and lacking in real understanding of Vietnam and the Vietnamese. On longer acquaintance, he confirmed my initial impression of a foolish man who thought he knew a great deal about Vietnam on the basis of some six-eight months' experience in Can-Tho. In fact, he understood very little. I was further shocked to learn that I was the only one of the consuls general who had any serious previous Vietnam experience.

Martin's greatest weakness was to surround himself with sycophants. He chose people for their supposed loyalty to him. He'd been in Italy, Thailand, and Korea. His principal subordinates were almost all people whom he had known in other places. Few of them had previous

experience in Vietnam. This was a serious weakness that was hard to justify. By this time, we had a large number of people with long experience of Vietnam. Surprisingly, prior to my arrival, none of them occupied one of these key jobs as consuls general. Moreover, his DCM had only been in the delta for six months. His understanding of his surroundings seemed superficial at best. In relatively junior jobs, at the embassy, however, there were many experienced, old hands. I did not have the impression that they were much listened to by their seniors.

A few old hands had survived. Colonel "Jake" Jacobson was still there as mission coordinator, but I don't know how much he was listened to on substantive things. I think he dealt more with operational aspects of the remnants of the CORDS network. But he was certainly a man of considerable knowledge, and experience. He met me at the airport when I arrived; he came out and picked me off the airplane and brought me into Saigon. We had known one another during my earlier tours, but we became good friends and allies while I was in Can-Tho.

In short, Martin's choice of subordinates was not brilliant. He picked them mainly for their personal loyalty to him. I'm not sure what it was, but most seemed without depth in terms of their understanding of what was going on in the country. This was true of the Mission's top leadership both in the embassy and on the CIA side.

Q: This consul general situation of developing little feudal baronies was sort of unique. After the American military pullout in Vietnam, what were they doing, and particularly what were you doing? What was the reason for these consuls general?

MCNAMARA: In about 1970 or '71, we were beginning our withdrawing. People were talking about an agreement with the North that would involve a complete withdrawal of American military forces from Vietnam. At the time, I was principal officer of the consulate in Da Nang. I suggested in a message to Saigon, that we set up consulates general in each one of the four corps areas. Under these civilian umbrellas, we could place all of the residual American activities left in Vietnam, outside Saigon. Apparently my suggestion was not forgotten. When the Accords worked out between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho were implemented, we set up four consulates general as I had foreseen. Under the Accords, no American military were to be stationed in the country outside Saigon. Instead, the CG's took over responsibility for all of the continuing U.S. activities. These included: road building, agricultural support activities, public health services and education. In fact, it encompassed support for all of the governmental and developmental activities being carried out by the government of Vietnam. In addition, American support for the Vietnamese military had not ended. We continued to provide essential logistics support which was monitored by the consulates general. We also gave military advice and intelligence. Finally, we had field personnel searching for the remains of MIA. While there were no Americans taking part in military operations, we were still providing advice and massive logistics support. All of these activities, where we'd had huge establishments previously, were put under the consuls general.

Can-Tho, in the Mekong delta, where I was, was the biggest and wealthiest of the regions. Indeed, it was the prize of the war.

Q: This is the rice bowl.

MCNAMARA: It had been the rice bowl of Southeast Asia. I had 16 offices, spread throughout the area. There were some 17 or 18 provinces in the delta. I had offices in all but one or two of them, with Americans resident in the offices. In all, I had about 1,000 employees.

Q: *Good God!*

MCNAMARA: Yes, it was a big organization. Most employees were Vietnamese, but I also had well over 100 Americans, as well as a sprinkling of Filipinos and Koreans.

Part of this large establishment was from the CIA. They maintained a certain separateness from the rest of the consulate general. In theory, we were supposed to be united under the overall direction of the consul general. In fact the CIA elements maintained both a psychological, as well as a physical separation. They still had their own compounds and separate logistical system. It was a hangover from the halcyon days when the CIA had a huge, semi-autonomous organization spread over the whole country.

Q: *What was your impression of the CIA operation when you got to the field? You said you weren't very impressed by the briefing you got when you first arrived.*

MCNAMARA: I was very depressed by it. It seemed amateurish. Moreover, it too was being run to a large extent by people without any real previous Vietnam experience. I arrived in Can-Tho almost simultaneously with a new regional CIA chief. His previous experience had been in Korea and Laos. His deputy had come from Laos, as had some of the other people in his organization. The little war in Laos had been run by the CIA. However, its intensity and the quality of the enemy was much different than in Vietnam. Taking people from Laos was akin to putting sand-lot baseball players up against the New York Yankees. They were simply out of their league.

Q: *I sort of sensed that the Foreign Service establishment (I'm speaking in the broadest sense -- CIA and State Department) was beginning to run out of steam as far as Vietnam was concerned. So many of us went through there, but people were beginning to look elsewhere by this time.*

MCNAMARA: Many were running for cover. People didn't want to go back. They didn't want to be associated with such an unpopular enterprise that might fail. I went back mainly because I was being offered a super job. By and large, I don't think that the personnel system in State or CIA were encouraging their best people to go to Vietnam. This reflected a general American disillusionment with Vietnam.

The war in Laos was really the Little Leagues. It was sandlot in comparison with the sophistication and the martial qualities of the Vietnamese Communist troops and their leadership. I have often heard that, in Laos, the nice relatively soft Laotians would often decide battles by how much noise each side made. Whoever made the most noise won the battle. Well, that certainly was not the case with the Vietnamese. They were tough, they were serious, they were world-class soldiers and very well led. This was the big leagues. Sadly, many of our personnel were no longer up to that level. Many were fine people, but they were out of their

depth. They did not have sufficient seasoning in such harsh conditions and against such a formidable enemy. This was true of the embassy, and that was true of the CIA. Certainly, it was true of the CIA leadership that I had with me in the delta.

Q: *What were they doing?*

MCNAMARA: Its hard to know, because they kept an awful lot from me. They wouldn't share an awful lot. Theoretically, I was supposed to be seeing everything, but I know that I wasn't. One of their most egregious faults was sneaking behind my back in dealing with the corps commander. One day, I asked the regional CIA station chief why he was briefing the corps commander without my knowing it. The corps commander had asked me, "Who is in charge? Which one of you Americans is really in charge? You, or the CIA man? What's going on here?"

I assured him that I was in charge.

He then told me that the CIA man was telling him things that were quite different from what I told him. You people do not speak with one voice, he concluded.

When I got back to the CG, I summoned the CIA man to come to my office. I then asked him, "What the hell's going on? What are you telling the Corps commander?"

"Oh, I can't tell you."

"Why can't you tell me?" I asked.

"No, no, it's confidential," he panicked, "I am not able to discuss sources and methods with you."

Q: *He could tell the Vietnamese corps commander.*

MCNAMARA: And I said, "But you're telling a foreign official things that you can not tell me?"

"But he's one of our agents," the station chief asserted.

The situation was impossible. It was like Alice in Wonderland, dealing with these people. I couldn't get any sense out of him. I was not trying to run his operations for him, but I really had to know what he was doing. And what he was telling my counterpart to at least assure that the Americans were speaking with one voice. Otherwise, we would lose all credibility. Moreover, long experience had taught us that the Vietnamese would soon begin to play us one off against the other. Indeed, they were probably already doing so. It was insane to operate in such a divided way with one American element undercutting another.

Finally, I complained to Polgar, who was the CIA station chief in Saigon. He assured me that I was in charge of the whole mission in Can-Tho, including the CIA contingent. He very sanctimoniously assured me that he would straighten out my CIA man insisting that he keep me fully informed. Of course, that was bull shit. He told them nothing of the sort. This was play acting to assuage me.

I also complained to the DCM. He told me, "You just get along with them. You're making a mountain out of a molehill. This is nonsense. You're there to get along with everybody."

My situation was not a happy one. I was being lied to by the CIA and was left without support by my own superiors. Martin was absent during most of this period. Without the DCM's support, I had nowhere to turn.

Q: Well, Terry, as an old hand, I've found that an awful lot of the CIA operations depended on basically a payoff. They'd buy people. It sounds a lot fancier than it really was. And that is, you paid somebody and you expected them to be bought and stay bought. That was the sum and substance of most of the CIA operations.

MCNAMARA: Well, can I tell you, that's exactly what was happening. Except I am not sure these agents were staying bought. We were really in a ridiculous position. As a country we were completely bankrolling the South Vietnamese war effort. They should have and would have given us any information we demanded without further payment. We had agreements that they would share completely all of their intelligence and tactical information with us. Here we were, supporting the war. And although we'd pulled out our troops, we were still there, and we were essential to the conduct of the war. We could not operate effectively, even in terms of giving them the support they needed, if we didn't know precisely what was going on.

Let me go back. I had some very good, experienced guys there, especially the old CORDS people.

Q: These were Americans.

MCNAMARA: These were Americans, and some of them had been there in Vietnam for 12 or 15 years. Some were retired Army officers, very experienced people. Others were former Peace Corps volunteers. They had served elsewhere with Peace Corps, but most had been in Vietnam for 5 or 6 years and spoke Vietnamese. They were good, solid people. They lived in virtually all of the provinces, and had established excellent contacts with the local people, including their Vietnamese counterparts. Most of the time, they could get any information we needed. Moreover, they were, by and large, sophisticated enough to evaluate what they were being told.

Q: You're talking about the CIA?

MCNAMARA: No. I'm talking about the Vietnamese. Sometimes people like the military intelligence people would withhold things from the civilian military intelligence people who were assigned to me. They were employed by the Defense Attachés Office in Saigon. They were retired Army officers who served as military intelligence officers in the provinces. They were supposed to have complete access to information, but sometimes the Vietnamese intelligence officers wouldn't share stuff with them. They would hold back hoping to sell to the CIA. At other times, they sold the same info to the CIA as they gave my people for nothing. The resource I had that was most reliable was the old CORDS people who were living out in the provinces and who were well plugged in. They came up with far better, more reliable information that cost us

nothing. On the other hand, the CIA people would produce information that was often inaccurate. Few of them seemed to have an ability to evaluate information, or to judge the reliability of sources. In any case, they were most often paying for information we had a right to receive as a matter of course. They were subverting the whole system without improving the quality of information available to us.

Q: They were paying for it. With paid-for information, there is not only, you might say, the moral problem, but there also is the very practical problem that it's a commodity, and it can be pretty shoddy, but if there's a market for it, people will...

MCNAMARA: The Vietnamese informants were selling the CIA what they thought they wanted, whether the info was right or whether it was wrong didn't seem to make any difference.

A perfect example of this was an incident that occurred in Can-Tho. The Vietnamese organized a conference. I was invited by the corps commander to all of the major conferences. He'd have his weekly briefing conferences, corps-level staff conferences and so on, and I would go as his counterpart, sitting next to him. This time, a man named Hoang Duc Nha, a nephew of Nguyen Van Thieu's and the President's principal political operator came for a special meeting. Obviously, they would be discussing domestic political questions.

Q: Nguyen Van Thieu was the president.

MCNAMARA: The president of the country. That morning, we had the long, regular weekly military briefing on what was going on in the corps area, the whole delta. I sat with the corps commander and participated in the conference, asking questions and discussing points of interest with the corps commander and his staff. In the afternoon, the corps commander drew me aside asking that I not attend. He explained that they would be discussing internal politics with Nha. It would not be proper to have a foreigner present.

I understood the General's point of view. As a good nationalist, he would find the presence of a foreigner repugnant. It was a point of view that was understandable and even admirable.

A day or two later, the CIA told me they were going to give me a briefing on what had gone on at the afternoon session. Earlier, I asked them to find out what went on in the closed portion of the meeting. To help them in their acquisition, targeting what was important and what wasn't, I'd said, "We really ought to find out, if we can, what went on in that afternoon meeting in which they were to discuss national tactics." Proudly, they prepared to demonstrate their prowess. A meeting was organized in a large conference room in the Consulate General. Their briefer commenced to describe what had happened at the morning conference I had attended. Finally, I stopped him saying that I had attended the morning meeting at which these subjects were discussed.

And they said, "No, this discussion took place in the afternoon."

I corrected the briefer -- gently at first. When he insisted that his version of the meeting had taken place with Nha present in the afternoon, I asked whether they had repeated in the afternoon

meeting exactly what was said in my presence in the morning.

The briefer and his bosses insisted that their version was correct because it came from their agents. I kept pressing them. Finally, I asked them to identify their agents?

The case officer then blurted out, "It was the Vu-graph operator."

Q: *The what?*

MCNAMARA: The Vu-graph operator. You know what a Vu-graph is?

Q: *Oh, yes, it's an overhead projector.*

MCNAMARA: He said, "It was the Vu-graph operator."

I found the level of gullibility incredible. The soldier sold them semi-public information assuming they would be taken in by it. I assured them that the Vietnamese would not have Vu-graphs at a sensitive discussion of political tactics. I couldn't believe it, that these guys could be that naive and that stupid that they would pay for such patently false information, especially as I had told them beforehand exactly what had happened at the morning meeting and my assumption of what would be the subjects of the afternoon session.

Q: *Well, I think this is the pernicious thing that happens with CIA intelligence. One, it's paid for. But the other one is that it seems to come from a source that is so much more exalted than what is developed by people out on the ground talking to people in the normal course of events. It takes on a mystique of its own, which, often, at certain levels in the government, people pay more attention to. And it can be wrong as hell, because it ends up depending on the integrity and the position of a Vu-graph operator, maybe.*

MCNAMARA: Well, the guy was selling them what he figured they'd be naive enough to take.

Q: *And also what he knew.*

MCNAMARA: That's right, he wasn't there that afternoon at the political discussion. They wouldn't have Vu-graphs when they were having a serious discussion on political tactics.

Q: *Incidentally, just to put it in frame, when did you arrive in Can-Tho, and when did you leave?*

MCNAMARA: I arrived August-September 1974, and I left on the 19th of April, '75.

Q: *Okay, now we'll go back.*

MCNAMARA: The Foreign Service inspectors came to Can-Tho in February 1975. The head of the inspection team was Bill Bradford. He was an old administrative officer from Africa. I think he was the head of AF/EX at one time. Ultimately, he became an ambassador in Chad.

Q: I think so, too. I think I've interviewed him.

MCNAMARA: Well, he did the consulate. I told him that the division in our mission between CIA and others is potentially dangerous. If we don't speak with one voice and have a single chain of command, we could have great difficulty should we have to evacuate or find ourselves in some other crisis. He promised that he would put my forebodings in his report. I never saw the report. But I saw him after the evacuation; he was working on the resettlement of the refugees. He assured me that my predictions of trouble had been put in his report. "I've got it in my papers. What you foresaw was borne out by subsequent events." Things that have been written about the terrible divisions in Saigon during the final days were repeated in Can-Tho. I don't know what happened in other corps areas.

I tried desperately to build and enforce a unity of command. One of my aims was to simplify our administration and logistics. I wanted to do away with separate administrations and wasteful independent logistic chains. I reckoned that half our combined budget could have been saved by combining services and facilities. But the CIA people wouldn't hear of it. Lehmann said that I was making waves. I think, if the crisis hadn't come, he probably would have gotten me booted out of Can-Tho.

Q: What was the situation? Obviously, there was a change.

MCNAMARA: The situation in the country was deteriorating rapidly.

Q: You're talking about Christmas of '74, of course.

MCNAMARA: Seventy-four, yes. It was around that time, maybe just after. The North Vietnamese mounted an offensive against one of the provinces near the Cambodian border, in III Corps. They laid siege to the province capital. The South Vietnamese tried to reinforce, but were unable to do so.

Q: Around Pleiku, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: No, it wasn't that far up. It was in III Corps. Pleiku was in II Corps. It was a minor province; I don't remember the name now. The South Vietnamese really tried to hold it, but couldn't. Finally, the province town fell. And that was the first province town to fall.

I remember coming into the Vietnamese corps headquarters' briefing room that morning. The Vietnamese senior staff officers were obviously very agitated about something. They were whispering to one another. I walked in with the corps commander. The sense of gloom was pervasive. Many of them sensed that this defeat was the beginning of the end.

The North Vietnamese were testing for an American reaction. When we didn't react to their attack on a provincial capital, prohibited under the cease fire, then they figured they could go ahead with their more important offensive plans. This attack was a precursor of the more general attacks that began with Kontum and ended in the fall of Saigon.

Q: How was this playing, as you were seeing it? I take it, the area you were in, IV Corps, was relatively quiet, wasn't it?

MCNAMARA: Well, there was fighting going on, especially around the periphery of IV Corps. Within some provinces, there was also minor skirmishing.

When I arrived in Can-Tho, I was struck by two things. The first was the sorry physical state of the consulate general buildings in Can-Tho. The second was the deterioration in the state of security in much of IV Corps. When I arrived, they had a hot dog stand in the lobby of the consulate general. My first weekend, I told the admin. officer to remove it immediately. I then got him to redecorate the lobby and put a new coat of paint on the exterior of the old buildings. The appearance of the consulate general was symptomatic of a general decline in standards.

I began my tour by insisting on cleaning up our physical facilities. I extended my efforts to an insistence on raising standards of work performance. I tried to infuse energy into a lethargic organization. The division in command and the problems with the CIA were my next target.

On the Vietnamese side, two things happened.

After the Tet Offensive, the VC infrastructure had surfaced, been identified, and then killed, captured or forced to leave the populated parts of Vietnam, by the much maligned Phoenix Program. A tough Corps commander, General Truong, who vigorously pursued the VC completed the task of putting the VC on the defensive. Cleaning the sanctuaries in Cambodia was another important element in pacifying the delta. Most of the supplies for the Viet Cong in the delta came through Cambodia. Once the supply lines were cut by the invasion into Cambodia, those supplies dried up for a while. And that had an effect on the war in the delta.

Another factor that was very important, which most people didn't recognize, was that the policies that we'd carried on in terms of economic development were really coming to fruition at about that time. We'd introduced miracle rice varieties from the Philippines. We'd redistributed land to the peasants after paying off the large landholders. We'd set up rural banks to provide ready credit to farmers and get them out of the clutches of the Chinese moneylenders. The success of our rural development program resulted in prosperity in the Mekong delta. When I returned after some four years, the farmers were prospering. They were growing three and four crops a year, where they had maybe two before. Each crop was much more abundant -- two, three, four times as abundant as any crop had been before. So they were producing lots and lots of rice. The USAID agriculture people calculated that, in 1975, for the first time in ten or 12 years, Vietnam was going to be exporting rice. Up to that point, we'd been supplying a lot of rice to Vietnam. Under our PL 480 program, American rice was coming in and feeding the Vietnamese. Now, they were beginning again to produce a surplus. Our efforts had succeeded in bringing about a green revolution.

As a result of this rural prosperity, the issues that had fed the rebellion by the Viet Cong in the delta had disappeared. The old peasant farmer didn't want his sons to go out and go to war. He wanted to keep them back on the farm to help him grow and market his rice. He had good economic reasons for not getting involved in the war. So recruitment dried up for the Viet Cong.

It also was much more difficult, of course, for the national army to recruit. They had to go out and drag draftees into the army. The peasant boys didn't want to go into the army, but they also didn't want to go with the Viet Cong. By the time I got there, I discovered that there were almost no locally recruited Viet Cong. The bulk of their forces in the south in the Mekong delta, were from the north. They were northerners who were doing the fighting, even as guerrillas, in the south. Actually, there was precious little guerrilla activity going on. It was almost all main force northern units.

Q: Obviously, that far south, with northerners down there, there wasn't much rapport. These were fish in unfriendly waters.

MCNAMARA: Yes. There were some, obviously, or the thing couldn't have gone on. But the real black-pajamaed local Viet Cong people were almost a thing of the past. If the northerners had gone away, the rebellion would have ended in a fairly short time in the south. The southerners could have dealt with it easily with their own means. But the northerners were the ones who kept it going.

Well, that was the situation.

When I arrived, there was a corps commander there, a guy named Nghi, who was an absolute wizard on briefings. He was a spellbinder. He had perfected the American Army briefing techniques. He could blind you with charts, statistics and all kinds of bull shit. A great deal of it was absolutely false. I saw American congressmen roll over when that guy got up with his charts. He was marvelous. He was a perfect product of the McNamara era. A perfect product.

The trouble is that he was also President Nguyen Van Thieu's bagman. He was Thieu's instrument for skimming the wealth off the countryside. The Mekong delta, being the richest part of the country, was one of Thieu's most important sources of revenue. The Americans had left. The money that the Vietnamese had been able to extract from our large expenditures was fast drying up. Money to feed the patronage machine had to be squeezed out of the people. A web of corruption was in place. It went from the palace in Saigon down to the corps commanders to the province chiefs to the district chiefs down to the lowest levels, the village chiefs and the hamlet chiefs. In the delta Nghi was the principal bagman. As corps commander, he was at the center of the web in the Mekong delta.

As I visited the various provinces, I found that some of the province chiefs were lying about their reports on the level of security in their provinces. They were saying that there were no problems in places where obviously there were grave security problems. The North Vietnamese were reinfiltrating into areas that had been cleaned out. The situation was deteriorating because they weren't doing anything about it. These guys were interested in making money and were neglecting the security side.

In Vinh-long, the province that I had served in when I first came to Vietnam, my old friends told how the situation was deteriorating while the province chief ignored reality. Our representative there, Bob Traister, was an old CORDS type who had been in Vietnam for at least ten years and spoke colloquial Vietnamese. He had good contacts and understood what was going on. He was

the representative also for the neighboring province of Vinh-binh. He confirmed the grim picture painted by my Vietnamese friends.

The corps commander paid no attention to my warnings. There was no way that he was going to bother the province chief in Vinh-long because the province chief in Vinh-long was supplying him with regular cash payments. Nghi was not about to disturb the proverbial hen that was producing his golden eggs.

Q: Just to get a feel for how this worked on the American side, here you were, you were on the ground, you were the consul general, you understood about this corps commander, but he was your principal point of contact.

MCNAMARA: No. He was my counterpart. We were at the same level. He was in charge of the whole Mekong delta as both military commander and as civil administrator.

Q: You had to have good relations with him. But at the same time, American congressmen, American generals, other people were coming and being briefed by this guy. Did you take them aside afterwards and say, "This guy is like the Wizard of Oz. Don't pay any attention to him. This is what's really happening."?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: Because at a certain point, this was obviously going to get back to him. How did you play this?

MCNAMARA: Well, I played it straight. I did try to correct impressions that he left with them. As far as I can remember, at that point, there hadn't been any American generals down there, but there were important visitors. I tried to play it as straight with them as I could. Congressman Leo Ryan, from California, who was later killed at Jonestown, Guyana, came down. I remember taking him out and watching a firefight from across the river near Chau-doc. I tried to correct impressions that this guy was leaving.

At this point, mainly in Saigon, but elsewhere in Vietnam, too, there was an anticorruption movement going on. A Catholic priest was leading the movement. This was putting a lot of pressure on Thieu. It was being played up big in the American press. As a result of the American press focus, Thieu could not use the police freely against these people. Demonstrations were being organized. In other times, Thieu would have unleashed the police who would have broken some heads, and ended the demonstrations. He couldn't do this because of the delicacy of his relationship with the United States. He desperately needed an appropriation from Congress for economic and military support. Finally, Thieu had to deal with the demonstrators by getting rid of some corrupt officials.

Under great pressure, he removed the IV corps commander and appointed General Nguyen Qua Nam, commander of the 7th Division to replace him. Nam was a real soldier. He was also incorruptible. An oddity among senior Vietnamese officers, Nam was a bachelor. This was important for wives were one of the principal conduits of corruption in Vietnam. I asked him

why he remained a bachelor, and he said, "When the war is over, I will marry. Until that time, I'm going to remain a bachelor. It helps to keep me honest."

Things in the delta quickly changed for the better.

Q: *About when was this?*

MCNAMARA: It was just before Christmastime. In other words, I wasn't there for very long with this Nghi fellow. Wolfgang Lehmann, in Saigon, when I tried to tell him that Nghi was corrupt and really doing a great deal of harm to the war effort, told me he was the best soldier he'd ever met. Nghi was no soldier at all; he was an accountant, a Mafia accountant.

But Nguyen Qua Nam was a real soldier. He came in, a very quiet man, but a lot of steel in him. He asked me what I thought was going on, and I told him honestly that I thought that he was faced with two things, and they were interconnected: one, was a web of corruption. The second was a deteriorating security situation. The second, I suggested, feeds on the first. Corruption kept in place and distracted inefficient military people who wouldn't prosecute the war because they were so busy extracting money.

"I agree with you completely," he said. "Can you get me some information?" I told him that I would start in Vinh-long, the province that I knew most about. Fortuitously, it is a key province in the Mekong delta, located astride some of the region's most important lines of communication, running northwards to Saigon. "Give your information only to me," he instructed. "I will keep it in my own safe. I cannot rely on my staff for such delicate information," Nam confided. "I want to know about the province chief. I want to know what's going on. I want a good assessment on both corruption and the security situation, and a good evaluation of the province chief and of all the district chiefs. I want you to tell me whether you think they ought to go or stay."

I got my representative in Vinh-long, Bob Traister, to undertake studies on both Vinh-long and Vinh-binh provinces on the most confidential basis. Our report recommended the immediate dismissal of the province chief. We told Nam which district chiefs were worth saving and which ones ought to go. He reacted immediately by canning the province chief. A regimental commander from his former division was named to replace him. I had a few reservations about the regimental commander. Nam told me not to worry. He is a good soldier. That's what he's going to be focused on, fighting the war, not on civil administration. We'll have an honest civil administrator deal with the civil side. The real sources of corruption are there.

We did the same thing in Vinh-binh. There, he said, "Okay, I don't have anybody to replace the province chief. In any case, he is recoupable. I'll leave him there on trial for a short time. But he's on trial and he knows it. If things don't improve, he goes, too." The district chiefs and some of the other officials that we had indicated were sent packing.

To deal with the security situation, Nam established a special zone right in the heart of the delta. He took a colonel whom I had known in I Corps, a young paratrooper, and made him the zone commander. Regular battalions were assigned on a rotating basis to the zone from the ARVN divisions. Under the aggressive command of my paratrooper friend things started turning around

in this key area in the heart of the delta.

Nam then went after the division commanders. His replacement in the 7th and the division commander in the 9th Division both were good soldiers. The 9th and the 7th were both performing well. They were in the northern part of the delta. The 7th was protecting the main route up to Saigon, Route 4, and the 9th was operating in the Parrot's Beak, which is a long strip of Cambodia that juts into Vietnam. It is a historic route of infiltration and invasion. He just prodded those divisions, because they were in good hands and were operating well already. The 21st Division, in the south, had a weak commander. As a result, the division was not performing well. Nam replaced this gentleman with a more aggressive officer. At the same time, he warned the other province chiefs that they must perform or be replaced. He also put out word that he would not expect the usual monthly payoffs. One province chief confided to Willie Saulter, my representative in a province along the "Parrot's Beak" that he was greatly relieved at not having to extract money from the local merchants.

Q: Let me ask a question going back to the initial discussion about the CIA. Basically, the CIA operation is a corrupting one: you're paying people of a government to supply you with information at the same time you're trying to wipe out corruption. How was this working out? When you tell your CIA man, "Look, we want to find out who's corrupt," obviously they're not going to tell you they're corrupt people.

MCNAMARA: That's right. Stu, I had better sources of information than they did. I did not involve them in any of these studies. In any case, I was never sure how I could trust them. They might well have told some of their friends about what we were doing. Since some of their sources were probably among the targets of our investigation, the whole effort could have been endangered.

Q: I'm sure you did.

MCNAMARA: Through people that I knew myself, because I'd served in the delta. I also knew a lot of people in the Vietnamese army with whom I'd served elsewhere. Also, I had my network of USAID guys from CORDS who were well experienced and well plugged in to very good sources of local information. So we had good information, and paid nothing for it. Moreover, we were capable of evaluating our information in a more sophisticated, knowledgeable way than was the CIA. In short, I got no information on corruption from the CIA. God knows what they were doing, because I didn't see all their output, but most of what I did was on the military intentions of the Viet Cong. Unfortunately, most of it was wrong. Of the rest, a large part came from their sources in the South Vietnamese army and police. We were getting almost identical material directly from the army and police as part of our regular liaison. Another significant source, I believe, was disinformation being fed to them by the Viet Cong to mislead us.

Q: Well, did you tell them to cut out paying Vietnamese officials, that you were trying to root out corruption?

MCNAMARA: I brought up the contradiction you mentioned, that we're against corruption, but yet we're corrupting people ourselves, to DCM Lehmann, station chief Polgar and the regional

CIA boss. I had no success in convincing any of them that we were defeating our own interests. One of the biggest problems was that Martin wanted several independent sources of information. He deluded himself in thinking that he had such a source in the CIA hacks that were then operating in my part of Vietnam. Lehmann loyally carried out his instructions despite contradictions.

Q: *Like trying to convert the Pope to another religion. That's the mother's milk of espionage.*

MCNAMARA: That's right. Good lord, they're...

Q: *Rolling in money.*

MCNAMARA: They did not understand or did not wish to understand. It all went over their heads. I tried to get them to do things which should have been acceptable to them.

Q: *Then how did the situation during the winter and early spring, until April, play out, as far as you saw it?*

MCNAMARA: In the delta?

Q: *Yes.*

MCNAMARA: In the delta, things, right up to the end, were going fairly well. Obviously, the problems elsewhere in the country were having an effect in the delta on morale. The war itself, however, was not going badly in the delta. NVA units periodically attempted to cut Route 4, but the 7th Division stopped them. Infiltration into the heartland of the delta was slowed, and Nam's effort to recover lost ground in Vinh-long and Vinh-binh had made a good start. The South Vietnamese could have held out in the delta for a long time, maybe indefinitely, if they had shifted their forces around Saigon southwards into the delta. Of course, this would have meant giving up Saigon. The North Vietnamese could not have used tanks in the soggy rice paddies of the delta. The southerners would have had the psychological advantage of fighting for their home. To accept the loss of Saigon, however, was probably too much for them to contemplate. I am not sure whether they ever really seriously considered a retreat into the delta. General Truong did come down to study the possibility just before the end. At that time, however, he was badly shaken by his losses in I corps, and may not have been capable of coming to grips with such a drastic strategy and of convincing others of its feasibility.

Q: *It's marshy, with rivers.*

MCNAMARA: It's marshy. You couldn't use armor down there. The South Vietnamese were doing pretty well in the delta, right up to the end. The problems were elsewhere in the country.

Q: *What were you getting from the embassy, as the situation was falling apart?*

MCNAMARA: Well, we got some reporting from the embassy on what was going on elsewhere in the country. I gathered most of my information on quick trips to Saigon where I could talk to

friends like Jake Jacobson. The situation in Saigon was very tense, very nervous and panicky. Many Americans were panicking in Saigon, and very nervous.

When Da Nang was overrun and Nha-Trang evacuated, I told the embassy that, "I don't want any of the people from up north, who have been evacuated or who've evacuated themselves, coming down to the delta. I saw what a state many of them were in. Panic is infectious. These people could not teach us much about evacuation and might only succeed in frightening some of my own weaker subordinates."

I was able to keep everybody out except the CIA people. Some of them came down and did panic members of the CIA contingent in the delta. They scared the shit out of them by telling them what had happened up north and how this was inevitably going to be repeated in the delta. In mid-April, the CIA people began to predict a Viet Cong offensive against Can-Tho. One of their number, with fear in his voice, told me that the Viet Cong would come pouring into Can-Tho. They would "breach the town defenses in half an hour." This was sheer fantasy. It was crap that they were being fed by the Viet Cong. I'm convinced that the Viet Cong were feeding them disinformation. It was meant to spread panic and to tie down the intact army division from deploying northwards to defend Saigon. Unfortunately, my CIA colleagues were also passing the unevaluated intelligence to Saigon and to Washington, breeding further unease.

I was trying to calm things, saying, "We don't have that kind of a situation down here. Basically, the military situation here is stable. The problem is morale. The VC are creating incidents down here. What they're trying to do is to tie down the three regular divisions in the delta so that these divisions couldn't be redeployed to the defense of Saigon." General Nam agreed calmly with my assessment.

One night the VC captured some artillery pieces in Vinh-long and bombarded Can-Tho. They started fires that quickly spread engulfing a section of the city near our consulate general. We were almost burned out.

There were such problems, but we weren't in danger of being overrun. I couldn't convince the CIA of this.

General Fred Weyand visited us in April as part of a mission to evaluate the situation for the President.

Q: He was Army Chief of Staff at one point.

MCNAMARA: Well, he was the Chief of Staff then. He had been in Vietnam, of course, and by this time he was a four-star general. I remember having him to lunch, and I asked him how things were going? "Very badly," he replied. He described how Thieu showed him letters written by Nixon, guaranteeing that, if Thieu would sign the cease fire agreement in '72, the U.S. would come to South Vietnam's assistance should the North mount a threatening invasion. The existence of these letters has since been in the press. At the time, their existence was not widely known. In fact, Weyand himself was not aware of the letters' existence until he was shown them by Thieu who called on us to honor our former President's promise. Needless to say, Weyand

was disturbed.

As things began to deteriorate elsewhere in the country, I started thinking about evacuation and how to make sure that none of my guys in the sixteen offices all over the delta got left behind. First, I had to think through what kind of an evacuation would best meet our needs under several scenarios. We had an evacuation plan, which was worthless. It called for our closing the consulate general and driving to Saigon. That would only work under the most ideal circumstances -- a luxury we were unlikely to have. Then I looked at evacuation by helicopters, because that's what they were talking about in Saigon. When I considered our numbers I began to realize this would require a major commitment of helicopters, as well as troops to secure LZs. It was just mind-boggling. Finally, I looked at the feasibility of a water borne evacuation down the Bassac River to the sea.

At the same time, I decided that I'd better start closing my outlying offices and bring people to Can-Tho or send them to Saigon for evacuation. I had to bring our number down, but at the same time, I wanted to avoid panicking the Vietnamese who were already very nervous. I had to avoid precipitous action that could prematurely collapse the fragile Vietnamese structure while moving fast enough to assure the safety of my personnel. If we caused a panic, as happened in Nha Trang, all of us might be trapped. This was a very delicate operation.

I then began to consider who I would attempt to evacuate, if it were necessary. I took stock. There were about a hundred Americans almost equally divided between CIA and all of the other agencies represented at the CG. Most of the non-CIA types were field reps left over from CORDS. By and large, they were as solid as rocks. I also had three or four young FSOs, one of whom was a consular officer, the others did political reporting. Then there was a potpourri of other technicians, people who searched for MIAs (missing in action). I was determined that I was going to do what I could for our Vietnamese employees. I felt strongly that we had a special responsibility towards them and their families.

I could now see that only the water option was likely to allow evacuation of large numbers of Vietnamese. I started to look at it more closely and saw that even limiting evacuation to immediate families, we would have 3000-4000 people. That is an awful lot of people. I thought how can I deal with all these people? There's no way that I would have the means to get them all out. Clearly, only the water option was likely to give me the necessary capacity. But even then, I could not handle such large numbers.

I then began seriously to consider how we would reduce our number to a manageable level. After several sleepless nights, I came up with a scheme for setting priority categories for our employees. First priority was given those likely to be in mortal danger if taken by the VC. These might include CIA interrogators, etc. Second, would be people who could easily survive in a modern society, like the U.S. or France. These would include most of our well educated staff who had skills, and spoke foreign languages. In the third category, I placed all the other unskilled or semi-skilled employees who spoke only Vietnamese and were not likely to be in grave danger. These would include guards, char-ladies, the GSO force, etc. I then issued instructions to all of my American supervisors that they must place all of their employees in these three categories. Finally, I told them that we would make every effort to get those in the top two categories out

with their immediate families, if they wanted to go. Those in the last category, we would only evacuate if we had the available capacity. Clearly, this was a soul scaring experience for many forced to play God in making what might mean life or death decisions.

Events were now moving rapidly. Offices were being closed and people sent to Saigon or brought to Can-Tho. We were reducing numbers of Americans and Vietnamese. Both the agricultural technicians and the MIA searchers were ordered to Saigon. I sent some on regular Air America flights while others were going by road to Saigon for evacuation from Tan San Nhut airport. Both Vietnamese and Americans, and they were supposed to be fed into the regular evacuation in Saigon. That was part of my plan. For the final evacuation, if it came to that, I figured we'd have to go down the river, unless we could get virtually everybody for whom we were responsible out beforehand.

I talked about this with people in Saigon. Jake Jacobson was absolutely against my going down river. He said, "It's too dangerous to go down the river. You've got to go out by air, and you will only be able to take the Americans, because you won't have enough helicopters." We had, at this point, three or four Air America helicopters working in the delta with a passenger capacity of some 30 people.

I said, "No, I won't go for that." I reckoned that I would still have between 300-400 Vietnamese plus some 30-40 Americans to evacuate.

And he said, "Well, that's the way it's going to be. If you don't like it, go see the ambassador."

So I went to see Martin and told him that I was very upset. I was being told that I would not be able to evacuate my Vietnamese employees. I explained that a water borne evacuation was the only feasible means of dealing with the number I had in mind. I told him that I had considered the possible dangers, but had concluded that the risk was acceptable under the circumstances.

He said, "Well, of course, you can take the Vietnamese. Of course, you can. It's part of our plan. Of course, you can do it." He was very agitated. He went in and grabbed Wolfgang Lehmann and hollered at him, and said, "What's this, Terry is being told he can't take his Vietnamese."

And Wolfgang looked frightened. "Of course he can take his Vietnamese employees," he stammered.

Martin said to Wolfgang, "You make sure that it's understood that he can do this, that he can take his Vietnamese out."

I then went back to Jake and told Jake what had happened. He looked me directly in the eyes saying, "That's all very well, what he's saying right now, but when the time comes and you have to get out of there, and the pressures are on and the time is short, don't be surprised if you get an order saying that you have to go by helicopter, and you won't be able to take the Vietnamese."

The CIA people were absolutely against this going out by water, as were some of the others. The admin. officer, a retired army colonel, was also absolutely against it. Some were just not as

committed to the Vietnamese as those of us who had spent years in Vietnam and who had gotten to know Vietnamese as people and not just as paid informants. Moreover, many were frightened. They believed their own intelligence reports that we might be overrun any minute. They considered going down the river just short of suicidal. That's the way their attitudes were described to me.

Q: How far up the river were you?

MCNAMARA: Seventy miles. It wasn't suicidal, nor was it without risk. For years Americans in Vietnam had focused on movement by air. They almost forgot about travel by surface. None of those who condemned evacuation by water were sailors. None of them ever asked themselves how one might block a river? It would be very difficult to block traffic on a river as wide as the Mekong. Of course there are some narrow spots. Before deciding on the water borne option I flew over the river myself from Can-Tho to the sea. Certainly there are some dangerous narrow places with islands constricting the broad flow of the river. Nonetheless, traffic could only be stopped by armed boats in the river. The VC, of course, had no navy. They could, however, make passage dangerous and uncomfortable by firing at passing boats from the shoreline. The fact that regular traffic on the river had never been seriously disturbed would tend to indicate that our boats had a very good chance of traveling down river without being harmed. Moreover, we had the element of surprise working for us. No one, including the VC, would have expected the Americans to leave by boat. I counted heavily on this factor of surprise in my calculations.

Q: And it wasn't as though the whole place was filled with people in black pajamas, all heavily armed, waiting to rise up at any moment.

MCNAMARA: No, that was not the case. However, about halfway down the river from Can-Tho to the sea there was a known VC infiltration route that crossed the river using a series of islands as easy stepping stones and as shelter from the Vietnamese navy. The VC forces were known to be in the area. I had no success in convincing our CIA colleagues of the feasibility of evacuation by water. Moreover, they were becoming increasingly frightened.

Early on, I made a mistake at one of my staff meetings. At that point things were not yet clear. The end appeared to be near, but one could not yet be certain when or how it would come about. I was struggling with the problem of honoring what I saw as a commitment to those Vietnamese who had allied themselves with us. Unfortunately, I expressed some of my musing aloud. Perhaps I inadvertently contributed to their fright. Speculating about what the CG's role might be if the regime collapsed, I posed the possibility that a few of us might remain behind as witnesses to deter the VC from the sort of mass executions that took place in Cambodia. It would certainly be risky and we would probably be taken prisoner. But the VC would probably not want to kill us. American prisoners had proven too useful to them in the past. Moreover, our status as diplomats might provide some measure of protection, but probably not much.

I should never have said anything like that even in a closed staff meeting. I reckon that I scared the shit out of many of my colleagues. Under such circumstances one had to consider all possibilities. Nonetheless, I should have kept this one to myself.

Getting back to my evacuation planning. I'd bought a rice barge, with some of our counterpart funds. A friend working for USAID logistics in Saigon heard about my evacuation plan. His name was Cliff Frink. His lady friend had worked at the CG before transferring to Saigon. As a result, he knew most of the Americans in Can-Tho. When he heard that I needed boats he offered two LCMs, lightly armored landing barges, with Vietnamese crews. They had been prepared to carry supplies by river to Phnom Penh. Slabs of concrete had been added to their engine compartments. Elsewhere, the sides and coxswain's port were protected with 1/2 inch armor plates adequate to deflect small arms fire. I was delighted. The boats were perfect for my purpose. When they arrived from Saigon I cached them at different places on the riverbank -- one at the Shell Oil dock, and the other at a USAID compound that we had further down the river. I did not want them together for fear of losing both at the same time. We filled them with fuel, and docked them ready for use on short notice.

Earlier, I bought a rice barge to use for the evacuation. However, the LCM's were much more capable. They were sea worthy, had strong engines, could handle relatively large numbers and were armored. Moreover, they came complete with trained crews. I now was confident that the trip down the river and out to sea was feasible at an acceptable level of risk. Furthermore, the boats were large enough to accommodate several hundred people.

At one of the evacuation meetings in Saigon I arranged with the Navy, and Marine representative, for a ship to meet us off the mouth of the river. The evacuation fleet representatives assured me that there would be no problem in picking us up just off shore. They would use a shallow draft LST that could get very close to shore. All we had to do, they said, was get to the river mouth.

In the event the Navy wasn't there -- but that's later on in the story.

Q: Well, why don't we stop at this point, and we'll pick it up about how the final days played out.

Today is June 9, 1993, and we're continuing with Terry McNamara. Terry, every once in a while would you put in a date or two, or give somewhat of the context. How did plans develop?

MCNAMARA: I have now given the form of things as they were in mid-April. We started to seriously consider an evacuation in the end of March, or the beginning of April. As Da Nang and Nha-Trang fell, we had had to make preparation in case the whole country collapsed and we had to leave quickly.

There was, I suppose, always a possibility that somehow or other they'd be able to stop the North Vietnamese from taking Saigon itself. There was also the possibility that they might make a stand in the Mekong delta. It was defensible and was still firmly in South Vietnamese hands. To fight in the delta, the North Vietnamese lines of communication would be very extended. Moreover, they could not use their armor in the marshy delta. Thus, the final outcome did not appear predestined early in April.

As you may recall, there was a very gallant defensive blocking action by the South Vietnamese 25th Division, north of Saigon, which lasted for at least a week, maybe two weeks. They stopped

the rapid progress of the North Vietnamese down the coast. This time, that was bought so dearly, could have been used to organize Saigon's defenses and/or shift forces to the delta.

As time went on, it became increasingly obvious that a total collapse would occur. Preparations for evacuation began in earnest in the second week of April. I began to filter people up to Saigon, gradually closing offices. This was a very delicate operation. If we did it too quickly or too publicly, we ran the risk of panicking the South Vietnamese and possibly collapsing their defenses and administration, as happened in 2 Corps and around Da Nang. That was a big risk. Also, we could have had a reaction against us by the South Vietnamese themselves.

Q: If we're going down, you're going down with us.

MCNAMARA: That's right. You guys got us into this now you are not going to leave us to face the consequences alone.

Q: What was the feeling about how we pulled out of Da Nang and other places like that? Were you getting any stories of lessons learned?

MCNAMARA: When I went to Saigon I heard various accounts of the chaos that took hold in the last days in Da Nang. The whole structure collapsed so suddenly. No one was prepared. I decided that there was little constructive to be learned from that dreadful experience. We had more time to plan and prepare ourselves for an orderly departure.

The one thing that I wanted most to avoid was panic. You had to try to hold people together, reassure them that they were going to get out, and maintain some kind of discipline. To avoid the spread of panic, I was very much against people who had been involved in the evacuation elsewhere coming to the delta.

Q: You didn't want them to infect the people.

MCNAMARA: I didn't want them to infect the people in the delta with...

Q: Defeatism.

MCNAMARA: Defeatism and panic. There's nothing like fear. It's much more infectious than any disease that you can think of. I'd seen this when I'd evacuated people from Katanga, how dangerous the spread of fear could be.

So I decided that I was going to get as many people out, quietly, to Saigon as I could, as quickly as I could, but with all due prudence in terms of staging them out and closing my offices around the delta.

As I closed the one in My-tho, for instance, I took the guys who were there and I sent them up to Saigon. They and Willie Saulter, who was my representative in an isolated little province south of the Parrot's Beak, were instructed to set themselves up in Saigon to help our Vietnamese employees and their families as I sent them up from the delta. They were to assist them in getting

through the confusion to Tan Son Nhut. At the same time I went ahead with my planning for a final waterborne evacuation.

On one of my visits to the embassy in Saigon I met the former Consul General in Da Nang, Al Francis. I had heard stories that he had conducted himself very well indeed during the evacuation. Courageously, he fought to evacuate as many civilians as possible. I understand that he was saved by my former body guard, Bucky, from almost certain death at the hands of some frightened Vietnamese marines. When I saw him, he was frustrated and very disturbed. I remember hearing him screaming in the halls of the embassy. I thought, "That is just what I don't need in Can-Tho." Shortly afterwards, Al came to me asking whether he couldn't come down and advise us on some of the lessons that he had learned from his evacuation.

Q: This was a test in diplomacy for you.

MCNAMARA: Yes! Because I respected Al. He had done a herculean job in Da Nang. I certainly didn't want to offend him. Nevertheless, I also didn't feel that I needed him in the delta.

It was just the sort of thing that I didn't want in the delta. I wanted to keep people as calm as possible, and to keep some control over, as you put it, defeatism. Obviously, the South Vietnamese were being defeated, but, damn it, there were still ways of maintaining our honor and our sang-froid. We weren't going to get out of there if we panicked, and we certainly weren't going to maximize the chances of getting out the Vietnamese to whom I felt a moral responsibility.

I also had a responsibility to my counterpart, General Nam, not to panic and not to cause more general panic among his troops and the population. The situation was so fragile. We could have easily had the same panicky collapse of order and discipline in Can-Tho as had happened in Da Nang and Nha-Trang. The Vietnamese were watching me and the other Americans very closely. We could easily have precipitated riots if we had shown by ill considered acts that we were about to leave. It was a very delicate balance that had to be maintained.

In Nha-Trang, I understand, they called in helicopters to evacuate the consulate general. The North Vietnamese did not arrive in Nha-Trang until a week or so after the American consulate general evacuated in great disarray. In the melee around the evacuation helicopters the Americans lost many of the people they most wanted to get on those helicopters. By bringing the helicopters in prematurely, they caused a riot with people fighting to get places on helicopters. Sadly, some of our own most valued employees were shoved out of the way by crowds of people trying to get on the helicopters. They never got out. Perhaps I am misjudging the situation in Nha-Trang. I wouldn't want my opinion of what went on in Nha-Trang to be taken as authoritative. I wasn't there. Nonetheless, that was my perception of what went on at the time. I wanted to prevent it from happening in Can-Tho.

Against my instructions, the CIA chief brought people in who had been in the northern evacuations. As I anticipated, they spread fear and defeatism amongst their already receptive colleagues. I made only one exception. I did allow Mac Prosser, the former provincial representative in Dalat, to join us in Can-Tho. His wife was one of the Ambassador's secretaries

in Saigon. Jake Jacobson asked me, as a personal favor, if I would take Mack down in the delta. I did, and he was perfectly okay. He was an old hand, a former Army officer who'd come into CORDS and had been around for a long time. He was not traumatized. He had not gone through the dreadful experiences in Nha-Trang. In fact, he was very useful later on when he kept notes of some of the easily forgotten details of our evacuation.

In our final briefing on the evacuation, Cary Kassebaum accompanied me to Saigon. We fixed a rendezvous at the mouth of the river with the Navy/Marines. They promised that a ship would be there. I took that promise seriously. It was also made perfectly clear to us by the evacuation fleet representative that there would be no fleet of helicopters for evacuation from Can-Tho. We were on our own, as I had expected we would be. Providentially, I had made the right assumption early enough to allow me to prepare for an evacuation using only our own means. Otherwise, I never would have been able to evacuate any of the Vietnamese employees who had stayed with us to the end in Can-Tho.

At that time, when I was in Saigon, the embassy itself was in chaos. The city itself was quiet, but you could see the apprehension in the faces of all of the Vietnamese. They didn't know what to expect. They were expecting the worst, but they didn't know quite what might happen. I didn't go out to see the evacuation points at Tan Son Nhut, but I was told that it was a madhouse.

I went around to some of the safe houses where some of my people from Da Nang were being held in preparation for the trip to the airport and a flight to safety. I wanted to say goodbye to them and wish them well.

While in town, I went to a French restaurant that I often frequented, La Cave. Before, when I'd gone there, the food was good, and the service was excellent. This time, I took Kassebaum with me. They had curfew on, so we had to go late in the afternoon to have dinner. The old Frenchman who ran the place, a Corsican who knew me, was very sad. He apologized for the poor service. He said he only could give us a fixed menu, very simple fare. We ate a last supper in Saigon, which wasn't too bad. My Corsican friend gave us a particularly good bottle of wine that he said was being saved for a special occasion.

We had taken the assistant cashier with us to the embassy. She carried back a large stock of American dollars and lots of Vietnamese piasters. These were to be used to pay off our employees. They might also have come in handy, if we needed to pay for cooperation in our evacuation. My admin. officer, a retired Army colonel named Averill Christian, who worked for USAID, had sent her up. He wanted to have the cash on hand, so that if we needed to bribe somebody, we'd have the money. We also wanted to be able to pay off all our employees before we left -- the ones who were going to stay behind, in piasters; the ones who were coming with us, we wanted to be able to pay off in dollars, so that they'd have some money when they got out. We were taking care of all eventualities.

No one could yet be positive that there would be an evacuation. In my own mind, I was ninety-five percent sure that it would come. There was always the possibility that somehow or other they'd hold on in the Mekong delta and we wouldn't have to leave. I was told in the embassy, that some negotiations between the GVN and the VC were going on. Obviously, these weren't as

serious as I was given to believe at the time.

I returned to the delta to continue preparations for an evacuation. At the same time, I maintained the flow of people going to Saigon progressively thinning our ranks.

Early one morning, I got a call from Jacobson. This was maybe three or four days before the final evacuation on April 29. He asked me if I had ordered helicopters for an evacuation from Saigon? I told him that I had not.

He said, "Well, somebody from Can-Tho has ordered a large number of Air America helicopters to come to Can-Tho for an evacuation. I assured Jake that I had given no such order, nor did I have any knowledge of such an order having been given by anyone else in Can-Tho.

"What about your CIA people?" Jake asked. "What do you think of such a mission?"

"It would be a very bad idea," I responded. "We are not ready to evacuate all our people yet. I still have teams in one or two of the provinces. Even in Can-Tho our people are not prepared for a sudden evacuation. Our preparations have not gotten to that point, nor would the local security situation warrant immediate evacuation. Moreover, the sudden arrival of helicopters for an evacuation of Americans could elicit panic and chaos among the general population and the Vietnamese army. We could cause another situation like in Nha-Trang. Under those circumstances, many of us might not get out, especially if everyone were not taken out in the first load. Those waiting for a second or third load would have a hell of a lot of trouble. This is just the sort of thing that happened elsewhere, and we don't want it to happen here. It's not necessary. It would be very bad, and it could prematurely collapse the whole South Vietnamese structure in the region -- something we did not want to happen.

I am convinced that it would be a bad thing."

"I will ground all of the Air America helicopters here, and you take the same action in Can-Tho, until we find out who gave that order."

Obviously, it was the spooks. There wasn't anybody else who could have done it.

So I gave the order immediately that all of the helicopters were grounded in IV Corps.

Then I called in the chief spook to my office. Initially he denied any knowledge for involvement in the order to bring helicopters to Can-Tho for an evacuation. A little while later, he came back to my office. This time he admitted that he had given the order to send the helicopters. I got very angry. He had initiated a monstrously dangerous course of action without any consultation, or even warning to others whose safety he might have endangered. He admitted that the CIA people and their agents would be the focus of his evacuation. The other Americans, as far as I could see, and certainly all of the Vietnamese for whom I felt responsible, were going to be left behind. Presumably, I would not have known anything about their operation until after they had departed. I hit the roof. This was the ultimate in duplicity and irresponsibility.

I told him that all helicopters were grounded -- they were grounded in Saigon, they were grounded here -- and that was that. He asked to use my direct line to Saigon. I refused. I told him that this was the last straw. He would have to leave Can-Tho!

As I calmed down I realized that I could not afford to fracture the always shaky unity of the Consulate General at such a critical time. Despite the fact that there had been repeated duplicity and were now guilty of almost criminal irresponsibility, I remained responsible for the safety of the CIA people, as well as all others at the CG. I had to provide strong leadership. Obviously, the CIA chief had already panicked. He could not be counted on to act responsibly.

This was part of the problem of not providing experienced people who knew and could deal with problems in Vietnam. Experience in Laos or elsewhere did not equip people for the kind of trials they faced in Vietnam. The CIA chief was a great tennis player. He was an Irishman with red hair, an athletic build and a hard looking face. He looked tough as nails. But there, at nut-cutting time, when it really came down to a crisis, he lost his nerve, as did many other supposed tough guys in our CIA contingent. Without strong leadership, the organization came apart with everyone looking for his own exit to safety.

Surprisingly, my ex-Peace Corps volunteers, like Cary Kassebaum, who looked like Caspar Milquetoast and had glasses about as thick as the bottoms of Coke bottles did not panic. They and my junior FSO's were rock solid. Moreover, these two groups were among the most insistent on our moral responsibility to take care of those Vietnamese who worked for us. Obviously, we could not take care of all of the Vietnamese in Vietnam, but we could at least try to take care of those who worked directly for us, and their immediate families. We had a clear moral responsibility to do that. Most of the CORDS old-timers like my deputy, Hank Cushing, the ex-Peace Corps volunteer and the young FSO's all shared this view.

Anyway, I felt I had to bury my difference with the CIA chief and work with him to get his people out. I called him again to my office and told him, "Look, I feel that you've done something which is very bad. Under any other circumstances, I wouldn't even talk to you again. But under these circumstances, we both have a responsibility. We both have to get all of our people out. So we must work together."

He indicated that he understood and agreed.

"Okay, how do we best accomplish this joint goal? How did you plan to use the helicopters?"

Answering my question, he told me that there was to be simultaneous landings of Air America helicopters. All CIA personnel would jump aboard and be whisked to a ship at sea. They had gotten the Navy to move a ship down to a position off the Mekong delta.

In fact, Jacobson had found out about this movement of helicopters through an admiral, who asked him, "What about this order I have received from the embassy to move a ship?" Jacobson couldn't figure out where the order came from; it had not come from his office which was responsible for the coordination of all evacuation operations. After checking, he found it had not come from, nor did I approve of it.

I was aghast when I heard what the CIA people had been planning. Nevertheless, I set about modifying their plan to make it less dangerous and more acceptable. I decided that helicopters come in singly, go to designated LZs outside town, pick up people sent to the rendezvous and then take them out to a ship offshore. The helicopters would fly low to avoid detection by the South Vietnamese radar at Ben-Thuy airbase near Can-Tho. We would use only the three or four helicopters assigned to work in IV Corps.

I instructed the CIA man to get his Vietnamese employees and agents out first. I reckoned that they would be in greatest danger should they be taken by the VC. When his people were all gone, I planned to continue the helicopter operation until all of our employees and their families were safely on the offshore ship. At that point, I would only have to worry about the remaining Americans and a few essential Vietnamese employees. Given these reduced numbers, we could probably all leave in one load on our 3-4 helicopters and not bother with a waterborne evacuation.

The air operation was started as I have outlined. Hank Cushing was given responsibility of monitoring it. I had insisted that Hank, a USAID employee, be named deputy principal officer even though the State Department was dead set against it. The Department wanted an FSO. I reasoned that a joint operation should be jointly staffed. The deputy ought to be from USAID. Moreover, I had known Hank when I was in Da Nang and he was province senior advisor in Quang Ngai. We were old friends and I had great faith in him. He had the experience needed for the job, and the confidence of both Americans and Vietnamese in the delta. Hank and Averill Christian, the Admin. officer, were charged with the detailed management of the evacuation.

In the last days of April, people were being moved out rapidly. Having taken precautions, our unobtrusive operation caused no ripples. The LZs were never used more than once. People were picked up by the side of roads or in fields. The helicopters were going all over the delta for their pickups. The system was working well. If we had more time, we probably would not have needed our boats. But we could not foresee when the final order to evacuate would come.

On the morning of April 29, the chief spook came to me and told me he had almost all of his people out. As planned we would then start on the non-CIA folks. By this time, only eighteen Americans, out of over one hundred, remained in the delta. We had already identified the people for whom we felt responsible. The others had been filtered out through Saigon as provincial offices were closed and non-essential programs curtailed. A number of "high priority" Vietnamese had also been reduced. Many had been sent to Saigon. There, they were having difficulty getting through the processing at Tan Son Nhut, despite the best efforts of the Americans I had sent to serve as expeditors. Others had come to Can-Tho to await transportation to Saigon, or a direct evacuation. The problems in Saigon, of course, were beyond my control. I could only hope that our people would be given appropriate priority by those running the processing in Saigon. Later I learned that this was not always the case.

My last provincial office was closed in Vinh-long, by Bob Traister on April 27th or 28th. I told him I wanted him out of there that weekend, the weekend before the 29th. He informed the province chief and the deputy province chief that we were closing our office. His relations were

especially close with many of the provincial officials. The deputy province chief, the top civilian official and a fine man, called me on Friday to ask if Traister could stay for a going-away party on Saturday night. His friends felt they were likely never to see one another again. All knew that the end was near. After I had given my permission the deputy told me that he probably would never see me again. He thanked me for my friendship and for the things I had done for the people of Vinh-long. There was no panic in his voice, only dignified resignation. Traister arrived in Can-Tho on April 28th. His was the last provincial office to be closed. Our timing could not have been better.

We had Vietnamese army interpreters assigned to our advisory effort. They worked directly for us as part of our operations. Traister brought his whole team with him including the soldier interpreters. They were good soldiers with lots of experience in the field. As soon as they got there, I told Traister to take his gang on board the Mike boats and the rice barge to protect them. Traister himself boarded the LCM docked at the CORDS compound. Thus, we had reliable armed men on the boats; nobody could steal them, nobody could screw around with them. We also had Vietnamese crews on the Mike boats.

Q: A Mike boat being...

MCNAMARA: An LCM (landing craft, mechanized). It's a triangular open decked landing craft, with a door in the bow that lowers to allow vehicles and personnel to exit the boat.

Q: It's sort of a half-sized LST, isn't it?

MCNAMARA: No, it's not half sized, it's much smaller than that. It'll take a good-sized truck or a World War II tank. It's a good-sized boat, but there's nothing indoors. The only cabin is over the engine. The rest of the boat is open, but with high armored sides protecting the cargo deck. The coxswain's post sits on top of the engine compartment in the stern. They are good work boats. They have heavy dual diesel engines, a shallow draft, and are lightly armored. Our Mike boats, however, had been reinforced with "sleeves" of concrete protecting the engine compartment against rocket attack.

Traister was on the boats with instructions to protect them.

On the morning of April 29th, I was in my house, in bed, when I was awakened by several explosions in the town. I jumped out of bed, got on the radio, and called the Marine NCOIC Staff Sergeant. Hasty came on, with his high-pitched pubescent voice. He was tall and skinny, with glasses. He looked about 15 years old. But he was a staff sergeant of Marines, and he was incredibly gung ho. When I told him that we were probably going to have to evacuate by water, he said, "Sir, that sounds very dangerous."

I said, "Well, maybe so, but that's what we're going to do."

He drew himself up and seriously declared, "Well, no guts, no glory."

I almost wet my pants. He was marvelous. A caricature of a Marine.

Q: Well, war is the great playground for an awful lot of people.

MCNAMARA: Despite his fantasies, he was very bright. Since our days together, he has become an officer in the Marines. The last time I saw him, about three or four years ago, he had just completed an MA at George Washington University in Middle Eastern studies. Hasty was very reliable but naive and very full of the Corps. Death before dishonor and that sort of thing. The only problem with him was that you had to restrain him, hold onto his coattails so he wouldn't do anything foolish. But beyond that, you didn't have to push him, which was the biggest problem with so many people.

Anyway, I got him on the radio, and he said that some rockets had landed on the Can-Tho waterfront. I believe he told me that one of my favorite restaurants was damaged in the attack. (Some Chinese had a hotel down on the waterfront, which you wouldn't have wanted to stay in. I don't think they changed the sheets very often, but they had a good restaurant.) To reassure me, he said that the physical damage was not extensive. I am sure that the purpose of the VC bombardment was more psychological than physical. The city remained calm, however.

Then he came over to my house, in a great squeal of brakes. There was a little terrace off my bedroom on the second floor, and I walked out on that. He was down on the driveway inside my little compound (I had a chain link fence around my house). And we talked; he told me what had happened then in more detail. So I said, "Okay, I'll be down to the office as quickly as I can get up and get dressed." So he went off to inspect whatever other damage there might be, and get his Marines squared away for the day.

We were then resigned to the fall of Saigon and the probable collapse of the regime. Thieu had gone and "Big Minh" had taken over as President. Our fate, and that of Vietnam, would be sealed in the next few days. In the delta, the VC were doing everything they could to give the impression that Can-Tho and the rest of the delta were in imminent danger. As I said, they had shelled Can-Tho earlier and now they had rocketed the town. Neither had any military significance, but they did send a morale damaging message.

The spooks were getting many reports of preparations for an imminent attack on Can-Tho. One version claimed that the North Vietnamese were massing troops just south of Can-Tho, in preparation for an attack. They allegedly expected to pour into Can-Tho City overwhelming the formidable defenses. As one CIA operator told me, with real fear in his eyes, "They could be in here in a half an hour's time." I was hearing similar reports from other sources and largely discounting them as VC psychological warfare ploys. The corps commander, General Nam, agreed with my analysis. He reckoned that his forces could repel any known force that could then be thrown at the defenses of Can-Tho. The North Vietnamese simply did not have the troops in the delta at that time.

Q: This was several days before, because by this time, they'd pretty well left.

MCNAMARA: Their Vietnamese auxiliaries were gone when the helicopters left. There were still some CIA Americans in Can-Tho. These reports had been building up. I had been talking to

the corps commander, General Nam, and he and I both agreed that this was just a disinformation campaign, and that what they were trying to do was to tie down the South Vietnamese troops in the delta, so that the South Vietnamese would not send troops northwards to the defense of Saigon and to help counter the thrust southward of the North Vietnamese columns coming down from the north. It was the oldest tactic in the world -- a diversion.

There was no real indication that there were the numbers of troops that would be required to break through the defenses of a very heavily defended Can-Tho, where you had a seasoned, calm commander who was determined to hold the place and who had good troops to do it with. There was no way that, without an awful lot of firepower and an awful lot of enemy troops, they had any chance at all of breaking into that town. And there were no indications, whatsoever, that they had that kind of strength in the delta at that point.

The threat wasn't credible if you analyzed it calmly based on the good enemy order of battle information we had. But, panicky people who had lost their nerve were not able to analyze rationally. That's just what had happened elsewhere in Vietnam. A lot of the collapse of the Vietnamese in the north had come about because of panic and loss of nerve. Their flight from the highlands and from I Corps was not because they had lost great battles. They hadn't. They had lost their nerve and they panicked. A recurrence of this was just what I was trying to prevent from happening in the delta, if I could. The corps commander was a very steady guy and was not likely to be panicked. He saw his situation clearly and was a good tactician.

Anyway, this was my appreciation of the situation, and I was sending it to Saigon, both through the defense attachés military analyst attached to the CG and through my own channels. One of my young FSOs, a man named Dave Whitten, who wrote very well, and I were writing reports and sending through both the DAO and our own channels. That was our appreciation of it.

The CIA's appreciation was very different. They were seeing the collapse in the delta as imminent, with the North Vietnamese pouring into the center of Can-Tho in an almost effortless thrust. As one of them put it, "They can be here in a half hour's time.

Of course, their own bad intelligence was taking a terrible toll on their nerves. The thing was feeding on itself.

On the morning of April 12(?) at about 1000 hours, I got a call on the direct telephone line from the embassy. It was Jacobson, the evacuation coordinator in the embassy in Saigon. In a calm voice he gave me the order to evacuate. He said the order had come from the President and we were to begin our evacuation at eleven o'clock. He then instructed me to evacuate by air, using the three Air America helicopters that were working in the delta. "You will be able to take only the Americans with you."

"You mean I can't take my Vietnamese?" I asked.

"No, you are to go by air as quickly as possible as we need your helicopters urgently to help with the evacuation of Saigon."

Well, I had heard earlier that morning, from the CIA guy who was running the helicopter air operations, that Tan Son Nhut had been bombed and that they had knocked out some of the small Air America Huey helicopters. I knew that the evacuation plan for Saigon called for using those small Hueys to pluck people off the tops of buildings. You've seen some of the famous pictures?

Q: *Yes.*

MCNAMARA: Well, if they had knocked out a number of the helicopters at Tan Son Nhut, that meant that their capacity to execute their plan would be reduced. Jake had said that my helicopters were urgently needed in Saigon. So I said to Jacobson, "Well, you know I want to take my Vietnamese out. As I've told you before, we are ready to go by water. I want permission to go that way."

He replied, "No, no, no."

I said, "Look, I know that you need helicopters desperately in Saigon."

He said, "That's right."

I said, "I know that Tan Son Nhut has been bombed. I've got helicopters here, and can release them more quickly if we evacuate by boat. Otherwise, it may take five or six hours to get the choppers to you in Saigon. You need them now, don't you?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "They're out on missions now. We've got to get them back here. They must then be gassed up by hand pumps." (I wasn't letting the helicopters land at the airport because of the danger that Vietnamese soldiers might commandeer them at gun point.) "Then they would have to fly out to the fleet, gas up there, and fly back to Saigon. All of that will take at least five hours, probably longer, and you'll be lucky if you ever see those helicopters today. I know that this is part of your evacuation plan."

Just at that point, the line went dead. I tried everything to get back in touch with him, so I could continue to make my case and get permission to go by water.

I was going to go by water whether I got permission or not, but I preferred to go with permission. I respected Jacobson very much; he was trying to do what he thought was right and in our best interest. But I just didn't agree with him.

Anyway, I tried every means of getting back in contact with Jake. We tried radio nets through the Philippines, through Thailand, through ships at sea. Nothing worked. Time was passing. In desperation, I picked up the telephone again and it worked. I got through to Jake, and made my case again. Reluctantly, he agreed, "You've got your permission to go by water," he granted. "Just get the hell out of there."

I had finally worn him down. The whole world was ending around him, and he could not get me

off the telephone.

"Just get out of there. And send those helicopters to Saigon as quickly as possible because we need them desperately." These were his last instructions to me.

Immediately after hanging up, I grabbed Kassebaum and Hasty (I wanted witnesses), and went to the CIA offices on the third floor of the CG. There, I told the CIA chief and a group of his subordinates that I had received the evacuation order from Saigon with permission to go by water. "We have been ordered to release the helicopters immediately. They are desperately needed in Saigon," I explained.

The CIA chief acknowledged my order to go by water, but asked that they be allowed to take their own motor boats that were fast and armed with machine guns. "We could run interference for you," the CIA chief explained to me.

I agreed, instructing him to meet us in the middle of the river at noontime. The time was then getting on to eleven o'clock. I concluded our conversation with an offer to take any of his people with us in the LCMs. The rendezvous in the middle of the river at twelve o'clock was set because our boats would be coming from different points along the river bank.

The CIA chief's name is Jim Delaney. He acknowledged my instructions with an unequivocal, "Yes, sir. No problem. We'll be there at twelve o'clock."

His deputy Fordick, repeated agreement that they would go by boat, and would meet us in mid-river.

Before leaving, I again told them to, "Send those helicopters to Saigon as quickly as possible."

In any event, the helicopters were never sent back to Saigon. Many of the people waiting on the roof tops were never evacuated. I understand that some of them were CIA employees. The Marine helicopters couldn't land on the roof tops because of their size and weight. But that was all part of the plan. It was perhaps too complicated, but that was an element in the evacuation. And so a lot of people got left in Saigon, including an awful lot of CIA agents, because they didn't get taken out of these compounds by helicopter, as was foreseen in the plan.

I then continued my rounds visiting all of the different elements in the CG. I issued the same evacuation order. In our plan, I was then to go to the dock at the CORDS compound and get the boats loaded and ready for departure. My deputy was to bring up the rear closing the office behind him. I went forward to get things moving.

I left the CG with Kassebaum, who was living in my house. We took my car to the house where we picked up guns, changed clothes, and picked up a few things to take with us. I didn't want to take much, because I didn't want the maids to know that I was leaving. If they knew, I feared they would spread the word quickly around town. We were being watched closely by the town's people. To prevent panicking them, I had issued orders that nobody could pack their household goods and ship them to Saigon without my specific permission. Some people snuck their stuff

out without my knowing it. But the reason I said this was that people were watching us very closely, and the least thing could panic them.

I said nothing to my maids. I gathered up a few things, not much, just a few things.

Also staying with me was one of my future wife's brothers.

Q: *She was Vietnamese.*

MCNAMARA: She is Vietnamese, yes. I mean, we weren't engaged, at that time, we were just friends from the time I was in Da Nang.

Her brother had just arrived a day or two before. He had gotten himself out of Hue, Da Nang, and Nha-Trang. He was on a boat where some of the military ran amok killing, robbing and raping. The boat ultimately arrived in Phu Quoc Island. The soldiers on the boat that had mutinied, raped, killed and stole from the civilian refugees. Some were taken off the boat and executed by the Vietnamese Navy. The authorities were attempting to restore order by these drastic measures. My future brother-in-law came within an ace of being shot. He was saved by somebody who recognized him and convinced the naval officer in charge that the money he had was not stolen. My wife's family was among the richest in central Vietnam. He had not stolen from anybody. Once out of the clutches of the navy executors he got off at Phu Quoc somehow and found his way to Saigon. His father was prepared to stay in Vietnam. He was a member of the old royal family, and wished to remain in his own country. But he sent his son down to me, to save him. He wanted his son to have a chance.

My future brother-in-law, my driver, Kassebaum and I got into the car for the short drive to the CORDS compound where the boat was docked. I'd left all of the money I had, for the maids, on top of my dresser, a big stack of piasters.

Q: *About five or six inches tall.*

MCNAMARA: Not quite, but all that I had. I hoped that they would get it before looters invaded the house. Given my system of priorities, I didn't feel that I could offer the maids a place in the boat.

When I arrived at the CORDS compound, the Marines had already started loading the boats. As people arrived they were hustled aboard the boats. I took up my stance near the entrance to the dock. I was determined to monitor who got on the boats. I feared overcrowding. I also wished to assure places were given those on our priority lists.

At some time during this period the Marines gave me a helmet liner that they had painted navy blue, with a big gold star on it, and an inscription: "Commodore of the Can-tho Yacht Club." (This is significant because of what I was accused of later.)

It was a joke. I put it on because I felt that one of the best ways of maintaining morale and preventing panic was to appear confident, even lighthearted. So I tried to joke with people and to

relieve tension. The Vietnamese, naturally, were worried and scared. My young Marines and CORDS old-timers were businesslike but joined in my show of bravado. We tried hard to maintain a calm, matter-of-fact, businesslike front. As we started on this adventure, I was not as full of self-confidence as I tried to appear.

Anyway, they gave me the hat. I probably never should have put it on, but I did. And Kassebaum took some pictures of me with the hat on.

Later, I was accused by Frank Snepp, in his book...

Q: *He was CIA.*

MCNAMARA: He was a CIA guy in Saigon, who wrote a bitter denunciation of the whole evacuation and of the CIA station chief and of the management of the embassy.

Q: *Decent Interval is the name of the book.*

MCNAMARA: Decent Interval, yes. Some of it may be true, some of it is not. I have no idea what went on elsewhere in the country. But in the Mekong delta region, which was my area, he hadn't been there, didn't know anything about it personally, so he got his stories from his own former colleagues, the ones who ran away.

He accused me of having a Patton complex (General Patton), of being vainglorious, and by inference of being a little crazy because I decided to go out by water. He was not able to refute the fact that I got out and saved three hundred and some people. The "Patton" complex is pure bull shit. The fact is that we got out and we saved all of the Vietnamese for whom we had a responsibility, who wanted to go and who were in Can-Tho at that time. That is the bottom line.

As we prepared to debark, I was getting people aboard the boats and the boats prepared for the trip down the river. People were coming into the compound and getting on the boats. Several CIA men came bringing people with them. I put them aboard while the CIA people left, ostensibly to join their comrades on their own smaller boats. General Nam's aide-de-camp and his wife and children arrived. Duc gave his family into my care, wished me luck and returned to his general's side. I was never sure whether this was an indication that Nam knew what I was doing. I suppose he did for he had already told me that he would never stand in the way of Americans leaving.

When I agreed to take Duc's family I asked him to say goodbye to the general for me. I probably should have gone to say goodbye myself, but I was afraid at that point that the general might stop me. I just couldn't take that chance. Also, I had to be present to make sure that everything went right at the loading. I didn't feel I could absent myself from the departure point. The decision had been taken by somebody else to leave, and I was under orders to get out of there. I was then focused on carrying out my orders. It might have been more gentlemanly to go and say goodbye in a civilized way, but this wasn't a civilized situation.

Anyway, Duc left his family. A CIA secretary, who was living in an apartment in the CORDS

compound, who was later killed in Lebanon, Phyllis Filatchy, came out of her apartment as we were loading the boat, jumped in a car, and zipped off. I assumed she too would be on one of the CIA boats.

Loading continued. Back at the consulate general, Hank Cushing and Sergeant Hasty were closing up the office as if we were coming back at two o'clock after luncheon. They were showing people out, getting the place closed down, and getting other people down to us. Some of the Vietnamese that we had selected for evacuation told us no, they didn't want to go, they wanted to stay there. We agreed that was their choice.

I remember the cashier, a little Chinese girl, elected to stay. So we gave her money with instructions to pay anybody who hadn't been paid. There was a list of people who were owed their pay and separation settlement. We gave her the list and said, "When they come in or try to get in touch with us, then please pay them." I hope she gave them their money. I don't know whether she did or did not, but there wasn't anything else we could do. We didn't keep the money, we gave it to her. If she put it in her pocket, well...

We also tried to get hold of the people at the Vietnamese-American Association, which wasn't official, but it still had connections with USIS. There had been a USIS presence in Can-Tho up until two or three months before the evacuation. The USIS branch PAO was then withdrawn. When he left, the Association became independent, but retained a connection with USIS. We couldn't get hold of anybody at their library. For a week or so before, we had tried to get people in USIS Saigon to make arrangements for the Association employees. We were never able to reach the PAO. We could never get anybody. The impression one got, from trying to talk to them, was of great chaos. They should have taken responsibility for the people who worked at the Association. At least, they might have told us what to do for them. We could have sent them to Saigon if we had some instruction from USIS. The head of the Association, whom I think may have been a U.S. government employee, was pregnant. She had gone home to Bac-lieu, a province south of Can-Tho to have her baby. There was no way of getting her. The other ladies who ran the place were in town, but must have been taking a holiday while the boss was having her baby. We started calling them about ten-thirty but we were unable to reach them by the time we left the dock at 1200 hours.

At the same time, my vice consuls, and others, were going about town alerting people, picking them up, getting them down to the boats. The consular officer, Dave Sciacchitano, went to people who were on his consular list, American citizens or those having close American associations. For instance, women who had children born of American fathers. He tried to convince them that their children, who had a claim on American citizenship, should be given an opportunity to go to America. He was able to convince some but not others. I remember, in the end, he failed with one girl. She just wouldn't leave. She was torn by indecision and fear. Reluctantly, he had to leave her and get on the boat.

As they were closing the consulate, Cushing and Hasty heard noise in one of the building's back rooms. Investigating the source of the noise, they found the CIA code clerk, trying to destroy his codes. For some reason, he wasn't able to do so, he just wasn't strong enough. He couldn't do it by himself. His colleagues had all departed leaving him alone. In their haste, they must have

forgotten the poor devil. Fortunately, we had some cooler heads with us.

Earlier, before I left the consulate general, I was near the front door, when the CIA chief came down the front stairs from his offices. He was pulling two big mail bags behind him. They were obviously very heavy as they clunk, clunk, clunked down the steps. I imagined them to be full of gold bars. They seemed heavy enough and were emitting metallic sounds as they thudded in his wake. When he reached his car parked in front of the CG, he threw the bags into the back seat, pulled his poor, bewildered Vietnamese driver out of the driver's seat, jumped in, and sped off with tires squealing. The poor man looked frightened as hell. I am still puzzled as to what he was going to do with his heavily laden mail bags. Perhaps he still has them.

Getting back to the CIA code clerk, abandoned in the CG back room, Cushing and Hasty helped him destroy his codes and other classified gear and brought him with them down to our boat. At the time, I couldn't figure out what was holding Cushing up. I was on our radio calling to him to hurry as the tide was ebbing fast. Further delay risked hopelessly beaching our boats for hours until the next tide came in. Of course, I had no idea that our CIA colleagues had abandoned their communicator with his codes. Cushing replied to my pleas with a laconic, "We are coming." Hank, who recently died, was unflappable.

Finally, Cushing and Hasty arrived with the code clerk sitting between them in near hysteria. He could not find his girl friend. They had stopped by her house, but she was nowhere to be found. Finally, Cushing and Hasty had to drag the communicator with them for he was reluctant to leave without his friend.

We forced him to get on the boat. Suddenly, I heard shouts of joy. The girl was on the boat. She had come along with the consulate general employees fearing abandonment. They had a happy reunion. Incredibly, the CIA people had forgotten their communicator who was responsible for their most secret codes. They simply forgot him in their anxiety to get away.

Just as we were about to board the boat, Cushing's maid came out of his house screaming that she wanted to go, but that her son was still at school.

By this time, I realized that we would have enough room for people like her in our boat. Therefore, I had no reluctance to take any of our employees who were there and wanted to leave with us.

But the tide was ebbing and we had to leave. I told her that her son would have to arrive within the next few minutes or be left behind. She was distraught. Just at that point, a little kid, with a school bag, waltzed in the front gate of the compound. He was whistling, in no hurry, coming home from school. Why should he hurry? She rushed to the gate, grabbed him, hugged him, and jumped on the boat still sobbing.

I then gave orders for those still on the dock to get aboard. The Vietnamese crew of this LCM had jumped ship. I told Traister, who'd been guarding the boat, to start the engines. He was about half drunk, maybe more than half. He went to the engine room and knocked around. Somehow he started the engines. I'm not sure how he got the engines started, but he did, the engines were

started. I took over the controls in the coxswain's compartment. I had been in the Navy and the Merchant Marine, but I had never run a boat like the LCM. I did understand the principles. In any case, there was no one else who had any significant nautical experience. So I took the controls of the boat and started trying to maneuver it off the mud bank. By this time, the tide was running out fast.

Suddenly a group of Filipinos came rushing down the dock dragging children, Vietnamese wives and girlfriends after them. They were CIA employees who had been abandoned. I stopped everything. Hasty rushed up the dock, grabbed them, and helped them get aboard. I too got off the boat to hustle them aboard. I was the last to board.

The boat was stuck in the mud but still in the water. With Traister's help, I violently maneuvered with both propellers until she became unstuck and off the bank. What a relief to be free of land and underway! My comfort was short-lived. We had a long-shafted outboard motor to propel the rice barge. In getting off the mud bank, the propeller had broken. The barge was dead in the water. There was nothing to do but tow it with the Mike boat. Mike boats have two powerful diesel engines. We threw ropes to Cushing who was on the barge with our GSO, Walt Heilman, a former merchant seaman and a mechanical genius. A very useful guy to have around. With the barge under tow we started out into the main stream of the river.

Just as we were getting underway, two helicopters flew overhead. The deputy chief of the CIA informed us by radio, that they had gotten permission "from Saigon" to use the helicopters in their evacuation. Therefore, they were taking the helicopters out to the evacuation fleet. Would we like some assistance, he asked? I could only conclude that they had disregarded my orders and taken the helicopter despite the desperate need for them in Saigon. I was never able to ascertain who might have given them permission to take the helicopter. It certainly was not Jacobson who later denied any knowledge of their request. He described their action as "piracy." Certainly, it was extremely irresponsible. No doubt the result of their panic. I was furious, but I was trying to maneuver the boat. So I told whoever was talking to them on the radio to tell them to please remind the Navy that we needed help when we arrived at the mouth of the river. We could also use some air support on the way down the river. I was never able to learn whether they made any effort to pass this information on to Naval authorities.

Anyway, whzzt, they were gone. I heard later that when they were taking the helicopters, their Nung guards (Chinese Nung's who were supposed to be very reliable mercenaries) held them up at gunpoint. They relieved our CIA friends of gold and dollars. Maybe that mail sack that seemed full of gold was part of the Nung's payoff.

We were now on our way down the river. The second Mike boat (LCM) that had been tied up at the Shell dock was also on its way down river, just ahead of us. We took up position behind it. The crew of this second boat had not run away. A former Vietnamese naval officer was in charge. He knew the river very well. I still had the rice barge in tow. In total there were some three hundred Vietnamese, eighteen Americans, and five or six Filipinos in the three boats.

We continued on down the river for some 6-7 miles past Can-Tho. To our north, over Vinh-long. The river there is very wide. We could see a helicopter firing its machine guns at something on

the ground. We could see the tracer bullets flying in both directions. The war continued.

Off to the port side, some Vietnamese navy boats were approaching on an intersecting course. They were "monitors" whose armored turrets mounted 40- and 20-millimeter guns. Pretty formidable stuff. Suddenly, the lead monitor fired a machine gun volley over the bow of the leading LCM. The signal was unmistakable. I gave the order to stop. There wasn't any way that we could outrun them, and there was no way that we could outfight them. The only thing to do was stop and talk to them. I had women and children in all three boats. Good God, we could have had a massacre if they'd ever started shooting with the 40- millimeter guns at our boats.

We were stopped. A lieutenant, junior grade, who was in charge of the flotilla of navy boats said that he was under instructions from the corps commander to stop us. General Nam believed that we had South Vietnamese army personnel and draft-aged males on the boats. He wanted us to be brought back to Can-Tho, to check the boat for deserters.

The navy people wanted to come on board our boats. I refused to let them come aboard. We were at an impasse surrounded in mid-stream with awesome 40- and 20-millimeter guns pointed down our throats. Most of the males on our three boats were heavily armed. If the navy people had come on the boat and tried to take any of the Vietnamese off, there could have been a shootout. I could not allow this to happen. All three boats were full of women and children.

Certainly, General Nam had good reason to have us stopped. A senior Vietnamese air force colonel was on my boat. He had been the deputy base commander at Ben-Thuy. I knew him very well. He had come down at the last minute. I thought he was there to bid goodbye to the Shell Oil manager who was a close friend. Unbeknownst to me, he shed his uniform and hid on the boat. One of my Americans identified him only after we had begun our voyage. By that time, there wasn't anything to do except throw him over the side. I could not do that. I was angry and disgusted with him, but I didn't feel there was anything I could do about it. I would not have minded the navy taking him, but I couldn't give him up without giving up some of our employees who were of military age.

Luckily, two weeks before, I had made an agreement with Commodore Kwang who was in charge of the South Vietnamese navy in the Mekong delta. I got his wife and children evacuated through Saigon in return for a promise of help should we have difficulty in our river borne evacuation. He owed me a favor. I wasn't very sure whether he would or could honor our agreement under these circumstances. Nevertheless, I asked the navy lieutenant to get in touch with Commodore Kwang and inform him that we were being held. I offered to allow the Commodore to inspect the boats if he would meet us in mid-river. I did not want to return to Can-Tho not knowing whether we would ever be able to leave again.

The lieutenant was friendly, but some of his sailors were not. They looked potentially dangerous. Obviously, they resented our leaving.

As requested, the lieutenant got Kwang on the radio. The Commodore offered to come immediately to resolve the impasse.

We were held for about an hour and a half waiting Kwang. When he arrived in a small boat, we greeted each other as friends. He smiled at me, "You don't have any officers, soldiers or males of military age on your boats, do you?"

"Of course, not," I replied. "The people in our boats are all my employees and their families."

"Right. Then I see no reason to bring you back to Can-Tho. I'll go back and tell the corps commander that I have inspected the boats and found no one on the prohibited categories."

He was really a smart cookie. He had taken the precaution of bringing a young sailor with him whose aged father was on one of our boats. He encouraged the sailor to say goodbye to his father in full view of all of the other sailors. It was a very touching goodbye; the young sailor was staying behind. This disarmed the other sailors whose animosity disappeared.

To further ease tensions, I gave the sailors our rice barge. It was more a hindrance to us with its broken propeller. We took the people who had been on the rice barge and divided them among the two LCMs. This meant that all our people were in modern, sea worthy craft behind protective armor. I was greatly relieved.

We loaded lots of supplies on the LCMs including military rations and water. To raise morale among our passengers, I allowed the distribution of some of our rations. They disappeared among the family groups as if by magic.

While we were stopped, I told my Americans to disarm all Vietnamese. The fact that they'd give their guns up to us was important. It was a sign of trust. Perhaps, they had no choice, but we got no resistance. My men circulated among the Vietnamese reassuring them in their own language. We kept all of the guns on the top of the engine compartment behind my steering post. The Marines were there to guard them. We also had a machine gun off one side and a BAR (Browning automatic rifle) off the other side. All of the Americans were armed. As my own protection, I had my Gurkha kukri from Katanga. It meant a great deal to me. I could not leave it behind. Besides, it might come in handy.

Q: You're talking about...

MCNAMARA: This is a Nepalese Gurkha knife that was given to me by Colonel Matra of the 3/1 Gurkha battalion in Katanga. I had been made an honorary Gurkha in Katanga during my times there living with the Gurkhas. My kukri was one of the few things I brought with me in the evacuation. Other than that, I had little more than the clothes on my back, an old pair of dungarees and a sports shirt. However, I did have the damned helmet the Marines had given me. We took some pictures on the boat with me at the helm of the boat. One of those pictures got into the State magazine. I was at the helm of the boat wearing the helmet and sun glasses. It did come in handy, however, when it rained later on our trip down river. It helped keep the rain out of my eyes as I stood in the open steering cockpit.

After Kwang released us we recommenced our journey down river. It was about two or three o'clock in the afternoon. The tide was running out fast which was useful in giving us additional

speed. This was important in my calculations as I wanted to reach the mouth of the river during daylight. I was not so confident of our ability to navigate on the river in the dark. I had only an Army grid map that did give depths for the river. It's accuracy, however, was somewhat questionable. Channels often changed in rivers that were not dredged. I had marked what I thought to be the deepest channels as I overflew the river. This helped but was not infallible. Luckily the Vietnamese commander of the other boat knew the river well. I followed him, for the most part, through the seventy miles from Can-Tho to the sea.

About 30-45 minutes after our release by the Vietnamese navy we were cruising down the river when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a flash. I turned my head instinctively in that direction. To my horror, I saw a long rocket with flame at the rear. I remember the smoke coming out of the back of the rocket, with the flame. Jesus Christ, I jammed the throttles to full speed. If I could have pushed them any further, I would have. I said to the Marines, "Hey, we've just been fired on by a rocket! Shoot at the source of the fire on the right bank!" One of the young Marines was behind a BAR on that side of the boat. There was an M-60 machine gun on the other side. He had never seen a BAR before. They were first developed in World War I. Certainly, this model was of WW II vintage. It was procured informally from a Vietnamese source to round out our armament. Nothing like it had been issued to American troops in 20 years.

Q: It was really World War I, I think. [Produced in the U.S. beginning in 1918.] It was an automatic, but very heavy, sort of like a machine gun.

MCNAMARA: An automatic rifle, but very, very heavy. Marvelous weapon, but it was too heavy to carry. But, anyway, he jammed the goddamned thing and couldn't get it to fire. So one of my CORDS guys, who had been in Quang-tri with the Air Force, but on the ground, picked it up, cleared it, and then fired a clip of ammo to show him how it worked. The young Marines had never been in combat. Another one had an M-60, and he aimed it horizontally and fired. The M-60 is like a mortar; you have to aim it upwards to get trajectory. The goddamned thing went out a little ways from the boat and exploded. Another of my old CORDS hands grabbed the grenade launcher, reloaded it and fired it properly.

Q: Basically, it's a grenade launcher, isn't it?

MCNAMARA: Yes, it goes up and down in a mortar-like trajectory.

Anyway, we put up a tremendous volume of fire. Some of the Vietnamese got hold of M-16's and supplemented fire by the Marines and my CORDS people. One or two rockets were fired and we put up such a volume of fire that they must have decided to leave us alone.

The rockets passed near our stern scaring the hell out of us but doing no damage. It's pretty hard to hit a moving boat in the middle of a wide river.

We were now approaching the narrowest part of the river. The channel flowed between islands. It was a well-known infiltration route used by the North Vietnamese, moving from one part of the Mekong delta to another. The VC held the banks on both sides of the river and often occupied the islands in mid-stream. The channel narrowed as it passed between the island. We

would be dangerously close to shore. This was certainly the most perilous part of the trip down river.

Before we got to this narrow part, a U.S. Navy F-4 flew very high over us, and did a barrel roll. I optimistically thought, "The Navy now knows where we are. They will protect us. We even have air cover." I had asked for air coverage to suppress anybody who wanted to screw with us. There it was, our U.S. Navy's F-4 fighter plane up in the sky, doing a barrel roll.

Less encouraging, the CIA communicator that we had rescued after his abandonment had several radios. He used every frequency imaginable. No one would answer. Finally, we put out an international "May Day" distress signal. Still no reply. Just as we were coming to the narrow part of the river, heavy rains began to fall. Providentially, a deluge obscured us as we passed between the islands. At times, the banks seemed close enough to touch. The VC aren't stupid, however, they get in out of the rain. Navigation was a problem during the rains. I could see very little ahead of our boat. We would have had difficulty following the channel without the experienced Vietnamese captain in the lead boat. I might have run the boat onto a sandbar.

The rain covering our passage through this very dangerous patch was another piece of extraordinary good luck. Oddly, it stopped soon after we emerged into the wide river below the islands.

We continued down the river. There was no traffic on the river until we came upon a boat coming towards us from the opposite direction. It was the first boat we had encountered since leaving the navy. Normally, that river was full of traffic. That day there was none. I suppose, the river folk were also frightened of what was happening. As we approached the other boat, I maneuvered so that we would pass to port side. I had the M-60 machine gun on that side, with my trusty Hasty all set to fire. As we came abreast of the boat, you couldn't see anybody on board. Then a woman and a child came on the deck. They were quickly past us. It was an innocent small cargo boat by the looks of it. There wasn't anything to be alarmed about.

At about seven o'clock, we reached the mouth of the river. There was a peaceful looking little fishing village on the left-hand side as we came down the river. Many fishing boats were anchored off the village, but there was no sign of life in the village itself. It looked deserted, but obviously was not. The fishing boats were all in good condition, bobbing at anchor just off the village. Their owners were not far off. No doubt, they were too frightened to show themselves to our heavily armed flotilla.

We still were unable to raise any response on our radios, nor did we see the promised ship off the mouth of the river. I remember Christian advising that we stay in the mouth of the river overnight. "Let's not go out to sea." He and others were afraid of the sea. Like so many people who have no experience with the water, they were naturally apprehensive about going out to sea in those small, open boats. There was an island at the entrance to the river from the sea. They wanted me to tie up there and stay overnight. The next morning, they reasoned, we would have a better chance of finding the ship.

I vetoed this option. I did not want to stay in the mouth of the river. I was fearful that someone

might come to interfere with us in the middle of the night. We knew that the VC controlled at least one bank and possibly both banks of the river. We had just had a run-in with the South Vietnamese navy. We did not need any more of that. The safest thing to do, I reckoned, was to go out to sea. Get about three or four miles offshore, and then we would be safe. The VC don't have a navy. Nobody was likely to bother us out there. The boats were seaworthy enough in a reasonably calm sea. Being a former sailor, I felt safer at sea than I did on land. But most of the people with me were land oriented. They were afraid of the sea. The unknown was what frightened them.

Since I was in charge, I decided to put to sea. No one questioned my decision, or my right to make it. We could discuss options, but, when a decision was taken, all loyally followed instructions. To maintain morale, I insisted that the U.S. Navy must be just over the horizon. They've probably got us on radar right now. They wouldn't abandon us. The American Navy has traditions to uphold. Honor would never allow them to abandon friends in peril on the sea. Moreover, the Task Force representatives had promised that a ship would be waiting for us. We only had to get far enough out to sea. The water's too shallow in here for them to bring a ship in, I reasoned. They will find us with their radar if we get away from the land.

I wasn't quite as confident as I made out. Nonetheless, I would not stay in the mouth of that river overnight. It would have been a stupid thing to do. The people who made the suggestion weren't stupid, but they also weren't seamen.

Symbolically, as the sun set, we left Vietnam. I could see the channel out to sea marked on my map. Depths were deepest on a line going in a southeasterly direction. Obviously this was the main channel. We just went in that direction. In any case, I had the captain of the other boat to follow, so I didn't have any problems.

I remember looking back as the sun set over the Mekong delta for the last time. God, it was beautiful. A beautiful big red-orange sunset over the flat, lush region. I had been entranced with the beauty of the delta ever since I first arrived some five years before. It was so beautiful, especially at sunset.

Anyway, I remember thinking, "This will be the last time that I'll see this."

Then I turned around to more important things, like which direction we should take once clear of the channel. To my sorrow, I discovered, at this late date, that there was no compass in my boat. Someone must have stolen it. We could not be sure of our directions. The night became increasingly dark with low cloud cover obscuring the stars.

There were many lights out at sea. I found they were attached to fishing nets laid there in the shallow water. At first, we were fooled by these lights thinking they might be boats from our expected navy ship. There was no one.

My only point of reference was the flashes from a tremendous battle going on onshore, near the little district town that I had visited several times in Vinh-binh province. The district chief was a guy I'd nicknamed "Snuffy Smith," after a comic hillbilly strip character. My Snuffy was a

Vietnamese version of the "good ol' boy." He had an undecipherably strong rural accent. Despite his rank as a major in the army, he looked and dressed like the local fishermen and rice farmers. He was the chief of a district that had been surrounded and under siege for years. The rounds and sights of heavy combat that guided us away from Vietnam must have been his final battle.

After several hours of searching in vain, we had all but given up for the night.

First, I tried to tie the two boats together so that we would not be separated in the night. This did not work. The boats beat against one another in the swell. We risked putting a hole in one of the boats.

Then, I decided that we'd tie up the boats to the buoys holding the fishing nets. They must have anchors that kept the fishing nets in place. We could lay there over night. The next morning either the Navy would find us, or we would run northwards parallel to the coast to where I knew the evacuation fleet was anchored off Vung-tau. All you had to do was keep the coast to your left. It would be uncomfortable to spend a night on the open sea but we were safe enough. The next day we would certainly find the fleet, one way or another.

My only questions were: What was the range of the boats? How much fuel do we have? Could we make it that far?

I found out, later on, that the boats could have gone all the way to the Philippines with the amount of fuel we had.

But I didn't know that at the time. I was worried about that. And it was hard to communicate with the captain on this other boat. Finally, I put Mr. Christian, my admin. officer, on the other boat.

Q: Mr. Christian, from Mutiny on the Bounty.

MCNAMARA: He didn't mutiny, although he was one of those who really didn't want to go down the river. Later on, he admitted that it was the only thing to do. He admitted to me that he'd made a mistake and that I was right. The water evacuation was the best option we had. He was very bitter about the way the CIA people had deserted us and run away. Later, he made some strong accusations to the press.

As we were about to lay to for the night, we saw some especially bright lights in the distance. I didn't know for sure if it was a ship. But we decided to make for the lights. It turned out to be a ship, called The Pioneer Contender, an American freighter owned by the President Line. In fact, it was the freighter that the spooks had asked be sent down to lay off the coast to evacuate their people. There it was, anchored off the coast. It was well lit. The ship had a Marine contingent aboard as guards. As we came alongside, they were not happy about these strange boats coming out of the night. Initially, they were reluctant to let us come aboard. Finally, we convinced them that we were fellow Americans and not pirates or VC saboteurs.

It was a ship on which they'd had some awful experiences in the evacuation from Da Nang. Vietnamese soldiers had run amok raping, stealing and killing. There was mayhem on the ship.

The crew locked themselves up in their quarters and ran the ship. Vietnamese gangs took over the rest of the ship.

Understandably, the Marines were apprehensive. They didn't know who these madmen were, coming alongside in a boat in the middle of the night off a hostile coast. The unknown is always a little frightening, and they didn't expect us.

Christian finally got aboard. He explained who we were and where we had just come from. Still wary, the Marines agreed to take us aboard. Rope slings were lowered into our boats. Our passengers were loaded into the slings and hauled up onto the deck. The Vietnamese were put down into the hold, where there were other Vietnamese. Some of them, maybe all of them, had been evacuated by the CIA people from the delta.

By this time, I'd been at the helm of our boat for over thirteen hours without a break. I was exhausted; my legs were starting to turn to rubber. But until we got everybody on board, I wasn't going to leave the helm, because I felt responsible for the boat. We could not abandon it.

We unloaded the other boat first, and then I brought my boat alongside. They told me, from the ship, that the Navy wanted our Mike boats in Vung-tau to evacuate people over the beach. So I said, "Okay, we'll run the boats up there." Hasty and Cushing volunteered to stay with me to run our boat. The Vietnamese crew would remain with the other boat. I was exhausted. Hasty agreed to run the boat while I slept on an Army stretcher that had gotten onto the boat. We were going to follow the Pioneer Contender, leaving the next morning for Vung-tau.

Christian had gotten onto the ship where he ran into an American CIA man from Can-Tho. The Filipinos, who were with us, had worked for him. Christian made a deal with the Filipinos to run the boats for us up to Vung-tau. We would take them over again for the evacuation from Vung-tau. He paid them with cash he brought from the CG.

We got on the ship. The Marine captain in charge of the security detail was very officious and not very welcoming. It was difficult to explain to him who we were and what a Consul General was doing wondering about in the South China Sea. Still skeptical, he took me to the ship captain's stateroom. The captain was there with his chief engineer and chief officer. They knew what a Consul General was. Quickly, they sat me down and gave me a cold beer. Then they put me in a stateroom that the CIA man had occupied. I even got a shower. Sadly, I was the only one in my crew who got a bed that night. Well, the Vietnamese were okay, because they were down in the hold where it was dry and clean. They had facilities there; with food and water. My Americans had to sleep on deck. It was cold and wet; it had been raining, and they had to sleep outside.

Christian, at this point, had what looked like a heart attack. He was an overweight, fifty-five to sixty year old retired colonel. He had exerted himself tremendously during the past month. The pressure had been intense on all of us. But Christian had probably more than his share. We put him in a bunk. The Marine medic gave him some medicine and calmed him and tried to take care of him as best he could.

I went in to see him, and he said, "Terry, you were right. This was the only way of getting out. We never would have gotten out otherwise." He admitted that going down the river was the right thing to have done under the circumstances. It was nice to have somebody who had been completely against it admit that. I had never been very close to him. I was close to most of the other people, but we had never been very close, he and I. But that bonded us, that experience.

Anyway, we were on the ship, we were safe. But they hadn't been waiting for us, didn't expect us. There was no Navy ship anywhere near the mouth of the Mekong. The Navy had simply forgotten. Later on, I asked a Navy captain in the evacuation fleet, "Didn't you hear us on the radio?"

"Oh, yeah, sure," he replied.

"Then, why didn't you answer?" I asked.

"Oh, communications security. Our communications were blacked out because of communication security," he told me as a matter of fact.

I thought for a moment of "Catch-22," or was it Alice in Wonderland? Unbelievable, but true.

After visiting our Vietnamese passengers and my American crew, I went to bed.

The next morning, I woke to the gentle movement of the ship as it bobbed along. They'd actually gotten underway while I was sleeping, and we were on our way to Vung-tau. I got up, went down, talked to my guys, and saw that they were all okay. I'd looked in on them the night before and made sure they were okay. The next morning, I got them to come up to my cabin for showers.

Then I went up to the pilot house and asked the captain if I could use his radio, to try to get us off that ship and onto one of the ships in the evacuation fleet. There wasn't any room for us on the Pioneer Contender. I couldn't let my guys sleep out in the open. I got some pretty nasty remarks from Navy people over the radio; telling me to shut up. Not a very pleasant welcome from uninformed bureaucrats.

However, some USAID logistics guys heard me. And they had taken a tugboat from Newport...

Q: *Just out of Saigon.*

MCNAMARA: Just out of Saigon. A Japanese tugboat with an Australian captain that was on charter to USAID. The logistics chief from Newport said, "We're coming to get you." These were some of our comrades; these were guys who knew who we were and were sympathetic. So they said, "We've got an LST anchored" (someplace or other). "We'll come and get you in the tugboat, then we'll take you to our LST."

The coordination was made. We were picked up by the tugboat, which had pulled barges filled with Vietnamese out of Saigon. It also looked as though they'd looted the commissary and PX in

Newport. "Liberated" is probably the better word.

Q: *Requisitioned.*

MCNAMARA: Requisitioned, whatever, because they had all the goddamned supplies you could ever want on there, cases of everything lying all over the decks of the tugboat. The Australian captain said he was going to take the boat back to Australia. What he was going to do with it when he got to Australia wasn't clear to me. Whether the owner was ever going to see it or not, I don't know. But, anyway, that wasn't my concern.

They took us down to a rusty old Korean LST, which was leased by USAID logistics, and we got aboard. Again, there was no place indoors to sleep. All of us, me included, were sleeping out in the open now. We spent two nights sleeping out on the deck on this Korean LST. There wasn't enough food for everybody. The Koreans did their best. It was, again, an LST under charter to USAID, and a lot of these USAID guys were on it, with their Vietnamese girlfriends. They, of course, had taken all the staterooms. By the time we got aboard, there was nothing left but the deck. Anyway, we slept on the deck, and I bombarded the Navy to get us the hell off there.

After two days, helicopters took us off the LST to the evacuation command ship.

I had gotten rid of all the shoulder-held weapons; I left them on the Mike boats. But we still had pistols and knives and things like that. We looked like cutthroats. So, as we got on the command ship, they took our pistols away and gave us chits for them. Of course, we never got them back. Navy men love souvenirs.

The ship was crowded with refugees, but it was a huge ship, with troop compartments on it. They normally would carry large numbers of Marines. The decks were made for helicopter lands and takeoffs. It was an assault command ship.

We were taken down to the wardroom for processing when we got aboard the Blue Ridge. Tables were set up for processing. We were debriefed. The Marine colonel, to whom I'd talked in Saigon about evacuation and who was there when the Navy guys had promised me a ship would be waiting at the river mouth said, "You mean, they didn't send a ship for you?"

And I replied, "Hell no."

Anyway, he said he was very proud of us. He took my Marines in tow immediately and had them sent off to be bedded down with the ship's Marines. He went over and talked to some of the officers on the ship, and we were treated royally. I was given the chaplain's stateroom. All my Americans were berthed in officer's staterooms. We were treated like heroes. In contrast, people coming from Saigon, even Jacobson, who had been a senior officer at the embassy, were living in the troop compartments, sleeping in ten-high bunks. You know what they look like.

Q: *Oh, I crossed the Atlantic in one of those. Pretty awful.*

MCNAMARA: That's what they did with these very senior people from Saigon.

Q: *Blue Ridge* was the name of the ship.

MCNAMARA: Blue Ridge that was it, exactly. So, anyway, we were treated royally, as heroes. We'd come out, flying our flags.

Q: *Had you flown a flag, by the way?*

MCNAMARA: I did, indeed. I had American flags up. As we got to the mouth of the river, I put the consulate flag on a boathook, as a flagpole, and we flew that from the bow. Oh, yes, we went out, flags flying.

We were really the only people who weren't traumatized in the whole thing, as far as I could see. Others looked beaten and depressed. My gang were upbeat. We had done what we had planned to do. We'd gotten ourselves and our people out. Nobody helped us. I was very proud of the guys that I was with, and they were all proud of having been part of what we'd done.

On a Navy ship, they have a police force. The head is called a chief master-at-arms. He's the big gun, a senior petty officer. I'd been in the Navy, as an enlisted man, and I knew the structure. I knew that if I really wanted to get anything on that ship, the way to do it was not to talk to the officers, but to talk to the chiefs and the senior petty officers. That's the way the Navy works.

Anyway, the word got around that we were the guys from Can-Tho who'd toughed it out and gotten ourselves out, in a sort of Terry-and-the-Pirates mode.

Somebody told the master-at-arms that I was a general. I was a consul general at the time, but they forgot the consul.

Q: *One can end up as consul general at about a major-general or a rear-admiral rank, if you're playing around with those things.*

MCNAMARA: Well, sure. In any case, the billet called for an FSO-1, which is certainly major-general rank. I wasn't an FSO-1, but that's what the job called for.

Anyway, they started calling me "General." And the chief master-at-arms came over and said, "Sir, please, sit down. We'll serve you."

The other evacuees were waiting in long lines. I had my group with me, so I said, "Well, my staff..."

"Sir, this table is yours."

He got a big sign: RESERVED. So we had our own table. My Marines started telling sea stories to the other Marines and then to the sailors. We were celebrities.

I had the chaplain's stateroom, and my other guys had other staterooms. The Marines, of course,

were billeted with the other Marines. But we all stayed together, absolutely together, a tight-knit group.

I said, "We've got to have an office." I asked the chief master-at-arms, "Who can get me an office?"

And he said, Chief somebody or other; I don't remember the chief's name. "The chief runs everything on this ship. You've got to talk to him. I will make an appointment."

I said, "Right."

And he said, "He'll come here."

I said, "No, no, no, I'll go to him. Where's his stateroom?"

He sent one of his sailors to guide me to a press center organized for journalists.

They called the chief from the center to announce my arrival. He told them to "send the general down."

The general went to talk to the chief. And the chief was a sergeant Bilko type, a wheeler-dealer.

Q: Sergeant Bilko was a TV character who was a wheeler-dealer.

MCNAMARA: A wheeler-dealer in the military sense. This guy was just that sort of person. He'd been up night and day, organizing things and running around frenetically, but obviously knew what he was doing and controlled everything. A little bit like the Mafia, you know, and he was the godfather.

Anyway, I told him, "Chief, I'm the consul general from Can-Tho. My people and I need an office where we can set up our Can-Tho-at-sea office."

The chief said, "Right, general. I have just the place for you. The chaplain is not on the ship now; he's on leave. You get the chaplain's office."

So I took over the chaplain's office. We put up appropriate signs: "Consulate General, Can-Tho," et cetera. And we set up a duty roster for the Marines. I had the place manned night and day, twenty-four hours a day, telephone watches were always in touch with me by phone. The master-at-arms in the mess hall had coffee cake and cookies sent down on a regular basis. He got the mess cooks to serve us. We had virtually anything we wanted on the ship, without moving out of our office. So we were all set up on the ship. We had absolutely no problems, and we were well looked after.

We were next to the press center. Journalists were in and out. They couldn't quite figure out who the hell we were, but, anyway, there we were. Some of them talked to my guys, and some of my guys (Christian, for instance) told them some awful things about the CIA.

Graham Martin, the ambassador, found out I was aboard. He sent word that he wanted to see me. I too wanted to call on him to wish him well. He was sick with pneumonia. He had the admiral's stateroom, way up in the superstructure. When I arrived, he congratulated me on having gotten out and gotten my people out. He had his public affairs advisor, a man named John Hogan, with him. I had known John from East Africa when he was the PAO (public affairs officer) in Nairobi. Martin told John to set up a press conference for me, to tell my story, because he wanted some positive stories to get out about what had happened, and thought that mine was one of the better ones. Graham Martin told me not to say anything about the CIA, that he would take care of them.

Q: You had told him...

MCNAMARA: Yes, I had told him the whole story of what had happened. And he said, "Don't say anything about it. Don't you get involved in it. I'll take care of them. And tell your guys not to say anything."

So (perhaps I shouldn't have, but I did) I said, okay. I went down and dutifully told my guys. But I couldn't control them all. I told him that. I said, "I can't control all these people. There's no way of stopping them from talking to the press if they want to. But I'll talk to them and ask them not to, and pass on your assurance that you will take care of this."

I felt strongly that a lawful order had been disobeyed by the CIA contingent in Can-Tho. But more seriously, they had compromised the safety of other Americans and the safety of a lot of Vietnamese, not just in Can-Tho, but in Saigon, too, by taking those helicopters.

I also brought up the question of the division of authority and responsibility, or the lack of authority and responsibility. It was the source of many of our problems. Obviously, that wasn't something that you could charge the CIA rank and file with. It wasn't of their making. It was something that Graham Martin himself should have dealt with earlier on. He should have brought the CIA under control. He didn't. It was his own fault, as much as anybody else's. If he couldn't do it, he should have gone to the president. And if that didn't work, he should have resigned. Perhaps, his responsibility was even more profound. He may have encouraged the divisions that caused him so many problems.

Q: This was the way he operated. He was renowned for never letting one side know what the other side was doing.

MCNAMARA: He wanted to have a division of responsibility. He wanted to get reporting from them and from the consulate general, independently. I can understand that to a degree, in terms of reporting. In terms of intelligence, I can understand it. But in terms of operations, it was disastrous. It was disastrous in Saigon, and it was almost disastrous in Can-Tho. It wasn't quite, because we were very lucky and better organized.

Q: Did you have the press conference?

MCNAMARA: I had a press conference and told our story. Some newspapermen wrote it up. Our story got into Time. Time International, anyway. It was published somehow or other in an English-language newspaper in Saudi Arabia. I got a copy of the article from a neighbor of my ex-wife's family, who was in Saudi Arabia. He got the thing, tore it out, and sent it to her to send to me. A little roundabout, but, anyway. I don't know what other coverage it got, but I saw the article in either Time or Newsweek. Oh, and there was something in The Economist. Our adventure was given minor notice. And that's what it was, it was a sideshow. The major story was the evacuation from Saigon. Obviously, Can-Tho was just an interesting aside.

Q: *Shall we stop here, do you think?*

MCNAMARA: Yes.

Q: *When we pick this up the next time, we'll talk about what happened thereafter, and continue your career.*

Today is September 17, 1993. Terry, we left you last time on the Blue Ridge. How did you get back and what was your reception?

MCNAMARA: The Blue Ridge landed in the Philippines, at Subic Bay Naval Base. They put us through customs there, and they tried to take my treasured kukri from me.

Q: *That was your Gurkha knife.*

MCNAMARA: My Gurkha knife, which was given to me in Katanga. And I argued. I said, "I'm going to stay here forever if you don't let me keep that knife, because it means a lot to me." They finally worked themselves up to a Navy captain, who realized that it was a waste of time to argue, so he said, "Go ahead, keep the knife."

So we got on a C-47, on our way to the embassy in Manila. The C-47 was almost flipped over by a crosswind as we were landing in Manila. That would have been ironic after our departure from Vietnam.

Q: *That was an old plane.*

MCNAMARA: We landed in Manila and went to the embassy. There was great confusion, lots of people from Vietnam. Martin and Wolfgang Lehmann were there with many others from embassy Saigon. A friend of mine, Frazier Meade, was the political counselor in Manila. He gave us the use of an officer in his section of the embassy. While there, we began writing efficiency reports and citations. I decided that everyone who came down the river should be given a medal for courage.

The strong cohesion of my people from Can-Tho was maintained in Manila. While there we decided that we wanted to go to Guam, as a group, to find and help the Vietnamese who had come out with us, and others from Can-Tho who may have gotten themselves to Guam. Many of my guys were Vietnamese speakers. In any case, even the ones who didn't, certainly understood a great deal about Vietnam, far more than most people in Guam.

Wolfgang Lehmann said, "Absolutely not. You've got to go back to the United States, and you've got to go back quickly."

I appealed his refusal to Martin, who said, "Of course, you can go."

A cable was sent to Guam offering our services. They wouldn't take us as a group but were willing to take most of us as individual volunteers. I stayed in Guam for several weeks where I found a number of former employees from Can-Tho. Others were there for several months.

The former Consul General from III Corps was there as a State Department representative. He wanted to leave and asked me to take his place. Initially, I was receptive until I met the Admiral in charge of the military's operation. He made it very clear that there would be no real role for a senior civilian on Guam. The military were in charge and saw no reason to share any of their authority or responsibility. I understood his point of view, and concluded that I would only be frustrated if I remained on Guam.

Q: Just a quick thing on Guam. The evacuation was so fast, and so many people were pouring in, how did you find the sorting out? I heard a story from Clayton McManaway, saying that a couple of guys didn't even know where they were. They were just a couple of fishermen and were picked up by the thing. It must have been sort of a mess. How was the sorting out going on?

MCNAMARA: Clayton McManaway wasn't there.

Q: No, I know, but he heard these stories.

MCNAMARA: Well, it was a mess, but it was amazing how well the armed services had things organized in Guam, which was the first real point of arrival on U.S. territory for most Vietnamese evacuees. Several large camps had been set up. They had social services organized. Water, food and all of the necessities were in place. By the time I got there immigration people were starting to work. There was confusion, but it was far better organized than anyone could have expected. The military did a superb job.

One problem we were able to work on was to reuniting of families. Many had been separated and were desperate to find family and friends. The language problems often prevented most Vietnamese from communicating with their American hosts.

My group from Can-Tho found a nucleus of Vietnamese-speaking Americans who served as ombudsmen with the American authorities. Records were made of every person who arrived on the island. Many people were able to locate missing friends and family members with the help of our informal interventions. We set up an information booth in the middle of the camp, with big signs in Vietnamese: "Information. Come here and we'll try to sort out your problems." I had a lot of young and no-so-young people, and they went out and tried to find people and sort out personal problems for disturbed, confused Vietnamese.

No, I don't think that it was as confusing as I would have expected it to be.

The whole evacuation, in fact, was less confusing than anyone could ever have expected. When has anyone ever tried to evacuate that many people by air from a city under siege? It's never been done before. It was a major accomplishment in terms of the logistics of the evacuation itself.

Q: *Well, then you came back. This would be when?*

MCNAMARA: This was May.

Q: *You came back to Washington in May.*

MCNAMARA: Well, I went by way of the camp in California.

Q: *Pendleton?*

MCNAMARA: Yes. I stayed at Camp Pendleton for about a week, looking, again, for people from Can-Tho, to see who might have gotten out and to see if I could help any of them.

After spending about a week there, I then made my way onwards to Washington, where my reception at the State Department was one of indifference.

At Pendleton, for instance, the reception was very warm. Nick Thorne was in charge there, and he took me out with all of the people I knew who were working there, and we had a big reunion.

In Washington, it was far cooler. A lot of people were very ambivalent about the whole thing. Some of them seemed to feel that the victims were somehow or other responsible. Perhaps that often happens. I have heard similar comments from people evacuated from other countries in less controversial circumstances.

Q: *This is one of the reasons why I'm getting you and others to talk about this. I was just talking to one of our people, and I'd said I'd gathered together a whole bit of information, accounts about Vietnam. And he said, "Well, a person's not certain, but I really just don't want to read it."*

MCNAMARA: That's twenty years ago.

Q: *Yes, this is the problem. You're not going to learn; you're not going to absorb experience.*

MCNAMARA: It was obviously a terrible emotional crisis for many Americans. There are people who really can't be objective about Vietnam. They can't talk about it, they can't think about it objectively, even now, some fifteen or twenty years later.

Q: *You belonged to East Asian Affairs when you came back, is that right?*

MCNAMARA: Yes, I did. They still had a Vietnam task force, so I went and sat around there for a while and finished writing my efficiency reports. Some of the people who came out of Can-Tho were still in Guam taking care of people. Others were back in the United States by this time.

Those in Washington stayed together pretty much.

The whole exercise was very controversial. Suddenly, the State Department also was in great disarray. They were suddenly stuck with large numbers of personnel coming back from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. What were they to do with the sudden influx? The system was overwhelmed.

Q: One further question. When you came back (I hate to ask this question, because I pretty well know the answer), did anyone try to say, "Okay, Terry, here you were, you were running this operation down in southern Vietnam. What were the strong points? What were the weak points?" In other words, basically a solid debriefing?

MCNAMARA: Oh, no. Nobody asked any of those kinds of questions. No.

Q: I'm doing it now.

MCNAMARA: No, there were no questions asked at all. They would have been very happy if I'd just gone away.

Q: Did you find people avoiding you in the corridors of the State Department?

MCNAMARA: Not so much me, but I'm sure that they avoided people, like Graham Martin. He was a pariah.

I wasn't given the warmest of welcomes, I suppose, but there were a lot of people who appreciated what I'd done in taking people out down the river. That was a sort of romantic, dramatic thing, and so I had lots of people shaking my hand and congratulating me on the fact that I'd gotten out. And that was nice.

But, as an institution, there was no effort to debrief me or to find out what happened or what we might have done differently. They didn't want to know about it. And then, of course, they were overwhelmed with all these people coming back. Plus there were the problems of the mass of refugees. At another level, which I'm not really qualified to talk about because I wasn't involved in it, people were scurrying for political cover, at the Henry Kissinger level and the presidential level. That was where Graham Martin, of course, was dealing. I saw Martin in Washington. He was still sick but defiant when he talked to me. He refused to go away quietly until he had been vindicated. I think he was trying to force the administration to nominate him for another job, even though he knew he could not get Senate confirmation. For the administration, of course, he was an embarrassment that they had hoped to use as a scape goat.

I stayed around Washington for a while, trying to sort myself and things out. But then I came to the conclusion that I was wasting my time. So I went home to see my mother.

I had sent people from Vietnam to my family, to sponsor: some to my brother in Ohio, some to my mother, and some to an aunt in Florida. This was before they set up the official sponsoring system. I did this on my own. When these people arrived, I had to sort out their problems. My

relatives were a little shocked when suddenly a family of Vietnamese arrived to stay with them. I went to see my mother in Troy, New York. I'd stopped at my brother's house on the way. He was okay. He was willing to take in people, but those destined to stay with him found other alternatives more attractive.

My present wife, three of her sisters and a brother came to my mother's house and stayed for about two weeks. They then went off to France to join older sisters and a brother who were long settled in Paris and Grenoble.

My maid's family was supposed to go to my aunt's in Florida. She was going to employ the maid and take care of her children. But when I was at Camp Pendleton, my maid's sister from Canada called her and told her that unless I could guarantee that I would take care of her for the rest of her life, she should come to Canada. When asked for such a guarantee, I encouraged her to go to Canada. Clearly, I could give no one such a guarantee. So she went to Canada. But, later on, she had a falling out with her sister. I then got her out of Canada, and she came back down here. She worked for Fred Brown until he got married. His new bride didn't want a live-in maid with several children around the house. Fred found the lady a job at a restaurant and financed a house for her. She's still here in Washington. Indeed, I just went to her son's wedding. Her family is all fine. Fred has continued to help them, as needed.

Anyway, I went home and tried to sort out such problems. Once they were solved, I went on a camping trip. I had an old Jeep that I had gotten in Dahomey from the Peace Corps. I was going to go across the Sahara in it. The trip was canceled when I suddenly got orders to go to Vietnam. The Jeep got sent back to my mother's house. I drove around the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains in my Jeep, with a Vietnamese girlfriend.

After some 2-3 weeks, I drove to Washington, stopping in Newport, Rhode Island. I had sent two orphans to a friend there who wanted to adopt children. I got them out at the last minute in one of the infant-evacuation flights. When they left me, I made the boy, who was a little older than the girl, promise that he would stay with the girl, never leave her side, and take care of her. I pinned notes, identifying them, to their clothing. All this was lost. Nonetheless, the boy never left the girl. When their flight left Saigon, I warned my Newport friend that they were on the way. She and her husband found out somehow or other that some of them had arrived in Philadelphia. They went to Philadelphia to search. There was great confusion. No one could give them any information. Finally, they appealed to Senator Pell from Rhode Island. His intervention led to their finding the kids whom they took home. I wanted to see the outcome of my efforts at running a private adoption scheme. When I got to Newport, I found all well with my orphans learning to swim in my friend's back yard pool. Evidently, all was well.

I continued on my way to Washington.

Q: This was what, July, August?

MCNAMARA: This was probably sometime in July. Shortly after arriving I went to see a friend, John Loughran, who was the country director for West Africa. It was he who had intervened with Graham Martin on my behalf and my assignment to Can-Tho was the result. John gave me some

disturbing news. He said that Dean Brown, then in charge of a special Vietnamese refugee task force, told him that I was in bad odor in the Department. He suggested I call Brown to give him my version of what had happened in Vietnam. Brown told me that he'd heard that I had evacuated people against orders, and that I had been hiding in the Pacific, not wanting to come back to Washington because I was afraid to "face the music." "The best thing you can do now is to help resettle the refugees." I told him that none of the above was true. I had permission to evacuate Vietnamese. I had not been hiding and had nothing to fear as regards my conduct during the evacuation. I explained that I was neither traumatized, nor guilt-ridden by my experience. Brown seemed neither convinced, nor pleased by what I had told him. I strongly suspect that the source of his misinformation was the CIA where he has long enjoyed close relationships.

For a short time, I wandered the halls of the State Department. Then I did go to work for the task force, resettling people. (Brown was gone from the task force by this time.) Ultimately, I became the associate director for operations. I helped close some of the camps, especially the one at Pendleton. I went out to Pendleton and helped Nick Thorne close the camp. I was given orders to get it closed, so we went out and got it closed.

Some of the young Vietnamese students decided that they weren't going to leave the camp unless they got absolute guarantees of full four-year scholarships. These were some of the boys who had dodged the draft by hanging around the university in Saigon for many years. We had scholarships for them in community colleges and some less well known four year institutions. They expected Harvard and Yale. This wasn't possible. Finally, I had to tell them that, "We're closing the camp. Either you go to the colleges we found for you, or you go out on the streets. One or the other." I had a company of Marines standing by. "Those are the trucks that will take you to the airport. You will then board aircraft for the destination where your schools are located. Those who refuse to board the truck for the airport will be taken in another truck to the camp's main gate where they will be dropped off to fend for themselves. You cannot stay here. This camp is closed. The Marines will assist you to board the truck for the airport. They will assure that those who did not wish to go to the airport will board the truck for the main gate. The choice is yours." All opted for the airport and college. Sadly, we had to get tough with these last few recalcitrants. Most of them were the spoiled offspring of the Vietnamese elite. Life had been too easy for them in Saigon. Finally, they had to be made to face reality.

Q: Of course, you did.

MCNAMARA: We couldn't keep them at Camp Pendleton, and we couldn't get them scholarships to Harvard.

Q: We didn't want to develop a Palestine-refugee-type situation in the States.

MCNAMARA: The American people had been incredibly generous. Most refugees appreciated what had been done for them. It was only a small minority that caused problems. They were used so enjoying privileges in their own society. Before leaving Washington I'd gone to see Phil Habib, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs. We had been friends for several years. He called the Deputy Director General on my behalf. Phil told me that he had no

good jobs available to give me. But he then called the Deputy Director General asking him to give me special consideration. With Phil's urging the Deputy Director General set a time for me to see him. Later that day, he assured me that he would find me an appropriate assignment. "Just have patience," he asked. I heard later that he made inquiries as to my suitability for a DCM-ship. My first option for my next assignment was an ambassadorship. Martin had recommended that I get an embassy. But his recommendations were not worth much at this point. I concluded that my chances of getting my own embassy were not bright. I then scaled down my ambitions to a principal officership in a Consulate General with substantive responsibilities. Bob Miller, who was then Deputy Assistant Secretary in the East Asian Bureau told me that I had been mentioned as a candidate to go to Laos as the chargé d'affaires. Someone else opposed my nomination because I have five children and had just come out of Vietnam. Instead, Tom Corcoran was sent to Laos. He had been vegetating in Quebec which he hated. He'd spent his whole life in Indochina. That's where he really wanted to be. He was rescued from Quebec and sent to Laos. I was then sent to replace him as Consul General in Quebec.

ELLSWORTH BUNKER
Ambassador
Vietnam (1967-1973)

Ellsworth Bunker was named ambassador to Vietnam in 1967. He was interviewed by Michael L. Gillette in 1980.

Q: Let's start with your appointment, Ambassador Bunker. Do you recall the circumstances under which you were chosen ambassador to Vietnam?

BUNKER: Yes, I remember how it occurred. I had been asked by Secretary Dean Rusk to go to Buenos Aires to head our mission to the OAS [Organization of American States] meeting. He had to leave, asked me to come there and take his place. I was then in Nepal. On the way back from Buenos Aires to Washington, I had a message from him which I received in Sao Paulo saying he would like to see me on my return. I got back on a Saturday, went to see him, and they said, "The President is in Texas, but he would like to see you Tuesday morning on his return. But I forewarn you, he wants you to go to Vietnam."

So I went to see the President on Tuesday morning, and he said he wanted me to go to Vietnam. Well, I at first said, "Well, you know, Mr. President, you've just appointed me ambassador-at-large and I was married last month in Kathmandu. I really have to consult Carol [Laise]." He said, "That's right, you do. I'll give you a plane. You go out to Kathmandu and consult Carol, and then meet me in Guam." He said, "I want you to go because it's the most important issue facing us today in our foreign affairs. I think it's very important that you should go out there and take over." So I did go out. I cabled my wife that I would be there probably for only a few days. And as I got off the plane she said, "Well, I know the answer."

But the President said to me, "I'm going to give you a plane. I want you to go see Carol every month." I did get the plane, of course. I didn't get up every month either. But when I couldn't go I

would send the plane up to Kathmandu and she would come to Saigon. It became a very popular flight because there were extra seats--I think some thirty extra seats in the plane--and we had a long line waiting for R-and-R in Kathmandu. So it was always full, whether I sent it up for her or whether I went up myself. It was a feature that added greatly to my satisfaction and situation.

Q: I recall reading that Congressman H. R. Gross, who opposed so many expenditures, opposed the use of that plane.

BUNKER: Yes, he did I think, but he didn't get much support, fortunately from my point of view.

Q: Did President Johnson elaborate the reasons that he was naming you or wanted you to go in particular? Did he enumerate the particular talents that he hoped you would bring to the job?

BUNKER: Well, he did remark on my role in the Dominican Crisis and did say that he admired the way I had handled the Dominican situation, and that we were facing even tougher problems in Vietnam and he wanted me to go out there and see what I could do with the situation.

Q: Was there any aspect of your job that he emphasized at that point?

BUNKER: My recollection is, and I have written to Walt Rostow also to see whether my recollection is correct, because I saw the President alone. There was no note taker there. I have no record; I made no record of our talks either when I came away from it. My recollection is that the President emphasized the fact that he wanted to see the training of the Vietnamese accelerated and speeded up to enable us to more quickly turn the war over to them, which was our main objective, of course, to enable the Vietnamese to defend themselves. As a matter of fact, a month after I arrived General Creighton Abrams came out in May, 1967 as deputy to [General William] Westmoreland. About his chief function then when he first came was to speed up the training of the Vietnamese armed forces. He did a splendid job, of course, and succeeded Westmoreland and was outstanding as commander there. So that--and I've asked Walt to check his recollections--certainly was my objective when I went there, and I think that was the beginning of what later was known as Vietnamization.

Q: Was there intended any departure from the procedures under Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge?

BUNKER: Well, I don't know, because I really don't know what the procedures were.

Q: But did the President say, "I want you to do this differently than Lodge?"

BUNKER: No, no. I don't recollect that he did that. But he did want me to arrive as soon as Lodge left, which was quite unusual for a new ambassador to arrive the day his predecessor left. Lodge left in the morning and I arrived in the afternoon. Usually there's a gap of some weeks or even months. But the President was very anxious apparently to see the post covered, so that I arranged to get there just as Lodge almost stepped on the plane to take off.

Q: Did you have any doubts in your own mind about accepting this post, aside from the one that you've already mentioned, consulting your wife?

BUNKER: Well, I realized it was going to be a difficult post, but my feeling was that since the President had placed a great emphasis and importance on it, that it was something that one had to undertake.

Q: Now given the broad authority of General Westmoreland, was there any notion that possibly you might be in a secondary role?

BUNKER: No.

Q: Was that spelled out in advance?

BUNKER: Well, it was understood that the ambassador was in charge. I simply acted on that premise. I never had any problem with Westmoreland or Abrams or anyone else. Westmoreland and Abrams never took any major step without consulting me first. I simply assumed that was the way it was going to be and proceeded on that basis. And I must say I had splendid cooperation from both of them.

Q: Let me ask you about the Guam Conference. Do you recall specifics of the President's activities there at Guam?

BUNKER: Well, first you had a general review of the situation. Lodge summarized the situation as he saw it from the political aspect; Westmoreland the military aspect. [Nguyen Van] Thieu and [Nguyen Cao] Ky were both there: both spoke, Ky at greater length than Thieu because Ky was acting as prime minister. Thieu was head of the council then and Ky was the more active and more articulate in some ways. But they both gave a report from their own view of it, aspect of it.

The atmosphere I would say was generally rather upbeat. There were reports of progress both from our people, from Lodge, Westmoreland and also from the Vietnamese, so that my reaction to the Guam Conference was that the feeling in Vietnam was fairly optimistic as to the progress that had already been achieved.

Q: Was this your first meeting with Thieu and Ky?

BUNKER: Yes, the first time I had seen them.

Q: What were your first impressions of them, do you recall?

BUNKER: Thieu was quite reserved, I felt, rather enigmatic, rather more difficult perhaps to get at, to get to. Ky was more articulate, rather flamboyant, and much more voluble. But Thieu had a certain solidity about him which I think Ky lacked. Ky gave the impression of being, I say, more flamboyant, more articulate, but not as profound as Thieu, as deep.

Q: Did the President seem to have a greater rapport with one as opposed to the other?

BUNKER: I don't think so. I don't recollect that he did.

Q: I understand from the messages that there was some problem or some pledge that Thieu and Ky gave to President Johnson that you would later remind them of again and again. Do you recall the circumstances of that?

BUNKER: I don't specifically recall that. Well, one thing that I did--and this may be it--was to impress on them fairly continuously the importance of their working together and in harmony, not only at the time of the council but after the elections, also in 1967 where Ky became vice president and took a secondary role. You see, there was considerable rivalry between Thieu and Ky for the top spot. There was even a threat that this might divide the military, and I remember calling in the military and making it very clear to them that we couldn't go along with any division in military ranks at the time of war, that they would have to come to some decision themselves. I wasn't going to tell them what it ought to be, but nevertheless they'd have to come to a decision.

Q: On one candidate or the other?

BUNKER: On one candidate.

Q: Was it a decision that was reached at the level of Ky and Thieu or was it something that their principal military backers decided on, do you recall?

BUNKER: Well, it came about through a meeting of the military council at which both Thieu and Ky were present, is my recollection. Ky finally agreed that he would accept the vice presidential spot.

Q: I want to ask a lot of questions on that, but before we get there I want to ask one more on the Guam Conference, and that is, what was the primary purpose of that conference, do you recall?

BUNKER: Well, I think the primary purpose was to review the situation as it stood, to get some feeling for what was possible, not only from the military point of view, but the political point of view. the development of democratic institutions and how rapidly that might progress. The question came up about the elections which took place in September--

Q: Third, I think.

BUNKER: 1967, and the preparations for that, for the drafting of a constitution. and the more or less tentative timetable worked out for that. Then one other decision that came out of the Guam Conference was to put the pacification program under Westmoreland. And Bob Komer was appointed to head up the pacification program under Westmoreland.

Q: Was this a decision that President Johnson made? Do you recall the process here?

BUNKER: No, I don't think so. I don't think he made it himself, but he agreed to it. I think it was suggested because the pacification program required a preponderance of military personnel out in the provinces. Numerically I think the military outnumbered the civilians about three to one, about that. Therefore, it seemed logical to put it under Westmoreland with a civilian head.

Q: [William] Porter I suppose had resisted previous attempts to do this, and his argument had been that the soldiers would not give a top priority to community development projects. Do you recall the rebuttal to this point?

BUNKER: No, I don't recall that. As a matter of fact, at Guam I had not been aware of Porter's opposition to it.

Q: Was there a belief at Guam that pacification was not working properly? That it needed to be overhauled?

BUNKER: Well, I think there was a feeling that it needed to be invigorated and speeded up, and that more emphasis should be put on it. That it was an essential part of our whole program.

Q: My notes indicate that the conference in Guam ended on March 22 and you arrived in Saigon on April 25, so I've got a month here that I can't account for. Do you recall the circumstances of the intervening month?

BUNKER: Well, you say the Guam Conference ended when?

Q: March 22.

BUNKER: Yes. And I arrived... right.

Q: Did you go back to Kathmandu?

BUNKER: I went back to Kathmandu, but I'm trying to think whether I went first to Washington and then Kathmandu. But I did have some time in Kathmandu, to give Lodge time to arrange for his departure and say his farewells and so forth. So that I waited there in Kathmandu and when I got word about Lodge's departure time, then I arranged my arrival time.

Q: Did you have an opportunity at some point, either at Guam or in the intervening month, to get Lodge's impressions of the situation there in Saigon?

BUNKER: No. I never saw Lodge from the time I left Guam, and of course didn't see him when he departed. So the last talk I had with him was in Guam itself, and there of course we had a chance to talk. Lodge, I'm not certain, but I have the impression that he rather felt that Ky was the more dynamic of the two. I remember his saying that Ky was a learner, could grasp things. But as the situation turned out, I think that Thieu was the abler in most ways.

Q: Let me ask you your first impressions of the mission in Saigon? I suppose the new Chancellery was under construction by this time.

BUNKER: It was under construction. I opened it.

Q: It opened the following month I gather. No, it would be in the fall I guess.

BUNKER: I arrived in the spring. I think it was in the fall, yes. Yes. we were in the old building when I first went there.

Q: The embassy personnel?

BUNKER: Embassy personnel, yes. I think was very good. First-rate. In fact in recalling my talk with the President when he asked me to go out there. He said, 'You can have anybody you want. If there's anybody there that you don't want, he'll be on his way home in twenty-four hours.' I think in the whole six years I was there I only asked for one change.

Q: Do you recall that one?

BUNKER: I've forgotten who it was now. I think it was our economic counselor at the time that I thought wasn't quite up to the job. But by and large we had a first-rate embassy. This was especially true of the younger people in the Foreign Service who were out there and out in the provinces, out on their own, of course in very hazardous posts, and did a magnificent job.

Q: You mentioned Bob Komer coming out to work on pacification. Was this part of your decision or was he already scheduled to go out there?

BUNKER: No. He was scheduled to go out, yes. And Bob was a very able fellow, but not always easy to control, I remember shortly after he got out there he sent through the back channel a message recommending that the head of our AID program be changed, without saying anything to me about it. I found out about it.

Q: How did you become aware of this, do you recall?

BUNKER: Well, what I did was, I had all the back channel messages come to me. Bob found out this, discovered this, and said, "I understand that all the back channel messages are routed through you." I said. "That's correct, Bob." I never had any more trouble with him.

Q: Barry Zorthian and Edward Lansdale apparently were scheduled to leave Vietnam, but it was decided that they would stay after your arrival. Do you recall that?

BUNKER: Well, they did stay for a period, yes. And they were both very useful. very able.

Q: How about Ambassador [Eugene] Locke, what was his role there?

BUNKER: He was my deputy.

Q: Did you delegate a certain area?

BUNKER: Oh, yes, I delegated particularly pacification to Locke. But he didn't stay very long, as you recall. He came out with me. He left I think in January, 1968 to go back to Texas to run for governor. So that he left I think in January.

Ambassador [Samuel] Berger didn't get out there until March, so there was that interim period which included Tet when I didn't have a deputy.

Q: Did the fact that Ambassador Locke was an old acquaintance of President Johnson cause any chain of commands problem at all?

BUNKER: No, not at all.

Q: Let me ask you about the atmosphere in Saigon at the time you took over. How would you describe the city and the mentality of the city in the spring and summer of 1967?

BUNKER: I think the city was quiet when I got there. People were going about their business. There was not an air of great apprehension. I think people were confident that progress was being made. The city gave the appearance of going about its business. And of course it was Tet which upset that whole situation there. But I think there was some feeling of euphoria.

Q: Others have given the impression of Saigon as being sort of very removed from the war and very different from the provinces.

BUNKER: I think that's true in certain ways, until Tet came along when that changed rather rapidly. But I think that was true at the time I arrived.

Q: Let's talk about U.S.-Vietnamese relations. I gather that one of your principal functions as ambassador was to deal with Thieu and Ky and to apprise them of our positions, to use, as Bob Komer would say, leverage on them to get them to do the things that we hoped they would do and things of this nature. Would that have constituted a major part of your role there?

BUNKER: Yes.

Q: I gather at the time of your arrival there was a considerable conflict between them.

BUNKER: There was rivalry between them. Certainly rivalry, particularly until the decision was made as to the ticket for the elections in September.

Q: Was there any one individual who was the key to this decision?

BUNKER: No, I don't think so.

Q: Not one military man on the council?

BUNKER: No, I don't think so.

Q: Did you yourself favor Thieu over Ky?

BUNKER: I did, yes. Yes, I was pleased when they finally did decide on Thieu.

Q: Was this primarily based on the difference between the two men or was this at all relating to different policies that one might espouse?

BUNKER: Not different policies, but the difference between the two individuals. I thought Thieu was a wiser, more solid person. Ky was too unpredictable, too emotional, too flamboyant. Thieu more solid.

Q: Did you use your influence before the unified military ticket, before they resolved the two candidacies? Ky was censoring some of Thieu's campaign statements and General [Nguyen Ngoc] Loan apparently was using some public officials and one thing and another. I gather you may have used some influence to get them to control some of the political activities that you regarded as excessive. Do you recall that?

BUNKER: Well, yes. Loan, this chief of police, was a very difficult--well, I had little use for him. I made it very clear to Ky and Thieu that I didn't think he was the right person in that job.

Q: But he stayed for a good while.

BUNKER: He stayed for quite a while.

Q: Was he primarily a Ky supporter rather than Thieu?

BUNKER: Yes. Yes, he was. No, he was bad medicine.

Q: Did you exert any other influence on Ky before he agreed to assume the vice presidential position?

BUNKER: I didn't. No, I didn't exert any influence on either one of them. I simply said to them and to the military, General Cao Van Vien, who was chairman of the joint chiefs, and two or three others whom I called in. I said, "I'm not interfering in this, but you've got to make up your minds. There can't be a division at a time of war among the military. It's not possible."

Q: Did you fear that it would go beyond a political division, that it might also involve a coup?

BUNKER: Not necessarily a coup but I just thought it would divide the military into Factions which was not acceptable.

Q: Why do you think Ky agreed to step aside?

BUNKER: Yell. I think that Thieu had the larger measure of support from the military actually.

Q: There was some notion at first that Thieu would actually be merely a figurehead and Ky would have the authority to name the cabinet and to head the armed services. Do you recall the dispute over a formula of who would actually do what?

BUNKER: No. As far as I can remember, I don't think Ky had any veto over individuals. I don't recollect any.

Q: Let me ask you about the civilian candidates, the others. There was quite an array. Was it important to the U.S. and to public opinion to keep those candidates in the race?

BUNKER: I think it was important, yes. Because I think it was a demonstration that the elections were free, as they were. Thieu and Ky were elected with a plurality, not with a majority. I think they got about 35 per cent of the vote. As it turned out, it was of course a more democratic election than the one in 1971 where there was no opposition. If the civilian candidates could have agreed on one they might have given Thieu and Ky a good run.

Q: Was there any civilian candidate that we favored informally as an alternative?

BUNKER: No, I don't think so.

Q: Would it be fair to say that we expected and hoped the Thieu-Ky ticket to win?

BUNKER: Yes, I think so. I think it's fair to say that we thought that would be the most effective in carrying on the war and carrying the country along. Because there are too many factions among the civilians, as evidence by the fact that there were eleven civilian tickets I think. So that it was very difficult to find a civilian who could bring the country together.

Q: I gather they were united only in their opposition to Thieu and Ky.

BUNKER: That's right. Yes, sure. And of course all those countries are more accustomed to authoritarian rule than we are. I mean, after all, they adopted our presidential system. As one senator said, "We've got a democratic system now though we have a history of four thousand years with no tradition in it of that kind."

Q: Was the election a maturing experience for them?

BUNKER: Yes, I think it was, yes. Because it was carried out, I think, really quite well. We had a great many observers there, as you know.

Q: Do you think that as the process continued during that campaign that there was less censorship, more freedom of the press? Did you see an emerging democracy in terms of the practices?

BUNKER: Yes, there was more freedom, freedom of the press. One of the problems of the whole war we had to contend with was the fact that there was no press censorship, which raises the issue or the question whether a democracy can wage war successfully without censorship and

with the war now being shown on television, which never happened before. This is the first time it happened, the first time that the war came into everybody's living room. No question in my mind that it had a very important effect on public opinion in this country, whereas the other side didn't wage war under those handicaps. They had complete censorship.

Q: Let me ask you about the prospect of "Big" Minh [General Duong Van Minh] returning from Bangkok to run as a candidate. Do you recall how this was prevented?

BUNKER: I should, but the details escape me at the moment. I must try to refresh my memory on that.

Q: Do you recall I think it's the Dongha incident where the other candidates were assembled and supposedly prepared to debate and Thieu did not join them? They all got mad about it.

BUNKER: Yes, they got mad about it. I remember that, too. Yes. But I do remember they got mad about it. My recollection is, too, that I've forgotten now why Thieu and Ky didn't show up. I think it's because they didn't want to give importance to the other side, lend that much credibility to their opponents.

Q: Did you urge Thieu to appear with the other candidates?

BUNKER: Subsequently I did. I told him I thought

Q: Anything else on the campaign that you feel is important?

BUNKER: No, I don't think so. I think I did report this to the President in one of my messages. We did have a chance to observe the elections over a wide area of the country, and the reports from the observers came in that they were fairly conducted, without pressure, and with everybody given a chance to vote, and that we were really quite pleased with the way the government had organized the elections and carried them out. I guess [Hubert] Humphrey came out for the inauguration.

Q: In one of these wires you referred to your persistent persuasion and patient prodding. Can you recall any particular examples of using your influence to get Thieu and Ky to adopt a policy during the campaign that has more in keeping with public opinion?

BUNKER: During the campaign?

Q: Yes.

BUNKER: No, I can't recollect any particular instance.

Q: There was a crisis I suppose at the end when the national assembly appeared to want to invalidate the election. Do you recall this crisis?

BUNKER: I do recall the crisis, but I don't recall the circumstances particularly.

Q: Well, I gather some of these assemblymen were defeated senate candidates.

BUNKER: Yes, that's right, some of them were defeated and wanted to--because of that reason, I think, but I just don't recollect the details.

Q: Could it be that some of them were also Ky partisans?

BUNKER: Might have been so.

Q: But I think the record indicates that you met with a group of them and brought them to a different frame of mind.

BUNKER: Yes, but I don't recollect what the reason for the... I think it was because, as you say, some of them were defeated. It's hard for an Oriental to accept loss of face.

Q: In addition to the observers, did the embassy make any other efforts to ensure an acceptable level of honesty and voter participation in the elections?

BUNKER: Well, we made it very clear to the government, Thieu and Ky and the rest of them, that we placed great importance on fair elections and that there should be no coercion or attempts of coercion of the voters. I made it very clear to both of them that the question of support. Degree of support they would receive from here would depend very largely on how the elections were carried out and how they were seen here and not only seen here and reported by the press.

Q: Did your pressures, do you think, generate anti-Americanism?

BUNKER: Well, I don't think so really. Maybe at times. Well, there were times, of course, later on when they generated anti-Americanism, when I tried to get them to go to Paris.

Q: What was President Johnson's reaction to the election, do you recall?

BUNKER: Well, I think he was very pleased, of course, with the way it was carried out, and I think he expected certainly that the military would be returned to power and probably felt that that was the best thing for the country, given the situation that existed at the time. And he was concerned that the election should be seen here as being open and free.

Q: I understand that there was an invitation to the UN to send observers as well. Do you recall your role in that invitation?

BUNKER: No, I don't recall specifically.

Q: Now General Loan arrested a former economics minister, [Au Troung] Thanh. Do you recall that incident?

BUNKER: No, I don't recall that.

Q: I have a note here that you filed a stiff protest after that happened.

BUNKER: I probably did.

Q: Was there a problem of regionalism that affected the government in Vietnam?

BUNKER: Well, regionalism in the sense that you had, for example, the Cao Dai religious sect, which is very strong in the South, very anti-communist and therefore pro-government. There's still also an element which was rather insistent on its prerogatives as such. and of course there were the Buddhists and what we call the radical Buddhists. who were often anti-government. And there was the Catholic element, which had come from the North, which was a minor but substantial element in the country, Thieu himself being a Catholic. So that you had this sense of rivalry between the Catholics, the Buddhists, the other elements like the Cao Dai. On the other hand, while that led to rivalries domestically, politically, still they were united I think in their opposition to the communists. So it was an element that could and did occasionally cause some disturbance, unsettlement. Before I got there they had the Buddhist uprising in the North, you know, at Danang.

Q: It seems that the Buddhists were never really brought into the process, that they were always a force of resistance.

BUNKER: Well, particularly what was known as the An Quang Buddhists, the more radical element. There was another element which was much more cooperative with the government, but it was the An Quang Buddhist faction that got the publicity, of course.

Q: Did you yourself have any formula for muting their opposition?

BUNKER: No. I didn't have any formula. I can't say that I did.

Q: In retrospect, as you look back, could anything have been done to further unify the country?

BUNKER: I don't know. The Thieu-Ky rivalry was at times unsettling and it's something that I kept working on constantly, pointing out to both of them it was absolutely essential that they work together.

Q: How responsive were they overall in these meetings?

BUNKER: They were responsive in the meetings, but they didn't always follow through.

Q: Did persistence help here? Were you eventually able to bring them around in some cases?

BUNKER: Yes. Yes. I think so, until the elections of 1971, and then they had the split between Thieu and Ky. But then Ky pulled out.

Q: Some of your advice to Thieu seems to have been more along the lines of political advice: to

get out more among the people, to use television, to become essentially a more aggressive leader in attempting to unify the people. Can you elaborate on this sort of advice and the success of it?

BUNKER: Well, Thieu, as a military man and being himself rather austere, and I think because of perhaps the secretive characteristics about him, was not used to using the press, the television. He was used to command as a military man, not used to persuasion, to giving orders but not used to persuasion. And he had to go through really an educational process. This is what I was trying to help him with and urging him to do, to expose himself more to the people. And he did progress a great deal I think. I went with him on a good many trips where he did get out among the people and talk to them, and I think improved very much in the course of time on his public relations aspect.

Q: Do you think he ever achieved the status in the minds of the Vietnamese as a national leader?

BUNKER: I think he did, but not necessarily--as a leader, but not as a national hero.

Q: Was there anyone in South Vietnam at the time that you felt would have been the natural leader to unify the country?

BUNKER: No. No, I didn't see anyone.

Q: Let me ask you about some more of your pressures. One, dismissing corrupt officials. I gather this was something else you were very interested in.

BUNKER: Yes.

Q: How far did you get with that?

BUNKER: Well, we made some progress with it. Thieu did replace quite a number of province chiefs who were guilty of corruption. Some of the military were, some not. One of the problems we had occasionally was with the military wives, the wives engaged in corruption instead of their husbands.

Q: Now another thing I understand that you were interested in was the matter of higher military and civilian pay scales. Do you recall your efforts there?

BUNKER: Yes. Yes, I know I did try. I did urge Thieu to improve their pay scales, because they really were getting very poorly paid, which as I said to him, leads to corruption. The attitude in the Orient towards corruption is somewhat different than it is here. In most of those countries there are no social security laws. The extended family, the family is the social security unit, and your first duty is to take care of your family, provide for your family. If you do engage or feel that you have to engage in corruption in order to do that, there are extenuating circumstances which you don't have here in the Western civilization. So people look at it with more tolerance as being done to take care of the family situation.

Q: Were the salaries increased?

BUNKER: Yes. Yes, they were.

Q: And did the government have the funds to do this?

BUNKER: Yes. Well, we of course were giving economic support to the government right along, but also the country was making progress economically in spite of the war, particularly in the later years of the war when I was there, not only in the industrial sector, but particularly in the agricultural sector where farmers were really more prosperous than they'd ever been. I can remember going down to the Delta, which is the great agricultural area there, and seeing farmers who used to ride bicycles riding motorcycles, and seeing television aerials or radio aerials in houses. And they were buying tractors, sometimes pooling on their tractors, but getting into machinery operations. There was a very large land distribution program effected, which became effective in 1970, 1972.

Q: Did we have a policy of advocating land reform?

BUNKER: Oh, yes.

Q: I know President Johnson was interested in that.

BUNKER: Oh, yes. He did have a very great interest.

Q: How effective were you at advancing that policy?

BUNKER: I think we were quite effective in advancing it and had good cooperation from Thieu and the government. They did a very substantial, really very creditable piece of work.

Q: Did you also favor giving more authority to the province chiefs rather than the military commanders? Do you recall this question?

BUNKER: Well, we recommended or advocated more authority to the Province chiefs because their concern was with the local government rather than with the military effort, except from the point of view of the village and hamlet security aspect. But they were closer to the people than the military were and were permanently stationed in the provinces. Consequently they had a greater interest in the progress of their own provinces, an interest, of course, in security, too, but also in the economic situation and the political situation. So that we felt that if people had problems or grievances or things of that kind, that the province chief was the more suitable person to whom they could address themselves and look for relief or redress or whatever it might be.

Q: The question of prisoners of war and repatriation of prisoners, were there questions here that were addressed to the Thieu Administrations?

BUNKER: I'm not quite clear on your question.

Q: Well, for example, did our concern over the safety of our POWs in North Vietnam cause us to advance a particular policy of how Viet Cong prisoners should be treated or repatriation?

BUNKER: Yes. We were, of course, interested in seeing that these prisoners, our prisoners, were treated according to the rules of warfare and that they were properly treated, and saw to it. And I think they were. The Con Son Island incident, where there was a great fuss about--

Q: Oh, the tiger cages?

BUNKER: Tiger cages, yes.

Q: Did you ever attempt to improve the conditions of Viet Cong prisoners or to step up repatriation in order to aid our own prisoners of war?

BUNKER: I'd have to refresh my memory on what we did on repatriation, I just don't recall at this point.

Q: Cambodia must have presented a dilemma at this point. It was clear that the enemy was using Cambodia as a sanctuary.

BUNKER: Oh, absolutely. In fact, I sent a message back in June--June 9, June 19, I've forgotten the exact date--recommending that we go into Laos and cut the trail on the ground, that the war was kept alive, of course, in the South by the infiltration of men and supplies and materiel and equipment, reasoning that if we could cut the trail that the Viet Cong in the South would wither on the vine. Well, obviously I was turned down; they never did it, on several grounds. One, it would be a violation of the Laotian treaty of 1962 to which we were signatories. My response to that was that it was quite true it would be a violation, but the other side violated it from the day they signed it, and the Laotians would be delighted to have us go in.

Secondly, it would take two or three more divisions, which again was true, but we put in that many more before we got through.

The third point was that there was fear it might provoke the Chinese. but my observation on that was that while we have no relations with the Chinese, had none, our friends did. The British had embassies in Peking, the French, Dutch, and we could make it very clear to the Chinese we had no designs on China or on North Vietnam. North Vietnamese could have any kind of government they wanted as far as we were concerned, but they weren't going to take over the South.

Well, we didn't do it. If we had done it, of course it would have helped to close sanctuaries, not only in Laos but in Cambodia, too. But we didn't do it, and then finally did go into Cambodia.

Q: Of course you had a problem with Prince [Norodom] Sihanouk, I suppose.

BUNKER: Well, Sihanouk tacitly let it be understood that as long as we didn't bomb civilian areas and kept our bombing to the sanctuaries that he didn't really object to it, although he wasn't going to say so.

Q: But you understood that this was his position?

BUNKER: Yes. Yes.

Q: There seems to have been some rivalry between South Vietnam and Cambodia here. One example, the halting of shipping on the Mekong River that impaired the Cambodian economy. Do you recall your efforts to free up the shipping on the Mekong River, keep Sihanouk in a friendlier posture?

BUNKER: I'm not very clear on it. I think we did, and did arrange to let shipping go up the Mekong. It's my recollection it went up pretty freely, even though the other side were bringing in supplies through Sihanoukville and bringing them up into the sanctuaries.

Q: Let me ask you about the post-election situation. Was there an effort made to broaden the base of the government?

BUNKER: Well, yes, I think there was. I think in the appointments to the cabinet, and Thieu did make several changes as time went on. I'll have to look. I'm certain I reported that in my messages, but I'd have to check it.

Q: During this period, before Tet and after the inauguration, were there overtures made to the other side to discuss settlement terms or cease-fires or peace conferences?

BUNKER: 1967. When was the San Antonio formula, which has been referred to in some of these?

Q: I have September 29, 1967 on that.

BUNKER: September 29. The President made a proposal there. I've forgotten just what the terms were. September, 1967.

Q: I believe there was a normal flow of men and materiel continuing from the North during the bombing pause, but no stepped up activity. Wasn't it something like that?

BUNKER: Yes, I must look it up to refresh my memory on that.

Q: For example, didn't President Thieu write a letter to Ho Chi Minh?

BUNKER: He did write a letter. The question came up of how it was to be delivered, I remember. I'm not sure whether we ever reached a solution, or that he ever did, on the ways to get it to him.

Q: I gather there was some consideration of having the Pope deliver it, and even some speculation that perhaps President Johnson in his visit had taken the letter with him to Rome when he saw the Pope at Christmas?

BUNKER: Yes, but my recollection is that it never was worked out.

Q: Really?

BUNKER: Yes.

Q: It seems a shame that there's no basis for communication. Another intriguing event was the Buttercup affair, where an NLF emissary supposedly was on his way to meet with you and was arrested. Do you recall this?

BUNKER: I recall it, yes, but I don't recall the details.

Q: There was some speculation that this was merely a hoax on the Viet Cong's part.

BUNKER: I must really refresh myself on that, too.

Q: But do you yourself recall any talks, informal talks, that you had with emissaries of the other side on the basis of settlements or ceasefires?

BUNKER: No. No, I never had any talks. No.

Q: Were there neutralists that you could talk with that could get word indirectly to the other side?

BUNKER: Not that I could talk with, no.

Q: What about foreign nationals, say British or French or other individuals that had contacts with North Vietnam?

BUNKER: Well, we never made any approach to the North Vietnamese through other nationals in South Vietnam. Now, anything of that sort was done in Washington, but outside of Vietnam itself. I never got involved in any negotiating proposals or peace proposals in Vietnam with other nationals, or with emissaries from the other side.

Q: Anything else on the negotiations before Tet?

BUNKER: No, no. I don't recall anything.

Q: Let me ask you about pacification. How would you define the pacification program?

BUNKER: Well, the pacification program had two sides at least to it. One was the question of the hamlet and village security. That was the primary objective. The second objective, also equally important, was the economic aspect. And third, the political. So that pacification was, you see, a well-rounded program in which the rural self-defense forces were involved, training civilians in defense. Economic development was equally important. And you remember the

village elections, council elections, were held all over the country also beginning in 1967. So that it was the development of a conscious part in the government of the people at the local level that really was involved in the pacification program, self-help program.

Q: Let me ask you about the CORDS program, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, as part of pacification. Do you recall that?

BUNKER: Yes. Oh, yes, very well. That was the principal part of pacification as far as Komer was concerned and his duties. That was really a very essential part of our whole program in Vietnam.

Q: What specifically did this involve?

BUNKER: Self-government at the local level. Revolutionary development is really a misnomer; rural development would be the better name for it. We called it revolutionary development, but I think we got changing it as it went along. We called it revolutionary development because in the beginning it was developing local political self-consciousness and self-government at the local level. But the reason I say it was rural development in this other sense was it involved agriculture, too, fisheries, agriculture, all of the economic activities involved at the village level, at the local level. So that it was a comprehensive program and a very important one.

It involved, as I say, security first, the training of the local citizenry. One indication of the confidence the government had in support of the citizenry was the fact that they distributed, if I remember correctly, six hundred thousand weapons at large in the countryside. Well, if you felt uncertain about the loyalty of the people, you wouldn't give them arms they could use against you. I mean, I think it was a mark of confidence by the government that they had the support of the citizenry. Anyhow, that was an important part. Training both men and women, too, in this hamlet and village self-defense.

Q: Did you have any feedback on the extent or evaluation to determine if, in fact, the arms were falling into friendly hands rather than potential Viet Cong?

BUNKER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Except where the Viet Cong could come in and capture them, we never had any indication they were ever turned over to the Viet Cong.

Q: How about the Phoenix program?

BUNKER: The Phoenix program, I think, was an important program in unearthing the underground. It was criticized, I know here, saying it was an assassination program. It was not an assassination program. People were killed when they resisted arrest, yes, of course. But the great majority of those people were imprisoned and were not executed. There were casualties, of course, because there was resistance, but it was an important program. You see, what happened at Tet was because Tet was a military defeat, a very significant military defeat for the other side, but a psychological victory for them here in the United States because of the press reaction and the way it was reported. And that I think is brought out by Peter Braestrup in his books. But what happened was that the communist side was so confident that the Viet Cong surfaced for the first

time. The underground all came up and were identified, many of them killed. I mean, they virtually suffered such severe losses at Tet they never recovered from it. But it made them more vulnerable. More identifiable, and hence the Phoenix program became more effective.

Q: Was it tied into the Chieu Hoi program at all, the returnee program?

BUNKER: Yes. Well, yes it was, where ralliers would come in. In my earlier messages to the President, I think every week I reported about the Chieu Hoi.

Q: Do you think that these people who came over and were evidently reimbursed for doing so and joining the South Vietnamese army, do you think they ever slipped back into the jungles and rejoined the Viet Cong?

BUNKER: Not many so. Maybe a few, but not many.

Q: Really? Our intelligence indicated that--

BUNKER: That's right, they didn't go back.

Q: Did you talk to many of these people and determine why they were changing sides?

BUNKER: I never talked to them personally, no. Our people did, of course.

Q: Well, lots of stories came in about the hardships and the North and the difficulty there, and the hardships of fighting in the South, this kind of warfare they were carrying on. Most of these Chieu Hoi people were guerrillas you know, not many of them were the regular military who were living hand-to-mouth and fighting in the jungles. What was Edward Lansdale's role in the pacification program?

BUNKER: Well, principally as an adviser, based on his long experience there in that part of the world: principally as an adviser on the local scene--which he knew. I suppose, perhaps better than most of us, most of the people who were there: he'd been there longer--aha, I think the native culture, psychology, so forth.

Q: Was he controversial in official circles?

BUNKER: Not with me or there at the time. I think he had been at some time. But I had no problem with him. I thought he was quite effective really.

Q: Was he critical at all of pacification, the implementation of it?

BUNKER: I don't think he was.

Q: I gather this was one of the ARVN's weakest areas, pacification.

BUNKER: Well, it may have been. Yes, I suppose perhaps so. They were more concerned really

about fighting the war and the enemy. However, I think they cooperated pretty well.

Q: William Corson, who was over there, made the criticism that the pacification project should not have to be cleared through the Vietnamese officials. Do you recall this issue?

BUNKER: Corson? Now, when was this, do you remember?

Q: This would have been, I think, in the 1967-68 period.

BUNKER: I don't even remember, was Corson stationed there?

Q: He was with the marines. He was a

BUNKER: Oh, yes, marines. In the North. That's interesting, shouldn't have to be cleared with the Vietnamese? I'd forgotten that. That's interesting. Do you remember how that came out?

Q: He wrote a book called The Betrayal.

BUNKER: That's right, that's right. I haven't read it. Have you read it?

Q: No. I have some notes on it here though.

BUNKER: What was the thrust of it?

Q: Well, I'm not going to elaborate, since I haven't read it, but I gather he was critical of Komer's performance.

BUNKER: Komer's handling of it?

Q: Also another issue that seems to have been raised was the method of evaluation of various hamlets.

BUNKER: Hamlet evaluation security, yes.

Q: The A-B-C-D rating system..

BUNKER: A-B-C-D, yes. A-B-C-D and the communists. Yes, well, like all evaluations it's inexact, of course. It's an approximation, really. But it was an approximation and gave a pretty good idea, I think, of the general situation. I say, like all evaluations based on judgments, it was not exact, but it did by 1972, end of 1972, you could travel anywhere in the country you wanted to go without any security protection or anything at all.

Q: The press argued at the time that the C category, which was the designation of hamlets under government control, were really sort of a toss-up and would thereby in the evaluation total reduce the government control to less than 50 per cent of the population.

BUNKER: Well, depending on, I think, what year you took the evaluation, because the situation kept changing steadily for the better.

Q: Did it?

BUNKER: Yes.

Q: Was this a direct result of pacification, do you think, rather than just military advances?

BUNKER: It was a combination of both. No question, a combination of both. The military situation improved and the pacification situation.

Q: What did we learn from that pacification experience that you would apply in other situations?

BUNKER: Well, I think we did learn the importance of getting the local population people involved in their own situation, not only their own protection, their own economic development, their own political development. This was the whole thrust of the pacification program. It was government at the local level involving defense, involving the political situation, involving the local councils, hamlet chiefs, and the local economic development programs. So it was a rounded approach. I think it applies not only to Vietnam but to other situations in the less developed world.

Q: It seems that apathy was a great problem, that so many of the Vietnamese people were not interested in the Viet Cong or the other side, but on the other hand they seemed apathetic about the Thieu-Ky government.

BUNKER: A great bulk would prefer to be left alone, obviously. I mean, prefer not to be involved in the war on one side or the other. But I think this is true anywhere in the world you go. I mean, many of them just wished the war would go away. Sure, no question.

Q: Another area that you seemed to have some concerns about was intelligence. In fact in November, 1967, when you came back to the White House and met with President Johnson, I gather that there were some proposals to revamp our intelligence system to get better intelligence.

BUNKER: Yes. I don't remember the specifics of that particular talk at the White House, but certainly the intelligence was a matter of concern, a matter of great concern to us. The question of attempting to improve the intelligence was also a matter of concern. Now, I felt that the agency, the CIA there was well run. We had good people, I thought, there. Ted Shackley, for example, was first-rate. His successor who was there a briefer time, Lou Lapham was good. Tom Polgar was the last one. He was only there about--well, he stayed on with [Ambassador Graham] Martin, but only the last year I was there. They were all, I thought, good, able. I thought they were doing a pretty good job for us.

Q: How about military intelligence? Did you feel that you were getting adequate military intelligence?

BUNKER: Well, I wasn't so sure about the military intelligence. Of course, I had a briefing every week from the military, a general roundup, of the situation each week. But it was more difficult for me to judge about the quality of it.

Q: Enemy troop levels. There have been indications, or certainly at least contentions, that we drastically underestimated the size of the enemy force in the field.

BUNKER: I don't know. I don't know about that.

Q: Do you recall this being a source of concern at the time?

BUNKER: No, I don't, really. Where did that develop, do you remember? Estimates of enemy force level.

Q: Let me ask you about some of the visitors that you had out there. I gather there was almost a constant flow of congressional and diplomatic visitors.

BUNKER: Oh, absolutely. I think the Christmas-New Year's season, 1967-68. I've forgotten how many congressmen, senators I had. I think I remember a hundred and forty-six or something like that, fantastic. Just descended on us in swarms.

Q: Was there any sort of official policy of how you treated these people and what sort of procedures to follow with them?

BUNKER: Yes, well, in this sense, that they all got briefings, of course, from the military aspect and also from us on the political aspect, the economic situation. And where they expressed a wish to do so, we would take them out into the country in areas we thought it was safe for them to go. I remember Senator [Charles] Percy and his wife came out. I think he got out in a place where he got pretty close to getting under fire.

Q: I understand that he injured his hand or something when he jumped for cover.

BUNKER: Something like that, yes. But we had some amusing experiences, too, I remember. The first helicopter ride I ever took in Vietnam, I had a forced landing.

Q: Crash landing.

BUNKER: Yes. Have I described that to you?

Q: Please do.

BUNKER: General [Bruce] Palmer was out there as deputy to Westmoreland, and he was out at Bien Hoa base. He had been with me in the Dominican situation, where he was deputy commander to the Brazilians. I was going out to see him and we were flying along over the highway, and we started to come down. I looked out and I didn't see anything that looked like the

base, and I thought maybe we were going to be met by a jeep or something. Well, then the traffic began to swerve off. And we came down and we skidded along. I got out of the chopper, thanked the pilot. He said, "Oh, we're not there yet. We've had a forced landing; I had to come down. My power shut off. Fortunately we were over fifteen hundred feet, or we couldn't have made it." Well, it was a very amusing incident in a way, but what happened was there was a photographer aboard. He got the strap of his camera afoul of the fuel valve, shut off the fuel. We came down and we were rescued by the Jolly Green Giant. [HH-53, special operations helicopter].

So I was quite amused by it. I described this to General Palmer. He said, "Anyhow, another chopper should have been following you anyway. Somebody will catch hell for that."

Q: Did you have any other close calls while you were there?

BUNKER: Oh, yes. Tet. We were under fire.

Q: Well, we'll deal with that in detail. But in your travels around the country?

BUNKER: No. At the same time I went out to the First Division fire base. The commander there asked me if I'd like to go around the base. I said, "Yes, I would." So he assigned an officer to take me out, show me the base. He took me around outside the base. So I came back and he said, "Where did he take you?" I said, "He took me around outside of the base." He said, "Well, we're supposed to be protecting you, you're not supposed to be protecting us." So I reported this to Bruce Palmer. too. "Oh." he said, "Somebody will catch hell for that." I got back. I thought it had been a very amusing day. I told Westmoreland about it. And he said. "A lot of people have already caught hell." (Laughter) But no, except for Tet, I don't think there were any very close situations.

Q: Did official visitors from Washington ever tend to want to go beyond the areas that were safe?

BUNKER: No.

Q: Let me ask you about George Romney's visit. This is the one where he was brainwashed.

BUNKER: Yes, but I think that was before my time.

Q: He came back then I guess in December of 1967.

BUNKER: Yes, he did come back in December. We didn't try to brainwash him then. (Laughter) As I remember, his visit was a very brief one. It really didn't make much of an impression on me.

Q: Hubert Humphrey attended the inaugural ceremonies, I believe.

BUNKER: Yes, he did.

Q: Can you recall the occasion?

BUNKER: Oh, yes. He headed the delegation, our delegation. Hubert, as usual, got along extremely well wherever he went. He was really great. But, as you know, Hubert didn't have many terminal facilities, and I said to him, I'd like to have him address the embassy staff. We had a very large embassy, you know, the biggest in the world. I said, "Now, Hubert, they'll all be out in the compound in the yard in the sun, and it's hot. So only talk ten or fifteen minutes." He said, "Oh, sure, Ellsworth, that's fine." Well, Hubert made a rattling good fifteen-minute speech. Then he made a second fifteen-minute speech. I thought, well this is going to be all. Then he made a third fifteen-minute speech. I think we timed him at fifty-two minutes. But he got a good hand, of course. Oh, he was great.

Q: Did he have any proposals or advice or any suggestions for President Thieu that you recall?

BUNKER: I don't recall any in particular, but he got along very well with Thieu. They were very appreciative of his coming out.

Q: How about the Maxwell Taylor-Clark Clifford mission in July, 1967? Do you recall that?

BUNKER: Well, that was to our allies, not to Vietnam. They went to our allies, I think, in the interest of seeing whether they could get further troop reinforcements. But they didn't come to Vietnam at that time. Clark Clifford came out later after Tet in 1968 again and wanted to start withdrawing troops then, and I objected to that because I thought it would have a very demoralizing effect. And I was upheld. We subsequently met in Honolulu, and the President agreed that we would not begin to pull out.

Q: Anything else on visitors?

BUNKER: Well, I remember that Governor [Ronald] Reagan and his wife came out, just what date I can't quite remember. He was a strong supporter of what we were doing, and I was very happy to see them because he really backed us up.

Q: Did you get many visitors who were opposed to the war or opposed to the conduct of the war, the way it was being conducted?

BUNKER: Some. Yes, we did. Well, Townsend Hoopes came out when he was Secretary of the Air Force I think. He later became opposed to the war, as you know. Congressman [Lester] Wolfe--in fact, I think Wolfe at one time said he thought I ought to be recalled, if I'm not mistaken. We had a visit from Senator [Edward] Kennedy, who was critical of the way we were handling the refugees, but unfortunately came out to make a case. He had his mind made up when he came apparently, because he avoided the embassy largely and brought some staff with him. They went to a refugee camp which was being abandoned because we had built a new one and a better one, but made their report based on what they'd seen at the old one, which didn't go very well with me. I didn't feel it was really a straightforward report.

Q: Did you meet with him while he was out there?

BUNKER: I saw him just briefly, that's all. He stayed away from us largely.

Q: Let's talk about the refugee situation some more. I gather there were a tremendous number of displaced people.

BUNKER: There were, yes, a great many. If you add them all up, they weren't all displaced at one time, but the total, I think, came to some five million. But that was spread over a span of years; it didn't all happen at once. I mean, they came out and went back again. But the point is that, as I guess Bob [Sir Robert] Thompson put it, or someone, they voted with their feet. They never went over to the other side. They always ran away from the other side.

Q: Was there anything that could have been done in your opinion to improve the refugee situation?

BUNKER: My feeling is, given the fact that the country was at war, given the fact of limited resources, I think it was handled remarkably well. Obviously hardships existed, but the fact is, as I say, nobody went over to the enemy. They did vote with their feet, and went back as soon as they had a chance to go back. Naturally they were attached to their own villages.

RICHARD T. MCCORMACK
Head of Operations Research, Philco-Ford
Saigon (1968)

After attending Georgetown University, Mr. Richard T. McCormack assumed a multitude of administrative roles for the Nixon Administration in addition to serving under Governor William Scranton of Pennsylvania and Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina. Mr. McCormack's career also included positions as the US Ambassador to the Organization of American States as well as Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs. Ambassador McCormack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

McCORMACK: Then, friends suggested that maybe I should go to Vietnam and consider some of the problems there. So I became the Head of Operations Research for Philco-Ford in their Southeast Asia Headquarters in Saigon, Vietnam.

Q: For whom?

McCORMACK: Philco-Ford Corporation. I originally worked mainly on the war refugee problems in Vietnam, but I had broader responsibilities. I was headquartered in Saigon, but traveled widely in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The Tet offensive occurred while I was there. I was also working as an analyst and sending papers with suggestions to Embassy people. At one point, Ambassador Robert Komer, who was in charge of the pacification program, asked me to become the Deputy Science Advisor to the Commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam, with responsibilities for coordinating all the soft science research being

done in Vietnam by such groups as Rand Corporation. This was a GS-18, PL 313, position. I agreed to do it.

This was, of course, a time of tremendous turmoil. I said I would take the job under the condition that I could return to the U.S. and recruit five or six top people of my own generation to work with me. That was agreed. So I flew back to the United States in July. Then a Congressional hiring freeze passed. I recruited six of the ablest people of our generation. We sat in the Pentagon and sat and sat. Komer, who was kind of an irascible fellow, began sending outraged cables demanding that I be sent back, but the Pentagon just wouldn't move. I later discovered that some functionary in personnel had said, "How can a 27-year old man take GS-18 responsibility levels?" So they used the excuse of the hiring freeze to delay. So after a month of this, I gave up and helped coordinate the Vietnam issue for Nixon in his '68 campaign headquarters in New York. My six friends all went off to brilliant careers in other areas.

Q: Well, let's talk about the time you were in Saigon. What were you doing when the Tet offensive hit

McCORMACK: I was living in Saigon in a very exposed section of the city when the attack occurred. There was a lot of gunfire in the neighborhood where I lived.

Q: Where was that?

McCORMACK: I lived right between Saigon and Cholon. You remember Cholon?

Q: That was the Chinese part?

McCORMACK: I was right on the border of Cholon. I was staying in an apartment building owned by a Vietnamese, Mr. Thu, a very nice man. We had Viet Cong all around us.

Q: Where there was a bunch of heavy fighting?

McCORMACK: Heavy fighting. In any case on the day of the TET attack, I was curious to see what was happening because you could see smoke coming up in different places and could hear gunfire. I walked down to the Bachelor Officers Quarters, where I often ate. Someone explained to me what was happening, so I began moving around town, going from one area to the other. I went to see if the U.S. Embassy was still under fire. I could see big piles of smoldering wreckage in front of the Embassy. The Viet Cong still had people who were hidden in the area there, and they were firing. Then I went to the Presidential Palace where there was another problem. As I was walking around the corner to the Presidential Palace, which was on my right, I stepped over a bunch of bodies that were on the sidewalk, and there was absolute silence. I looked around, and all of a sudden gunfire erupted. I dove into a little alley, where the Korean Embassy was located. It turned out the Viet Cong were occupying a large building next to this embassy, which was immediately to the left of the Presidential Palace. There were two brick walls along the driveway, where the Ambassador's car was normally parked. That is where Korean marines were crouched, attempting to deal with the Viet Cong in the high rise, 30 yards to the left.

They were firing at each other, and I was there with them. Of course except for a pistol, I was unarmed, but it went on for quite awhile, and it was very loud. Walls were shaking and people were screaming. As it turned out, a CBS camera crew was filming us from across the yard of the Presidential Palace with a telescopic lens. During one period when the gunfire was particularly intense, I leaned up against the wall and just put my fingers in my ears because the noise was absolutely deafening. Tank fire eventually dealt with our problem. All this appeared on the CBS evening news, generating letters from personal friends who saw the footage. The same footage was run again years later as "Letters from Vietnam," a special CBS program on the war.

Fortunately the Viet Cong never got into my apartment building. After a week, they were pushed back. Then I began traveling around Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Herman Khan was doing assessments for DARPA, and I was put on his plane. He and I traveled all over the region, interviewing military people to learn what might be done.

Q: What was your impression at this point where public opinion was beginning to move against the policy in the United States? In the field, what was your impression about the value of our commitment there and how things were going?

McCORMACK: I thought it was a winnable proposition under certain circumstances, but I was not always impressed by what I saw at the upper levels of our operation over there. It was also very obvious to me that we were more enthusiastic about winning that war than a lot of the Vietnamese were by then. It was largely an American war. There was a tremendous amount of dedication by the U.S. Officer Corps: captains, colonels, majors, lieutenants. There were many good people there. At the time, though, I felt our strategy of graduated escalation was flawed and not well thought out. But in those days, I took the domino theory seriously. We all did. As I traveled around other countries in the region, it was very clear to me that even Thailand was potentially vulnerable. Malaysia had just come through a very close call with communist insurgents.

Q: During the trouble, what did they call this? I can't remember what they called it.

McCORMACK: I did not by any means think that it was a hopeless proposition, but I felt that we might not win it operating the way we were. Herman Khan came up with his idea of building a barrier around Vietnam with moats and fences. Herman Khan was a very smart man and I was very fond of him. I kept in touch with him for years after that. Some of his ideas were brilliant. Some of them, however, were not. After returning from our fact-finding trip around Vietnam, Herman addressed the officers of the U.S. Command in Vietnam. He started out by saying, "The reason the war is going badly is because of the shortcomings of the men in this room." Some of the officers actually got up and walked out. But in any case, I learned a lot selectively from Khan. He was quite an interesting man with a tremendously eclectic mind and a very engaging personality.

CHARLES LAHIGUERA
CORDS Refugee Officer

Phouc Long Province (1968-1969)

Mr. Lahiguera was born and raised in New York. After graduating from Georgetown University and serving in the US Navy, he entered the Foreign Service in 1963. Though he served outside the South East Asia, his primary duties concerned the Vietnam War and its aftermath, particularly refugees. His overseas posts include Germany, Curacao, Vietnam, France, Hong Kong, Thailand and Swaziland, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission. Mr. Lahiguera was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when?

LAHIGUERA: Well, I went back to Washington and they put me in a training course. In fact I was in the same class with Terry McNamara.

Q: This was State Department?

LAHIGUERA: Yes. This was our operations and rural development course. It was our aid program on the ground. It was funded by USAID.

Q: So, '66 to '67 you were in training mostly?

LAHIGUERA: Yes. The training at FSI was at Arlington Towers. The atmosphere in the language school was not very cordial. In fact, it wasn't like anything I ever saw before or since. It was a very unfortunate situation. I was interested in learning Vietnamese, but many of the students assigned were first year students. They were brought in after the A-100 course. It was my impression that they all were assigned to Vietnam. A lot of these candidates had a very adversarial attitude. They didn't want to learn Vietnamese and they didn't want to go to Vietnam. The Department was going to make them by George and it was shape up or else. This was their welcoming speech. They had a woman in charge of the program who I did not admire at all. I felt there was a lot of unnecessary hostility. I was working along and I remember there was one young man studying with me, a fellow named Vespa. He had no problems learning Vietnamese and he spoke French. He had just come I think from graduate school somewhere. He had a very good education. He had just finished graduate school and didn't want to go to the language school. So, he didn't want to study Vietnamese and they were giving him all kinds of problems. So, he finally just resigned and he ended up getting a job I think in Greece with Citibank. He was perfectly willing to go. He just left because they were being so unpleasant. At the time of this program Westmoreland had started putting some light on the end of it and I had a vision that I was going to go through this year learning Vietnamese and the war was going to end and I would be the only Vietnamese speaking officer assigned to Ottawa. In between that, I thought the people managing the course were just terrible. I finally went to personnel and said, look I don't need the language qualification, as far as qualifying I had the requirements to go. I just wanted to go. I didn't ask for language training. If you don't think I have to have it, just let me know. They said, all right, we'll take care of it. The next thing I know I was assigned to leave. They terminated my training and I was about to leave when the Tet invasion occurred.

Q: January of '68 I think.

LAHIGUERA: Exactly. So, I was just waiting for the airport to reopen and as soon as it reopened, I flew in.

Q: Well, you got to, you were in Vietnam from '68, early '68 until when?

LAHIGUERA: '68 to '69. Towards the end of '69, so roughly two years.

Q: Tet was basically still going on at the time you got there, wasn't it?

LAHIGUERA: Well, obviously there was still a lot of fighting and there was a curfew in Saigon. You had to be in by 8:00.

Q: Well, you sort of met and got absorbed in the apparatus when you got to Saigon?

LAHIGUERA: I was processed in and they said, what do you want to do and where do you want to go. I said, look I'm a volunteer. Put me where you want. So, they said, okay, we'll think about it. I was still very naive about all this. They said, well, I think we're going to send you to the refugee camp. I said, that's fine. Then a fellow come in and said they needed a refugee officer up in this province, the Phuoc Long province which was in the third corps on the Cambodian border. I said, fine, I'll go. Phuoc Long province is a special place. They only took volunteers for Phuoc Long province and allowed us to inspect it first. So, I flew up to Phuoc Long province.

Actually where we were was Song Be. We had no roads in Phuoc Long, I mean none that we owned. The only way to get in and out of Phuoc Long was to fly. It had very steep decline. They had to have them shooting out of airplanes coming in. So, I remember at the little airstrip they had a big sign saying, "Song Be can be dangerous to your health." We had all kinds of black humor. There was a Lieutenant Colonel Rider who was in charge. He lived in a little trailer, which was bunkered with concrete. I found it an interesting place. I fell in love with the place and went back and told them I'd go. They assigned me to Phuoc Long and I became the refugee officer at Phuoc Long .

Q: Well, now what was sort of the CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) team consist of in that province?

LAHIGUERA: Well, in provinces that were militarily active, the senior province advisor was the military officer. We had military principals in the province and we had a deputy civilian under contract. A gentleman named John Joseph who was a FAA retired airborne colonel from the Second World War and he had done combat jumps in Europe. He was highly respected by the military. He was a very competent officer. I liked him a great deal. We had a civilian admin officer and a GSO. I had to worry about most of the refugee population. John Joseph did the civilian, other civilian programs. I focused on the refugees. We had about 100 Americans I'd say assigned on the team. Most of them were military.

Q: What was the military situation while you were there?

LAHIGUERA: We didn't have any large units in our province and we were defended principally by a local force, a local Vietnamese force. We even had bunkers and our advisory team on the military side made several bunkers. The normal civilians lived separately in prefabricated housing. I had a little trailer with a local hired Vietnamese guard. We were protected principally by the Vietnamese military. Our military was involved in immediate protection of the Americans. We had one reconnaissance airplane. The town of Phuoc Long had the main airfield where we got supplies in. All supplies had to be brought in by airplane and were taken out by air. We had an advisory team living in that town as well. There was a district team in each district. There were camps along the border. They led a D camp in Song Be. I got to see all of these places and worked at them all. As I said, there were a lot of refugees, mostly Montagnards. Most were from towns near a Vietnamese communist infiltration route. They had been told to move and they didn't move and the communists came and burned the towns. We tried to get big projects done and give them everything they needed. We built refugee villages. When the communists came in and drove people out, they'd be given some land and provided supplies.

Q: Well, the communists were basically forcing the resettlement as opposed to our trying to keep people together?

LAHIGUERA: Oh yes, no we didn't have any force at all. This was all triggered by their military.

Q: What were they trying to do, the communists?

LAHIGUERA: Well, they used this area as an approach towards Saigon.

Q: Were they mainly North Vietnamese as opposed to Viet Cong?

LAHIGUERA: Yes. After Tet my impression, my experience was that we always were against North Vietnam. I was in one district that was used as a processing place for bringing troops in. They shot down one of our planes when I was there. It severed an artery of the pilot. He was able to land the plane, but he died because he lost so much blood. He died before we could get him out. Then our district advisor was in a staff meeting, there were only about a half a dozen of them and they took a shell right under the table and killed them all. We had these Swiss aircraft, that's what they called them? They were able to set down on a very short runway. They were designed to fly in the Alps. We used to get them to get in and used helicopters to get out to the districts.

Q: What were you doing for the refugees?

LAHIGUERA: Mainly, just monitoring their conditions and providing what they needed, food, tin roofing. Arranging for medical visits and getting military to the refugee camps. I spent a lot of time in the camps. I brought a lot of patients from the camps to our hospital. We had a hospital manned by both Vietnamese and U.S. army doctors. I used to spend a lot of time going back and forth. I remember dramatically. There was a young boy with the bubonic plague. I just thought it was amazing that in this day and age, he had this stuff. He had a very swollen neck and under his

arm. It just infected his glands. I remember talking to his mother. She didn't want to let him go to the hospital. If he didn't go, I guaranteed he would be dead in a week. The refugees had the belief if you go to the hospital you die. We got this fellow there and he was cured with penicillin. You could get the plague in the dry season before the rains came; apparently the rains killed the flu. We had to worry about it.

Q: Were you getting much on the political situation in Vietnam itself or could you find yourself living in your own little world pretty much?

LAHIGUERA: Yes, you lived in your own little world. We were surviving. We were under pretty frequent attacks. Little mortars fell regularly. There was an incident with a journalist, I think he was from New York. Anyhow, we were all in the military mess, in the military camp and mortars came in and we were just about to start dessert. We all dropped on the floor and these mortars dropped onto the compound and they were buzzing around and then it stopped. Everybody got up and brushed off the dirt and sat down and started passing the tea. This poor journalist was just shattered. He was off on the next flight out.

One other interesting thing while I was there. The senior officer, this colonel, had been wounded before I got there. Not in the same place, I forgot what location, but he had been leaning out of a bunker and a rocket came by and creased his head a little bit and he had a scar on his forehead. I went over to see him one afternoon after I was there five or six months. I parked the car and I was just about to go to his office, this was in the middle of the afternoon, and we got a shower of mortars. I was trying very hard to become part of the floor of this nearby building and my car got splattered. I had a white shirt on. When I got up, I looked like somebody who had just cleaned the chimney. The place was a mess. Our senior advisor was sitting at his desk and he had shrapnel come right through the wall. He had a package of cigars in his back pocket and they cut through the cigars and got him in the rear end so we had to move him around on a stretcher. We medevaced him out and he elected since that was the second time he was wounded, he elected not to come back. He allowed us to pack him out. We shipped his stuff to Saigon and I remember his replacement was a gentleman by the name of Lieutenant Colonel Ray Suarez, I believe from Mexico. Suarez was another volunteer who had extended his stay in Vietnam and he stayed close to a year or so. We were attacked and he was killed.

Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese officials you saw there?

LAHIGUERA: Well, we had a colonel who was the province chief and I thought he was very good. I remember when Suarez got killed, after the day we were supposed to be overrun, he went around in his armored personnel carrier and waved at everybody just to show that they had not gotten him. I worked with the Vietnamese district officers. I found them quite confident. There was some animosities between the Vietnamese and the Montagnards. That was a problem and I'm sure it still exists even now.

Q: Oh, I think it's traditional really. It's the mountain folks and the plains folks.

LAHIGUERA: Well, it's more than that because they're ethnically completely different. The Montagnards are more closely related to Cambodians and the Vietnamese are more closely

related to the Chinese.

Q: Did you find yourself ever telling the Vietnamese officials to ease up or be better dealing with the Montagnards?

LAHIGUERA: What I did have to do was make sure that they provided the Montagnard refugees what they were entitled to. That was one of the things that I was there for. I had a counterpart in the Refugee Bureau. He managed to show that he had siphoned off some supplies and I had called in the inspector general for the Vietnamese service. They did an investigation and confirmed it. He was demoted, but he was sent to Dalat, which is a resort area. That was a very Vietnamese way of handling things. I think there was this feeling that Montagnards ought to be taught in Montagnard schools in Montagnard, in their language. I always thought this was insane because if they were going to learn, if they were going to participate in the Vietnamese economy, they had to learn Vietnamese and they had to be accustomed to dealing with the Vietnamese society. So, we did build refugee schools and staffed them with Vietnamese instructors. I don't think this was completely in accord with the instructions. First of all, we couldn't get Montagnard instructors and I didn't think it was realistic.

Q: How did the writ of CORDS and the embassy play where you were? Were you getting visitors from Saigon quite often from the CORDS headquarters and then also from the embassy and the political section and all that?

LAHIGUERA: In Song Be we didn't get too many visitors. We went down to Bien Hoa, which was the III Corps headquarters periodically and did reporting, but they seemed to feel if we survived we were meeting the requirements.

Q: I take it you really had the feeling that you were at the end of beyond or something?

LAHIGUERA: Yes, it was.

Q: Was there a feeling that this was a place where you could really hang out? Why weren't you overrun? Why did it stay this sort of static position of lots of fighting around?

LAHIGUERA: Well, they attempted to overrun us. I can remember towards the end of my time there, they made a major push against us and we brought in a lot of helicopter gun ships and these fixed wing aircraft. Puff the Magic Dragon was what they were called and all these 50 caliber machine guns on the side. We also had artillery. There was an artillery base in Quang Ngai. We pounded them pretty severely. After this one assault the Montagnards reported to us that the North Vietnamese forces carried the bodies out all night. We generally knew what unit was in the area and what regiment of course, so as I said we weren't talking about the so-called VC (Viet Cong).

Q: Well, you did this for what, almost how long were you there?

LAHIGUERA: Just over 18 months.

Q: That's a long time though in a place like that?

LAHIGUERA: Well, it, yes, I guess. Well, actually I take that back. In Song Be I was there a year.

PARKER W. BORG
Deputy District Advisor, CORDS
Binh Dinh (1968-1970)

Ambassador Borg was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Cornell University. In 1965, after a tour with the Peace Corps in the Philippines, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his career he served in Vietnam and Zaire, and in the State Department in senior positions concerning Vietnam, West Africa and Counter Terrorism. He served as US Ambassador to Mali (1981-1984) and to Iceland from 1993 to 1996. Ambassador Borg was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Well then, you went to Vietnam when?

BORG: When I went to Vietnam it was the summer of 1968, and I was assigned immediately to a district headquarters up in the second military region, Province of Binh Dinh, where I was assigned as the deputy district senior advisor.

Q: You were there how long?

BORG: From 1968, summer of 1968, to December 1970.

Q: What was the situation there?

BORG: The district surrounds the city of Qui Nhon, the largest city in the province, but does not include the city. It had islands out in the ocean which had never been touched by the war. It had fishing villages along the sea which had minimal contact with the war. There was a leper colony that had also not been touched by the war. There were valleys where US troops had established their rear support elements, and there were miles and miles of slums. There were agricultural villages that grew rice. In the northern end of the province there were villages that had been destroyed and were no longer inhabited, and on the interior it went all the way into areas where the Montagnards lived. So it had sort of a full range of things that happened in the war, that the circumstances in Vietnam I could see in my district in a miniature form.

Q: What were your responsibilities?

BORG: I was the deputy district advisor. I had a major who was my boss. The district had about 250,000 people living in it, broken up into 26 villages and some 150 hamlets. On our direct team

there were about six or seven people, and then I think it grew to maybe six or seven military advisory training squads and one civic action team. I was the deputy, meaning all of the military people reported to me, so I had some six or seven captains that reported to me and I reported to the major. We were integrated into the MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) structure.

Q: This must have been a little difficult for both sides, the captains to report to you and you to deal with the captains and all that.

BORG: Since I had had a year of Vietnamese and spoke the language and nobody else did, if the captains had come fresh from college or been in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) and come over to Vietnam fresh, I got along well with them. If they were somebody who had worked their way up from the ranks and been sergeants in the military and made it into the officer corps and they were some 40 years old or whatever they might be, they were a little more difficult to deal with.

Q: What were you all doing there?

BORG: My job, outside of the administration of the team, was to work on rural development, and over a period of time the program evolved so that I had a large sum of money - it was almost an endless pot of money - to be used in villages for village development programs. A Vietnamese counterpart and I would go around the country - almost every day we'd go to a couple of villages - and we would talk with the villagers about "What is it that you think your community needs?" What we tried to do was reinforce local government, get people to think about projects that they wanted to build in their communities, and see that they held meetings where they decided on the project, and then we provided the materials and the money in order to implement the project, and afterwards we would come around and inspect the projects to see that they were effectively done. This is what took up my days. In addition, I'd go out with the military advisory teams. Each of them was responsible for a certain number of local units. While there were American support elements that lived in the area, the defense was all in the hands of the local Regional Forces and Popular Forces, and our advisory training teams were training these units in defense of their communities.

Q: During the time you were there, what was the situation on the ground vis-à-vis the enemy?

BORG: This was, again, after the Tet Offensive and so there was a much greater awareness, because of the Tet Offensive, of where the Communist sympathizers were, so we had a pretty good understanding in our community of which villages and which hamlets were most sympathetic to the Communists, the Viet Cong. I remember one particularly illuminating story. I was out at a hamlet that had been many times fought over, and I talked with somebody in the village: "Tell me why is it that this group of people support the Viet Cong and this group of people don't," and they said, "Well, you have to understand that back in 1800/1850, we were invaded. When Vietnam had been unified by Gia Long, he sent his troops up and landed here, and some of the people stayed and they took the land away, and so the people who are with the Viet Cong now are the people who were dispossessed back in the 1890's or whatever it was, and so they've always been against the government and they're against the government now." What I

learned elsewhere was that it was a very complicated series of local disputes that determined who was the Viet Cong in every one of the communities. We had a sense of who they were, where they lived, but our approach was to try and provide government assistance programs to all the villages, to all the hamlets, even those that were sympathetic to the Viet Cong, on the understanding that, if they could see that the government was doing something on their behalf, they might become more sympathetic to what was happening with the rest of the country.

Q: The Tet Offensive has been described as just taking the heart out of the Viet Cong because they threw all their cadre into that and so many were killed and all. Did this show itself where you were?

BORG: I think it did, yes. Our compound had been overrun during the Tet Offensive, and the place where my predecessor had lived had been destroyed, and he just happened to be out of town or out of the camp at the time. Otherwise he would have been killed. But the Tet Offensive was very serious in this particular area, and there were many fewer Communists but there were still the older people who were sympathetic and there were the younger people who hadn't quite gotten into the movement, but these were not troops that came in from the north who were fighting. These were local people who disagreed with the way things were going, and they banded together sometimes but more often they just fought individually.

Q: In your area was there any North Vietnamese army threat?

BORG: Not that we saw.

Q: What was your impression of the hand of the South Vietnamese government where you were?

BORG: The hand of the South Vietnamese government was invisible. There were regional officials appointed by the central government. There were health ministries in Qui Nhon and education ministries and so forth, but in terms of the impact, the knowledge that people had about the central government, it was nonexistent. People were concerned about their families first, their hamlets second, their village and their province, and everything else might well have been in South Carolina or Soviet Russia as far as they were concerned. It's not something that they really thought about.

Q: How did you feel that the AID program was going?

BORG: There must have been a macro-economic AID program which was run out of Saigon which, as far as we could see, had no impact whatsoever on anything we were doing. We had military assistance funds. All of the development activities that were going on locally were the things that we were funding. I'm sure I could find a book somewhere that describes what AID was doing, but there were no projects that I knew of anywhere in the area that were AID funded, although we worked with AID and I suppose our program was a big part of the AID effort.

Q: Where did your money come from?

BORG: I'm not sure whose budget it came out of. I suppose I could check, but I don't recall. We

did not report anything through the AID bureaucracy in Saigon. The money came through the CORDS office, which was more closely connected with MACV. It wasn't even in the same set of buildings.

Q: How did you feel that the projects you were approving and looking at, were these things done in pretty good shape?

BORG: It was a mixed bag. It depended upon the community. We would go around, and the person who was my counterpart on these projects was incredibly tough on the villagers. He was a local boy, and he would go in and he'd periodically take the cement blocks that they had built and he'd drop them from shoulder height, they would shatter, and he'd say, "This is poor quality. You've got too much sand in these, and they're never going to work. We're not going to pay you any more money. You've got to find some community resources to replace what it is that you lost, and that's the way it is." He was very, very tough. He was subsequently ambushed and killed, but that was after I left. I think that to me would indicate that he was probably pretty tough his whole career.

Q: How did you find the US Army worked in your area?

BORG: Again, the only US military that we had any real contact with were the MACV people, and our CORDS/MACV program was sufficiently integrated that I thought at that time, and I still think, it was a very successful combination of civilian and military into a single organization. Yes, there were problems, but things worked far better and there were many more successes than there were failures.

Q: Did you get any feel about what the embassy was up to? Did you have people from the political section coming around and chatting with you?

BORG: Never. I had more journalists that came around from *The Washington Post* and the various other publications. I didn't know a soul who worked at the embassy. I guess there were provincial reporters.

Q: Usually it's the provincial reporters that get out and talk to people.

BORG: I could not recall who the provincial reporter responsible for where I was might have been, and I don't recall ever meeting the person although there must have been somebody that came out and did it. But, again, there were how many provinces in the country and there were how many districts? In Nam Dinh alone there were eight or nine districts, so the idea that a provincial reporter was going to come out to my district would have been happenstance. The person might have gone to some neighboring district. You were asking about the things that we did. One, we did the community development, and we also had the civic action team which we used if we needed really big materials for building bridges and so forth, I-beams or something like that. Their task was to go to the nearest US military unit and see what they could scrounge, and there was a group of champion scroungers. The second aspect of it was seeing that the military assistance teams understood the lay of the land, and I spent a lot of time with each one of the teams when they arrived, helping them to understand the section of the district that they

were in, to understand that Vietnamese were not an enemy, and to talk with them about how to go about their activities to minimize the casualties. One of the things I discovered in our area was that the local Vietnamese officials did not want to see any casualties, so when I was going about my work, I made sure that I stopped in the local village headquarters and said, "We're here now and we're going down this path on our motorbikes, and this is where we're going to be at lunch," and so forth. We found that this kept us really quite safe. The violence in the area took place at night. Rarely was there anything that happened in the daytime. I spent a lot of time trying to help the young lieutenants and captains understand what it was that the war was about in the area. Then the third component was the evaluation of the security situation in each one of the communities, and I think you've probably heard about the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). I can't believe now the amount of time we spent on the 10 different factors for each little hamlet, and we seriously attempted to make an honest evaluation of what the circumstances were. While there might have been pressure in some places to show improvements in the hamlet security, there certainly was no pressure ever applied to me to see how things have improved over a period of time, or now that you've got this military advisory team, aren't things much better. We certainly saw, when province senior officials came in, that a new province advisor immediately downgraded the security to the extent possible so that by the time they left things had been much better. But we declined to play that game in our community. We used to joke that, while security was bad in a number of communities where we were working, it was bad at night, whereas if you did a similar hamlet evaluation in Washington DC - this was 1968/'69 - some of the hamlets there would appear far worse and you wouldn't want to spend the daytime in some of these places.

Q: The major with whom you were working, was he feeling pressure from the American military to show something a little fancier?

BORG: I worked with two separate majors, both of whom were sufficiently out of their element that they left me alone, and they were quite happy to have me doing different things. They would attend the meetings in Qui Nhon, and I would try to avoid the meetings if I could. But I got along with them all quite well.

Q: How did you deal with something like the slugs, which wasn't a village? It was, I guess, a residue of the refugee program.

BORG: Is that what you call them, the slugs?

Q: The slums.

BORG: The slums, ah. We didn't do much. They were in such awful shape. They rarely had village organization. They were just accumulations of people that had assembled around the area where motor pools and various military camps had their logistical headquarters. So we really didn't even try to work with them. We had enough work with the agricultural communities.

Q: How about the Montagnards? Did you have much dealing?

BORG: Yes, we went down there. There was one village and it had about three or four

Montagnard settlements, and the people there were, I think, maybe Banaa. I don't recall specifically, but there was a Korean unit, the Korean Tiger - it wasn't a regiment; it was a Tiger...

Q: Brigade.

BORG: No it wasn't a brigade.

Q: Battalion.

BORG: No, bigger, Tiger Division. The Tiger Division had its headquarters in my district over in one corner, and they didn't have any troops operating around their division headquarters. It was at the upper end of the Montagnard community, and so the Tiger Division provided basic defense down that valley, so there was never a security problem down there. We were able to work well on projects without much problem. In fact, one night we even went with the villagers hunting at night. This was something that was inconceivable in most parts of Vietnam, but they wanted to organize a hunting party at night, and we all put flashlights on our heads and went traipsing around the jungle killing what few animals that hadn't already been killed.

Q: The Koreans had the reputation of being quite tough, and so this meant that everybody avoided them, which included the loyal Vietnamese, the Viet Cong, the North Vietnamese.

BORG: That's right, absolutely, but they had already established their security system in the community by the time I got there, so I arrived with a peaceful status quo and it remained that way.

Q: When you left there, were there any incidents?

BORG: We were a district that was continuously under siege, one would say, in that we had rocket attacks at night, probably once a week. When I first got to the village, I had trouble sleeping at night because I was just very, very nervous about where I was and what was happening, but after I had been there for a while - I was there for a year and half - they couldn't even wake me up in the middle of a rocket attack. I was a security breach by not hiding under my bed; I just, you know, slept through. But we did have incidents. We lost two or three people from MAT's, military advisory teams, who were caught in ambushes and killed. But there was no defining event. I remember driving down the road one day and there was a group of soldiers assembled on the side of the road next to a big mountain, and the mountains in this area were not mountains so much as 300- or 400-foot piles of stones with all sorts of caves and so forth in them. They said, "We cornered a couple of Viet Cong in the cave." I said, "Oh, that's very interesting. What are you going to do?" and he said, "Well, we're going to call in air strikes." I said, "You're calling in air strikes, are you?" They said, "Yes, we've already called the base." There was an American military base at a place called Pooka not too far away. So before long the American jets - I can't remember what they were at the time - were circling not far above our heads and firing whatever they were firing at the time into these piles of rocks. We were all sufficiently close that when they struck the shrapnel would come all the way back to where the troops were standing. I'm not really familiar with military operations per se, but I was

overwhelmed at how sort of casual and informal all of this was. It was a Vietnamese unit and they were engaging the enemy using American troops. But it wasn't long before all the local ladies were out there selling soft drinks and snacks. Here were the jets going over and people were going around, "Do you want a Coca Cola?"

Q: When you left there in 1970, what was your impression whither Vietnam?

BORG: Well, my impression, which I guess I developed maybe a quarter of the way, maybe I hadn't had at the beginning, was that the United States really didn't care particularly about what might happen in Vietnam as long as Communists didn't take over. The things that we were doing were all pretty marginal. We were holding the line. But what was most remarkable to me was that when I got there the Tet Offensive had ended but we were still under the Westmoreland doctrines of how to fight the war. Creighton Abrams took his place and supported everything that Westmoreland had done in words but reversed everything that Westmoreland had done in deed so that - it was called Vietnamization - we were providing advanced military equipment, the M16 rifles and the grenade launchers, and training local troops in the use of these pieces of equipment. So they were far more effective at defending their communities and they had far greater pride. We provided military uniforms for the first time, so they looked pretty spiffy. I felt that our pacification effort in this area had been a great success in that we had succeeded in building a sense within these communities that - again, I'm only speaking for the communities where I was working - they had pride in their village and the people wanted to defend their villages. We made a point, during the final eight months or so that I was there, of going out and spending nights in some of the more hotly contested villages, the district chief, myself, the major who was with us, and a collection of other officials, and we were defended by sometimes the local popular forces.

I left very pleased with the work that we had been doing in the villages. We also went through elections of the village chiefs and hamlet chiefs, so we had popularly elected officials in each one of the communities. They had their own military forces that reported to these leaders, and the communities seemed to be working. So I left with a sense of satisfaction, again feeling at the same time that the United States was not necessarily in it for the long-term development of places like this, because we were looking at the picture in Saigon and the leadership in Saigon, and that was absolutely irrelevant to what was happening in the villages. The political leadership in Saigon was not relevant.

Q: While you were there, did you have much of a chance to talk to other FSOs out there?

BORG: Yes, there were a half dozen or so FSOs working in the province with me, some in similar jobs to mine, and we had meetings once every couple weeks where we would talk about things. Different FSOs approached their jobs in different ways. Some of them did things very similarly to the way I did them, others spent as much time in their bunkers as they could, and there were some who went really gung-ho and strapped M16s on their backs and pretended they were junior power rangers or something going out shooting up the countryside and participating in ambushes. In our training program before we went out there they gave us weapons training so that we could shoot a .45, I think it was, and once I got there I was assigned a weapon. I was criticized by the other Americans on the team that I didn't spend the time that I should going to target practice and cleaning my weapon on a regular basis. They said it's really dusty and it's

going to misfire. I responded to all this by deciding that the weapon for me was more of a threat to me than it was going to ever be of any use, so I made a point of never carrying a weapon. I always tucked my shirt in so that anybody who saw me could see that there was no gun anywhere. It was known that I did not carry a weapon, and I felt much safer this way than if I did have a weapon.

Q: From your other colleagues was there developed an esprit, or was it a job to get through and get the hell out? How did you feel?

BORG: It was a job to get through and get out. Yes, we had esprit in that we were all in this together, but I don't think people were under any illusion that we were making a big difference.

Q: So in 1970 whither?

BORG: In 1970 I was, in about October, getting ready to leave my district because we had 18-month tours. I was really interested in seeing the war from the perspective in Saigon, and so I began going down and talking with people about finding a job in Saigon. I was talking with the people in the office of Program Plans and Policy, which was run by Clay McManaway.

WILLIAM LENDERKING
Advisor to Vietnamese Information Representative
Pleiku (1968-1969)

Joint US Public Affairs Officer, USIA
Saigon (1969-1970)

A native of New York, Mr. Lenderking graduated from Dartmouth College and served a tour with the US Navy in the Far East before joining the Foreign Service of the US Information Agency in 1959. As Public Affairs, Press and Information Officer, he served in posts throughout the world and in Washington, D.C., where held senior level positions in USIA and the Department of State dealing with Policy, Plans and Research. Mr. Lenderking was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: And you were in Vietnam from '68 until when?

LENDERKING: I was there almost exactly two-and-a-quarter years, leaving in mid-winter of 1970.

Q: Let's talk about your initial impression. Before Tet, what were you told you would be doing and where were you going?

LENDERKING: I was in Saigon for a few days just for checking in and learning my assignment. My first impression is that it was lucky I had learned some Vietnamese because all new arrivals

were supposed to be met at the airport and assigned to a hotel, because Saigon was very chaotic and they didn't want people wandering around getting lost and blundering into difficulty. In my case, there was a screw-up of some sort and I was neither met nor assigned a hotel; they had no record of my coming and I thought okay, if this is what Vietnam and the American involvement here is like, we're going to be in deep trouble. Guess what? I was right.

Anyway, I could speak Vietnamese so I made my way into town, having found a taxi and giving the driver directions on my own. We were not supposed to do that for security reasons, and I found a place to sleep and the next day I was able to straighten it out. But that was not a good start.

Q: What were you going to be doing?

LENDERKING: My assignment was a reflection of the unreality that people in Saigon had about the way the rest of the country worked. I learned right away I was going to Pleiku in the Central Highlands not far from the Cambodian border. My job was to be Psyops Advisor to the Vietnamese Information Service rep there, and the psyops advisor on the civil-military advisory team in Pleiku. The team was part of CORDS, the bureaucratic acronym for the pacification program. More on that later.

There had been a lot of fierce fighting in and around Pleiku Province, and the U.S. 4th Division was based outside the small city in a huge area. The climate was fairly nice but it was a poor provincial city and I, as a mid-level foreign service officer, definitely not a senior officer, was supposed to deal on equal footing with Major General Ray Peers, who was a legendary figure and a very senior Army general. He was commanding general of the Fourth Division, and there was no way he was going to deal with me as an equal. In fact, although I met and worked with many military men from the rank of captain on up, I never even met General Peers. So I found someone farther down the pecking order who I could deal with. The basic problem was that some of the objectives of the pacification program ("hearts and minds") were at cross purposes with the objectives of a big, tough Army division ("find the enemy and kill them.")

I was assigned to CORDS, which is the Civil Operation for Revolutionary Development Support, otherwise known as the pacification program, headed by Robert Komer at the time. We had an advisory team in which every significant Vietnamese official had an American advisor, a counterpart, who was supposed to get him resources and advise him on how best to pursue the war. On our team, which was more than half military, we had a group of about 45 or so military advisors and the civilian advisors numbered about six or seven, depending on the vicissitudes of the war and assignments. We civilians had our own separate compound, five or six people, and we lived about a mile away from the military advisory team compound. They were commanded by a full colonel and we worked very closely with those guys and they were, for the most part, very good. I got to know some of the younger officers quite well, as well as the colonel who was the head of the team, who was technically my boss and I got to know them all well and liked them a lot.

Q: This is before Tet; what was the situation in the field at that time in Pleiku?

LENDERKING: I stopped in Nha Trang on the way to Pleiku, which was the headquarters for Region Two. Vietnam was divided into four regions for purposes of military organization and I met with the senior psyop people in Region Two, and they said well, you come at a good time because we are expecting trouble. There has been a rising level of Viet Cong activity and we have lots of intelligence that there could be a major offensive and we're glad you're here. And in Nha Trang I had lunch with my predecessor, who was on his home.

Q: Who was that?

LENDERKING: His name was Frank Dean. This was the only time I ever saw him, and he was very, very glad to be leaving. He looked tired and sort of beaten down and he said with obvious relief, "I'm out of here." He then told me life in Pleiku would not be very comfortable – I was not going to like it, there are very few creature comforts, there is a lot of fighting and it is a dangerous place, and so on. He said just for his own privacy and wellbeing he rented a small house on the outside of town so he would not be crammed in with the military guys or the civilians. He said he saw them all the time, every day, and just needed a little privacy. Well, basically what he was saying was that he wanted to have a Vietnamese girlfriend in, so having his own house was very convenient for him. When I got to Pleiku I went and looked at this house, which was a small, rather forlorn house on the edge of town, but a bit nicer than living in the civilian compound with a tiny bedroom and a cot. But I said to myself, I'm so new here, I don't know the lay of the land, I'm hearing all these reports that there could be an attack, I don't even know how to get around on the roads and I'm not going to live out in that house until I know it's safe. And that saved my life because that house was overrun a couple of days later and was used as a temporary staging area for Viet Cong who would then go on to attack the town. So I moved in with my civilian colleagues on the advisory team. There were four or five or so of them and that was a good decision to make.

Q: We're talking now about the time just before all hell broke loose -- with all this talk of pacifying, what did that mean, exactly? What was your daily workday like?

LENDERKING: There were a number of projects all involving aid of one sort or another for the Vietnamese so the government would be able to show it was working for the people and the people would then be inspired to support the government. This could be building schools; it could be helping with the refugees and internally displaced people; there was a Chieu Hoi advisor who was supposed to work on messages and programs to encourage the Viet Cong people who might be wavering to defect; there were some construction projects and agricultural assistance, things of that sort. Anyone who was in Vietnam at the time, and thousands of Americans worked for CORDS in the provinces at one time or another, could probably talk for hours on these things, and all these programs were flawed because the war, in a place like Pleiku at the time, was overwhelming everything. And the Vietnamese people whose hearts and minds and basic allegiance we were competing for were just trying to survive and there was no program I could see that was reaching them in any way that would reassure them that the government was on their side because the government was in fact corrupt, a lot of the officials were venal, they were not interested in helping the people and they were badly organized and they were not very capable. That is, the Vietnamese military talent level was not very high in Pleiku, and in most places in Vietnam, with some notable exceptions. And civilian officials were even worse – more

corrupt, less motivated, poorly trained and unqualified, you name it. To be fair there were outstanding exceptions and I did meet a few of those.

My Vietnamese counterpart was a civilian. He was lazy and corrupt; all he wanted from me was supplies that he could dispose of as he saw fit and to his own advantage. And he wanted me to get him a gun and help him find accommodations for his girlfriend, and things like that. Now, we were all under instruction to build rapport with our counterparts in order to make the advisory concept work, but I saw these things as outside my job description, shall we say. So I was beginning to see early on that there were deep flaws in this program and far from being reassured, as I was told in Washington I would be once I got with the program, my dismay was growing by leaps and bounds. And this was even before the Tet offensive.

Q: How did the American military welcome you and how did they feel the war was going?

LENDERKING: The American military people I met and worked with were, for the most part, exemplary people. I'm talking especially about some of the enlisted men and most of the young officers and the commanding officer of the advisory team, and he was a full Army colonel. And later on, the officers I worked with in JUSPAO in Saigon. These guys were well-trained, dedicated and probably more inclined to be gung ho than the civilians -- we were generally more skeptical -- but we got along well. There was a dichotomy -- the guys in the field tended to be realists because they dealt with the muck of the war every day at close quarters. The true believers tended to be more in Saigon, where they could talk about their pacification theories over after work drinks and didn't have to worry much about rockets coming in the window and things like that. Of course, even Saigon had plenty of action from time to time.

Anyway, whatever our misgivings in Pleiku, we were all there to do a job, and we all accepted that. We generally liked one another, we worked and socialized closely (social life in Pleiku consisted of a beer or two before dinner, and maybe a few more after as well). The military guys welcomed me and my civilian colleagues as valued members of the team, they depended on us to get out and see what was going on and we were extra eyes and ears for them. When I arrived, I was issued an old M1 rifle by the CIA, who apparently were authorized to give us these things. But we were non-combatants and I never fired it the whole time I was there, although I'd take it along on overland day trips of any distance outside of Pleiku.

Q: That's not much protection. It's an awkward weapon, and not easy to load.

LENDERKING: In that case I'm glad I never had to depend on it. I also had my own jeep, so I could go where I wanted and I often ventured out of the city alone to visit a village, talk to the people and try to gauge how things were going, what the people needed, and what we could do to further our mission. Doing this by myself probably sounds dangerous, and it was, but I wasn't foolhardy. It's interesting, but very quickly most of us developed a kind of sixth sense of when and where it was safe to go on a dirt road somewhere in a territory that is basically Indian territory. And when it was safe to enter a village, and when it might not be. In those situations, you rely more on your gut instinct than anything else, more than the morning intel briefing from the military guys. And so I developed this feeling quickly; it was maybe a couple of weeks after the Tet Offensive when I began to have this confidence. And you looked for telltale signs; for

example, if you went into a village, if there were no people around, that was clearly a bad sign. Or if the little kids didn't come running out to greet you or something like that. If that ever happened I just turned the jeep around and off I went, and I wouldn't even get out of the jeep. But for the most part, everywhere I went I was in my jeep by myself so in that sense I was on my own in hostile territory. But it was not as dangerous as Baghdad is today. (July 2007).

But there was a very large U.S. and Vietnamese military presence in the province. So I traveled all over that province by jeep and to other places by helicopter and other airplanes of all kinds. I calculated once that I'd been in about 30 different kinds of aircraft in Vietnam during my two year tour. After I left Pleiku and was transferred to Saigon I went all over the country, so I saw a lot of it.

In our compound I was the only person who spoke Vietnamese, the only one who had had Vietnamese training, so one of my first duties was to check on the guards, old guys in sandals who always ran off at the first sign of danger, and who could really blame them? They also had a habit of dozing off at all hours – their jobs were unbelievably boring – so I'd say their only value was as a kind of deterrent. Occasionally, I'd see some Vietnamese, perhaps an itinerant food seller, stop and ask them questions, but if anyone wanted to enter the compound they wouldn't have been deterred by our guards.

Daily life in Pleiku was trying at best, but it was especially hard right after Tet. Of course, we were all grateful we'd survived a close call with no casualties at all, so that was important, and we got right back to work after a day or two and we knew that large offensive attacks from the Viet Cong were improbable for a while. But we had a number of housekeeping difficulties, the most important being that the generator for the compound lost power and we had no electricity and therefore no power to operate the water pump at a time when it was beastly hot and extremely dusty. There was a kind of laterite red dust that would seep into everything – our living areas, our clothes, our vehicles, our hair, our eyes, our noses, everything. There was no protection from it, so at the end of the day the thing you wanted first off was a shower. Although we tried to fix it ourselves and had several mechanics in, we could only get it running for short periods. It was a heavy generator housed in an outdoor shed, and it took three or four of us at full strength to turn the crank to turn the wheel to try to get the generator started. It was very hard work, and most of the time it was futile.

Now, we had maids come in every day to clean the floors and wash our clothes because they would get so dirty, and they would use whatever power we had to wash the clothes. And so we could not get the generator fixed and I was designated as the compound person to talk to the maids and to the one guard we had out at night whenever we had a problem. I explained to them as best I could that we had a water problem and to go ahead and clean the houses and wash the clothes but try to conserve water. And every day when we were coming back from our day's adventures, usually about 4 pm, the maids would just be squeezing the last drops of water from the wet clothes and walking off to spend the night with their families, and they'd say to us with a smile, "Hut nuoc roi," which means "water gone already." I can't tell you how those three little words came to have a dispiriting affect on us. Of course, we eventually got the generator fixed, but I think it took about four weeks.

Now, just to finish the housekeeping details, we may have had a small oven in the back of the main house but we hardly ever used it. Instead we jumped into our vehicles and went up to the Advisory Group quarters and joined them for meals, which we paid for. That way we didn't have to cook, or clean up.

Q: OK, now when was the Tet Offensive? Was there any lead up to it where you were, and what happened?

LENDERKING: When I got to Pleiku, people again said there were a lot of indications that something big could be underway. And the second in command of psyops in Region Two in Nha Trang came up with me, and I guess he did this with all new people, to introduce them around to the brass and say to the various military commanders, here is this guy, he can help you get the message out and you've got to work with him, and so on. So I appreciated that. He was very pleasant and helpful, a lieutenant colonel, and the first night we were there he stayed in the civilian compound with us, and there was an extra bed in my room. It must have been about 2:00 in the morning, there was some shelling and it sounded like really close, artillery shelling and machine gun fire, and of course I was very startled, it was my first experience of this. I jumped out of bed and said, "what's going on?" And I hear this voice from the floor, and Ben, the Lt. Col, is down there lying flat, and he says in a slow drawl, "better hit the deck, Bill." And so that was my introduction. So, right from the get go, there was a lot going on.

The Fourth Division had their big division headquarters outside of Pleiku, maybe ten miles, but there was also a big installation at the airport, about three or four miles from our compound, which was close to the tiny downtown of Pleiku. There was a big airfield there and it was used for both civilian and military purposes, and there was a big military installation there that was part of the Fourth Division. They had a military field hospital and I used to go up there all the time. There was a small PX (post exchange) and you could buy provisions and it was clean and you could get a cold beer and slightly different food. I used to go up there in the evening because it was like something out of MASH; they had a field hospital and I started hanging out with some of the nurses; it was just nice to go and have a beer with them after they got off work. But I would pop into the field hospital to see if anyone was interested in a beer and just getting off work. And often they were just mopping up the blood from an operation they'd just finished on a wounded soldier. So it was pretty graphic. And they were a pretty plucky bunch so it was nice just to sit down and talk with them for a little bit because it was kind of a lonely place. I got along well with all my civilian counterparts too; they were great guys and we all bonded. We might not necessarily have been close friends in any other circumstances but we became very close and of course all we did was talk about the war and I learned a great deal from them because I was the new guy.

Q: So what happened during the Tet offensive?

LENDERKING: Our little compound had four very small buildings, maybe 2-3 basic bedrooms in each one, like a cabin, except that the buildings were just cement blocks and had mostly cement floors. So during the main night of Tet, firecrackers were going off all over the place after dark because that is the principal way the Vietnamese have of celebrating that holiday, Chinese New Year, the biggest holiday in Vietnam and China.

The Viet Cong cleverly used all the noise and smoke as cover to disguise their attack, and soon there was a lot of gunfire and it occurred to us that there was something more than firecrackers going off. At first we didn't think anything of it but we were a little bit nervous. Also, for a couple of nights previous, there had been really concentrated attacks on Camp Holloway, which was where the Fourth Division helicopters and small planes, used for reconnaissance and forward air control, were kept, and that was quite near our compound, only about a mile from where we were so we heard all of that, but wouldn't find out until the next morning what was going on.

And not to string this out too long, but we got word by radio from our military guys about a mile up the road that there was an attack going on and the best they could tell was that there was a small platoon of Vietnamese Regular Army Rangers out there, about 12 guys, in a rice paddy and that is where the attack in this part of the town was coming from. So get ready, they told us, the attack is coming right towards you and we don't know where they are planning to attack but there are some of the enemy right there. And this was about a mile away, over nearly open ground.

And so we heard this; we had a bunker inside our building, and it had sandbags and a metal airway runway piece over it and we had some hand grenades and a couple of guys who knew how to use weapons. I would have been hopeless because all I had was my M1 rifle and a grenade with a pin sticking out of it. But we had a Filipino Special Forces guy who was the civilian advisor to the Chieu Hoi program, aimed at persuading the Viet Cong to lay down their arms, and he knew what he was doing. And it was a comfort to have him there along with a couple of other guys who'd had recent military experience. But we wouldn't have been a match for anyone had they come in the door. Of course, our one guard, an old man with a wispy beard, ran off the minute the guns started firing.

So the Viet Cong are coming up the dirt road and I'm thinking, "Oh my God, what am I doing here?" My civilian boss, the head of the civilian team, was nervous and he said, if you're not comfortable staying here, they have room for us to stay overnight with the Advisory Team just a mile up the road. And we all discussed it and decided we were going to stay where we were, where we'd be less of a target and had the flexibility of moving around if we had to. If we're going to be attacked, we're going to stay here together, we decided. And the military team up the road was much better armed and there were active duty guys who knew how to fight. But they were much more likely to be a target for rockets and direct attacks that we couldn't handle, so we guessed that although the Viet Cong knew we were there (we'd received threatening notices before), we were not a very important target to them so took our chances by maintaining the lowest possible profile.

The civilian boss headed up to the military compound for the night, and when he left he was very nervous. The rest of us stayed, and we survived; so did all the military advisors up the road. The Viet Cong came close, but did not enter our compound.

Q: How long did this last?

LENDERKING: All night. At one point it sounded very, very close as though there was fighting just outside the gate. And I firmly believe, but I can't prove it, that it was that small Vietnamese platoon of rangers that saved our lives. They were not defending us, but they were blocking access to the city from a large rice paddy, and they either deflected or turned back the Viet Cong choosing to enter the town that way. Now, we never saw those guys, and we often disparaged the Vietnamese army because it was rife with corruption, incompetence, and lack of discipline. So maybe it's a bit ironic that a platoon of Vietnamese rangers inadvertently saved our lives.

No one came bursting through the door or anything like that. But a couple of guys I knew in other places like Hue were in fact captured and killed in circumstances much like that.

Q: So in Pleiku, was the Tet Offensive sort of a one day thing?

LENDERKING: It was really basically one day. And the next morning, this is my recollection, we went into town and all the buildings had huge artillery and shell holes in them, plus strings of holes where bullets had hit. And there were all the corpses of the Viet Cong and the people were standing there holding their noses because they were decaying and puffing up in the sun and the smell was pretty powerful. There must have been a couple of hundred bodies. The Army put them out to impress the people that they'd whipped the Viet Cong. And by this time the sun was out, and it was quiet, there was no more fighting, and the townspeople were just standing there, clutching a handkerchief or something to their noses, not talking, just standing there looking. In addition to the scene right in the central square of the town, which had just a few buildings, there were outlying hamlets and villages. One in particular, a hamlet with perhaps a hundred two-room shacks arranged on the side of a hill, the Viet Cong entered in force, and for some reason lost to history they made a fatal mistake by allowing themselves to be caught in daylight out in the open without any cover except those tiny houses, from which the occupants had apparently fled. And our pilots, I don't think the Vietnamese Air Force was involved, spotted them and just cut them to pieces and I think there must have been several hundred killed and they were lying all over the place. All the houses had huge holes in them from the firing – they looked like Swiss cheese. One of my colleagues said you know, they are our enemy and they would have killed us but you almost have to feel sorry for those poor devils who got caught in that, because it was carnage.

Q: Was this mainly from an air attack?

LENDERKING: Yes. I think the main body of the Fourth Infantry Division, a huge army division, was out fighting in outlying areas. In that period, there were some legendary battles, the Ia Drang Valley, other places in Pleiku and Kon Tum provinces, where there were some fierce set piece battles, mostly before Tet.

Q: Were these Viet Cong as opposed to regular North Vietnamese?

LENDERKING: Yes. None of the people I saw had regular uniforms on. They had just peasant gear of some sort but they were all armed and suffered heavy casualties.

Now, right after this we had a post-mortem, and some of the military guys were crowing about what a stunning defeat this was for the Viet Cong. And here we were talking about the whole

country, our region, about the Vietnamese who penetrated our embassy in Saigon and were fighting almost hand-to-hand with our people in the embassy. And some of the military guys were insisting it was a huge setback for the enemy and a lot of us didn't see it that way at all. We were surprised at just how enormous an attack they had been able to mount countrywide and how close they had come to actually turning the situation entirely to their favor. Yes, they certainly took heavy casualties but then in the following days the security situation was not any better for us. The attacks, after a day or two, mounted up again. The roads were often not safe to go on; you took a chance when you went out to a village. We all did it. If we could, we would go out in a helicopter because it was safer. But it was always dangerous.

I remember going out on a road in the morning, it was a dirt road going to a village I had to visit, and it was fine. And when I came back several hours later there was a Vietnamese Cit-lo, a little putt-putt kind of thing, lying smoking beside the road. In other words, it had passed over a bomb and detonated it (what was later called in the Iraq insurgency war of 2005-2008 an IED – improvised explosive device) and these kinds of bombs were placed in the roads all the time. I should explain that most of the roads in Pleiku province were unpaved, but the main ones were broad and not rutted, so you could drive around 50-60 mph on them without a lot of discomfort, although you kicked up a lot of dust. Anyway, the Cit-lo detonated the bomb on the exact spot I had passed over earlier. How did I miss it? Or, was it planted after I passed over it, in broad daylight? Either way it was spooky, and it could have been me and my jeep that were detonated. That's the way it was.

Q: What was the population of Pleiku? It was up in the highlands; were these Montagnard or was it a mixed population?

LENDERKING: It was mostly Montagnard, although there was a small overlay of Vietnamese small businessmen in the town. And the Montagnards in Pleiku consisted of several tribes, principally the Rhade and Jarai. They spoke their own languages and they even had different kinds of huts and villages. They had not been very well treated by the Vietnamese and, as it turned out, not very well by us either, although most of the Montagnards were friendly to us and some of them became fierce fighters on our side. The biggest project I was involved in was one to relocate the Montagnards to a safer place and turn the area in which they farmed and lived into a free fire zone. The idea was that they would be safe and we would provide security and anyone moving in the rest of the surrounding area would be fair game. And to make sure the population understood this we dropped leaflets. Well, can you imagine anything more ineffectual than that? And people went around in the villages and said you have got to stay out; this was their land, mind you, this was where they farmed, this was where they roamed freely. I could give you a lot more details about this project, which was huge. It involved building almost a mini-city on what looked mostly like scrub land – perhaps thousands of huts with tin roofs, in a new community called Edap Enang. This large village we built was supposed to accommodate thousands of people but it had no infrastructure to it. It seemed to some of us the real question was, how are these people going to live and how are they going to survive?

To answer your earlier question, I don't recall how large the population was but it was not a heavily populated province. It had a couple of plantations, tea plantations, that had been run by the French, and the French plantation owners wanted to stay. They didn't like us at all because

they knew that wherever we were there was going to be fighting. And some of the plantation owners, I think, stayed on but maybe had to leave eventually when the North Vietnamese won the war. I don't know if some managed to stay. But I never got to know them.

Q: Were there Special Forces camps around there?

LENDERKING: Yes. There were a couple, especially over near the Cambodian border because that was an area the Viet Cong used often, for infiltration and safe haven. And so I was over there a lot. We had a Special Forces guy who stayed with us for a while in our compound. We always had an extra bed or two if someone wanted to come in and the guys would come in sometimes and they just wanted a shower and a hot meal. And wow, they looked awful. They had rings in their ears and they were covered with dirt and dust and they really looked like savages. You had to feel sorry for them -- they were pretty tough guys to be living out there under those conditions -- but they were so grateful just to have a warm shower and a decent meal.

Q: Did you get any feel for efforts of the central government to put teachers in the provinces or anything like that?

LENDERKING: This was a problem. We were filing reports all the time, and we had a weekly province report and all the different section chiefs would write something. The reports were nonsense because it was all based on numbers: this week we opened X number of schools; used X bags of cement and rebar to build houses; spent X number of dollars. These were used to compile progress reports and because the totals were going up, Saigon could report we were making "progress." But none of the real questions were addressed: there were no teachers for the new school buildings, or they were unqualified, or the Viet Cong had killed them or intimidated them and they had run off; the cement and rebar were being pilfered by the Vietnamese, or watered down so that if you walked across the cement floor in a new schoolroom the cement cracked under your feet -- things like that.

So basically, the idea was not to talk about what was happening, really, but to inform Saigon what problems we had solved. This approach was supposed to be forward looking and we were encouraged to put in these progress reports what we had accomplished during the week or previous weeks so people would say our projects continued to make progress. They all seemed to start out that way. So we had all these empty shells all over the country that we had built and were not being used. And we had education advisors who could not get textbooks and all kinds of essentials. So there were major, major dysfunctions.

Q: Well, was anybody coming from headquarters and from CORDS and asking how are things going? And could you tell them and did they pay any attention?

LENDERKING: All the time they came. And most of them would make sure they did not stay overnight because it made them nervous. And I can understand that. I mean, I got to feel that, after I had been there several weeks, I got used to it and my anxiety level went down because I was dealing with the situation every day. But if you came from Saigon you did not want to stay in a place like Pleiku overnight. But they came all the time and yes, we took them around to the projects, we told them things are not going well here. About this time I formed the conclusion,

and I think it is very relevant to the situation in Iraq today, that without security there is nothing; nothing can happen. You can have a corrupt government and a situation where justice is episodic and the government takes advantage of the people and rips them off and so on.

But if the government provides a modicum of security and exerts its authority over territory then you have a situation which is at least viable, and maybe some projects and programs can be initiated. But without security nothing is possible, and that is what we found, in Pleiku and elsewhere. There was no security, there was no place that was secure. And so all these projects, all the money we were expending...I can't remember how much money I had but I would go to the one bank in Pleiku, this tiny little place, and draw down my account and there were wads of piastres, you could put them in a gym bag or something like that. And I paid my Vietnamese assistant, and the culture-drama team we operated in the province. The culture drama teams were one of the few things we did that actually worked, and ironically the idea for them was borrowed from the Viet Cong. They were teams of Vietnamese entertainers that operated in most provinces, singers and storytellers, who would go into the villages dressed in black pajamas and they would get the people involved in stories and they would tell them that the Viet Cong were bad and not to support them. It sounds simplistic, and I was initially skeptical but I developed tremendous admiration for these mostly young people, who were brave, intelligent, and talented. They could sing, dance, tell stories and argue politics in a way that people could understand and respond to. They lived at the grass roots and they were like troubadours. And they were very impressive. My Vietnamese was not great but it was good enough so I could talk to them. They knew that if they got caught they were certainly going to be killed, and the women, who often were young and attractive, would have terrible things happen to them.

Well, CORDS was a huge organization and there were literally hundreds of different programs and some of them were imaginative. But in the end they didn't make much difference because the security was never good enough; the soldiers were generally poorly led although some of the Vietnamese officers were outstanding. But in a situation like that, the Vietnamese never developed enough confidence that they could handle the job, and all our programs couldn't instill that in them. So what you ended up with was a very large army with every individual top to bottom motivated chiefly by the need to save himself and his family rather than fight for his country.

I have to tell you one little anecdote because it was memorable. There was some criticism of the civilian team that I belonged to, and I guess just through attrition, no one was killed but some people left and they were not replaced, so perhaps by default I became deputy province senior advisor, a grandiose-Potemkin-like title. What it meant was that I was no longer just the psyops guy but the senior civilian in the province. We always had a military guy as the senior guy and the top civilian was his deputy. The whole advisory team was about 55 or 60 people, military officers and enlisted and civilians, and I was, for a number of months, in charge of the civilian team of about six or seven guys so there was a real imbalance. But I felt the whole situation there was not going well and that the programs were ineffectual. There was criticism of the team from some of the military guys because while we did not have much security our little compound was a little more comfortable to live in and at the end of the day we could have a couple of beers and put our feet up and play some poker or talk, and it was more congenial. And so there was a little bit of resentment on the military side, that they took all the risks but we lived better. But we did

not live very well; I mean, there were rats in our houses and other unwholesome aspects, and it was not all that comfortable. The Filipino Special Forces guy got bitten one night and had to have that very painful series of 13 rabies shots in his stomach.

So I asked to go out on an overnight patrol one night and the colonel said okay, I know you are not a combatant, you are not experienced with weapons. You know there is a big risk and if you want to take it I'm not going to say no but keep your wits about you and so forth. And a couple of civilian guys said, you know, if you have to use a rifle you will shoot yourself in the foot. And they checked me out a little more. Anyway, I did this and I went out on an overnight patrol and it was a memorable experience because it was scary. The purpose was to surround a Vietnamese hamlet in which there were suspected Viet Cong, enter by surprise at daybreak and see if we could capture any suspects. We had to travel through heavily wooded areas; at any point we could have run into an ambush. The senior American was a savvy young captain I respected, and we had a radio man and we had me, and I was not supposed to be there. And there were about 50 or 60 Vietnamese troops, and they were carrying a heavy machine gun and their own individual weapons. And even I, inexperienced as I was, became alarmed at their behavior because we were supposed to be moving silently and they were bunching up and giggling from nervousness; we had to keep telling them not to bunch up and to spread out, because if we were ambushed we would all be killed in one burst. We came to a stream we had to cross, and one of them couldn't swim at all and would have drowned from the heaviness of his pack if we had not grabbed him and pulled him across. I found I was going back and forth helping these poor guys get across the stream and they were scared, they were alarmed and afraid they were going to get ambushed and killed and they were certainly more nervous and alarmed than I was. I realized they were just young Vietnamese soldiers and probably hadn't had much training.

Anyway, the idea was to enter the hamlet at daybreak, surprise some people in there, and maybe capture some weapons and suspects. We reached an open field at the edge of the hamlet while it was still dark and decided to stay there until daybreak. Now, one of the most fearsome and effective weapons we had was what we called spooky, which was a helicopter with a Gatling gun arrangement mounted that could fire something like 600 rounds a minute. And when those things opened up they could cover a field in a matter of seconds and put direct fire into every square foot of that field.

While we were lying in this field waiting for the night to end so we could enter the hamlet, there was a spooky operating perhaps a quarter mile from us, and it was firing at something but it was circling around and getting closer and closer to us. And it dawned on us as it was getting closer to us the crew didn't know we were there. And so we thought well, friendly fire, we could easily be killed. Finally the captain got the radio man and he broke radio silence -- we were not supposed to do this, but he got on the radio and he said, using very strong language, there is a Vietnamese platoon down here and an American advisory team and get the hell away from us. So they did and we weren't killed and the next morning we went into the village and people were surprised; we got a couple of suspects. There was no firing; the suspects were rounded up and taken off for questioning and that was the end of it. But we knew that because we were going to turn them over to the Vietnamese they would probably be beaten badly or something like that.

Every day it seemed like something happened that was memorable and indicative of what was

happening in the war. Right after the Tet Offensive, almost immediately afterwards, General Westmoreland, who was commander of the American forces in Vietnam, went around the country to see the soldiers and give them encouragement. The Tet offensive had been a major upset, so these visits were both timely and necessary for morale. Now, the field hospital I mentioned was quite a nice, clean, well staffed hospital, and I received a radio message saying there was a North Vietnamese prisoner up there and he's been wounded. He's lying in a hospital bed and he's so grateful for the care he's getting that he's ready to talk, and we can use that for a propaganda message.

So I got my tape recorder and I raced up there and I saw this guy, and there were some other Vietnamese soldiers in there too, and the poor guy was in bad shape, all bandaged up, conscious but grimacing with pain. He'd been getting good treatment. I talked to him, and I could make myself understood to him. I could ask him who he was and how he was feeling, but he was in no shape to talk to anyone. He was hurting and it wasn't because he was hostile or anything like that, but I think he was just glad to be alive, just as any of us would have been. But he was in bad shape. So I realized that messages were getting distorted from the grassroots as they went up the line. This guy was in no condition to talk to anyone, so the idea of getting a useful statement or something was just nonsense. And I went back a couple of times and he was never in any condition to say anything that would help us.

Anyway, in the midst of all this in comes Westmoreland and he's going along and the North Vietnamese soldiers, there were only three or four of them as I remember, were lying right in adjoining beds to the Americans and there was no problem, no one was worried about security or anything like that. The guys were all wounded, some pretty badly, and that was the one thing they shared. And so I said hello to the general and I must say, he was very impressive. He made some major mistakes in Vietnam; mainly we had a strategy that was based on measuring our success by body count and that was not the way to measure success or failure. There were also distortions in how we counted the casualties. But he was a good soldier and I was very impressed with the way he greeted the wounded American soldiers, stopping to talk to each man informally, with no pomp or standoffishness due to his rank, and he put his arm on them and for a minute or two it was just one soldier talking to another. It was quite moving. So that was another indelible experience for me.

Q: As time went on, what were you getting from the village chiefs? Did you feel you were getting true stories from them or were they looking to you to give them supplies and they would say whatever it took to get them?

LENDERKING: I think they would tell us anything they thought we wanted to hear that would help them. The CORDS hierarchy seemed to assume that it was a simple matter to go into a village unannounced, seek out the village chiefs or elders, sit them down, find out what they needed, and then put it all together and chalk up another success. I was among the more fluent Vietnamese speakers of all the provincial CORDS representatives, but the level of communication I had with the village folks was quite primitive, not because I couldn't communicate in Vietnamese, but because the cultural and political divide was enormous and couldn't be bridged by simplistic contact. That was a basic lesson that most Americans just didn't understand about grass roots nation building across cultures.

On paper our CORDS organization looked good. But it didn't account for practical obstacles that we were never able to overcome. In Pleiku, there was a province chief who would be similar to a governor; a province was the same as a state and he was a Montagnard, so that was good. But he wasn't an educated man, he didn't have a lot of experience. He had an unfortunate habit of giggling, and looked out of place in a uniform so there was no inspirational leadership he could provide to his province. But his chief military man was a Vietnamese major and he was very good, brave officer, one of the truly good ones. I wonder what happened to him. But anyway, a lot of the Vietnamese military leadership was not competent.

One day I was out in a village where the province chief was supposed to go and I don't know what happened, but there were all these aircraft around and he was supposed to be transported by helicopter. I went out in my jeep – it was a big ceremony or something -- because there wasn't any room in the helicopters that were going out. The province chief was going to say something at a ceremony. We would have these things from time to time, where they would round up the villagers and make them stand out there in the sun for a couple of hours and then a dignitary would come in, like a province chief, and he would walk around and say a few words, then get back in his helicopter and off he'd go. You had to wonder, what are we accomplishing with this kind of nonsense?

So anyway, the province chief's helicopter did not come and I got on the radio and tried to straighten things out. I saw all these helicopters going back and forth, and finally it's getting dark and still no helicopter for the province chief, who didn't have any security guards with him and he was getting a little nervous. You didn't want to be out anywhere outside of the town after dark, certainly not on the roads because the night belonged to the Viet Cong. And so they finally said well, there are no helicopters, they're all assigned. And sometimes helicopters would be assigned to some high ranking officer to take his girlfriend around or something, in addition to official missions. Now it was getting dark so I said to the province chief come on, let's go, I'll take you in my jeep. And he climbed in beside me, in my jeep with a canvas top, and I guess we were probably about 30, 40 kilometers from Pleiku. I hit the pedal hard and headed back as fast as I could go on the unpaved road, and I thought well, wouldn't it be nice if the Viet Cong caught us, and the province chief would be a nice catch for them. Anyway, we got back. I guess the moral is that there were always things to be worried about, something was always going wrong, but this was life in a war zone. There was reason to be concerned on this day but nothing happened. So you'd think you were just lucky.

I guess I should say a word or two about danger. These were new experiences for me, and even though I had military experience, I was at sea in the Navy and that didn't include combat. I was certainly apprehensive about a lot of situations I encountered in Vietnam, first in Pleiku which was a hot combat zone, and later in Saigon, when a guy could throw a bomb from a motorcycle into an open café and take out most of the people inside. That happened sometimes, and I experienced one or two such incidents at close range. I can't say I became nonchalant, but life does go on, even in a combat zone. I mentioned that I developed a kind of sixth sense that I learned to depend on, and that gave me confidence. Still, I'm sure at many times I let my guard down and was just lucky that nothing happened. I don't think I was ever specifically a target. Yet, people I knew were killed in some of the same circumstances I was living through every

day, so it wasn't like a walk in the park.

Most of us coped – it was something you did. But some people, including American military officers, Vietnamese troops, seasoned Foreign Service officers, cracked under the everyday tensions, which weren't palpable but just a fact of life. In any case, an Army major I knew quite well said, "I just can't take it any more." He was worried about his wife, his family, and of course himself. I think he was transferred, and that was probably wise. So, I have nothing really profound to say about facing danger, and don't consider myself brave, but you either do it or you don't, and there's no predicting how a given person will react. Most people I saw, including the Vietnamese people who were generally under much greater duress than we were, took it in stride and did the best they could day by day. A few couldn't deal with it, and I never thought they were cowards or anything like that.

Now, getting back to CORDS, there was a disconnect between policy and what was actually happening. Robert Komer, who was an ex-CIA guy and in overall charge of the huge CORDS operation – he was nicknamed "the blowtorch" because he knew he was dealing with a cumbersome Vietnamese bureaucracy and a huge American unwieldy bureaucracy and a very, very difficult war -- Komer's idea was apparently to pump money and resources into the economy through all these programs, get them going and that is how reconstruction and development would happen. Well, it didn't happen that way at all. I think there were some good ideas but they were tried too late and by the time of the Tet Offensive it was too late. I would say Komer was a very smart man; he was not a good listener and he was not a success. His successor was Bill Colby, who later became head of the CIA, and he came up to Pleiku to talk to us and I was very impressed with him. He was a very smart man and he seemed to be one of those guys who knew what you are going to say before you said it, and then paraphrased it better than you could have. He was clearly well briefed and knew about all the jargon and all the field talk; he never asked, what are you talking about. And he would say, we need you guys to do a better job. One thing we had to do on the psyops side was send in a weekly attitude report, which got to be kind of a joke because how could an American out in some province or in Saigon gauge what the peoples' attitudes were, especially if he didn't speak Vietnamese, and most of us did not. Even if we did speak Vietnamese, and I spoke well enough to talk to people about serious topics, who are you going to talk to? You go into a village and go up to some guy out of the blue and start asking him questions, is what he is telling you just blowing smoke or is he actually telling you something? Well, of course, you can't just happen on a stranger in a foreign country and expect him to tell you anything useful about what's going on in his life.

Anyway, the idea developed, I guess it was on Komer's watch, you had to specify in the report who you had spoken to. So these guys were saying, you know, seven cyclo drivers and four bar girls said they feared the Viet Cong were going to come again, or some such thing, and it was total nonsense. So Colby said look, we need to know better what you are doing and who you're talking to. You've got to find people who are credible interlocutors, talk to them, and report what they say. I know it sounds easy, but it wasn't, and it didn't happen except in some of the larger cities where it was a little bit possible to build some rapport with local leaders, politicians, merchants, soldiers, whatever.

I believe Colby knew the whole CORDS program was in deep trouble, and there are a number of

things he did -- I can't remember all the details -- to tighten things up and just make us stop chasing after mirages and get down to reality. And in fact after some months things started to get better and we had some military successes and the follow up was much more effective in terms of getting resources to the grass roots and establishing an anti-Viet Cong presence in the villages and so forth. So it was a mixed situation say, maybe eight or nine months after the Tet Offensive.

Q: Did you get to Nha Trang or Saigon from time to time?

LENDERKING: As often as I could. My usual feeling, even to go to Nha Trang, a small city on the beautiful Region II east coast, was that I was a country boy allowed a few hours in the big city. After Pleiku it almost seemed that way. There was an excellent French restaurant in Nha Trang and the city is right on the South China Sea; the location is beautiful and the beaches are gorgeous. Now, you had to be careful if you were going to go out and spend any time on the beach; there was no security out there and also the kids, if they could, would rip you off. I lost a nice camera when I was a little careless and it was gone in a flash.

Q: I lost a pair of pants at Vung Tao (a famous Vietnamese beach resort).

LENDERKING: I'm not surprised. The kids would take everything they could grab. But people from Saigon were going out to Vung Tao. I only got there once and it was a very quick visit; I didn't have time to even walk on the beach but it was crowded. Now, here was another aspect of that crazy war -- you'd go to Saigon and wild parties were going on -- guys with money in their pockets and beautiful women available -- and it was a totally different atmosphere from the austere countryside, where it was dangerous every minute, there were no amenities, and the most you could look forward to was a couple of beers and some conversation at the end of the day. Of course, Saigon could be dangerous too at times, and it certainly was dangerous during the Tet Offensive, but you could go up to the roof of one of the major downtown hotels such as the Caravelle, or the Continental, with its large open street level veranda where guys used to sit and drink a citron presse or a beer at the end of the day and watch the staggeringly lovely Vietnamese girls float by or putt-putt down the avenue on their scooters. The Majestic was the third big hotel, and it was right on the Saigon River, so it had a great vantage place for watching the war, just across the river, in full technicolor. You often could see up close a firefight in progress, with helicopters firing rockets, machine gun fire rattling into the night, and so on.

Q: I remember seeing the movie "Patton" and watching traces go up in the air and flares going off...it was an odd world. So, did you develop a sort of country boy versus city slicker attitude toward your American counterparts?

LENDERKING: For sure, yes. One thing that is legendary, even to this day, is the daily press briefings that were held at JUSPAO, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, which USIS operated with the military. And those came to be known as the five o'clock follies. At any given time there were 4-500 foreign correspondents there in-country and some of the really top names in journalism were there at one time or another as foreign correspondents. So it was a big deal, and this was how the world was seeing the war, through what these guys wrote.

One experience I had in Pleiku: we were informed that a Viet Cong company had surrendered,

and this was a big coup for us because the Chieu Hoi or amnesty program was not really successful. Some people came in but they were low level people and they were just tired of the war and we very rarely got anyone of any consequence. For this reason, the surrender of a large number of the enemy was a big deal. But I was a personal witness to all this, and my colleagues who went out to check and see who those folks really were saw right away they were just bedraggled Montagnard villagers forced out of their homes and just trying to survive. They'd been uprooted from their village by the war and had been wandering about for some time without much water or food, and maybe a couple of them had old rusty guns or something. They weren't Viet Cong, they weren't combatants – they were just part of the war's huge flotsam, but somehow someone thought it would be helpful to call them Viet Cong and report they had come in and laid down their arms. So after hearing from my colleagues in Pleiku what this incident was about, the very day I went to Saigon on other business, and at the end of the day I went to the Five O'clock follies. And guess what they are talking about? The big news of the day, announced to a briefing room full of war correspondents was this: a company or a platoon of 55 hard core Viet Cong have come over to our side. And I took this in from the back of the room, and I said to myself, this is just total bullshit. And this is what happens: an incident of some kind occurs, and immediately it is passed up the line, getting more distorted at each link in the chain. Now, obviously I wasn't going to say anything there but I went afterwards and said you know, I'm from Pleiku and my colleagues saw these people you're calling defectors, and what was said just now was total nonsense. Well, they didn't want to hear that. I was pouring water on their story. They didn't want to hear me out and put out a correction; they wanted me to go away and not come back. I could give you many such examples.

I remember a cocktail party conversation, not really a cocktail party but there were always parties going on in Saigon, some reception or other, and I was talking to a guy from USAID (United States Agency for International Development), a senior guy in Saigon. I told him who I was and we were just talking, and I said it doesn't matter whose side you're on or whether you think this war is justified or not; from my perspective we are losing and we're not going to win it. The war is unwinnable and we're doing all kinds of things wrong. And he got red in the face and said if you feel that way you're disloyal. You should go home; you shouldn't be here. And I said, "I didn't ask to come here but I'm doing my best and all the guys who are here are doing their best but this is what the situation is. And we're out there where we can see what's really happening."

When you came into Saigon there would always be guys from the provinces in there; they're coming in to get some money or coming in to push a project or something like that so I talked to many of them and found I wasn't alone in the way I felt. Almost all of us in the countryside felt that way. Guys in other parts of the country had stories very similar to the ones I've mentioned and they had the same sense of disillusion: we were doing badly, we weren't winning and our side was not capable of winning the war. So I felt okay, it's not just me, it's not just because I am disgruntled; I'm seeing the same things these other guys are seeing. So I think that was a good chance to learn that we were not crazy or disloyal; but we were dismayed and a lot of guys had really good projects going but they had this sense that our side was not capable. And my Vietnamese was getting better and better because I was using it all the time and I would talk to students on the street corners in Saigon or something like that and they were just like guys who hang out on street corners anywhere. They were chasing women and looking after themselves,

and I said to one of these groups one day, why don't you join the army and fight for your country? They were university students, and they said "No, we are not soldiers, we are intellectuals; we are students." So I paraphrased Lyndon Johnson's well-worn argument, "do you think it's okay for Americans to be here and fighting this war, when Vietnamese students hang out on street corners, drink coffee, and chase women?" "Oh yes," they replied, totally without guile. "You should fight, it's perfectly all right for you but it's not for us and you go out there and win it and we'll stay here."

That little vignette always stayed with me. As privileged kids in a class-ridden hierarchical society, what they were advocating was perfectly reasonable. They weren't soldiers, they were young intellectuals. It helps to explain why our side could never win.

Q: Well of course, in a way it reflects two things; the Chinese, who put the soldier down at the bottom and all that; and the Mandarin Chinese and also the French.

LENDERKING: Exactly right.

Q: While you were in Pleiku, were there teams of provincial reporting officers from the embassy coming out and talking to you?

LENDERKING: Not so much. I knew some of those guys and we are still in touch to this day and they were more in the Delta and more populated areas where they could get a better gauge on Vietnamese attitudes and what was going on both militarily and politically. And I think because most people disdained the Montagnards as a military force and they really weren't a strong political force for the most part, we didn't see them much in Pleiku but they were there. And I read their reports and they were good, they were usually very solid. The trouble was, our hopes to help build a democracy in this infertile soil were unrealistic. There were political parties and some good people in some of them, but they faced overwhelming odds and of course they ended up being overrun.

And here is another little vignette. I had a good friend who I went through Vietnamese language training with who was a State Department guy assigned to the political section. And I exchanged notes with him, I guess maybe after we had left Vietnam, and he said he agreed with the criticisms of the reporting and acknowledged the process of distortion and how the message got altered along the line to Washington, because of the pressure to produce good news. He said, the best reporting on Vietnam, for all their faults, came from the press and there were good people and bad people but press reporting was the most reliable. And the second was the CIA. And the third I guess were the provincial reporting units, the fourth was the reporting from the embassy, and dead last were the voluminous and so-called objective reports from CORDS and the countryside. He told me supervisors would alter reports people had written, and alter the meaning to reflect good news, which was not borne out by the facts on the ground.

Q: Who was this officer?

LENDERKING: His name is Dick Thompson and he was a very conscientious officer - you probably know him.

Q: Yes. I think I have interviewed Dick.

LENDERKING: He was a smart officer with a lot of integrity, and still is – and we got to be good friends.

Q: How were relations between what you were doing and the headquarters of the Fourth Division? Was this not the ivy (IV) division, the famous fighting Fourth?

LENDERKING: Yes. Well, I went out there a couple of times to remonstrate with anyone who would listen to me and basically I just did not count enough. I mean, I never got in to see General Peers but there were a couple of guys, say, lieutenant colonels, majors, I could talk to and their attitude was that an Army division is a massive thing and we have a war to fight and we're not going to worry about the people who get in the way. And that was very unfortunate because some of that has happened in Iraq, too. And they did have a war to fight and they were doing things like using Agent Orange and they were trying the best they could to not contaminate places. The planes were only supposed to fly when the conditions, like wind direction, were a certain way, and there were other rules as well, but in a war zone you fly those planes when you have them, you know. Put your finger in the air and take off.

One time, I had an argument with an Army captain. He said his troops had to destroy what were called "monkey bridges," makeshift bridges made of a narrow plank or two that the people used during the day to cross streams to get to their crops, or whatever. And then at night the military would come and chop them down because the Viet Cong were using that bridge too. And the captain said, look, I am here to protect my men and I'm not going to allow that bridge to be used by the Viet Cong to attack my troops. Of course I could understand his viewpoint; I would have felt the same way in his position. But here was a tiny but fundamental conflict, right at the grassroots, that went to the heart of some of the problems of trying to defeat what was already more than an insurgency. It was an attempt by North Vietnamese to repel what they regarded as an invasion and occupation by a foreign power, and that's what it was. From our viewpoint, we were trying to help a weak and corrupt non-communist regime survive so that communism would not take over another country. If we had understood better that the forces of nationalism and xenophobia were stronger than any pro-communist sentiments, perhaps we wouldn't have made so many mistakes. In any case, we feared that Vietnam would become a satellite of Communist China, and that was never really a possibility. Later, the Vietnamese flared up at the Chinese over a border incident, and the Vietnamese really bloodied some Chinese noses and gave a very good account of themselves before the Chinese numerical superiority dictated an end to hostilities.

Q: Did you stay the whole time in Pleiku?

LENDERKING: No. I was rather disillusioned at this point and I was having some domestic problems -- I think the separation was not good for our family, the same effect it had on many families. I felt bad about having to go to Vietnam -- we had three young children and I really missed them. I had to leave my wife, Lois, to cope with all of that, moving into a new home and neighborhood in Washington, looking for a job and all the rest of it, and so I went home on leave

and I thought hell, this is awful. I'm not accomplishing anything; it's dangerous, if something happens to me what is going to happen to my family, blah, blah, blah. I seriously thought about quitting the Foreign Service – it was my only option to serving out my tour -- and in fact at one point I did submit my resignation while I was on my first leave. I was looking around for another job, which I was not able to find because I didn't have enough time – my leave was only for a couple of weeks. But as a result of all this indecision I overstayed my leave. I said to my wife, "I've had it, I'm not going back." And my wife said, "you've got to go back, otherwise people will think you're a quitter and it will dog you the rest of your life." A couple of close friends said the same thing. So after a few days of inner turmoil I decided to go back, and take my chances. A couple of other friends said "you still have a good career, go back, finish up, stay in the Service."

And so I did. I went back, I was basically AWOL (absent without leave) by about, oh I guess almost two weeks, and so the head of JUSPAO wasn't happy when I got back. He called me in and he said, "You don't know this, but I was considering you for an important senior job in Saigon, where you'll be supervising people technically senior to you. It will require dedication and good judgment. But before I consider it any further I have to have your ironclad assurances that you will restrain the impetuous side of your nature and not indulge in any further adolescent capers." Those were his exact words.

Q: Obviously this was seared into your mind.

LENDERKING: Yes. And it was such a classic dressing down that I almost smiled, and said "okay, yes, I'm back, I'll do my best." And so I went up to Pleiku to finish up and work my way out of there, hoping I wouldn't get shot now that my luck had changed for the better, and Komer hears that I'm going to transfer. I don't know where he got this but I saw his message protesting my transfer, and it said, in effect, "why are we transferring good guys out of the field? Here is a dedicated officer who wants to stay in Pleiku and continue his work. I think he should stay." My heart sank. I was dying to get out of Pleiku. I had been there a year, I felt I'd paid my dues, I could see nothing good happening there under any kind of realistic scenario, and I wanted to move on and maybe do something where I could try something different.

Anyway, it took about two months to effect the transfer and I went down to Saigon, and I got the senior job there. I was supervising guys who were senior to me, FSOs and military up to the rank of LTC, and because I had field experience I was often called on to be the vetter- to vet projects that were aimed at communicating better with the Vietnamese. And so I brought that perspective to the job. Now, of course I wanted these things to be as effective as they could be, but I also was as honest as possible without being a total naysayer, saying that some ideas were unrealistic, inappropriate, counter-productive, poorly crafted, and so on. Our military counterparts, the U.S. military, were very weak in that regard; they just did not have any clue about who the Vietnamese were as people, what their values were, anything like that. I at least knew something.

Q: I would think that you would get all sorts of cockamamie ideas from people sitting there who had no idea. You know, let us put our message on bars of soap or what have you.

LENDERKING: Yes, exactly. There was a lot of that. But sometimes there were good ideas. I don't want to be totally negative. They had these little radios that they dropped and could only

tune into one frequency that of course was limited to messages from our side, such as surrender messages. But I heard that the Viet Cong figured out a way to rejigger the frequency. Well, who knows? But I believe it. So many of our ideas were well-intentioned but ineffectual, because they didn't reach the core of Vietnamese attitudes. The Vietnamese enemy – Viet Cong and North Vietnamese – was clever and inventive. They were defending their own country and were willing to fight as long as it took, while we were there for a year or two and then went on somewhere else, usually disillusioned and dismayed.

We used to have frequent meetings, probably once a week, joint meetings with the military brass, and the military psyop guys were headed by a full colonel, and I guess I was the senior civilian; big conference room, table, all the military trappings out at the military base at Ton Son Nhut near the airport, and this guy said, "Today we are considering putting messages in cereal boxes so that as the Viets open their cereal they will get a message. And I or someone said, you know, that is not the way Vietnamese eat their food; they do not have cereal boxes. Whatever they might be eating, rice, fish, or meat or whatever, they eat it with their fingers or with a fork or spoon or chopsticks. They don't have cereal boxes. Well he said, "OK, we'll put these messages in their Cracker Jack boxes, or whatever the hell these people eat." You see, he just didn't have a clue.

Q: Seems reminiscent of the attitude in Panama years later, where we, trying to get Noriega, blasted the house he was holed up in with loud rock music, hoping to wear him down. Now, how long were you in Saigon?

LENDERKING: I had a year in Saigon. So the way it worked was the tour of duty was two years plus whatever time you had spent on home leave. I think I had two more trips home of about ten days each. And I have to tell you, of course this interview triggers all these memories, the first trip I came home was about three or four months after Tet. I was really anxious to see my family for reasons I just mentioned, and by then I considered myself a hardened veteran because I'd been up in Pleiku through all the tough times and I flew home non-stop and happened to arrive when a huge anti-war demonstration was going on in Washington. So the next morning I went to American University, which was one of the centers of it, and Walt Rostow, who was National Security Advisor, and a lot of other prominent people were speakers. I had only left Saigon the day before and I go and hear Walt Rostow and he's talking about a country that bore no connection or resemblance at all to the place I had just left 24 hours ago. He was saying the Viet Cong have suffered a terrible defeat; the people are happy, they are rallying around us. Well, my goodness. The country was in ruins, the people were afraid, disillusioned with their government, demoralized, and the programs are not working. By that time, it was not just Pleiku – the whole country was really in bad shape.

And then all the other groups represented there – and there were scores of them – each seemed to have its own agenda at this huge rally. The different groups had separate workshops, so I went to one that was dominated by a group that was probably affiliated with the Black Panthers. I quickly realized they weren't interested in the war at all; they knew almost nothing about it except that they were against it, and wanted to use the protest to get some resources for themselves for their projects in the city. So I was disillusioned by the likes of Walt Rostow, and I was turned off by the various advocacy groups who wallowed in ignorance about Vietnam and

were nothing more than political opportunists. So when I got back to Vietnam, I was almost glad to be back, because although there were plenty of people whose views of the war differed from mine, at least all of us had some familiarity about the issues and the problems.

Q: Well how did your family welcome you when you got home? I know my wife was taking courses at University of Maryland at the time and she was picking up an awful lot of their anti-Vietnam stuff. I'm sure it wasn't an easy time to come back.

LENDERKING: It was not. It was tough on my wife. We eventually got divorced, and I can't in all honesty blame Vietnam for that, but it made things more difficult. The situation was tough on her. I was never late with sending the rent money and the support money and those things but she had three young boys to contend with and she was trying to get a job, and when she found one she had to juggle house and job. But as I mentioned, she also didn't want me to resign, because she liked the Foreign Service and our life overseas. So she was ambivalent about Vietnam. Later, when there were some of the huge anti-war protests on the Mall, I took the kids down there as an act of witness, not to demonstrate. My oldest son was about ten at the time.

So I took them down to the Mall and there were thousands and thousands of people, plus some of the anti-war celebrities such as Peter, Paul and Mary, Jane Fonda and others, and someone unfurled a North Vietnamese flag and they started chanting, ho, ho, Ho Chi Minh or something like that. I said to the kids, let's get out of here; we're protesting the war, not glorifying the enemy. So I took them home, again dismayed by the shallowness of my fellow Americans, whose dislike of the war immediately transferred them into supporters of Ho Chi Minh. And that was another indelible experience. I explained to my sons why I took them in the first place and why I then pulled them out of there when I didn't want to be any part of that aspect of the demonstration. There were always those elements in any kind of political demonstration in Washington, and there still are on the Iraq issue. The radicals, and some of them are genuinely dangerous, always try to hijack the demonstration and use it to their ends. So I really got soured on those big demonstrations.

Later, Lois, my wife, was going to take a candle and march in a demonstration and I said look, it's an act of hypocrisy...you've urged me to go back. If you were really against the war you wouldn't have urged me to go back where I was in danger; you would have said stay here and support me. But ironically, it was probably a good idea that I did go back, because I really liked the Foreign Service and I didn't wreck my career, and in the end it was very satisfying. But there were tense times.

Q: JUSPAO was essentially USIA's headquarters in Vietnam...?

LENDERKING: Yes, but it was married with the military.

Q: -How did you deal with your sense that the information that was being disseminated didn't reflect what was happening in the field?

LENDERKING: It may be hard to explain the work atmosphere of JUSPAO. The head of JUSPAO for some years – I came on the scene near the end of his tour -- is a legendary figure,

Barry Zorthian, who is still around and still very articulate about the war and public diplomacy issues. His successor was my PAO in Tokyo, Ed Nickel, who was nobody's fool, a very savvy bureaucrat. Ed's idea was, we all know how many of you feel about the war, and you may be right. But we have a job to do and we're going to do our very best. That was a reasonable position. So Ed would tolerate people like me to a certain extent, as long as he saw I was trying to do a good job and not out there trying to sabotage the mission. Here's what I mean: some years later, in 1973, when I was back in Washington, USIA formed a large inspection team for Vietnam and I was chosen to be part of it because I think I was the only guy on it who had had a lot of experience in Vietnam. Most of the others were senior to me. And Ed Nickel, and a few others tried to keep me off the team because they knew how I felt and they felt my views would wrongfully influence the team. Now, no one ever stated this in writing or to my face, but I learned about it from colleagues.

Ironically, as it turned out most of the others on the team – we were seven in all -- felt even stronger than I did and when we got out to Vietnam the people who were in charge of USIS -- the office in Saigon and all the infrastructure we still had in Vietnam -- were not particularly cooperative with us and thought that we were probing where we had no business to probe; but that is what inspection teams do.

Q: Before we leave Vietnam, I do want to get some of your impressions of the press corps. I don't know if you dealt with them but there were hundreds of correspondents running around, and some of them were amateurs, or wrote amateurish stories. There was a lot of that as well as solid reporting. And I would like to talk about that next time, plus anything else you would like to raise about Vietnam, because this is important.

LENDERKING: Well, I've self-reflected as the Japanese say, on what we talked about last time and I had a couple of maybe amplifying thoughts and we can do that next time.

Q: Today is the 16th of March, 2007. Bill, amplifying thoughts and the press corps.

LENDERKING: Okay, plunging in: As for amplifying thoughts: I've had these considerations before, but I served in quite a few countries, nine altogether, and in four of them there were major American foreign policy blunders, from serious mistakes to fiascos or disasters, Vietnam probably being the worst. So roughly 50 percent of my career was in assignments that dealt with American blunders that did not need to happen. Books have been written about all those things, Vietnam and the rest of them, but you have to wonder, if you agree that these other places were also disasters, that would be Cuba, Vietnam, Italy and Pakistan, what is there wrong, systemically, that causes such foreign policy failures? We have so many able people to analyze situations and carry out our policies in a forceful and credible way.

Q: Well, let's talk about the press first, and then get to the other topics. What was your impression of the foreign press corps in Vietnam?

LENDERKING: In Vietnam, there were as many as 500 foreign correspondents there at a given time, and they ran the gamut to really top people to adventurers and people who weren't really competent. But I would say, on the whole, as I said last time, the press did a better job of

presenting accurately what was really happening than the embassy reporting, the CIA, and others such as USAID. I'd have to rank CORDS reporting way down at the bottom because there was so much pressure to produce good results. Most of the bosses weren't interested in knowing what was really going on. They wanted to know how much money you spent, and they wanted to hear things that would allow them to say the programs were succeeding, when in fact most of them weren't succeeding at all. In fact, I kept a memo, I think I probably still have it, a directive from our regional headquarters in Nha Trang (Region III Headquarters) saying that the amount of money we spent would be an indication of our effectiveness and that we were not spending all the money that we had allotted. Never mind, they didn't know what we had spent it on or what the result was – we were just supposed to push the money out there and then report something positive to Saigon. The result was a jumble of meaningless statistics that they kept track of by computer – so many tons of cement used to make so many school houses; so many Viet Cong laid down their arms, although we never were able to differentiate actual fighters from those poor souls who were just fleeing the horrors of war, like those scraggly Montagnards I mentioned earlier.

Anyway, the press was very good but even the best of them had their faults. I happened to be in Japan, towards the end of my tour in Sapporo, when David Halberstam of the New York Times won his Pulitzer Prize for Vietnam reporting. If you went back and looked at his reporting there was some brilliant investigative reporting and it put him on the map as a first rate correspondent, certainly one of the best and brightest among the correspondents. But the night he won the Pulitzer, I happened to be having dinner with the Times's man in Japan, Emerson Chapin, who was a senior editor on the foreign copy desk when I was a copy boy there. He was almost apoplectic about Halberstam's Pulitzer: he said almost every story Halberstam sent in had to be very carefully fact-checked because there were so many factual errors. He said ruefully, at the very least that Pulitzer should have been shared with the foreign copy desk because he and his fellow editors had to do so much heavy lifting to change Halberstam's often brilliant raw copy into a story that would meet the Times's high standards for accuracy, fairness, and depth. And while Halberstam certainly produced a lot of really good hard reporting, he was very loose with the facts and "The Times" was very scrupulous about those things. They had a huge "morgue" – a ready reference capability, and a large number of fact checkers. Chapin said everything that Halberstam sent in had to be sent to the morgue to be fact-checked, and if anyone deserved the Pulitzer it was the fact checkers and editors.

Well, that's just one example. I don't mean to denigrate Halberstam – he was one of the great ones. But even the best were mistaken at times, or careless. And when Halberstam left Vietnam for a while and came back a couple of years later, I believe, it's interesting that he came back to do kind of a Vietnam update and some fresh reporting, and he of course went back to his old sources. But the situation had moved on and those old sources were no longer the best people he should have been talking to. I'd bet if you dug out his reporting from this later period, it would seem rather undistinguished and a lot of it was probably flat out wrong. I don't have any particular pieces in mind, but that was my impression at the time, when I followed what the media were saying very carefully.

Q: How did you find dealing with what I would call the "amateur press corps"? I mean, they tended to get in trouble from time to time and this consul general- I and one of the other consuls

had to go and bail them out or something because they were sort of an undisciplined group, sort of like coming for spring break, and reporting in an scattershot way. Did these types cause you much of a problem?

LENDERKING: They didn't cause me a problem because I didn't have to deal with them, and very few correspondents came to Pleiku. In Saigon and JUSPAO, my job didn't encompass dealing with the media, but rather trying to see that the huge number of products we issued – newspaper stories, films, book translations, photos, you name it – met standards of credibility and accuracy. Also, I was one of the principal contacts with military psyops, and I have to say that despite a lot of energy and earnestness, backed up by DOD's limitless supply of resources, the products were generally amateurish and ineffective.

Now, back to Pleiku for a second: if correspondents did go there, they went to the Fourth Division to try and get the story about the larger battles – Ia Drang Valley, and others. And they got the Fourth Division treatment about what the Fourth Division was doing. They didn't cover the pacification program, which was where the real war was being waged, and lost. The only two people I remember, the whole year I was in Pleiku, were Peter Kann and Robert Keatley of The Wall Street Journal. Peter Kann was one of the best of the correspondents who spent considerable time in Vietnam. He eventually went on to become president of Dow Jones and The Wall Street Journal. Robert Keatley spent less time in Vietnam and some years later become the managing editor of the "South China Morning Post" in Hong Kong. Anyway, both of them were very savvy, eminent reporters. I was grateful they chose to spend a whole day with me and the pacification program, so I showed them as much of the province as we could cover in a jeep in a day. We looked at the war from the grassroots, not through the eyes of some briefer at the Fourth Infantry Division. I felt that was the real way to understand what was going on, not just get your information filtered through the Army. The Army was great talking about weapons, orders of battle, set piece battles, estimated casualties. The subtleties of pacification tended not to be worth very much of their time. The Army briefers also, in my experience, put out a lot of misinformation. That is, they didn't intentionally distort, but they reported only one side and they didn't know very much about Vietnam, the people, or their history and culture. Since I attended our own local briefing in Pleiku every morning I knew what the briefers were saying. And I contrasted that with what I saw with my own eyes in driving around and talking to people. And then I could also hear what our briefers were saying in Saigon at the Five O'clock Follies.

Anyway, that is a long winded, roundabout answer, but in Vietnam I didn't have a lot of contact with the press. In later assignments, as the press attaché or the public affairs officer I was intimately involved with the media every day, especially in Italy, Thailand, Peru, Pakistan, and Washington.

EDGAR J. GORDON
Economic Officer
Saigon (1968-1969)

Mr. Gordon was born in New York City in 1930 and educated at NYU and

Princeton. He began working for the Treasury Department in 1957. His career, largely as treasury attaché, included posts in Paris, Seoul, Buenos Aires, Saigon and Hong Kong. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: So you settled for Vietnam in what, late 1967?

GORDON: Middle of 1968.

Q: Middle of 1968? Well, this was after Tet then?

GORDON: That is what I was going to say. We went on long home leave-about the only long home leave I've ever had during my Treasury service because of the way things fell. We went through Latin America to the States and then decided to return by way of Puerto Rico (my wife's father came from there and neither one of us had ever been there) for a few weeks to escape the cold of Washington.

So up to this point, as I say, we were discussing Vietnam. The only question was that since families were not permitted, where my wife and children would live. We decided they would go to Taipei based on the advice of friends in the Foreign Service and CIA who had already served there. But that meant, for the first time, that we would be separated for long periods of time because I could only [visit] once a month. Vietnam itself didn't seem to pose any particular danger if you were sitting in the embassy in Saigon.

But when we were in Puerto Rico, Tet took place, and I remember we were looking at a copy of "Life" magazine a few days later with these pictures of Saigon. My wife looked at me and said, "Are you crazy...you're going to go to a place like that?" And I said, "Frankly, it's too late now. I can't admit I'm a coward and not go. Maybe if this had happened before I would have said I'm not going. I can't very well change my mind now." She was rather disturbed by that and rightly so. And so was I disturbed because it was an element of risk I hadn't really counted on when I accepted the assignment. In the end, I could have refused to go, I wasn't obliged to go, there were other people.

But we went back to Argentina for a few months at that point. I didn't actually go until June. I missed all the Tet and the aftermath and the second rising in May. Saigon was still a little "hot" as they say when I got there in July and we did have a few rocketing and things like that. It remained a dangerous place but if you minded your business and avoided certain areas, it wasn't too serious.

The American organization in Vietnam was enormous. The combination of the embassy and the AID mission proper and CORDS [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support], which dealt with the provinces probably had a couple of thousand American professionals to speak of in this place. It was larger than any embassy, AID mission anywhere in the world. The AID mission was so large that even the meetings of the heads of sections was about thirty five people or something of that. Of course, the military also had two large headquarters with which we dealt from time to time.

All the economic work was concentrated in AID. The embassy economic section was relatively small. And the foreign service officers assigned to it were put into AID. So we had one division. We had an economic counselor, who was at that point an AID man, Lloyd Jones. The people under him consisted of AID people, foreign service people, and there were some military who had economic backgrounds who were seconded as well. I was the only Treasury person in that group.

I was given an office with three assistants to work on the financial/macroeconomic issues. I reported to the chief of the economic section, who in turn was supervised by the economic counselor who also controlled the aid programming function. That was the situation from the time I arrived until about October or November. Jones decided to make me chief of the economic section which meant I had all the economic personnel under me. There was the question of administration. I had had only one person, a secretary, under me up to that point in my government career. There I had something like 20 professionals and half a dozen secretaries, a few of which weren't even in Saigon. We had a couple of field offices that we were responsible for in the corps areas-in three of the four corps areas in which Vietnam was divided for military purposes. So this was quite a challenge to me. To organize work and motivate so many people was difficult for a man accustomed to working alone. Just the sheer burden of writing reports on them was something.

Q: Writing efficiency reports, yes!

GORDON: I never had to do that before because we didn't have efficiency reports in Treasury until the establishment of the SES [Senior Executive Service]. I remember at the end of tour there were something like twenty efficiency reports to do. I spent the last month writing efficiency reports. But again, it was an interesting period. And, of course, we were working I think with the same focus I had when I was working on Vietnam my first year in Treasury, and on Korea later. Usually the problem was that the exchange rate was overvalued and that was distorting everything.

We were trying to get a devaluation but we succeeded in getting a very complicated reduction in tariffs. There was a rather long and lengthy negotiation on that score. We were also concerned in a whole host of things because the United States was so deeply involved in Vietnamese economic affairs that we were really co-governing with the Vietnamese Economic Ministries-the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy. I can't remember specific issues but we handled anything that came along. We had almost as many professional people at a high level as some of these ministries had because they were really pretty thinly staffed when it came to professionals who could develop policies, not simply those who could shuffle the paper and carry out the operations. In fact we had so many people we had to limit visits so that our counterparts could not be spending too much time talking to us rather than doing their work.

Given my previous experience and analytical interests, I also spent considerable time improving the reporting system, converting it from a casual AID process where operational, not descriptive reports, to a regular enhanced embassy reporting schedule.

This was the situation from late 1968 and then I left just before Christmas, 1969. It was a very

interesting period. There was a great deal of work to do. It was very different than the normal embassy situation in the same sense that Korea was. We had policy issues that we constantly had to work on and to which we urgently had to propose solutions. I enjoyed it from that point of view a great deal. Personally it was rather difficult because as I say I had never been separated from my family for any length of time. We developed this routine of going home about five days every month, which is more than a lot of people did who had their families in the States. My children were young at the time. It was a strain on them and especially on my wife, who kept busy teaching at the American school in Taipei. She has afterwards told me a number of times that it was a test of the durability of our marriage through which we came successfully, but not easily.

Q: What about the currency there? As I recall the-what was it? The piaster was at a certain level and the real rate was three or four times that and was used by everybody except all those government groups?

GORDON: Well, the issue was, as in Korea in the early 'sixties, that by having an over-valued exchange rate and at the same time having the rationale for the import program basically the generation of local currency for budget support, you were providing a higher level of aid than the economy really needed. Also you are bringing in goods at a subsidized exchange rate you, in effect, were simply allowing whole rafts of people to make exorbitant profits on the imports because the true price of these goods locally reflected the much more depreciated black market exchange rate.

We couldn't solve the problem by an outright devaluation at the time for political reasons. Instead, by raising various tariffs and surcharges we created a complex multiple exchange rate to do this. It was not a very good solution from the either technical or economic point of view but it was perhaps better than they had before.

Subsequently, Chuck Cooper, who had been the economic counselor during my first three months there, and then returned after I left, came up with another idea. It was to create a special exchange rate for personal exchanges, high enough so that the black market disappeared. The effect would be to increase the government's foreign exchange resources. He had proposed this idea to me on a visit in mid-1969 and I had resisted it because I thought they already had too much foreign exchange and was intent on them getting less, not more. It was carried out in 1970.

Maybe that was my ideology in this matter but the South Vietnamese government, just like the South Vietnamese Army, wasn't a very effective honest organization. While we had good relationships with the people we knew and I like them personally and some of them, at least the ministers and the senior people were fairly competent, they really weren't in charge at the end. President Thieu and his group were in charge and they made the ultimate decisions. And those decisions required that the people who ran things got as much money as possible because they expected that they wouldn't be there forever. They wanted to save up a nest egg.

It was, as I say, an interesting job because we had so many responsibilities but ultimately frustrating because you knew what ever you did wouldn't last very long. The breakdown didn't take place for another four or five years. I was succeeded by two other people from Treasury

which maintained the post until the very end, April 1975.

Q: What about corruption? Did this play much of a role in what you were dealing with?

GORDON: It didn't touch us directly but we knew it was there. That was one of the motivations for raising the import price and getting some of this revenue directly into the budget, rather than allow it to simply dissipate in the form of random riches for who ever was getting the licenses to import these things.

Q: I recall one of the measures was to promote the importation of motorcycles and other things in order to generate more proceeds.

GORDON: Well, yes. That was the idea, the choice of commodities once the aid dollar amount was set, depended somewhat on the demand for particular products. Usually AID had a list of authorized goods that they could bring in under these programs. Obviously they wouldn't let them import Mercedes or something of that sort, with U.S. aid dollars. But there was a proposal to import motorcycles because those were readily saleable and you would get the proceeds into the budget very quickly once licenses were issued for them. Saigon filled up with these Honda motor bikes. Just from a personal point of view I can tell you that the curfew went off at six thirty in the morning and went on again at ten or eleven at night-I'm not sure.

At any rate I remember getting up in the morning and getting ready to go to work and at six thirty suddenly there would be a blast of sound outside because everybody had been dressed and sitting on their motorbikes in their houses waiting for six-thirty. And the streets were absolutely filled with these motor bikes. I think we had imported two to three hundred thousand of these things and the bulk of them were in the Saigon area. They were from the Vietnamese point of view a relatively cheap form of transport.

Q: ...talking about the Hondas...

GORDON: They used very little gasoline. With that long seat you could get a wife and husband and a couple of kids on one of these things.

Q: I saw one time, a family of seven, husband, wife and I think, five kids on it at once.

GORDON: So you were there. But then I guess people criticized this after awhile, saying this could hardly be the most essential thing you can import in a war time economy and they finally cut it off. That increased the price and domestically anybody who had a Honda immediately had a windfall profit in terms of selling them or using them for any other purpose, or leasing them. That was an issue.

Q: What kind of guidance did Treasury provide?

GORDON: I received very little guidance directly from Treasury. I really worked basically with the embassy and AID missions. When I went to Washington I would spend a lot of time with AID because they were the ones involved with all the economic issues that I was involved in. I

was considered part of their team out there.

So while Treasury had a point of view, no one sent me letter saying don't do this, that and the other thing. I was back two or three times during that year and a half in Washington which is fairly unusual for us. Treasury was essentially happy that I had become influential in the mission and trusted me to take the right positions.

Q: What was the atmosphere like in Saigon in 1968?

GORDON: Saigon itself, after Tet and after the May offensive, until October, was still a bit "warm." One incident I might mention concerns the visit of one of the assistant secretaries of Treasury in September. He wasn't my assistant secretary. He was in charge of among other things, the U.S. Mint. His ostensible reason was to see if he could get a contract for the U.S. Mint because Vietnam did not have a mint of its own and its coinage was manufactured abroad. The real reason I think was that Mr. Wallace, who had once worked for Senator Paul Douglas, with the 1968 election in two months and Vietnam the number one issue, wanted to be able to say that he had been there and talk about it. I can't remember if Douglas was running for election or what the reason was.

I set up a schedule for him, the most important event of which was a visit to the Central Bank which was in charge of coinage. I never knew whether this was a coincidence or whether someone knew he was there. We had a date at the Central Bank in the afternoon and we were a little bit late. I remember we were hurrying down the stairs to get into our car in the parking yard outside when we heard this explosion. We went outside and there were several Vietnamese lying dead in the parking yard.

The AID mission fronted on a wide street and one of what we used to call Saigon cowboys, a guy on a Honda had tossed a grenade into that place at a time when a number of Vietnamese employees were just leaving. They had just been standing, there talking getting ready for transportation, when this thing came out of nowhere. I sometimes think that if we had been two minutes earlier we would have been in our car at that point when that grenade went off. I don't know what would have happened to us. I have no idea and we never did find out whether it had anything to do with him or it was just happened to be random terrorism against AID.

But it was one of the rare incidents. We were generally not targeted by the terrorists. Very little terrorism actually took place inside Saigon proper.

Q: Did you get involved...Sam Berger had this idea and was tasked with trying to do something about Americans involved in the black market. Did you get involved with that at all?

GORDON: I don't think so. Another subject which I didn't mention which was the beginning of the US troop withdrawal in 1969. I think that was a big issue. Stabilization being the other. I was part of a group that was formed to look at the consequences of the U.S. Vietnamization, as it was called at the time. We had gotten this message... I guess it was about mid-1969 which of course was very hush-hush at the time that President Nixon had decided he was going to gradually withdraw American troops from Vietnam.

The mission was asked to propose several scenarios how this could be done. My job was simply to look at the economic consequences of the reduction of the American forces in the country and what affect this might have on foreign exchange availability and any other economic consequences It was a secondary issue: obviously the military-political issues were far more important.

There wasn't anything very sophisticated one could do about this. Basically you could look at the amount of foreign exchange and develop some relationship between the number of soldiers and what they were spending and then examine some secondary effects. I think that the embassy came back with three scenarios shorter or longer-it was really the speed of the withdrawal. I put an economic price on each one of them. That was sent back as the position and I think they probably picked the middle position. It had already started in the fall of 1969 in the Delta region which was the quietest. By the time of the North Vietnamese offensive in the spring of 1972, there were no American ground forces left in Vietnam. There were some aviation I believe. But that was it.

Q: And so in the summer of 1969, fall of 1969 you left?

GORDON: Just before Christmas. I was there 18 months.

CARL C. CUNDIFF
Economic Officer, USAID
Saigon (1968-1969)

Ambassador Cundiff graduated from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and the Fletcher School at Tufts. He entered the Foreign Service in 1966. His career included posts in Saigon, Paris, Lagos and Abidjan and he was named ambassador to Niger in 1988. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1996.

Q: And then you volunteered for Vietnam? Was that a real volunteer or were you sort of coerced? Did you have a choice at that time?

CUNDIFF: There was a lot of pressure on people to go to Vietnam and since I wasn't married at the time, I felt that I would probably end up being sent to Vietnam at some point anyway. I was, I guess you might say, anxious to get on with it and I also had friends of mine who were already serving in Saigon. And I wanted to join them if possible.

Q: So you went there in 1968. It was an interesting and busy time there. Did you go with any Vietnamese language or any other special training? Was this a direct transfer from Singapore to Vietnam?

CUNDIFF: I was transferred initially back from Singapore to Washington for training. I took

two types of training. Initially I was tested for language skills. I did not test high enough to be put in the long-term Vietnamese language training program. So, I completed a counter-insurgency training program and after doing that I went directly to Saigon.

Q: You were assigned to what...the embassy in Saigon or did you go into one of the CORDS provincial programs?

CUNDIFF: I was trained for the CORDS provincial programs. But I was interested in serving in the economic section because of my background and I was able to get assigned to that section upon my arrival in Saigon. So I spent my eighteen months in Saigon working on economic issues.

Q: Now was this a combined AID-embassy economic section?

CUNDIFF: It was a combined embassy-AID economic section located at USAID headquarters in Saigon.

Q: What kind of things did you do there? And how long were you in Vietnam?

CUNDIFF: I was there for a total of a year and a half and I specialized in taxation. The collection of customs duties and the collection of income taxes. The object of the exercise was to participate with a group of economists who were working on various models for trying to keep down the rate of inflation during the war.

Q: Was your role and that of the others primarily analytical to try to understand what was happening? Or were you advisors? Or was it some combination of the two?

CUNDIFF: Well, I would say, there were two parts to the economic stabilization program. One was to analyze the situation to find out what was going on. Secondly, the object was to use that information to shape our policies and to shape those of the Vietnamese to the extent possible. One of the critical policy questions was how much did we need to provide to the government of Vietnam in the way of commodity import financing so that they could absorb the purchasing power of the economy and keep down price increases.

Q: Remind me sort of, the state of the war in this period-this year and a half. Was it coming close to Saigon?

CUNDIFF: It was close. It was actually in Saigon in a sense. I arrived in June of 1968 which as you may recall was right after what we call, "Mini-Tet," which was an offensive by the other side in May and before that, at the end of January or early February, there had been the big Tet Offensive when the embassy compound had been occupied. And a large part of the city was fought over. When I arrived in Saigon, the city was essentially secure, but there were rockets landing on the city and coming in from the swamps across the river primarily. But that was not a major problem. Terrorism continued while I was there. USAID headquarters was grenaded while I was out actually making an economic demarche in Saigon. So, I went out the entrance to AID and when I came back 25 minutes later there were signs of a grenade attack.

Q: So there was a feeling you must have had of insecurity about or at least concern about personal security as well as the other broader issues that you were dealing with.

CUNDIFF: I would say there was a feeling of insecurity but not the same sort of insecurity that the soldiers would have who were in an actual combat zone.

Q: I am sure you had good relations with the Vietnamese tax authorities and economic policy officials. Did they have a sense of hope or was there a feeling of despair or discouragement during this period?

CUNDIFF: I don't remember whether there was hope or discouragement. My impression in general was that people were simply going about their lives as they could under difficult circumstances. And the war just seemed to be part of life. I don't recall that anybody anticipated that it would be over soon but I guess nobody thought it would go on forever either. It seemed like a very long-term commitment on their part and ours. And I worked fairly closely with some young Vietnamese economists in the Central Bank and their moral certainly seemed to be high.

Q: Were they trained in France or the United States or...?

CUNDIFF: In this case they were trained in the United States. And that is probably why we got to know each other a little bit.

Q: Did you use French quite a bit or was it English?

CUNDIFF: No. English largely dealing with the Vietnamese. Some French occasionally with older Vietnamese civil servants. And then I used my rudimentary Vietnamese on the streets and in restaurants and with taxi drivers and that sort of thing.

Q: Who was the head of the joint section in the period that you were there? Do you remember?

CUNDIFF: Well, there were a couple of heads of it...it changed. There was somebody by the name of Chuck Cooper who was there for a while. Then there was Bill Sharpe who was head of it for awhile.

Q: These were mostly people from AID?

CUNDIFF: These were people from AID. However, there was one State Department person at one period of time who was there. I'm sorry I can't remember his name now.

Q: But there were several other State Department officers in addition to you in the...?

CUNDIFF: Yes. There were indeed. I would say that there were probably more AID officers but there were a number from the State Department.

Q: Did you do much outside of the capital in terms of travel and working with the provinces and

people in the provinces?

CUNDIFF: I personally only made two trips outside the capital. One to the Delta to look at the situation there. I went to Canto for a very brief trip. And went to Da Lat, north of Saigon up into the mountainous area in what we called "Three Corps" at the time.

Q: You say you were there...?

CUNDIFF: Nineteen months, I think. Eighteen months.

Q: That was kind of the length of your assignment as it was set from the beginning. Was there pressure on you to extend or come back after home leave for another tour?

CUNDIFF: No. There was no pressure at that time. Later, when I went to my third assignment in Paris, however, I was put on notice to come back to Vietnam to be part of one of the peace-keeping efforts that was going on at that point monitoring the peace process. But as it turned out, I did not have to go back.

Q: Because the situation probably, in Vietnam changed. We pulled out, or...

CUNDIFF: No. I think the reason I didn't have to go back on an urgent basis from Paris was, as it turned out, they had enough officers to do the job they had in mind.

GALEN L. STONE
Political Counselor
Saigon (1968-1969)

Ambassador Galen L. Stone grew up in Massachusetts. After attending Harvard University and serving in the U.S. Army, he joined the Foreign Service. His career included positions in Germany, France, India, Vietnam, Laos, Austria, and Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Cyprus. He was interviewed on April 15, 1988 by Malcolm Thompson.

Q: Very interesting, as you know it has always been a problem with Ambassadors who choose to take people outside of the normal Foreign Service staffing pattern and generally arrange to do so. This naturally causes some problems in the Department. Would you care to comment any further on your tour in Saigon? How were things looking then? Was there light at the end of the tunnel?

STONE: Well, when I arrived there, it was just after what was known as "mini-Tet." The Tet Offensive had occurred in late February of 1968, the mini-tet came in May. I arrived just after that. I had only been there about ten days having had no prior involvement with that area at all.

In fact every other person who was assigned to the country was required to take as a minimum a

three weeks orientation course before taking up their assignment. I was told that I didn't need to have that course, that they wanted me out there immediately and I could learn on the job. Well, within ten days of my arrival I was told I was in charge of the visit of the Secretary of Defense, the preparation of briefing papers and everything else, and it was very much a case of being thrown into the water and having to do your best to keep your head above it. Fortunately that visit came off well. One's existence in those days in Saigon with no families for distraction was pretty intense. We worked probably fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. There was just no break at all. The only break that I took was during the lunch hour, when I would go to Circle Sportif, which had a magnificent Olympic-sized swimming pool, and swim laps and work out my frustrations in the water. I was responsible for twenty-four junior Foreign Service officers, eighteen of whom were trained in the Vietnamese language, and these young fellows were going out in the countryside in jeeps with pistols on their hips to talk to the local headman and provincial officials, to do our best to keep a finger on the pulse of what was happening in Vietnam. We were really in competition with the wire services, because Washington did not want to be surprised by any story that came out of Vietnam. We just worked flat-out and filed a tremendous number of telegrams and reports to keep Washington fully abreast of the situation. There wasn't much light at the end of the tunnel, really.

Q: Was this during the period of Ambassador Lodge or Ellsworth Bunker?

STONE: Ellsworth Bunker was the Ambassador, and Sam Berger was the Deputy Ambassador. They had two Ambassadorial positions there at the time.

Q: This followed then the overthrow of Diem?

STONE: Oh yes! This was long after the overthrow of Diem. This was President Thieu's time, and to me the most satisfactory part of my assignment there was a result of trying to fix appointments with President Thieu and other top officials of the Vietnamese government. For this purpose, I was expected to deal with the Protocol Officer of the Palace. I soon found out that this man was totally ineffectual and I could never be sure which end was up.

By chance I met a distant relative of the President who worked in his inner office, and a fellow with whom I felt very much on the same wavelength. I arranged with the Signal Corps to have a direct telephone line installed between his office and mine, so we could do business over the telephone, which saved an immense amount of time. This man has remained a close friend and at the present time is a senior officer in one of our largest corporations, living outside Chicago and making a great success as a businessman.

Q: Was General Westmoreland in charge, or was it still General Taylor?

STONE: No, Westmoreland had just left and General Clayton Abrams was the new commander. He would regularly attend the embassy country team meetings. I had the pleasure of accompanying him on Christmas day of 1968. We flew to Tay Ninh which was very close to the Cambodian border because we had an indication that the Viet Cong might release three American prisoners. We wanted to arrange this release without any political implications, so I was asked to accompany him. We flew to Tay Ninh and we stayed there on the ground until

these three soldiers eventually were released and got back to our lines.

Q: With the changing Generals from say Westmoreland to Abrams, did you notice - or was there a marked difference in the relationships between the army and the embassy, or was it more or less smooth?

STONE: I wasn't there during the Westmoreland period so I can't speak to that situation. The relationships when I was there between the civilians and the military were excellent; very close working relationships between Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams. I chaired one of the committees which was involved in joint military - civilian operations. We had very close working relationships with the military, and by and large they went along very well.

Q: Very good, anything else that you would like to talk about in hindsight about your year in Vietnam? Was there anything that looking back on you wish that you had done differently, or wish that you would have seen the embassy handle differently?

STONE: I wish that I could have had a certain period of time to prepare for that assignment, I had none at all. I really felt like a bit of an ignoramus as far as that part of the world was concerned. I had read and studied almost nothing about it during my earlier career of even in college, so that it was all relatively new. I found it a very fascinating and interesting part of the world and I can well understand why a number of our officers have made it their area of specialization.

I quite enjoyed the Vietnamese as people. They are a dynamic people, hard working. At that time, I had very close relations with the U.S. military. A field force commander used to come and pick me up with his helicopter on the roof of the embassy and I joined him in making his rounds of various divisional and other unit headquarters, getting briefings on what was going on and this was a very stimulating experience.

Q: It's been said that many of our top ranking officers in the policy making positions had, like yourself, very little experience in Southeast Asia and particularly in Vietnam. That may be one of the reasons that perhaps our policies did not work out; that you were not alone in your lack of basic training and understanding of the area. Do you think that is a fair comment?

STONE: Well, I think there is some truth to that, but after all, the policy is set not by the embassy but by Washington. The mistake in Vietnam was partly that we allowed ourselves to get out in front of the South Vietnamese. We were really taking over and fighting the South Vietnamese's war for them, rather than supporting them from behind to the extent I think we should have. It was certainly a great tragedy and the thing that upsets me the most when I look back on it is the criticism of the U.S. military. Today you have films like Platoon which in my mind depict the seamiest side of the U.S. military in Vietnam and are not a true reflection of the caliber of the army that we fielded at that time.

I personally believe from what I saw that we had an excellent and well run army that was functioning in the field. Of course we did not turn loose the ability that we had to fight the enemy and, as you may have heard, the other night, Mr. Nixon was saying that the thing that he felt was

the greatest mistake during his Presidency was not bombing Hanoi and Haiphong which he thought would have brought the war to a much more rapid end.

Q: Do you think it's fair to say that the objectives were ever clearly delineated so that the military was really put in an impossible position?

STONE: Yes I would. After that I went back to India and that was the period which was to me, the most frustrating of my Foreign Service career as I mentioned earlier. When the word came that we were sending the aircraft carrier Enterprise task force into the Bay of Bengal, I really felt that all I had been working for in terms of improving relationships between the United States and India was being totally jeopardized almost overnight. I seriously considered resigning from the Foreign Service at that point. I discussed the matter with Ambassador Keating. I recalled a colleague who had preceded me at the Imperial Defense College in London, David Ness, who resigned from the Foreign Service because of a policy difference relation to Egypt when he was the Chargé d'affaires there. I remember that the day after he resigned, there was a front page story in the New York Times, and after that Mr. Ness was never heard from again! I finally concluded that I could be more effective by remaining in the service and doing my best to do what I felt was right, rather than submitting my resignation.

Q: That raises an interesting question that I was going to ask you about later, but we might as well touch on it now. What can an officer do when he does disagree with the governments' policy? In this case, what actions were you able to take - if any - to express your dissatisfaction with the policy that you were supposed to carry out?

STONE: Well, I made my feelings very clear in my messages to Washington, but I was overruled. At that point, once the decision is made, if you are a good Foreign Service Officer you simply carry out your instructions as best you can. If it becomes a matter of such conscience for you that you simply can't do it, then you have no choice but to resign. I think that many career officers have been in that position. While you may not like it, you have to do the very best you can to defend your government's interest as reflected by those in responsibility at the time.

Q: I thoroughly agree, but I think that today it must be very difficult for officers in controversial areas such as Central America and the Middle East to live with that problem?

STONE: My son was a member of a congressional staff group that was sent to El Salvador to observe the recent parliamentary elections. The main reaction he returned with was astonishment at the extent to which events in El Salvador are being run out of the U.S. Embassy. So sometimes, as we all know happened during the period that I was in Southeast Asia, our embassies do play a remarkably involved role in the events of other countries.

SAMUEL VICK SMITH
Deputy District Advisor
Bien Hoa (1968-1969)

Samuel Vick Smith was born in California in 1940 and graduated from New Mexico State University. He served in numerous posts including Nairobi, Vietnam, Madagascar, Tokyo and New Zealand. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: Was there much in the way of indoctrination as to why we were in Vietnam and what you were going to be doing in Vietnam?

SMITH: Well, I wouldn't call it indoctrination. We all took this original course of four or six weeks which was called "operations" where they told us what we would be doing, more or less. Then we had about an hour of that every week, too. They explained all the programs and they gave us history. They gave us some pretty good history of Vietnam over the last one hundred-fifty years, especially over the last ten to twenty years up to that period. As far as indoctrination of why we were there, there wasn't any. I think everybody had their own views. I think most of us were with the program. The brightest were the most skeptical.

Q: Well, were you running across, I mean by this time the opposition could pick up and organize and all, was this hitting your group at all?

SMITH: No, I don't think so. I think there were people in our group who were maybe sympathetic to the opposition, maybe, but not so much that they were going to quit or resign. There was one young man who had had one tour in Latin America and had decided this was the way to jump-start his career and he had volunteered. He had a family, two or three little kids, and the rest of us were single. He actually went to Vietnam and then realized this was a big mistake and he came back and had to resign and that was tragic. I kept in touch with him for a couple of years, but I don't know what happened to him. It was just too bad. I think if I'd been married and had kids I would have looked at it entirely differently, but I was single. I hadn't volunteered to go, they chose me to go and I was willing to go. It was at least going to be interesting and exciting probably.

Q: When you went to Vietnam, you were there from when to when?

SMITH: Well, I got there I think in late October of '68, it may have been early November. I can't remember which now. I was supposed to spend eighteen months, but as will become obvious later I left in June of '69. I was supposed to be there until what would be the spring of '70.

Q: Well, where did they send you?

SMITH: As you will know later, I married a Vietnamese lady who I met here and she has written out the places correctly spelled with the diacritical markings. They sent me down in the delta to a province, which we called Kien Hoa. Before it had been called Ben Tre, and after the communists won the war they renamed it Ben Tre again. The capital town of the province was Ben Tre and that was one of the towns that infamously was said "had to be destroyed to be saved" during the Tet Offensive in early '68. To get to this province by normal means you would take route four down to My Tho and instead of turning right and going deeper into the delta, you

would take a ferry across the My Tho River, which is the northern big branch of the Mekong. Then you'd be in Kien Hoa Province which was bounded by arms of the Mekong as it went down to the ocean, or the South China Sea. There were nine districts in this province. I think the population in the province was half a million people. So, each district was in the order of 50,000, and my district was Binh Dai.

Q: When you get a chance to correct this, you can fix up the spelling.

SMITH: Binh Dai was an interesting little district. I was sent there to be the deputy district senior advisor. The way the Vietnamese had their government organized was you had about forty provinces and each province had a province chief. Most of these were Vietnamese army colonels. Each province had from four to ten districts. They each had a district chief. Most of them were Vietnamese army majors. Our "pacification" program was known as "CORDS." Originally it was "Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support." The Vietnamese said we've got one revolution already, we don't need another. So, we changed it to "Civil Operations and Rural Development Support." This was an integrated program, which I guess was started in '67, and it had the U.S. Army, the other U.S. military, USAID, USIS and everybody working together within an integrated command structure. So, you could have military people supervising civilians and civilians supervising military people. It was all run by the deputy for CORDS up in Saigon who, when we got there, was William Colby.

Q: William Colby.

SMITH: Right. The country was divided up into four military regions or corps and the fourth corps was the delta, which is the rice basket of Vietnam. There I was down in this district, Binh Dai and there was a major who was the Vietnamese district chief. His advisor was a U.S. army major who was district senior advisor and he had two deputies, a captain for military matters and I was the deputy for administration. My counterpart was the district chief's administrative officer who was a young army lieutenant who didn't wear a uniform because he was doing a civilian job. He had a white shirt and slacks. I should say a little more about the advisory team. We were in a district of 50,000 Vietnamese. It was an island with a major river on one side and a minor river on the other side, the South China Sea at one end and a canal at the other end. Our district advisory team was the major, the captain, two or three sergeants and me. We were the only Americans there. There was no Vietnamese regular army force, and no American army force at all. The district chief had four "regional force" militia companies. Then he had about thirty "popular force" platoons. These regional forces, and popular forces were what he was supposed to use to counter the communist insurgency which controlled admittedly probably fifteen or twenty percent of his land area in the day time and a lot more at night.

Q: You came there oh about ten months after the Tet Offensive?

SMITH: That's right.

Q: How had the Tet Offensive been carried out in your area?

SMITH: I think it concentrated on the province town, the province capital of Ben Tre, and that's

why Ben Tre had to be “destroyed to be saved.” I guess they overran some other areas. I think there was one district town they overran, but they never completely overran Ben Tre and they didn’t do much at all in our district that I ever heard about. Again for those who aren’t conversant with all this history, there was something important that happened while I was in the training. I remember it very clearly. When we entered the training at the very beginning of ‘68 we were told there were about 300,000 communist soldiers in South Vietnam. About 200,000 were local guerrillas and about 100,000 were North Vietnamese Regulars. Several months later they were giving the briefing and they said there are about 300,000 communist soldiers in South Vietnam. About 200,000 are North Vietnamese Regulars and about 100,000 are guerrillas. I put up my hand and said, “That’s not what you said before.” The briefer said, “Well, it’s changed now.” During the Tet Offensive a great part of the communist guerrillas were wiped out and this is why people say that it was a tactical victory for the South Vietnamese and the Americans but a strategic defeat because the communists won the war here instead of there. Where I was it was never anything but guerrillas. It was a real guerrilla war. I’m sorry, I cut you off.

Q: No, no. Because you know I think it’s interesting to get a feel for the time. What were you doing?

SMITH: Well, I was supposedly trying to aid the district chief and his deputy for administration on “winning the hearts and minds.” Part of this was to go out to areas which were sort of contested and provide more goodies from the government. A big part of my job was to complete the hamlet evaluation system form every month. The famous HES Report where we rated every hamlet. A number of hamlets made up a village, a number of villages made up a district. We had about eighty hamlets and the only way you can really do this report halfway honestly was to go out and visit the hamlets. So, I did a lot of that. The hamlets were rated A, B, C, D and V, -V for VC, so V was an F. We conceded a number of hamlets to the Viet Cong and these were in what we called “free fire zones.” These were places where any American artillery or air force or navy plane could shell or bomb at will without anybody’s prior permission, because the people that lived there were supposed to be communist. Then the rest of the district as I said were the areas where you could usually travel safely in the daytime, but at night you might not want to try. I spent a lot of my time going out and visiting these hamlets to see what was going on. You did learn things. One of the things I remember: I can’t do it anymore, but the Vietnamese they taught us at FSI was good enough that I could find this old lady who had never spoken anything but Vietnamese in her life. I could ask her “at night do the Viet Cong ever come out of that tree line over there and come into the village?” She could understand me perfectly and then she’d answer and I couldn’t understand the answer. She’d say, “yes” and then give me a lot of details and I never could get the details. At least I knew that this was a place where on the hamlet evaluation system form, I would have to say we don’t control it at night.

Q: The hamlet evaluation program came under a lot of criticism because there was a lot of pressure particularly on our military commands to make it look good.

SMITH: Oh, yes. There was pressures of various kinds on us, but I never felt any. I think the most pressure I had was I wanted to be a success. I wanted our district to be a success. So, I just naturally I tried to make it look as good as I could while not lying to myself. I was still only twenty-eight and twenty-nine. I was a former physics major where things are black and white,

and I don't think I fudged very much. If I fudged, if I made a mistake it was an honest mistake.

Q: What were the Viet Cong, I mean was it mainly Viet Cong in your area or regular North Vietnamese?

SMITH: There weren't North Vietnamese, it was all guerrillas. I think there were village units and then there was an infamous 519th battalion. The 519th Battalion roamed around the whole province and they were the ones who were causing the most trouble. There were all these areas that they could stay in safely. Our district was one of the better districts, so there were other neighboring districts that were worse where they could have refuge. Our district chief would get an order at night from the province, a coded order over the radio, which would tell him to run an operation the next morning. The next morning he would gather up two of his four companies of regional forces and commandeer a couple of boats and we'd go up the Mekong. In this case it was the My Tho River and we'd go up the My Tho to some place and disembark and go into a village where we would find nothing. The worst that ever happened was we'd find that they'd abandoned the place or a couple of times there were booby traps. The communists, to my mind, clearly knew we were coming. Somebody was telling them we were coming whether it was a leak at the province or a leak in the district, but since the orders were sent out overnight, by the next morning, they'd had enough time to skedaddle. I frankly think the district chief probably didn't mind that at all.

Q: How about the problem of corruption?

SMITH: Before we get to that I ought to talk more about the war. Write corruption down so we don't forget it, but there were attacks near us. The government had something called the RD Cadre, the Rural Development Cadre. These were young men who were probably better educated than the soldiers and were supposed to be idealistic. They were in platoon-sized units and they were supposed to go out and bring security and development to the people. It was a way they could get out of being in the army. We had one of those little platoons in our area and they got attacked in the middle of the night and about eight of them were killed. They killed at least one Viet Cong with claymore mines, which I can describe if need be. They were pretty unhappy. This happened in the middle of the night. Then a couple of other nights we were mortared in our compound and one of the attacks was clearly aimed at us Americans. We were living in a long building and their sixty millimeter mortar was set up perpendicular to our building. Its rounds all fell short, just parallel to our building. What had happened, obviously, was that somebody had paced off the distance because they just went down the road from where we were and set up the mortar in the middle of the night in somebody's backyard. Either they paced it off wrong or the wind was wrong and the mortars fell about fifty yards short, parallel to our building. If they had hit our roof we would have all been killed because they would have exploded on the roof and then showered us with shrapnel. When things like that would happen we'd go and hide in the bunker for a while.

Q: Did you have any sort of quick response teams, military?

SMITH: That was all up to the Vietnamese. When the communists attacked this Rural Development cadre camp, RD cadre camp, the district chief and my boss, the major, and some

other people got together and went out to see what had happened. Of course everybody was afraid that they would get ambushed on the way because the common tactic of any good insurgency is to attack one place and then ambush the rapid response team. They weren't ambushed. That was about all that could be done. The district chief presumably could have always tried to organize something like this. In this compound where we lived there were two regional companies, the militia troops; there were also two 105mm howitzers from the Vietnamese army. The artillery were the only Regular Vietnamese Army in the whole district. They would sometimes, if there was an attack on a village, give fire support up to their range maximum which may have done some good.

Q: How about naval craft, river craft?

SMITH: We had a lot of contact with the U.S. navy and we always felt that if we ever got in trouble ourselves and had to ask for help, the only chance we would have had was some navy helicopters which were called the "Sea Wolves." I think it was considered a wing of attack helicopters. There were only two or four based anywhere near us. These were Army surplus helicopters. You could still see on the sides where they had painted "Army." They were armed with rockets and machine guns. They would visit us and we'd give them a Coke. The navy had small fiberglass speedboats which were called PBRs which had two .50 machine caliber guns in a kind of a turret on the front and a couple of machine guns in the back and a crew of four or five. They used to bring us fresh water. The Vietnamese had to live off water from a brackish well or rain water. The dry season being half a year long, you couldn't use rain water half the year. We would get jerry cans of fresh water from the Navy. The U.S. Navy as far as our little district was concerned, was the only U.S. military that could do much for us with these lightly armed speedboats and helicopters.

Q: What about from Saigon? You used to send out progress reporting officers who would spend time out and you know, ask around, were you, did these come through there at all?

SMITH: Never saw any?

Q: You were out of sight, out of mind?

SMITH: We weren't easy to get to. The only way to get to us was by helicopter or Air America HelioCourier or boat. You couldn't drive there because in the center part of the island, the road wasn't completely safe and at the other end of the island where the canal was, you couldn't get across. We were only accessible by air or sea.

Q: Was Can Tho ever the big city?

SMITH: Yes, Can Tho was the big city to the Vietnamese, but it was in a different province. Everything for us had to radiate out of Can Tho to give you an example of how things worked. The abnormal way we got to Saigon was, first of all, a boat or a helicopter or a light airplane took us to Ben Tre. Then another Air America airplane took us to Can Tho, which is farther away from Saigon, and then finally a bigger Air America airplane would take us to Saigon. Well, that could be a two or three day trip.

Q: Sure.

SMITH: The Vietnamese, either the communists or the non-communists, could probably get to Saigon in five hours by taking a boat up to My Tho and taking a bus.

Q: I was wondering if near that river was there a?

SMITH: Excuse me. My Tho is where the PBRs had their little base and then just up the river a big American army base called Dong Tam which was part of the U.S. ninth infantry division, was where the navy helicopters had their base.

Q: Yes. Somewhere around there, there was a famous monk who...

SMITH: Yes, the coconut monk.

Q: It was cult there around the monk. Was he ever...

SMITH: Was this the guy with the garish temple on the river?

Q: Yes.

SMITH: Yes, he was called the coconut monk. He was an engineer. If you took the ferry from My Tho across the rivers to get to our province you'd pass one little island out there. The end of the island looked like Disneyland with all these big steel things that this engineer had built, painted garish colors, red, yellow and blue. That was his establishment and that's all I know about him.

Q: Well, I went to visit one time. You know I wanted to see it.

SMITH: Did I describe it right?

Q: Yes, absolutely. All of a sudden here you are in the middle of a war zone or something like this you run across Disneyland west or east.

SMITH: But the boat, the ferry I was on would just pass it and we'd look. I probably took a bad picture of it.

Q: Did you run across Howard Gross while you were there?

SMITH: Don't think so.

Q: You mentioned talking about corruption. What about it, this was always a concern of ours, wasn't it?

SMITH: Yes, and I tried to be a corruption cop and didn't get very far. I would inventory the

supplies in the district warehouse and try to account for the roofing, aluminum roofing. Aluminum roofing was a big commodity. The commodities in the warehouse were cement and roofing. Roofing was easy to count. I'd count it and I'd count it again and it wouldn't come out right. Finally the poor old guy who was running the warehouse came to me with an interpreter and fessed up that he had been stealing the roofing. I was so sorry for him that I didn't do anything about it. It was penny ante compared to what was really going on, it was nothing.

Q: Well, I mean the real problem often would be I guess, at the district level?

SMITH: This was the district level.

Q: I mean higher up, what would be higher up?

SMITH: The province.

Q: The province level. I doubt in the Delta there was as much as, you know one thinks of Da Nang and that sort of place.

SMITH: Well, I think what we're edging up to is, if there's not much to steal you can't have much corruption. There wasn't that much down there. Looking back on it, I was wasting my time. It was nothing really. There wasn't that much coming down to us to be stolen. There was probably all sorts of other stuff going on. The district chief was probably getting kickbacks. There were probably soldiers who never showed up by giving a kickback, things like that, but how was I to know?

Q: What about that whole area was the sort of rice bowl thing. Was there good rice production?

SMITH: Yes. Since I was only there a short time; most of the time, the rice wasn't growing. I arrived after one harvest and left just as they were getting ready to plant.

Q: How did things play out there because you left in June of '69?

SMITH: How things played out was I was on one of these trips to visit the hamlets so I could fill out the HES form. I was in an International Harvester Scout with an American army master sergeant who had only been there a few weeks and our interpreter was a Vietnamese master sergeant. The main district road ran right down the middle of the district. It was up on a dike with rice paddies on both sides. This was in June of '69, the rains had just begun to start so that the rice paddies had become wet and dried out again. It was just at the beginning of the wet season. On the way out from Binh Dai we passed one of the MATS team; which was a small group of American army troops who were supposed to be advising a small group of Vietnamese militia troops. These MATS teams typically had about two officers and three enlisted men. The senior guy would be no more than a captain and often a first lieutenant. We stopped by this MATS team to get a spare battery for our radio because we thought the battery in our radio was going bad. The battery was about the size of a carton of cigarettes, a big, wax covered box. It really was a battery because there were lots of little cells inside and at the end were a couple of wires you plugged into the radio. So, we got to where we were going and we spent the night in

this mud fort with the popular forces. It was clear that our battery was going dead. I switched the batteries and then it became clear that the new replacement battery was already dead. It didn't work. The next morning, rather than continue with the trip we drove back to get another battery because it wasn't safe being out there without any communication with anybody. We were just two Americans, and one Vietnamese. On the way back we happened to pass a unit of American army engineers who were working on the road. We got their call sign and asked if they had a battery, which they didn't. We kept going and we got to a village where, by this time, it was probably nine-o'clock in the morning. I asked the village chief in my Vietnamese if the road ahead was secure. In Vietnamese he said "yes." Then my Vietnamese interpreter asked the same thing so there wouldn't be any misunderstanding because it was his neck, too if it was not secure. So, we drove off down the road. There were places in this road on top of the dyke where years earlier the VC had destroyed the road so that the tide would go back and forth between the paddies and so there was a large dip. At the bottom of this dip it was muddy from the rains that had just started, but not in earnest. The mud had dried out into these big cakes about the size of a pie plate, sort of a hexagonal shape. We gingerly went down into this dip and kawahami; the left tire hit an anti-tank mine (we presume because that's where they'd been laying them.) These anti-tank mines were about six inches in diameter, two or three inches deep and they are made to blow the tread off a tank. These were things we'd made and given to the French and the VC had gotten them. It takes an International Harvester Scout and just rolls it over a time and three-quarters. I remember uttering the immortal, "What happened, did we hit a mine?" We're upside down; my glasses are broken or gone, and I was in and out of consciousness. The American army sergeant wasn't badly hurt and pulled me out of the overturned Scout. I had sandbagged the Scout as best I could for mines.

Q: The Scout is like a large...

SMITH: Like a Bronco or something.

Q: So it's sort of like a large jeep.

SMITH: Yes, except that the jeeps were made so you could put sandbags up under the pedals and the Scout was made so you couldn't. I won't go into the geometry of it, but there was no easy way to completely sandbag the driver's position. It was my tire that hit the mine. The American Army sergeant dragged me out. We were all three scared. We were laying against another paddy dyke waiting for what comes next. We were trying to use our broken radio and I was in and out of consciousness. The two things I remember the Vietnamese interpreter saying to me was, as he saw this blood from my face and down my chest. "Ong, Smith, you very bad." I was bleeding a lot, but not too much. The main injury was my left ankle, which was all smashed. I had shrapnel up and down my left side from my knee to my arm to my face. The other thing he said confirmed what we'd always thought - that he wasn't Vietnamese. He was really Chinese. He said, "Those damned Vietnamese, they said this road was safe." He had been in the back seat and so he was the least hurt and I don't think the American army sergeant was more than scratched. Nobody had seat belts. Fortunately the weak radio could reach that engineering group and we had their call sign. They called a medevac and a medevac came in and picked us up and took us to Dong Tam and that's the last I saw of the other two.

I should say some other things just to give the color of it. I think the medical corpsman in the back of the helicopter was fascinated to find this young civilian American in the middle of nowhere blown up, more fascinated when he found pistols on me. I had a .38 pistol in my pocket and a .38 pistol under my armpit. I gave that to the corpsman. I was in and out of consciousness. At one point the corpsman said, "Sit up, the pilot wants to take your picture." I sat up and the pilot took my picture. Probably the first American civilian he'd ever picked up and I gave him a sign. Frankly I don't know which one got the pistol. Then we get to Dong Tam, this big U.S. army base, part of the ninth infantry division. They had taken this huge area, it was probably a square mile and just denuded it of everything and built a fort. The hospital, which was called the Third Surg, was huge timbers with sandbags and dirt to protect it from mortars and rockets. Inside was an inflated hospital, which was pumped up with air-conditioned air, and inside everything else was like any normal army hospital. They did the surgery on me. That was in the morning. Probably that afternoon a young army doctor came in and said, "Well, your left ankle is badly broken and the rest of the stuff we fixed up and you're really lucky because, do you know what the carotid artery is?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, that is the big artery that carries all the blood to your brain. It's got a sheath around it, the carotid sheath, and the shrapnel cut the sheath, but it didn't cut your artery, so that's why you didn't bleed to death out there in a few seconds." He said, "We picked little gears and little things out of your cheek." I said, "Could I have those?" He said, "No, we threw them away." These little gears were either little gears from the speedometer or little gears from the mine itself and I wish I had those, but I don't. Within twenty-four hours I was on a helicopter up to Vung Tau, a more established and safer hospital, but older and not as good. That's a story I won't bore everybody with, but I was laying flat in this big army CH47 helicopter.

Q: The Chinook?

SMITH: Yes, it flew me up there, me and a bunch of other people, strapped down in stretchers.

Q: They shake a lot, too, don't they?

SMITH: Oh, yes, they make awful noises. Especially when they stop it when they're starting and the crew chief runs out the door with a fire extinguisher. That's scary. Anyway, we got there and then I spent about eleven days in this hospital in Vung Tau where, since the water was minerally rich, all the bed sheets were a light tan color. We had a ward in a Quonset hut of about sixty people and there were about two sets of crutches, which was always a problem. Whenever they would move you from one place to another, they had to lift your blanket to make sure you weren't stealing crutches because there were never enough crutches. Another thing I learned there was that, in our district, whenever a helicopter came in to pick up wounded, if we gave them a wounded person on a stretcher, we had to get a stretcher back from them or we wouldn't have a stretcher. So, anyway, I spent a long time in Vung Tau. The surgeon of the Third Surg had operated on my ankle and then they operated on me twice more there in Vung Tau. They never could get it set right because you know; the ankle is just a bunch of bones. It was shattered so badly there was nothing they could tie together very well. So, it's still not right, I can walk okay, but it's still not right. If you look on an x-ray, you can see how bad it is. I stayed there a long time, I think, because the embassy in Saigon had to fill out the papers so that the Air Force would evacuate me. Without the papers and the agreement to pay I was stuck. So, finally they all

got their act together. Then another trip to Tan Son Nhut where we spent the night and then a C-118, which is an old DC6, over to Clark Field in the Philippines because no matter what happened to you, the State Department evacuated everybody to Clark Field. I got to Clark Field and the Air Force doctor said, "Well, what are you doing here? You're leg is badly broken, we can't do anything more for you. You might as well go home." Well, then of course the State Department had to get into the act again and so forth after every surgery. Every time we took a trip by air they would go to all this trouble to put a cast on and then they took a little saw and sawed the cast off so that if you went down in the water you wouldn't sink. So, I spent about a week at Clark Field and finally again the State Department got its act together. Incidentally the day I was blown up was D-Day, the 6th of June, 1969. Finally we left Clark Field and we were supposed to go to Yokota Air Force Base outside Tokyo, but a typhoon intervened and we went to Guam. Then we went to Yokota and finally after all that, the next trip was the trip that finally got somewhere. We left Yokota and refueled in Anchorage, refueled in St. Louis and ended up just before the 4th of July weekend at Andrews Air Force Base. I had been told that I was going to Bethesda Hospital. I was put into a civilian ambulance at Andrews Air Force Base and I said, "Am I going to Bethesda?" The driver said, "No, you're going to George Washington University Hospital. That's what the State Department told me to do with you." I saw this little box of records. You always have to have your medical records. There was this little box, six by six inch box, with all my medical records in it. Off we go down the Suitland Parkway to GW on a hot July day and I arrived there and the first time the first doctor showed up, the question was, "Where are your records?" So, somewhere after the ambulance arrived at GW and before the doctors could get to me, my records were lost. Part of the trouble of course is being named Smith. This happens. So, I had to tell the doctors what had happened. I had to tell them the ankle was broken and they'd tried to set it three or four times. This was a mine explosion and all this other stuff is from shrapnel. I didn't mention that at one point in Vung Tau every time I ate, saliva would come outside my left cheek from this scar here and that was worrisome until finally the saliva glands I guess atrophied. I probably have five saliva glands now, instead of six. I was in GW Hospital for about another week and finally they operated for perhaps the fifth time and that time the surgeon that had been assigned by the State Department didn't give me any anesthetic. He just gave me a sedative. I didn't go to sleep. He had one nurse pushing down on my knee and another one pulling on my leg. He would try to set it by sound and when I made too much noise, he would stop. I said, "Why didn't you give me a anesthetic?" He said, "Well, you've had General Anesthetics five times in the last two or three weeks and sometimes people don't wake up." So, from the sixth of June until about the first of July, it took that long to finally get back here to Washington, DC.

Q: Well, then this is a good place to stop, but I'd like to put at the end so we know where to pick it up, what happened to you?

SMITH: Well, let me, I'll say a little bit.

Q: Yes, I was wondering about how the State Department, you know, sends out these brave heroes, but also, how do they receive them?

SMITH: Well, the first thing that happened was, I got a letter from Marshall Green, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, in which he started, "Dear Vick." Well, that's what my father

was called. I've never been "Vick"; I've always been "Sam." So, I told the poor staff assistant who brought the letter, "Take it back. I don't want it; it's not addressed to me." Then people from the Vietnam Training Center came over and they were standing over me looking down at the bed. They said, "Well, Sam, we've got good news. You've just been promoted to FSO-6 and we're going to send you to Nairobi via Swahili training." So, finally what I wanted came true. I said, "Thank you, thank you." I looked up at them and shook their hands. When next we talk, we can talk about that and we can talk about what I did in-between which mainly was once I got out of the hospital, but on crutches, I went to the Vietnam Training Center to help on the staff. Of course, that was really good for morale for the new troops to see me hobbling around on crutches. By that time the method they were using to recruit people to go had gotten pretty dishonest, too, whereas in our case, they were honest with us.

Q: Well, why don't we talk about what you were seeing, I'll put this at the end so we'll know where to pick it up. We're into the late summer of '69 I guess.

SMITH: That's right, or mid-summer.

Q: You're recovering from your wounds and you're at the Vietnam Training Center and you were mentioning the recruitment was not as honest as it had previously been.

SMITH: I had this cast on. All you could see was my toes and then the cast came all the way up to my trunk. All the way, a full leg cast with a pin going through the heel to try to keep it pulled out. The pin went through one side and out the other and it had two knobs on it so, the steel pin wouldn't catch on things.

LLOYD JONNES
Counselor for Economic Affairs/Associate Director, USAID
Saigon (1968-1969)

Lloyd Jonnes was born in Ohio in 1924. He graduated from Antioch College in 1948 and served overseas in the US Army from 1943 to 1945. Working for the ECA and USAID programs he served in overseas posts including Switzerland, Austria, the United Kingdom, Libya, Turkey, Vietnam, and Indonesia. He was interviewed August 19, 1986 by W. Haven North.

JONNES: In '68 I was assigned to Saigon for a year as the economic counselor at the embassy and as the program officer/planner for the AID mission. That was quite a different world. I arrived in Vietnam about the first of August, 1968, to take on the dual position and found myself almost immediately in the middle of the fourth wave of the TET offensive, the first one having been the very end of January that year. Two more followed, and yet a fourth, each weaker than the preceding one. Nevertheless it gave me once again a taste of war. As I mentioned, I had been an infantryman in World War II and it was in a perverse sense going home, but not a home I particularly liked.

The responsibilities that I had in Vietnam were two-fold: one, to seek to ensure that the South Vietnamese government maintained reasonable economic policies that above all restrained inflation, for hyperinflation could have undone all of the efforts to sustain the South Vietnamese nation; two, to help direct whatever the United States could do to speed the processes of economic development in the middle of wartime. The Vietnamese economy was of course a typical dual economy, so typical of the less developed world, that most of the output was agriculture, and there was a very, very thin industrial/processing/handicraft/trade sector.

Let me back up. I would underline that the principal concern of my office was to ensure that the price of rice remained relatively constant. And this necessitated that one had available emergency supplies of rice, but it also entailed constant surveillance of what was going on in rice production in the country, because one did not want to completely destroy the local agriculture economy by throwing large quantities of imported rice on the market. On the other hand, if the progress of the war was such that it physically threatened domestic rice production, one had to be in a position to provide food supplies on a large scale almost immediately.

So much of the year I was in Vietnam was spent moving around particularly in the Mekong delta, constantly checking on what was going on in the rice market, what was going on in the production side of rice. A mundane economic problem and yet at times a very exciting process, because one was working really in the middle of a war. Where we were out beyond the sound of artillery, one could regularly hear the B-52's working off in the distance, a formidable sound. And at night on the outskirts of Saigon the war was present. One could go on the roof of our building and see the gun ships operating and see the flares go up and hear the sounds of shooting. Such a setting, if I may understate a bit, tends to prejudice the process of development, if only because physical security is a necessary condition. I also spent a great deal of time in talking with reporters and visitors.

Q: Further on the rice, what were the factors and how did production....?

JONNES: In the year I was there I was very fortunate that domestic rice production was doing very well in spite of all four TET offensives. Rice was moving into the market, and one may assume the price was such that the farmers were willing to move to sell their rice. But this was a constantly shifting equation, and one simply had to be aware of what was going on.

Q: Were you providing assistance to the rice growers?

JONNES: Yes we were providing all sorts of assistance. Above all we were trying to provide security through the military, and trying to make available the traditional inputs, trying to ensure that credit was available to the villagers. We were also launching the introduction of some new varieties of rice, but this was a very tricky matter because of the traditional pattern of consumer tastes; the city people were unwilling to use the new rice because it didn't have quite the right consistency.

One of the key questions in this equation of inflation was that of the wage level that the U.S. forces paid to its Vietnamese employees. This became curiously enough one of the great policy issues that we macroeconomic workers had to cope with because the U.S. DOD was not

particularly concerned with price levels as such. Their concern was to make sure that they had employees who were willing to do the many jobs that needed doing for them, and what they had to pay was really irrelevant to them. For the South Vietnamese economy, the level of these salary levels was a critical determinant of what was going to happen to the GOVN's budget. It became almost impossible to persuade the Department of Defense of the unhappy aspects of their wage policy, but the time that was spent arguing with them in Saigon and back in Washington was incredible in retrospect. I would say that we fought a successful delaying action time and time again, but ultimately the Department of Defense was not to be deterred.

Q: Was there inflation?

JONNES: The year I was there, for practical purposes, no. The price increases for consumers may have been within five percent. But because rice problems were being kept in hand, and because we kept the Department of Defense at bay, as it were, we were successful in the short run; in the longer run we were much less successful I think. In mid-winter of '68-'69 I had a long chat with the prime minister who was persuaded that the problem of inflation was really the American fault, that the patterns of consumption that the Americans showed to the Vietnamese were a stimulus to ever-growing consumption by the Vietnamese. He felt that the psychology of this was the critical question, that one need not worry so much about what was being paid to the Vietnamese by the U.S. or what might happen to the Vietnamese budget. So in a sense I got little support.

Q: Was he right?

JONNES: I'm sure there was a psychological impact of the pattern of consumption by the Americans. How much this effected the price level is almost anyone's guess.

Q: What was the problem, what was the issue then?

JONNES: We were just chatting about the psychology of inflation, how he felt it was inevitable simply because of our presence. But then war by its very nature is inflationary. He was suggesting a much more passive position on dealing with the problem. The government itself had of course a swollen bureaucracy because of the war, and their wage policy was a major determinant of price increases. If they felt that their budget deficit was going to be underwritten by the United States, there was no reason for them to exert any discipline.

Q: So you had a debate with the government also?

JONNES: We had a debate with the government, but this was much less serious because you never knew to what extent you were being successful in your communicating. So if they tended to feel the issue was irrelevant because of the simple fact of our presence, their interest in any action would be equally irrelevant.

The other half of my duties were those to which I devoted much less time, i.e.: what could and should the United States do to encourage, to stimulate, to help with the process of longer term economic development in Vietnam.

We had a very large AID mission in the country, about 2,500 people, American officers who were focusing on what was happening at the village level. And we had our people in each of the four regions. AID representatives in each of the four regions responsible for conducting those programs of education, village health and general community development that would support the further thrust of development. The program office staff concerned with these programs ranged at about 225 people. Essentially Jim Roush, who was my deputy for the programming side, looked after these.

Q: What all were you doing?

JONNES: They were concerned with transportation systems, they were concerned with various agricultural programs I mentioned, they were concerned with public health, they were concerned at the national level with educational programs, of public administration. All of the more typical development undertakings that AID had sponsored over the years. We did a great deal of teacher education in Vietnam as I recall. Perhaps this sort of detail I can get as we come back through it.

Q: Do you think they were effective?

JONNES: Everything we did probably had its effectiveness severely reduced by the simple fact of war. There was hardly an area in Vietnam that was not being touched one way or another by direct war or by the indirect effects of the war. The Viet Cong was almost ubiquitous. The problems of village security were in a word overwhelming. And how one can encourage or work with the people in the villages under these circumstances was a constant problem.

Q: Do you have any sense of lasting effects? Obviously you were only there a year.

JONNES: This was a short term assignment for me. In the longer run we obviously didn't succeed because of factors having precious little to do with what we were up to. My own feeling was one of disaffection with the process because my judgment had been that the United States had erred in its policies toward Indochina in the mid-1950s at the time when the Geneva Accord was concluded. That was the moment to have agreed to a political solution, but the United States saw fit not to sign the accord and not to support the process of electoral resolution of the political problems of Indochina. My appreciation of French colonialism was never very high, and the prices we have paid in truckling to French colonialists in the name of anti-Communist were a bit high.

Q: What was your view about the policies that were implemented at the time you were there, the general policy toward Vietnam?

JONNES: Well, I thought probably it was doomed to failure. Having long since concluded that we had gone in the wrong direction, I simply gritted my teeth and focused on the suboptimal problem of short term economic evolution of the country. Another possible way out would have been, after the events in 1963 and the virtual revolving door leadership of Vietnam following the killing of the Nhus, to negotiate then. And who knows what might have happened had Kennedy survived. He survived the assassination of Diem in Vietnam by only two weeks I guess. It was a

very unhappy time.

In retrospect, one of the more powerful shocks of my life was the discovery of the grave misgivings that McNamara had about our policies there that led him out of DOD and the similar problems that led to Clark Clifford's disaffection. If the Secretaries of Defense are opposed to our policies, what are the civil servants, not to mention the US citizenry, to think of these policies.. There I was worrying about precisely the same things as they were. Domestic political events in 1968-9 were extraordinary. President Johnson became a political prisoner; he could go nowhere in the country of which he was president..

Q: Did you have any chance to voice your concerns while you were there?

JONNES: I voiced my concerns to the head of the agency very loudly. Yes.

Q: The head of the agency.

JONNES: Mr. Bill Gaud.

Q: What was your line of comment?

JONNES: Basically what I've been saying to you. I found that paradoxical that I should be in this position I was in, feeling about the general venture as I did. In fact I had long since expressed views to the head of the Vietnam bureau, Grant. I had not expected to be in Vietnam longer than a week or two. And I was lied to systematically.

Q: What was the reaction of Mr. Gaud?

JONNES: Very understanding. And I was being transferred out. I had planned to go elsewhere at that time, i.e. to one of the international agencies. It was a very unhappy time of my life.

Q: Was there a primary security issue that you concluded while you were there?

JONNES: I'm not sure I know what you mean. Personal security never bothered me particularly. While I had been in infantry war in 1944-45 and did not like it at all, that was not a problem. Perhaps, we could have won the war, but that to me was a secondary issue. The real issue was what we were doing to the United States, and how we misunderstood what was going on in Vietnam.

If one goes back in history to Ho Chi Minh in France in 1919-1920, here is this image of a poor struggling Vietnamese Indo-Chinese who presents himself at every political gathering in the country trying to make the French understand that the Indo-Chinese want their independence. The only political group in all of France that gave ear to any of this were the communists. In 1920 in Tours at the annual meeting of the communist party, here is Ho Chi Minh receiving support. The relevance of Marxism to Indochina is totally zero, perhaps a negative quantity. But politically, this is where he got his support and was led right down the path. The United States could have supported the independence of Indochina except for our need of the French in dealing

with communism. To this, one might add the view that our support of the South also would convince the Russians of our steadfastness in opposing Communism. Our Vietnam involvement ultimately, in my judgment, was part of the cost of the cold war if you will.

Q: And our misjudgment as to whether there was an honest national government as opposed to communism.

JONNES: Yes, exactly.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Vietnamese people in your travels around? What was your impression?

JONNES: I had a lot of contact but certainly not with villagers.

Q: Did you talk to villagers about this?

JONNES: It was very difficult to talk to villagers.

There were all sorts of policy problems. One of the more curious was the position of the South Koreans on Vietnam. They had been encouraged to support our position in Vietnam and one of the devices for insuring this was in effect a broad assurance that we would do everything we could to help ease the economic impact of their being there. This included opening up the PX's to their people. Also, there was a South Korean group that was interested in getting the scrap metal out of the actual war zones. It was their view that they had a first priority on this and that they should be assisted in getting it out no matter what the cost in terms of dealing with the war conditions. It was almost impossible to deal with this; they were so clamorous in reiterating their demands for access to scrap metal.

**WILLIAM VEALE
Captain, U.S. Army
Vietnam (1968-1969)**

Mr. Veale was born in Washington, D.C. into a US military family and was raised primarily at Army posts in the US and abroad. Entering the military after graduating from Georgetown University, he served with the US Army until joining the Foreign Service in 1971. Throughout his career Mr. Veale dealt primarily with Political/Military and Disarmament affairs, serving both in the Department of State and the Department of Defense. Among his assignments, Mr. Veale was posted to Strasbourg, Berlin and Rangoon. He also taught in the Political Science department at the US Air Force Academy. Mr. Veale was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in 2000.

Q: When you got back from Vietnam and on to the campus at Georgetown, did you find any

strong feeling against you personally because of your service there?

VEALE: I found that there was a strong feeling generally against individuals who had served in Vietnam and I had had a particularly demanding assignment in Vietnam and I was fairly closed mouth. I didn't like the attitude of the students. I didn't like the attitude of the American press. I thought most Americans were under-informed about the real situation in Vietnam. So, I was pretty disgusted.

Q: Could you tell us in a few words what your demanding assignment in Vietnam was?

VEALE: I was a case officer running agents into Cambodia. This was fairly sensitive stuff and I was undercover and working fairly closely with individual Vietnamese who were caught between a rock and a hard place, between their lousy government and a worse enemy. I thought this was a tragedy. I later heard a reporter talk about the situation and I am amazed to hear the same kind of things coming from her that I was experiencing.

ANDREW F. ANTIPPAS
Political Officer
Saigon (1968-1970)

Andrew F. Antippas was born in Massachusetts in 1931. He earned his Bachelor's from Tuft's University and entered the Foreign Service in 1960. His career has included posts in Africa, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Korea, Canada, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 19, 1994.

ANTIPPAS: I think that I volunteered in March, 1967. My tour in Kobe wasn't up until October, 1967. I kind of hoped that I would go right away. The way it would work, if my wife stayed in the United States, the tour was 18 months. If she was "safe-havened" in a post near Vietnam, the tour was two years. My idea was that she would stay in the U. S. for 18 months, I would be promoted, and we would go on to greater glory. She didn't see it that way. She said, "I'm not about to stay home." So she decided to go to Bangkok for safe-haven. Of course, by that time she was also pregnant.

I didn't get to go to Vietnam right away. In fact, I didn't get there for something like eleven months, which was a very difficult time. I got to Saigon just after the Tet offensive [of late January, 1968]. The whole scheme of things had changed by February, 1968. In fact, my arrival was held up by the Tet offensive. When did you go to Vietnam?

Q: I went there just a year later, in February, 1969.

ANTIPPAS: We were in Saigon together, in the Embassy. Of course, by the time I had volunteered to go to Vietnam, I couldn't take it back. It would really have hurt you, professionally, to have declined to go. At that time the Department was ordering people to go.

Whole junior officer classes were being ordered to go, over their objections.

I was assigned to the Political Section. I was supposed to replace an officer in the Internal Unit of the Political Section. Then, when I got there, it was decided that I would work in the External Unit. We had a 25-man Political Section. These were Foreign Service Officers, not including any "spooks." They were all "straight leg" Foreign Service Officers. We had four or five guys that covered the provinces, three guys in Political-Military Affairs, three in External Affairs, five in Internal Affairs. We had one guy to cover the Upper House of the National Assembly, another guy to cover the Lower House, we had two guys covering the labor situation. One guy would cover the Buddhists. We were very specialized.

When I got there, I went to the External Unit. It was decided that my area of concern in the political section in Saigon would be Cambodia, the French Community, and what we called the "More Flags" project. The latter was President Lyndon Johnson's effort to get more foreign countries to support the South Vietnamese Government. A lot of work already had been done on this. I was a sort of "guardian" of the files but periodically I would have to go out and visit the Philippine contingent [PHILCAG], the Thai division, the Iranian hospital down in the [Mekong] Delta -- and things like that.

In fact, I spent most of my time working on Cambodia. The "French Community" really meant the rubber plantations. Many of the French left in Vietnam worked for the rubber plantations. The rubber plantations were mostly located in Zones "C" and "D" [areas North of Saigon where communist armed activity was very active], as well as near the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, where they were being used as sanctuaries by the Viet Cong. There was a sort of synergy between the functions.

My job required me to be chairman of the Mission Cambodia Committee. We were not represented in Cambodia at that time. Prince Sihanouk broke diplomatic relations with us, I guess, in about 1965, over border incidents with South Vietnam. We didn't reestablish relations until 1969. Between 1965 and 1969 the Australians were our "protecting power" in Phnom Penh [capital of Cambodia]. It's interesting to recall that W. Randolph Kidder who was nominated to be Ambassador to Cambodia in 1965, had been the Senior Inspector who inspected Douala in 1964. He was the man who suggested that I be left in charge of the Consulate in Douala for several months and be given a chance to "show my stuff." After his assignment as an inspector and his nomination as Ambassador to Cambodia, he went to Cambodia, but Sihanouk never accepted his credentials. We closed the Embassy down after that.

During the time I served in Saigon the Johnson administration was trying very hard to convince Sihanouk to do something about the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong use of his territory. In 1968 we recorded over 200 border "incidents," involving firing from Cambodia into Vietnam or attacks by the North Vietnamese which resulted in the loss of American lives on the border.

Then there was the famous "understanding" of some of the missions sent by the administration to Cambodia to try to talk Sihanouk into being more cooperative. One of these missions was led by Eugene Black, who was then President of the World Bank. He was accompanied by Philip Habib. During your time and mine in Vietnam Phil Habib had been Political Counselor in

Saigon. He was one of the "legends" of the Foreign Service. Wasn't he your Ambassador in Seoul?

Q: No. My Ambassador was Dick Sneider.

ANTIPPAS: Anyway, Phil Habib was the Foreign Service Officer who accompanied Eugene Black to try to talk Sihanouk into being more cooperative. We wanted to "beef up" the International Control Commission in Cambodia so that it could be more effective, by offering them better communications equipment and maybe even helicopters. For the benefit of people who don't know about the International Control Commission [ICC], it was created as a result of the Geneva Accords of 1954. The Commission had four branch offices: one in North Vietnam, one in South Vietnam, one in Laos, and one in Cambodia. They were each basically independent of each other. The function of the Commissions was to make sure that the provisions of the 1954 [Geneva] Accords were met. Most of the Commissions became virtually moribund very quickly. The only one that seemed to function at all was the one in Cambodia, because it suited Sihanouk's purpose to have an international presence to try to protect Cambodia's territory.

The members of the Commission were the Poles, the Canadians, and the Indians. India provided the Chairmen of the International Control Commissions. The Indian who was Chairman in Cambodia at that time was V. V. Paranjpe, whom we all thought was pro-communist. He actually went on to be Indian Ambassador to China. He was a China "expert."

There was a constant battle. Sihanouk would take members of the ICC up to these border sites and make a big "PR" thing, alleging that this was where the Americans bombed Cambodia. Dead bodies would have lain out there for three or four days until he could get the ICC to go up there. You want to talk about a sight! The poor ICC representatives -- they were all diplomats -- were just trying to do their jobs. They would look at these fly-ridden bodies. We had, of course, good relations with the Canadians. The Canadians never really acted as our "agents," per se, because they were much more independent than that. But they were basically our friends.

One of my jobs was, from time to time, to brief the Canadian ICC representative, At that time, a Canadian diplomat named Dick Gorham, who would come over from Phnom Penh. I would take him to J-2 of MACV [the Intelligence Branch of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] to get briefings about where the North Vietnamese were in the border areas. If he could get down there, he might find them. I remember telling him one time that in the "Parrot's Beak" [West-Northwest of Saigon, where a salient of Cambodian territory jutted into South Vietnam], "If you guys would go down here and go one kilometer further, you'll find the Command Post of the First North Vietnamese Army Division."

I remember arranging for a firepower demonstration to be put on at a range in Long Binh Province. We actually had the military fire various kinds of weapons and then we took Dick Gorham out and showed him what the hole looked like [at the impact points]. What the Cambodians would do was to go out, dig holes, put pieces of rusty shrapnel in it, and say, "The Americans did that." We wanted to show the Canadians that, "If we shoot something, this is what it's going to look like." So the Canadian ICC representative became much more active.

The other representatives on the ICC, the Poles and Indians, knew about this. They assumed that the Canadian ICC representative was feeding us a great deal of information. Dick Gorham went on to be an Under Secretary of External Affairs in the Canadian Government in Ottawa. He hated the Indians. He'd been assigned to India at one time and disliked the Indians. He couldn't stand Paranjpe, the Indian ICC representative.

I remember that when we reopened our Embassy in Phnom Penh in 1969, my wife Judy and I went over to visit Phnom Penh and Angkor Wat [Buddhist temple complex Northwest of Phnom Penh]. We went to a party at the apartment of the Canadian Military Attaché. Dick Gorham was there -- the whole, small Western community was there. Dick introduced me to Paranjpe while we were standing on the balcony of this apartment block overlooking the Mekong River. My wife was there. Dick said, "I want you to meet Mr. Andrew Antippas. He's an American Embassy Political Officer in Saigon. He follows Cambodia, and this is his Canadian wife." I saw Paranjpe's eyes widen, and suddenly, everything fell into place for him. I thought that he was going to do a "back flip" off the balcony when Dick said that. Paranjpe was probably thinking, "The son of a bitch. He's been doing that all of this time. He's been feeding intelligence [to the Americans]." Because the Indians saw their job as covering up what the Viet Cong were doing in Cambodia. Gorham's job was to try and get this information out, try to "expose" it, try to do his job.

Anyway, Cambodia was an interesting subject to follow. I wasn't, as I have mentioned, particularly a believer in why we were in Vietnam, since my original feeling about Vietnam had been the one I gave to Charley Whitehouse in 1965. Since I had been in Korea and knew very well what the French had experienced in Indochina -- I had grown up during the Indochina War, after all -- I doubted the wisdom of what we were doing in Vietnam. But the fact of the matter was that we were engaged, our armed forces were engaged, and we were taking a beating through the communist use of neutral territory -- in Laos and Cambodia.

I really became kind of a believer in doing what we could, not so much to get Cambodia into the war. Nobody believed that the Cambodians could do anything to influence the war. One of the things that I knew was the condition of the Cambodian Army. It was pathetic. It was a 30,000 man force, organized into 50 battalions scattered all over the country, mostly in "Beaugeste" type mud forts [from the novel by the British author, P. C. Wren]. Those forts were simply there to demonstrate Cambodian sovereignty, not to be able to defend anything. They couldn't have. The North Vietnamese would pull up artillery units, next to the Cambodian forts, and fire into Vietnam at our Special Forces camps. The U. S. Air Force would come over and attempt to plaster the North Vietnamese, but they would frequently hit and kill Cambodians.

One of the things that Eugene Black and Phil Habib had gotten out of Sihanouk was a commitment to receive intelligence information on the presence of Vietnamese Communists on his territory. He indicated that he would accept such information. One of the jobs I had, working with American Intelligence, was to prepare what we called "packages" of information about the location of these base camps. There were about half a dozen or a dozen, major communist base camps just inside the Cambodian border, which we knew about, mostly through signal intercepts and POW interrogations. We knew which units were in there and what they were doing. Now and again we would have an American prisoner who would escape and tell us what was in there.

There's an interesting aside that I must tell you about, just to show what the atmospherics were in Vietnam during that period. I would prepare these "dossiers" and give them to the Australian Embassy in Saigon, which would send them over to the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh, which, in turn, would give them to the Cambodian military. Sihanouk never acknowledged the receipt of any of these "packages" of intelligence. We would know, again from signal intercepts, that the Cambodians would send out a unit looking for these Vietnamese Communist units. One time one of these Cambodian units got lost, up in the Northeast "Tri-Border" [Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos] area, trying to find one of these locations. It was really pathetic. But we knew that the Cambodians were beginning to realize how much of their territory was being taken over by the Vietnamese Communists. I think that what really "blew" their fuse on this matter was that the Viet Cong started moving their families into these base areas and farming the land. Then they started issuing tax receipts to the Viet Cong families for the rice fields that they were farming and preventing Cambodian District Officers from going into those areas. They would literally seal off whole zones of these base areas.

Well, anybody who knows the Cambodians will tell you that they really get upset about Vietnamese encroachments on their land. All of the Mekong Delta, all of the territory South of Saigon had been part of Cambodia, up until the 19th century. It was only at the beginning of the 19th century that the Vietnamese, moving slowly southward, as they have done over the past five centuries or so, took over. The Cambodians called this area "Kampuchea Krom," which means "Southern Cambodia." The ethnic Cambodians living in the Mekong Delta, many of whom we recruited for our Special Forces, were called, "Khmer Krom," which meant "Southern Cambodians." When they worked for the U. S. Special Forces, they were called "KK," or "Khmer Krom."

You can be sure that when the Cambodians finally realized that the Viet Cong were, in fact, taking over their territory, they started getting upset. That's what happened in 1970, when there was a...

Q: General Lon Nol took over.

ANTIPPAS: Well, the overthrow of Sihanouk took place because there was a demonstration in the provincial capital of Svay Rieng, which is the "Parrot's Beak" area I mentioned before. It took place in late February or early March of 1970. I was not in Saigon. I was back here in Washington. There was a demonstration in front of the provincial governor's house [in Svay Rieng], protesting the Viet Cong takeover of their land. The "Tet" offensive [of 1968] in Saigon had been launched from the "Parrot's Beak." The southeastern tip of the "Parrot's Beak" is only about 35 miles from Saigon.

Then there was a sympathy demonstration in Phnom Penh. That is where what happened becomes questionable, because that was set up, we think, by Lon Nol's younger brother, Lon Non, who was then a police official. Sihanouk was in France on one of his periodic "rest or health cures" [in Mougins, near Nice]. There was a sympathy demonstration which was followed by another sympathy demonstration near the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Embassies. The Vietnamese communists had two Embassies in Phnom Penh: the Viet Cong Embassy of the so-

called "Provisional Revolutionary Government" and the North Vietnamese Embassy. A mob sacked both embassies. They literally threw everything in them outside, including over \$100,000 in U. S. currency, which they burned. We later found half burned greenbacks. The Vietnamese were using this money to buy rice in Cambodia for Vietnamese communist troops in the border areas. We used to have people take pictures of bicycles carrying sacks of rice down to the Vietnamese-Cambodian border area. There was a very sizeable cross-border trade going on, particularly in the so-called "Parrot's Beak."

Following the riots in Phnom Penh, all hell broke loose. Sihanouk was very angry. He made very threatening noises from France that he would "fix" those responsible when he returned to Cambodia. Gen Lon Nol started negotiating with the Vietnamese and said that he would reestablish the "status quo ante," but the Viet Cong troops in the border area had to leave Cambodian territory. In other words, he would continue the arms and the rice trade, because the communists were also shipping arms through Cambodia, along the "Ho Chi Minh Trail."

This was one of the great intelligence debates of the Vietnam War. Which was the route the weapons and ammunition that the Vietnamese communists were using. The trail or by sea on 100 ton trawlers? We knew the stuff was coming from China. There was a way of calculating the expenditure of communist [artillery] ammunition, just by the number of "booms" that went off. Every U. S. unit would report how many [Vietnamese communist] shells were heard exploding on a given day. Over time you could figure out how much ammunition they had on hand. This would tell us what the resupply operation would have to be. The experts could figure out how much was "in the pipeline." The debate was whether the Viet Cong were bringing the ammunition down by trucks along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, or on these 100 ton steel hulled trawlers which go down the Vietnamese coast and then up to Sihanoukville in Cambodia. The weapons and ammunition would be offloaded and the supplies were then trucked up to the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, where the communist units were stationed. A great internal debate went on in the intelligence community in 1968 as the Johnson Administration was winding down. The U.S. Navy under Admiral Elmo Zumwalt was convinced the stuff was coming down by ship. It was very hard to prove since we had few agents inside Cambodia and the top Cambodians were profiting from the arms and rice trade.

Near the end of the Johnson administration [October, 1968] William H. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs, the younger brother of McGeorge Bundy who had been President Kennedy's National Security Adviser, came to Saigon with a group of high-powered people from CIA. They conducted a debate with MACV as to whether the Viet Cong ammunition was coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail or through Sihanoukville. The obvious, political implication for the administration was that if the predominant amount of ammunition for III and IV Corps in South Vietnam, more or less the southern half of South Vietnam, was coming through Sihanoukville, that was something that we could do something about. We could blockade Sihanoukville, overthrow Sihanouk, or do something else. But if it was coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, nobody could stop that. We had been trying to stop that for three or four years, without success. You can see the political implications.

This was at the end of the Johnson administration. We were going into the elections of November, 1968. The last thing in the world that the Johnson administration -- or the Democratic

Party -- wanted to do was to expand the war into Cambodia. Given my position in the Political Section in the Embassy in Saigon, I sat in on the briefings for the Bundy party. I worked very closely with the intelligence community representatives in following all of this. In fact, I received an award from the U. S. Navy for the work I did in this effort to try to identify where this Viet Cong ammunition was coming from.

The Bundy group came to Saigon and asked to see all of the reports that we had which asserted that the ammunition was being delivered in Sihanoukville, trucked inland by General Lon Nol's people to the arms caches, and then distributed to the Viet Cong military authorities. They went through this debate. I remember that the decision was that there was no real "smoking gun" and, therefore, the Johnson administration wasn't going to do anything about Cambodia.

However, the following, Nixon administration was very much of the view that this was happening.

Q: How did you feel about it? What did the people who were dealing with the problem in Saigon feel about it? Obviously, this had political repercussions.

ANTIPPAS: I believed that Cambodian territory was being used to resupply the Vietnamese communists. I can still remember the name of the [Cambodian] trucking company used to bring the ammunition up [from Sihanoukville]. It was the Hak Lee Trucking Company. We would find out that there was a Chinese [Communist] ship off the Cambodian coast, going into Sihanoukville (now Kampong Som). So my job was to rush over and ask the Australian Embassy in Saigon to send a message to their Military Attaché in the Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh, stating that there was a [Chinese] ship arriving in port and requesting him to "hot foot" it down there to see what he could find out.

He [the Australian Military Attaché] would do that. He would jump in his car and drive down Route 4 to Kampong Som, a four-hour drive from Phnom Penh. More often than not, he would get there and meet the [Hak Lee] trucks coming back. I don't know whether this incident was simply "alleged" or "apocryphal" or what, but there was an assertion made that one case of guns had fallen off a truck, had been found by people friendly to our side, and had been reported back. By virtue of the serial number on an AK-47 [Chinese-made automatic rifle], they could tell when that gun was manufactured in China and when it was delivered. Therefore, it had to come by ship through Kampong Som.

We had intelligence reports that said that the Hak Lee Trucking Company was delivering these weapons to certain locations where the Viet Cong would take them and distribute them. I think that the Australians believed this. Well, nobody actually saw them do this. It was worth your life to watch them deliver the weapons to the communists.

We also had U-2 [very high-altitude, reconnaissance aircraft] flights over Kampong Som. The port at Kampong Som had been built by the Russians. We built Route 4 under our aid program in the 1950's [the so-called "Khmer-American Friendship Highway"]. In fact, the project to build Route 4 was the source of the story on the "Ugly American," [from the book of the same name].

The port at Kampong Som had no onshore loading and unloading cranes. There was no equipment to offload ships at the docks. Ships had to offload cargo, using their own, shipboard cargo booms. I remember that we would have these great debates. The U-2 photos that we were taking could tell us how big the cargo hatches were. Looking at the booms, you could tell how long it would take to unload that size ship. You could then analyze this information. The experts would say that it would take two days to unload whatever it was -- 10,000 tons of ammunition or whatever it was that they were unloading. The communists always managed to do it faster than that, because I think that they worked day and night. They'd get this stuff on the trucks and get the trucks up Route 4 or Route 5 up into the Vietnamese-Cambodian border area and deliver it.

Anyway, there was a great debate about how this was done. I believed that this was how it was happening, based on the expenditure of ammunition. Afterwards, Gen Lon Nol's supporters kicked Sihanouk out and he became our "buddy." I was at the Embassy in Phnom Penh in 1970 as a Political Officer. We actually began to confirm these earlier ammunition reports. We visited some of the arms caches where these items had been kept.

It's kind of funny because the arms caches we found in Grenada, when I participated in the Grenada operation in 1983, looked just like the arms caches I saw in Cambodia. This was because they were built by Russians -- designed and constructed by Russians or Russian trained people. The piles of weapons all looked just like the ones in Cambodia. Talk about "deja vu all over again!"

So the Johnson administration was unable to "pass the ball" to [former Vice President] Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic candidate for President, and the Nixon administration came into office. During the Eugene Black and Phil Habib visit to Cambodia in 1968 Sihanouk reportedly either said or indicated, using our favorite Foreign Service term, "indicated," that it was all right to bomb communist base areas. However, Sihanouk was reported to have said, "But if you kill Cambodians, I will scream like a stuck pig." He reportedly said, "If you kill Vietnamese, that's all right with us." Since most of these base areas were basically uninhabited, that's what was said. So, based on that, the Nixon administration began the "secret bombing" of Cambodia in 1969. This campaign was first "discovered" by William Beecher and surfaced in articles in the "Boston Globe" in March, 1969.

I believe that I was the first individual in the Embassy [in Saigon] to find out about the "secret bombing" of Cambodia, because I had special access to MACV J-2 [intelligence] information. I used to wander into the office of the J-2 all the time -- particularly the photo interpretation side. You know, they were keeping track of what the Vietnamese communists were doing, because you could tell a great by photo interpretation.

I remember an Airman Second Class acquaintance of mine who was a photo interpretation specialist, in J-2. I wandered into his office, in a very secure area, probably the most secure area in the whole building. People used to call MACV headquarters, "Pentagon East." This specialist said to me, "Do you want to see something interesting? We tried to hit the CP [Command Post] of the First North Vietnamese Army Division last night with B-52 strikes, and they were one kilometer off the target." He showed me the track, on a 1:50,000 scale map. It was about five kilometers inside Cambodia. I said, "What? We just did what? We bombed Cambodia?"

I jumped in my car and sped back to the Embassy. I told the Deputy Ambassador -- Sam Berger, at that time -- and I don't know who else I told. I don't know whether Martin Herz was the Political Counselor at that time or not. Anyway, I was telling Sam Berger. I could tell from the expression on his face that he didn't know that this was authorized. So I was dismissed from his office.

Then all hell broke loose. General Westmoreland was furious. I was never allowed back in the photo interpretation lab after that. I wonder what happened to the photo specialist? The affair caused an enormous "stink" in the U.S. when it was discovered that we were bombing Cambodia. Of course, the explanation was that, "Sihanouk said that it was OK to bomb Cambodian territory as long as we just kill Vietnamese. If we kill Cambodians, "you'll hear about it."

Of course, the border incidents continued, and we continued to kill Cambodians. It would happen, time and time again, that our forces would return fire into Cambodia and would kill Cambodians. So I spent my time dealing with incidents like this.

Q: Did you get any feel for what the CIA was doing? They had a huge operation in Vietnam, and you were in the Political Section. How did they "interface" with you?

ANTIPPAS: We had, of course, signal intercepts, which were a big part of their function at that time. I had the impression that they didn't have much in the way of "resident assets" in Cambodia. They had become notorious in Cambodia. The CIA was alleged by the Cambodians to be implicated in an effort to overthrow Sihanouk in 1959. This caused such a stir that the CIA subsequently kept a very low posture. In fact, when Mansfield visited...

Q: This would be Senator Mansfield.

ANTIPPAS: Yes, Senator Mike Mansfield. He was quite an Asian expert, in his own right, and was very friendly with Sihanouk. We reopened the Embassy [in Phnom Penh] with Mike Reeves as chargé d'affaires in the summer of 1969. I remember that I helped them a good deal in reestablishing the Embassy, with resources from the Saigon side. Senator Mansfield arrived in Phnom Penh the week after Mike Rives set up shop in the Royal Hotel. Mansfield spent a week in Phnom Penh. He made a commitment to Sihanouk that there would be no CIA presence in Cambodia. He said that there was none then and there would be none later. And there wasn't -- at least initially, when Sihanouk was still in power.

So I think that the CIA really had very little in the way of assets in Cambodia. Of course, the conventional wisdom in some quarters in Washington and elsewhere was that the CIA overthrew Sihanouk, that it was at our behest that Gen Lon Nol' supporters kicked Sihanouk out. I don't believe that this is true, based on my own knowledge of what was going on in Cambodia. Obviously, there's a lot that I didn't and wouldn't know. However, over time you learn the signs. I believe we had decided that we were getting out of Vietnam, as a policy. The great debate was simply over the rate of our withdrawal -- how quickly we would get out. One of the great criticisms of President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger was that it took them four years to

get us out of Vietnam.

I think that no one who had any knowledge of the capacity of the Cambodians to fight had any illusions about their ability to defend themselves. They certainly were in no position to take on any kind of Vietnamese at all. Overthrowing Sihanouk would have set off a dynamic that no one could predict or control. More than that, it's one thing politically to shoot into a so-called "neutral" country, with the screams of outrage and diplomatic repercussions that would follow. It's another thing to shoot into a communist country. If Cambodia went communist, we would really have ended up with "egg on our faces" and would have a situation like the one we had with North Vietnam and Communist China.

It seemed to me that nobody would want to do this [i. e., overthrow Sihanouk] because we were drawing down and getting out of Vietnam. Bombing Cambodia would start off something that we couldn't predict. Secondly, if Cambodia did go communist, that would be an even bigger problem. So it was better simply to keep the status quo, until we could get out of Vietnam. I think that the argument that we overthrew Sihanouk to widen the war and bring Cambodia in on our side of the struggle might have been plausible in 1966 or even 1967. By 1968, it was too late. We were on our way out. The American people had indicated very clearly that they wanted to "get out" of Vietnam. So I have always taken the view that Sihanouk was overthrown by Cambodians.

[After we reopened our Embassy in Phnom Penh], I was one of the first Americans to attend sessions of the Cambodian National Assembly. We had a very tiny Embassy in Phnom Penh -- only eight people -- when all of this took place. I arrived in Phnom Penh as a Political Officer in April [1970]. Three weeks after Sihanouk's overthrow on March 9, 1979, the Vietnamese started attacking the Cambodians. I didn't finish that story, which I began earlier.

Lon Nol had started negotiating with the Vietnamese, saying that he would reestablish the "status quo ante," but Vietnamese [communist] troops had to get out of Cambodian territory. They talked for a week or two, in March, 1970. Then the Vietnamese evacuated all of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Embassy staff. The Chinese communists also evacuated their Embassy staff.

Vietnamese troops in the "sanctuaries," particularly up by the rubber plantation country [where the "Terre Rouge" plantations were located], started attacking Cambodian Police and Army posts in Kampong Cham province. A full three weeks before we intervened, the Cambodians were being attacked and pushed back. By the time the American "incursion" into Cambodia began on May 1, 1970, the Vietnamese communists were 25 miles outside of Phnom Penh. When I got to Phnom Penh, on April 27, 1970, the Vietnamese were literally outside of Phnom Penh. The first CIA officer, John Stein, arrived in Phnom Penh two days before I did, on a Special Mission aircraft. He was basically an Africa hand. He had no Indochina background whatsoever. That was sort of a tip of the hat to Sihanouk's fear of the return of CIA people with Indochina experience.

At the time I was sent to Phnom Penh, Tom Corcoran was Country Director for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. He said, when he sent me to Phnom Penh, "You should know that Mike Rives

doesn't want you. Nothing personal, he doesn't want a bigger staff. But when U. Alexis Johnson, [Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs], signs this telegram, you're going out there." He said, "I want you to report more than what's in the newspapers. Find out what the hell's going on there." I did that.

The Cambodian National Assembly overthrew Sihanouk in 1970. It approved a resolution that said that Sihanouk, in fact, had endangered the well being of the state by collaboration with the communists. It was the National Assembly which had approved the constitution which made Sihanouk "head of state for life." So since they made the constitution, they could unmake it, and they threw him out.

I went to the National Assembly and started talking (in French) to the members. During the two years that I was a Political Officer in Phnom Penh the National Assembly was my "beat."

Q: Let's talk a little more about Saigon before you do that. You mentioned something about a story concerning a prisoner escaping.

ANTIPPAS: Right. We had very little information about the communist "base areas" in Cambodia. We had the case of an American soldier who had been captured up in the Central Highlands of Vietnam [Ban Me Thuot-Kontum area]. He had been taken into one of the communist "base areas" in Cambodia, number 704 if memory serves, as a prisoner. One of the things that they did was to take his boots away, which makes it a lot harder to run away. Nevertheless, he managed to escape and walked out of the communist "base area" and back into South Vietnam, where he managed to be picked up by American forces.

I went out to the medical clearing station near the Saigon airport and MACV headquarters, where he was being treated, to interview him. He'd been brought in for medical treatment, as his feet were all torn up. He had walked out of the "base area" barefoot, through the jungle. I wanted to talk to him about what he saw, what was there, and what the "base area" looked like.

Of course, he couldn't tell me very much. But it was interesting to see all of these wounded American soldiers at this medical clearing station near the airport. The severely wounded were being evacuated to Japan for further hospital treatment. I saw a lot of these beat up Americans -- just kids. You know what movie they were watching on AFVN Television [American Forces in Vietnam]? They were watching "Combat," a TV serial on the American Army in combat in Europe during World War II. Every week you had a new episode of this war. Here were all of these kids -- literally kids, who had legs and arms blown off and terribly beaten up. People talk about being "anti-war." If you haven't been in a ward full of wounded soldiers, you really don't appreciate what war is all about. That struck me -- the irony of soldiers wounded in Vietnam watching a TV series on World War II.

Q: What was the atmosphere in our Embassy? At this time you were in this huge Political Section [in Saigon]. What was the atmosphere about what was happening? Was everybody so busy that you weren't focusing on...

ANTIPPAS: There was a lot of concern, about corruption, which was considered a major issue.

We were very concerned about the corruption of our allies -- the wholesale theft of PX items for example by the Thai and the Filipinos in particular. Our Political-Military unit worked very hard to stop the use of "Agent Orange" for defoliation -- to stop defoliation completely. You remember that the defoliation effort was called "Operation Ranch Hand." They were quite prescient to realize what that meant.

I remember the son of my first boss in the Foreign Service, a guy I had worked for in the State Department in 1961. His youngest son received an ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] commission and was sent to Vietnam as an infantry officer. He looked me up in the Embassy. He used to come down to Saigon for weekends, when he could get time off from his base camp up near the Cambodian border. He would come down, and we would talk. I would show him a little bit of the night life of Saigon.

He told me what it was like to lead an infantry platoon through these defoliated forests. We allegedly defoliated them so that we could see the enemy. Nobody was thinking about the chemical impact on the immune system of our soldiers, or anything like that. He said, "These are triple canopy forests. You defoliate the first canopy, you might even get the second canopy." Literally, these planes would fly over the forest and turn everything gray. They would kill all of the leaves. But he said, "You still had to walk down there, through all of the third canopy, which is all of the lower brush. But with the sun beating down on you, it would be like a Turkish bath." He said that it was "murder" to move through these areas, because the defoliation really didn't help all of that much. So he felt that it didn't make any sense to do this. He wondered why we were spraying this stuff all over the place. Our Political-Military unit was trying to stop defoliation, and eventually we did stop it.

It was interesting that one of the people that I had a lot to deal with in connection with the Cambodian arms traffic was the Commander of the U. S. Navy Forces in Vietnam, Admiral Elmo "Bud" Zumwalt. He went on to become Chief of Naval Operations. I worked with him directly. He had been Naval Attaché in Denmark at one point in his career, so he had a very good appreciation of how Embassies work, unlike most of the military guys, who had no understanding of diplomatic niceties or our requirements and needs, and the context within which an Embassy had to work.

It was ironic that one of Zumwalt's sons was running a patrol boat [in the Riverine Forces, the so-called "Brown Water Navy"], down in the Mekong Delta, along the Cambodian border. The son had been sprayed by these defoliants several times and eventually came down with cancer and died. Of course, Zumwalt had ordered the defoliation of these waterways as part of his function as Commander of Naval Forces in Vietnam to cut down areas for ambush. Our boats used to be ambushed down there. It was a terrible, moral burden for "Bud" Zumwalt that, in fact, he had believed that he was responsible for killing his own son in the process.

Q: How did you feel about the reporting as far as what was "getting through?" Was there a kind of ferment, say, among the Political Officers?

ANTIPPAS: Let me give you a personal observation on that. I'm glad that you mentioned it. I was the Embassy Duty Officer the week of the May offensive of 1968. The "Tet" offensive took

place in February, 1968. The next "high point" was expected to be in May. I forget why that was. There was a holiday in May. We expected a repeat of the "Tet" offensive, when they [the communists] almost got into the Embassy. I remember the first night that I was on duty [during this period]. The Embassy Duty Officer spent the night at the Embassy, sleeping in a small room next to the Code Room on the top floor of the Embassy. He had a flak vest and a pistol. This was early May, 1968. We didn't run the air conditioning in the building at night, because paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division guarding the building were stationed on the catwalks between the sunscreen and the building. We had the paratroopers there and turned the air conditioning off, so that they could hear if people were skulking in the bushes surrounding the Embassy.

The building was kind of silent when I went to bed that particular night. I heard a couple of mortar explosions go off up the street. So I jumped into my pants, pulled on my flak vest, buckled the pistol belt, pushed the elevator button, and went down to the Embassy lobby. The Marine Guards were running around in circles. One of them looked out the back door and said, "Son of a bitch! The back gate's open." I thought that this was no place for me. I punched the button and went back upstairs, went into the Code Room, and locked the door.

That was the opening salvo of the May offensive. It was not as severe as the Tet offensive. There was a lot of fighting...

Q: Particularly in Cholon.

ANTIPPAS: In Cholon. There was a battle around the "Y" bridge [on the south side of Cholon]. The 47th Infantry Regiment, in which I took my infantry basic training in 1952 at Ft. Dix, NJ, was involved in it. My job was to stay in contact with everybody. I called the MACV Situation Room every morning to find out what was going on. I also called Washington and talked to John Burke, Director of the Vietnam Desk. I was in a kind of loop at night. I called each of the Corps areas and learned what was going on. I was preparing my own intelligence summaries, right from individual sources, before anyone had a chance to "massage" this information. The information which I assembled was put in a cable, which we would send out to the Department, reporting what was going on.

The commander of U. S. Forces in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, was very irritated at these cables that were going out and which his people hadn't seen -- reporting what was going on in the country, before his staff had a chance to look at the information. Deputy Ambassador Sam Berger said that MACV was complaining bitterly about these cables. However John Burke, said, "Keep up the good work. The only way that we know what's going on there is what you're sending us."

Q: Was there a feeling that...

ANTIPPAS: There was the whole "body count" issue and the whole matter of "massaging" impressions of what was going on. This was another reason why we had this Provincial Reporting Unit -- so that our guys, who reported through the Embassy, but not to AID or to the military, would go around and try to find out what was actually going on.

Q: What would happen? Let's say that they would go out, and we would get information from the Provincial Reporters which indicated that MACV was putting its own "twist" on a given situation. Would the Embassy report something different from MACV or would it end up going through a process of "synthesis" so that everybody reported the same thing?

ANTIPPAS: I can't answer that directly. All I know is that the Provincial Reporting Officers would come into Saigon from time to time. There were five of them [Actually, the Unit reached a high point of eight officers, including the chief of the Unit.]. They had a boss whose name escapes me [Tom Conlon]. He was Political Counselor when I was in Bangkok, and John Burke was DCM. There were four guys that I remember: Jim Mack and two David Brown's: David E. Brown and David G. Brown, both of whom are now Office Directors in East Asia, one for Korea and one for Regional Affairs. These were bright, young guys several who spoke Vietnamese. Some of them had just come into the service or out of language school at the FSI and were still "feeling their way". They were assigned to different areas of South Vietnam and traveled as they thought suitable [sometimes by plane, sometimes by automobile or truck, usually alone and frequently at substantial risk to their lives], picking up information. They would come in and "dump" their material on someone [Tom Conlon, as chief of the Provincial Reporting Unit]. I think that their message was getting through but I think that their reporting, given the interagency politics that had to go on, may well have "pulled its punches." There are many ways to do that. I saw the same kind of thing more directly in Cambodia, more so than in Vietnam.

Q: We'll come to that later on.

ANTIPPAS: We'll come to that, because I was Desk Officer for Cambodia. I knew the guys in Cambodia and I knew what was coming out. I believed that I understood what was happening in Cambodia. I had to assume -- from my own experience of what was going on in Vietnam -- that the same kind of thing took place there. Of course, it [the U. S. presence in Vietnam] was much bigger. It was enormous. The CIA alone had an enormous computer capability by that time [in Saigon]. They were feeding in all kinds of material. They were getting all of the answers that they needed. They could produce any answer you wanted, based on the data that was being fed into it. There was an enormous "scam."

Q: Andy, within the Political Section, was there a chasm between, may I say, Martin Herz, Sam Berger, and Ellsworth Bunker -- that level -- and the officers who were going out in the field?

ANTIPPAS: I don't think so. The one thing I clearly recollect is that I did not serve under Phil Habib [during this time Deputy Assistant Secretary of State with particular responsibility for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia]. I came in after Phil Habib had been Political Counselor in Saigon. I'll tell you, anybody who had to fill Phil Habib's shoes had a big job. He had such a manner and such ability to relate to his officers. He was such an iconoclast himself that he was just wonderful to work for. He motivated everybody. He was tremendously loyal but at the same time he was a hard taskmaster.

He was replaced by Arch Calhoun. Arch hated to be reminded of the fact that he had been Ambassador to Chad, because he hated that place. He said that he didn't want to be reminded that he had been Ambassador in Chad, "that awful place." He was a German specialist. He had been

U. S. Minister in Berlin. His reward was to be assigned to Saigon as Political Counselor.

This is a kind of reminder of the jobs we had in Saigon. We had former Ambassadors as Section Chiefs, which we never do in the American system. Other foreign services do this all the time. It's nothing for a foreign ambassador to serve subsequently as consul general in New York.

Q: They don't carry the title with them. We do. It's about the one title we have that we carry around.

ANTIPPAS: If you've been an Ambassador, you have to be at an ambassadorial level in subsequent assignments or you are forcibly retired. But Vietnam was special. We had such large numbers of assets. I mean, 25 Foreign Service Officers in the Political Section! The Political Section was bigger than most of our Embassies throughout the world.

Arch Calhoun was a different breed of cat. He was a more soft-spoken kind of guy. Habib was a real "blue collar" type guy, and everyone loved him for it. He encouraged people to speak out. He encouraged people to be iconoclastic. You could tell that. People would say things in staff meetings that I could hardly believe. I felt that they were really telling people off or speaking their mind. This had quite an impact, I thought, for several years after Habib left Saigon and the East Asian Bureau. Of course, I worked for Phil Habib in the East Asian Bureau, toward the end of the Indochina experience. I had a real sense of how he operated. It was wonderful to work for a guy like Phil Habib. He looked to you to say what you really think. He would ask questions like, "Do you think? What do you think?" He made clear that he wanted to know what we really felt.

In the Bureau of East Asian Affairs he would have meetings with the lower-ranking Desk Officers from time to time, without the Country Directors [their supervisors] present. He wanted to hear the unvarnished attitudes and opinions of his officers. I think that this is the best way to operate. This is a system which I used when I became a supervisor. In my later career as a supervisor I tried to encourage people to say what they really thought. Are we doing something right or not? People can't argue that I didn't give them a chance to say what they thought. Of course I found out that a lot of people don't think at all.

I think that from Ambassador Bunker on down people were encouraged to say what they felt and how they saw things. But once you've done that, you've done your job. It was up to the senior officers in their relationships with the military, the CIA, or the host government to carry out the policy. If you couldn't live with that, then you had better get the hell out of the Foreign Service. You should quit. And a number of people did that.

Dick Holbrooke is one of those who quit. He went on, after his Vietnam experience, to go into politics, in effect. He's done very well for himself. That's your choice. There is a discipline within the Foreign Service. If you can't tolerate the policy, and you might well not tolerate the policy, the only honorable thing to do is to get out, once you have had your say, once you feel that you've really aired your feelings.

Now, one of the things that I did get involved in was dealing with the French, which in this

context meant dealing with the rubber plantations [in South Vietnam]. I was the point of contact when our military would do something involving the rubber plantations. They would do two things. One, they would defoliate or, more importantly, use bulldozers with the "Rome Plow" attachments. They would cut down hundreds of thousands of trees on their main supply routes which ran through the plantations, on the ground that the communists were ambushing their convoys going through the plantations.

Well, without telling anybody, the U. S. Army would go in on a weekend and cut down 100,000 trees. The Army started with a 50 meter margin on each side of a main supply route, cutting down these rubber trees. Then they would widen these margins to 100 meters on each side. Finally, in 1969, I think, they widened them further to 200 meters on each side. So that's a quarter of a mile. Of course, the Viet Cong would sit behind that patch of plantation and lob shells onto the roads, because they had them zeroed in. When the U. S. Army cut down these trees, they left windrows -- piles of brush, which made excellent ambush sites. The Viet Cong would burrow into these trees and shoot at armored vehicles or trucks or whatever was coming through. So we had big arguments with the military.

I remember trying to make a case that the rubber plantations were an economic asset that should be preserved for peacetime use, and we should not be destroying them. It really did not make much all that much sense from a military point of view. So we would have these big fights with the U.S. military. I found that the Embassy supported me. My "clients" were the French, who would come to us. Basically, they cooperated with us. The French were very helpful. They knew what the Viet Cong were doing in their plantations. They would pass the information to me. On more than one weekend I would go up to the plantations and spend the weekend -- fly up in the rubber plantation airplane. Do you remember a guy who ran the American Chamber of Commerce when you were Consul General in Seoul? He's a retired brigadier general, a heavy set guy. His name was Frederick "Brick" Krause.

Anyway, I first met Krause when he was a full Colonel and brigade commander in the 1st Division at the Quan Loi rubber plantation [Binh Long province], up near the Cambodian border. I had gone up to investigate a defoliation complaint by the plantation. The U. S. Army had defoliated a bunch of young [recently planted] rubber trees -- not the old trees. I went there and was standing by this Colonel's CP [Command Post]. We'd just gotten off the plane. The French rubber plantation manager was there. The Viet Cong had apparently seen our plane come in and decided to lob some shells into the CP area. You should have seen five guys try to get into a one-man hole! I remember the Frenchman standing there, looking scathingly at these Americans, scurrying for cover.

Krause retired from the Army as a brigadier general in Korea. I ran into him at the residence of Ambassador Dick Sneider, when we had the East Asia Consular Conference in 1977. You were there, weren't you?

Q: *Yes.*

ANTIPPAS: Well, this brigadier general was at the reception that Dick Sneider had for the conference. I said, "God, you look familiar." And then I found out that this guy had been a

brigade commander whom I had visited in Vietnam at that time. We have remained very good friends since that time.

I think that the Embassy was supportive of trying to "rein in" the American military, because the military became a virtual law unto themselves. It was a lot harder to deal with them on PX corruption.

Q: I was a member of something called "The Irregular Practices Committee." I was the chairman of it, which was a kind of civilian court martial. Did you get at all involved with the "More Flags" business and the corruption of the Thai, in particular and the Filipinos? The Koreans had this so well organized that it wasn't even corruption. They just...

ANTIPPAS: Well, what happened for example, was that the manager of the Commissary or the PX in Cholon was a Filipino employee. He was one of those "TCN's," or Third Country Nationals. The PX would get in a supply of TV sets, stereos, or whatever. He would call PHILCAG, Philippine Civic Action Group, which was out in Tay Ninh province. He would call them, and they would scarf up everything that had come in. I was in Saigon for months before I could buy a TV set. The old saw about the Thai was that, "If we could only maneuver the Viet Cong between the Thai and the PX, we'd have a military victory on our hands."

Q: I can remember watching Thai soldiers being marched into the PX. They would each buy the limit of whatever they could. This was a whole unit. Then they would turn it over to their officer.

ANTIPPAS: They would buy refrigerators and sell them off the back of their trucks. It was on such a wholesale basis. Our military took the view that this was simply the cost of doing business, and who cares? "We'll bring in more and sell whatever we can." Our allies were so corrupt. It used to anger everybody in the Embassy.

Q: And a lot of our military, too. Do you remember seeing the Provost Marshal of Saigon, standing outside of the PX, watching these Thai go in there and just...He was red faced, his jaw muscles quivering.

ANTIPPAS: We had the same thing in Korea.

Q: What was the feeling in the Political Section about the Vietnamese Government?

ANTIPPAS: They felt that it was pretty weak. There was always a question in everybody's mind whether or not these people were going to be able to "hack it." Thinking back on that time, I'd really have to give the matter some thought. I think the situation was pretty hopeless, from our point of view. The problem was so insuperable, given our inability to stop the North Vietnamese from reinforcing their troops in the South. How can you possibly protect hamlets? We had this hamlet protection program and all the other "gimmicks" that we tried. For example, the Vietnamese Government, with U. S. support, took people and resettled them in villages that they tried to protect. How could you do that, when you couldn't stop the infiltration of the military forces, the ammunition, and all the supplies that the communists needed?

It was all part of the same situation, you know. You couldn't solve the problem in Cambodia and Laos or stop the communists at the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone, roughly the 17th Parallel of North Latitude]. How could you possibly bring any kind of security to the countryside?

I'm convinced that if we could have handled the military problem successfully, the political problem could have been solved. There really was no political problem. The South Vietnamese didn't want to be communists. It was also very evident that nobody wanted to be a communist in Cambodia. Nobody believed any of that "liberation" blarney. It was just that we couldn't solve the military problem with our own self-imposed limitations, which involved how to stop the communists from coming down from the North.

Q: You left Saigon in...

ANTIPPAS: February, 1970. Somewhat in disgrace.

Q: What happened?

ANTIPPAS: It was very interesting. I really thought that I would be promoted to FSO-4 for the good work which I had done in Saigon -- and I really had done good work. I got pretty good ratings on my efficiency reports from my several bosses in the External Unit of the Political Section. I worked hard. I think that I once went three months without getting out to Bangkok to see my wife. My son was born there in Bangkok. In Vietnam I was shot at. I was running around in the woods with the U. S. military.

But I had a personality problem with the chief of the Political Section under Martin Herz, the Political Counselor [who replaced Arch Calhoun]. Martin Herz liked me personally. He was the resident Cambodia expert in the Foreign Service. He had served in Cambodia in the mid 1950's and had written a little book, "A Short History of Cambodia." You might remember it. Since I was the Cambodia expert in the Political Section, he liked me. I had known him from my first job in the Foreign Service. He was in the Africa Bureau when I was setting up conferences. So I had a pretty good relationship with him. Martin Herz was a very tough taskmaster. I've seen him make grown men cry. He was tough. He could take faster dictation than most secretaries.

Q: He did his own shorthand and his own typing.

ANTIPPAS: Anyhow, I got along with him and thought I got along with the section chief as well, because he and I were both from Massachusetts. He was a Massachusetts "blue blood." His wife was "safe-havened" in India. He went from Saigon to be DCM in New Delhi under the former U.S. Senator from New York. Was his name Keating? It turned out that this officer would pass through Bangkok on his way to New Delhi and have dinner with my wife at our house, while waiting for his flight. She'd pick him up at the airport in Bangkok. So I thought that we had a good relationship.

Anyway, without a long "to do" about it, there was a "glitch" in our relationship. He got angry with me and wrote in my efficiency report for 1969 that he questioned my judgment about something that I had done. That's all that's needed in the Foreign Service. An efficiency report

was then as now, so important. My file was put down at the bottom of the pile. I was ranked in the lowest 5% of my class. You hope to be in the top 5% of your class to be promoted. When you're in the lowest 5% of your class, you are what they call "low ranked" for that year. If you were "low ranked" a second year in those days, you were selected out of the Foreign Service.

I wasn't promoted that year [1969]. What had happened was that all onward assignments were canceled. I had just then wangled an onward assignment to the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, followed by assignment to Greek language training. I had asked for Romanian or Greek. So I had been given what I wanted. Roger Kirk, who was my boss in Saigon, wangled this Greek language training, followed by an onward assignment to Athens. Because of my "low ranking," the training assignments were canceled.

I remember that Martin Herz called me up to his office, on December 22, 1969. He said, "I just got this 'back channel' message from Personnel in Washington that says that you've been 'low ranked.'" I was due to go home in January or February. Herz said, "They want to know when you're going home. They want to talk to you."

I was devastated by that. I said, "Look, I've got to go to Bangkok and tell my wife. No way I can tell her over the telephone." I had really screwed up this great adventure of the Foreign Service in a major fashion. There was a question as to whether I had a career. You remember the telephone system available at overseas Embassies at the time. This is before we had communications satellites. In the war zone we had military switches. The switchboard in Saigon would go to a switchboard someplace else, say, in Thailand. You had to go through about four different switchboards to make a civilian telephone call, including the Thai civilian telephone system. So, more often than not, you'd start a telephone conversation with your wife and family, and you'd be cut off. You'd be pre-empted by a higher priority telephone call. I told Herz that I had to tell my wife about this disaster, face to face. So Herz authorized me to catch a military flight and go over and tell her. Bless her soul, she took it very well. I was really down about it.

Q: Had you known, or was this...

ANTIPPAS: It came out of the blue. I had not expected that at all.

Q: Did Herz understand what the situation was?

ANTIPPAS: Well, I think that he understood. But, you know, the section chief did this to a number of people in the Political Section, particularly unit chiefs. He did this to Bob Shackleton, who was the Political-Military guy, and three or four other guys. He "clobbered" a number of other people. So I left Saigon very depressed. I thought, "Well, where do we go from here?"

DENNIS G. HARTER
CORDS Officer
Ba Tri District, Vietnam (1968-1970)

**Special Assistant to Ambassador Colby
Saigon (1970)**

Mr. Harter was born and raised in New Jersey and educated at Georgetown University, Seton Hall and American University. He joined the State Department in 1966 and was assigned to the CORDS program of USAID in Vietnam. He subsequently studied Chinese and served in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Hanoi, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission (1997-2001). In his Washington assignments Mr. Harter dealt primarily with East Asian matters. He also served as Director of the State Department's Press Office in Washington and as State's Representative to the Washington Council on International Trade in Seattle. Mr. Harter was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: You went out when?

HARTER: I went out in August of 1968.

Q: And you were there for how long?

HARTER: I was in the countryside until January of 1970. We all had an 18 month assignment overseas for the CORDS tour. I then extended for six months to take a job in Saigon as the special assistant to Ambassador William Colby who was then the Deputy in charge of the pacification program under the overall Commander, General Abrams. I had originally been chosen by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to be his special assistant, but I made the mistake of speaking my mind to the then policy coordinator at the embassy and he took me out of consideration for that job.

Q: Who was that, do you remember?

HARTER: I think it was Martin Hertz. I told him, after I'd been interviewed and selected by Ambassador Bunker, that no one had told me when the job was supposed to start, but that I hoped I could finish up a major project in the district where I worked, which I needed to complete by the end of the year. Martin Herz reacted very negatively to this statement and, his message to me was, "If you're not prepared to serve at Ellsworth Bunker's command when he expects you to be there, you're not going to serve in Ellsworth Bunker's office at all." He then told Ambassador Bunker I didn't want the job. John Paul Vann, the head of the civilian program in IV Corps where I worked had nominated me for this interview and he was very mad when I told him what had happened. Shortly thereafter, however, the staff assistant job came open in Ambassador Colby's office and he again nominated me for that position. I was again selected and fortunately was not required to be there before the start of the New Year so I could still finish off the project in my district.

In order to take the job with Ambassador Colby, I had to extend my tour. As my time in Vietnam was winding down, I had been talking with the Personnel Officer at the Embassy about getting back into the China area and was applying to study Chinese, beginning in the summer of 1968, at FSI in Washington and so my initial extension with Ambassador Colby was only for six months.

In February, I guess it was in February 1970 I was told I'd been accepted for the Chinese course and would be able to start that fall when the new classes began. Even though I'd only been on the job for a little more than a month, I was really getting a great opportunity to work in the headquarters with Ambassador Colby. So I asked Personnel if I could extend for another year, to take me into the following summer, and then take the Chinese language course opening in 1971. PER (Personnel) in Washington said FSI would not hold open the training slot for a year and that I would have to apply again for the training in the next bidding cycle if I stayed in Vietnam. Since I was assured of getting the Chinese language training in 1970, I didn't want to risk taking a chance on not being chosen the following year for whatever reason and so I said, "to hell with it. I'm going to go back to Chinese, because I don't know whether I'll get the shot to work on China again."

There was another unusual circumstance on the personnel front at that time. When I was looking at job options with my the Personnel Officer at the Embassy, I told her I wanted to transfer from CORDS where I'd had 18 months of experience, into the Embassy for my second assignment in the State Department. She said, that wasn't possible because all of the vacancies were already slotted with people in the language training or direct transfer pipeline from a year ago." This included officers who had no language training or just the basic FSI language training and they had no experience in Vietnam. No effort was made to recruit State Department officers assigned to CORDS for Embassy positions. Instead, the Department was sending brand new officers into the Embassy in Saigon and sending home officers with 18 months or more of field experience and who spoke Vietnamese with relative fluency. While I thought the FSI training we received was really very good and quite comprehensive, it didn't really prepare me for a lot of the work I did on a daily basis. For example, there were no local newspapers to read where I was assigned and what I needed to read in Vietnamese was provincial and district level government documents and reports. And, there is no better way to learn to speak a language than to be immersed in that language environment every day. So my Vietnamese was certainly a lot more fluent at the end of my first 18 months in the countryside than it was when I left FSI's CORDS training. Anyway, what I was trying to point out here is that State Department personnel policy was not making the best use of its officers.

Of course, it may have been the time. When I arrived in Vietnam in 1968, personnel issues, it seemed to me, were handled strangely. You had no sense that anyone in the AID structure in Saigon knew where there were regular vacancies coming open and where personnel were needed to start up new programs or any real semblance of a structure or organization to put people in place. It seemed as though periodically, Saigon would be sent a bunch of bodies and when they arrived somebody would try to figure out where to put them. Two of my classmates when they came in went off on their own and negotiated their own jobs in offices where they wanted to be. And, that was it. This was apparently not an unusual occurrence and for one of the new arrivals there was just acquiescence. And, while it was projected we would all be going out into the countryside, this classmate had lined up a job where he could stay in Saigon.

The other fellow, one of the members of my small language class, ran into a much tougher assignments officer. While my colleague had gone to speak with an office about opportunities in one particular field that interested him, he was not trying to stay in Saigon and avoid working in

the countryside. My classmate was not a “sit-in-the-office” type, he was clearly somebody who wanted to be out in the field and he had wanted to use his Peace Corps background in a particular area. He like a lot of others of us had been frustrated by the lack of a real placement system and had just been trying to maximize his usefulness in the program. But the personnel officer over-reacted and said, “You’re not leaving Saigon.”

Let me explain this a bit further. When we all reported to the main AID office in Saigon we were all gathered for a meeting and were told “you have no assignments.” AID’s plan was to run us through some orientation sessions and make sure we all had proper payroll arrangements and then the idea was to parcel us out to various locations where there were vacancies. The fellow who had successfully arranged to stay in Saigon already had an office backing his assignment so he didn’t get into any difficulties with his bucking the system. My friend, however, had only been asking questions about different assignment options and hadn’t signed on with anyone. So he had no one to back him up and say “we want this fellow in our program.” As a result, the personnel officer had his say and stuck my friend in the Saigon office in charge of the People’s Self-Defense Force (PSDF), a relatively new program designed to train village and hamlet militia to protect their own homes. It was totally different from what he was hoping for. He stuck it out in Saigon for a year but I was able to break him out of that office and arranged to have him come to work with me in the District where I had been assigned.

As I said, the assignments process was really strange. Here’s how I ended up in a small district on the coast in IV Corps. The Senior Advisor in the province of Kien Hoa was named Nicholas Thorne. He was an ex-Marine who had joined the Foreign Service as an Admin hand and then was recruited for the CORDS program because of his military background. Kien Hoa is the province at the mouth for the Mekong River where it hits the South China Sea. Right there where all the river branches come out into the sea, those are the various districts in Kien Hoa. It’s now called Ben Tre Province. A few months earlier, Thorne had said to his CTZ (Corps Tactical Zone) Senior Advisor in Can Tho, “I want a Foreign Service officer assigned here. I’m going to make him a district senior advisor, because we ought to have a civilian district senior advisor somewhere in IV Corps and right now, there are none.” All of the civilian advisors assigned in the districts were deputy advisors in IV CTZ. There were lots of civilian senior advisors at the province level, but these men were almost all ex-military. There were a couple of civilian senior advisors in districts closer to Saigon in III CTZ but in general people had thought until that time it wasn’t safe enough to put a civilian in charge in the delta districts. Anyway as the result of Thorne’s request, AID either in Can Tho or in Saigon had decided to get one of the members of my class into that assignment. But, the person they had projected against that request was the one who successfully negotiated himself into a job in Saigon.

Anyway, when we finished the orientation class, we were all farmed out to different CTZ Headquarters where the real decision-making was supposed to occur on where we would all get placed. I was part of the group sent to IV Corps and, I think I was the only regular Foreign Service officer in the group. So, when I got to Can Tho, the office had Nick Thorne’s request for a Foreign Service officer and, I then became, I guess, the only live candidate. That’s how I ended up going to Kien Hoa. The district I was assigned to was Ba Tri District, a coastal district in the middle of the nine districts in the province. It was a pacification show place. In 1965-66, the Vietnamese and their U.S. advisors sought to create some models for development. They were

trying to determine what kind of military forces and activity combined with civilian economic and political project mixes might provide the best security and development options for different parts of the country. I don't know who was actually responsible for choosing Ba Tri, but it was certainly an atypical spot, even in the relatively flat southern part of the country. The district was virtually treeless. It had a small mangrove swamp along the coast and beyond that it was nothing more than flat, wide-open rice fields with small settlements scattered throughout the area. It had no tree cover, no places for people to hide if they were going to try and carry on the guerrilla type operations that characterized the war in the south.

During the Tet offensive in 1968, the Vietcong had two conflicting goals, destroy the pacification effort in Ba Tri district and take over control of the provincial capitol, Ben Tre, a big symbol for the VC offensive in the south. Ba Tri was connected to the provincial capitol by a laterite highway and an old French-era bridge where it crossed the main canal that connected some of the Mekong branches close to Ben Tre. Ba Tri and its pacification program were protected by two battalions of the ARVN 7th Division, the Vietnamese regular army, in Ba Tri. The Division headquarters was in Ben Tre where a couple of other battalions were based.

I should also add as a footnote here that the National Liberation Front, the Vietcong's so-called government, was founded in Mo Cay District in Kien Hoa Province. So that made capture of Ben Tre a very important objective and one that would have had great significance for the Vietcong if they could capture and hold the city. Mo Cay district and its immediate neighbors was a very hard nut for the Vietnamese Government to crack. Like a lot of other delta areas, there was lots of tree cover along the rivers and swamps that broke up the rice field areas, making it easier for the VC to hide out, move under cover and harass government forces and civilian villages. In the entire time that I was in Vietnam, Kien Hoa was either the most insecure or next to the most insecure of all the forty-odd provinces that U.S. advisors were rating under the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). And yet I was in one of the safest districts in the entire country. That of course, is why nobody raised any real objections when Nick Thorne said he wanted to have a civilian senior advisor there before one was sent anywhere else in IV CTZ.

Going back to the Tet offensive. The VC (Vietcong) military forces were of course successful in over-running Ben Tre City and taking control of virtually everything in the immediate surrounding area. You will recall there was a famous saying from the aftermath of the Tet offensive that was quoted all over the press - "We had to destroy the town to save it." The place they were talking about was Ben Tre. The VC were afraid the two battalions of ARVN forces in Ba Tri would come and reinforce the provincial capital, so the first thing they did when they attacked the city was to blow the bridge between Ba Tri and the center island district in the province, Truoc Giang District, where the capital, Ben Tre was located. While that gave them a better chance to take on the forces around Ben Tre, it also meant the VC attacks in Ba Tri to destroy pacification progress pitted a reinforced, VC main force company against two ARVN battalions in a district where there were no places to hide. The VC unit in Ba Tri was annihilated. After the Tet offensive, the VC had to rebuild that unit from scratch. Because there was so little for the Vietcong to pull together to stymie the pacification program, the targets we were focused on for the rest of 1968 and 1969 had all been much further down the line in the more gradual plan that had been put forward to take control of the district. Because the Tet offensive had been such a devastating blow to the communist forces, the Vietnamese Government decided to

remove the ARVN battalions and to concentrate military protection for the district entirely in the hands of locally recruited military units, the Regional Force (RF) Companies and the Popular Force (PF) platoons. The pacification effort moved rapidly through all the remaining target villages and hamlets in the entire district. I believe we had basically accomplished all the goals to establish a government presence in all parts of the district by the end of 1968. And, by early 1969 we had conducted village and hamlet elections that weren't scheduled to take place until sometime in the 1970s under the original plan. We had recruited and trained 5 RF companies and probably around 60 or more PF platoons to provide protection for the district. Thus, a combination of terrain and poor Vietcong tactics turned the situation in Ba Tri very much to the advantage of the Vietnamese Government. With the large Regional Force presence, the District was often called upon to provide mobile forces to operate in other districts and under the Vietnamization program which President Nixon popularized, U.S. helicopter resources would be used to bring Ba Tri's Regional Force units into military operations in neighboring districts, usually just for a single day operation, though occasionally for a couple of days. This sort of military operation made our field unit advisors very important. They were the ones who could get helicopter gunship and fighter aircraft support and medevacs for wounded soldiers because their radios could connect with American military in the air over the southern part of the country.

Q: When you arrived there what were your duties?

HARTER: I was initially assigned as the Ba Tri Deputy to work with a U.S. Army Major who was finishing up his advisory tour as District Senior Advisor there. Previously he had been the S-3 (military staff designation, officer in charge of operations and logistics) for the provincial advisory team, the operations officer, in Ben Tre. During the Tet Offensive, it was he who said "we had to destroy the town to save it." Just before Tet, the Province Senior Advisor, a Foreign Service Officer, on his way to the local airport said, "Nothing ever happens at Tet, I'm going on holiday." While the Major's comment made the international news, the Senior Advisor's comment became the inside joke for the province team. The number two, the Provincial Deputy Senior Advisor was U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Dare. When the attack began, he left the advisory compound and went across the street to the Vietnamese Province Chief's house. He went into the bunker in the basement of the house and didn't reappear until the Tet offensive was over and the VC had left the city. That left the S-3 Major, Major Lizardo, in charge of defending the advisory compound. These two residential compounds along the river comprised just about all the territory that was not over-run by the Vietcong in Ben Tre.

When I started in Ba Tri, I was to overlap with Major Lizardo for several weeks and to work as his civilian deputy. I had two Vietnamese counterparts. The first was the Deputy District Chief for Administration, a French-trained Vietnamese bureaucrat who was in charge of the civilian side of the local government, though in reality this meant largely that he managed the paperwork. My second counterpart was a Vietnamese ARVN Major who was the actual District Chief. Major Thanh had been an NCO (no-commissioned officer) in the French Army during the previous war period and then became an officer under the new Vietnamese army. He was relatively young, at that point probably only 40. Officially, he was Major Lizardo's counterpart, but we shared the duties of working with Major Thanh. Part of this was because I was going to be taking on the Senior Advisor responsibilities after about two months. But the other reason was simply the nature of how the District was run. Major Thanh ran the district's military operations,

but he also made all the decisions which determined how the district was managed. Thus, in order to have any impact on what was happening on the civil side, I really had to work directly with him. Moreover, I spoke Vietnamese and the two Majors, Lizardo and Thanh only spoke basic GI slang in the other's language. Although other U.S. advisors who spoke Vietnamese had come into the district and worked on one project or another, none of them had ever been assigned to stay in the district and work directly with the local authorities. So the two of us were able to communicate directly and I often passed on Major Lizardo's suggestions to the Major and vice versa.

Once Major Lizardo left and I was officially his counterpart, I would generally accompany the Major Thanh in his visits to hamlets and villages around the district. We'd each travel in our own vehicle but then we'd join together to talk to local officials, businessmen, farmers, etc to learn about what was happening in a particular area. We'd ask about VC activities, try to find out about local problems and talk about government programs. Around mid-day, we'd generally have lunch with some of the local officials and then we'd either have a mid-day break there or back at the District headquarters before spending much of the afternoon reviewing things at the District compound. My ordinary work day started around six in the morning and I generally finished up around 8:00 or 9:00 pm. Some nights we'd have a movie from the U.S. military and we'd set it up outdoors in the compound to show to the military families who lived there with us. We had electricity in the compound from our generator for about four hours each evening and thereafter operated with Coleman lanterns if anyone stayed up late. Some nights the Vietnamese Operations Center there would get reports from outlying military units of VC movements in the District. Then, if the VC units were in range, the Vietnamese would often fire artillery into the night. That control room was immediately adjacent to my bedroom and with the sound of the artillery, I'd have to get up and quickly determine where they were firing so we could get on our radio net to alert American aircraft that we had artillery fire in the area. Some days then were a lot longer than the average 14 or 15 hours that I usually spent on the job. And, of course, there was work to do like this every day, including the weekends. The only weekend days I had off were when I was traveling out of country on R& R (Rest and Recreation) trips.

I've said a couple of times, the reason Ba Tri was the first District in the Mekong Delta to get a civilian senior advisor was because it was "pacified." But as I noted earlier, we frequently had reports of VC troops moving through the District in the late night/early morning hours. One evening, the main force VC unit that operated in our part of the province was spotted passing through the District by one of the local Popular Force platoon ambush units. Amazingly, the local unit engaged the enemy with gunfire. I say amazingly because this was a small ambush unit and the unit passing through probably had between eighty and one hundred men and for the most part, Vietnamese ambush parties let any enemy movements proceed unmolested because it was safer that way. Anyway, the local forces engaged the enemy and reported the contact to the District headquarters a few hours after midnight. The VC were so surprised by the ambush that they moved into one of the village housing areas and took over that area for self-defense. After he had been notified, the District Chief contacted his Regional Force outposts and by six in the morning he had four or five Regional Force company sized units surrounding the village exchanging fire with the VC in the houses. I assembled my Advisory unit team and sent my Deputy, Captain Echeverria, an NCO, the radio operator, Private Sowders, and the interpreter out with the District military force that joined the attacking forces. I went with the District Chief to

the Command Post he set up back behind the fighting area and the tactical struggle was enjoined. The District Chief had notified the Provincial authorities about the bottled up enemy force and the Vietnamese offered to send air strikes against the VC unit. The Major refused this offer, saying the VC were in a populated part of the village and he did not want civilian casualties. He also decided not to use his 105 artillery tubes because he could not be sure this too would not lead to unnecessary civilian losses. Instead, he tried a couple of probing attacks along the edge of the houses and looked to the idea of a frontal assault as his main tactic. During the firing, the American advisors, particularly the young radio operator were actively engaged in firing at the enemy. Unfortunately, Private Sowders was too eager in his desire to engage the enemy and while firing his own weapon he was exposed to enemy fire and seriously wounded. Captain Echeverria gave the radio to the NCO and along with the interpreter tried to line up a medevac flight to get Private Sowders out of the combat area. The two of them tore a bamboo door off of a nearby house and using that as a stretcher carried Private Sowders out of the fighting area to a place where a helicopter could come in and get him. He was successfully picked up but he died enroute the hospital. Afterward, I wrote Captain Echeverria up for the Silver Star and the interpreter for the U.S. Bronze Star and both nominations were approved and the awards presented. This surprised the Captain because while he appreciated my writing the award nomination for him said the military would never approve an award that had been recommended by a civilian. But the big loss was Private Sowders. He was our youngest team member, only 21, and just married before he came to Vietnam. Although it was going to be done by someone in the military chain of command, I felt I also had to write to his wife about the loss she now had to face. That was the only time I had to write such a letter but it certainly was a difficult thing to do. The rest of our team throughout the eighteen months I was there was remarkably lucky. Only Captain Echeverria's replacement, Captain Donohue, suffered a serious war wound and had to be medevaced and subsequently taken out of country for treatment. He was coming back from an operation with a Regional Force company which had not had any enemy contact when he was wounded as the result of the detonation of an artillery shell booby trap that had been placed on a rice paddy dike. It was really unfortunate because everyone had seen the booby trap and had deliberately gone around or over it when one of the Vietnamese soldiers stumbled into it and detonated the charge. Captain Donohue got hit with shrapnel behind one ear and by the time he was taken out of Vietnam for further medical treatment he had not recovered his hearing in that ear and had some problems with balance. So, to get back to my point, although Ba Tri was a pacified district, the war was always there and you simply could not assume nothing was going to happen.

Before we go any further, I should note how many people were involved in our local advisory effort. This was a very large district team. We had eight or nine men assigned at the district compound headquarters and then we had subordinate units – groups of five – who stayed out in the compounds of the regional force companies who were now the main Vietnamese military forces in the district. These are the teams I was referring to earlier when I said they'd go out on operations with the Regional Force companies and use their radio links to American support forces in case there was contact with enemy forces.

Q: These are Americans?

HARTER: That's right, these were groups of five Americans. Usually one officer and four

NCOs, different grades of sergeants. We sometimes had Army Captains heading the five-man teams; sometimes they were lieutenants. Although the plan was to try to keep a captain on those team assignments, we ended up with a lot of lieutenants, because our team requirements expanded so quickly. As I said earlier, as the district became more and more pacified, the national plan was to reduce the ARVN presence and replace the regular army with local force units. So, when we lost the battalions, when I first came in the summer of 1968, we still had one ARVN battalion in the district. That battalion left, I think by the end of the year, but certainly by January 1969. So, our regional force company and popular force platoons that were assigned around the district had to expand. We went up from initially two or three regional force companies when I arrived to five before I left. We went from popular force platoons, maybe 20 odd of those units to 60 or more popular force platoons by the end of 1969. Each of these units had distinct responsibilities. The regional force companies were set up in bases scattered throughout the district and they were to provide rapid response in the event of any trouble in the district. The popular force platoons were more locally centered and they focused on securing lines of communication and village areas with larger population concentrations. Also in that mix was the group I mentioned my classmate had been associated with, the People's Self Defense Forces (PSDF). This group was composed of local hamlet residents who were given only rudimentary military training, wore regular clothing – black pajamas – and they were only expected to try to protect their homes if the VC tried to get into the hamlets. They were just a little local gendarmerie or militia that would be used in the event of a hamlet emergency. They were pretty hopeless as a real defensive force because they were really too poorly trained to be very effective and the weapons they had to use were the bottom of the line hand-me-downs which had already passed through ARVN and the RF and PF.

I should also finish up what happened in the big battle with the main force VC company that was caught in the District. As the afternoon wore on, the District Chief's idea of a frontal assault was not approved by the provincial authorities. He asked for additional military forces and was turned down. In the meantime, the VC were utilizing their own network to provide a way out for the entrapped unit. Reports came in to the District Command Post of isolated incidents in other parts of the District. A hand grenade incident in a market place. Another being thrown near a military outpost. As night began to fall, the District Chief pulled his forces out and sent them back to their static security positions to protect different parts of the district. Once it was dark, the VC unit pulled out. We later learned they had lost their company commander and some other senior military leaders during the fighting. And, they certainly learned it was not just going to be all that easy to march across Ba Tri District in the middle of the night without risking some kind of contact. Still, it was disappointing to see such a well-staged military operation that had the opportunity to destroy a main force VC unit end up with the VC walking away. Unfortunately, that sort of indecisive combat characterized a lot of the fighting in Vietnam.

In addition to working with the Major, my job was also to work with the civilian administration and look at the development of the political, economic and social units within the villages and hamlets in the district. This was all to fit into a national plan of elections and village development. I had what they call an AIK or Aid-In-Kind budget that I could work with. At its peak, I think it was close to \$2,000.00 a month that I could spend at my discretion to stimulate development projects. This would be anything from helping to get supplies for a new maternity clinic, supplies for a school, or even lending money to put concrete floors in a pig sty. The

biggest project we got involved with was providing some funds for building a new dam near the district capital to prevent salt water intrusion into the inland crop producing areas. A lot of the very small scale self-help projects that were being promoted were associated with Vietnamese Revolutionary Development (RD) cadre. These teams of young men and I think perhaps occasionally some young women were scattered around the villages and hamlets at the early stages of pacification development work. Their goal was to try to get the local people to work together and identify needed projects, while at the same time trying to foster loyalty to the GVN. The teams consisted of young Vietnamese mostly from the cities who dressed like the peasants in black pajamas and worked alongside them. Their goal was to encourage the local villagers to establish schools and the RD cadre did some of the early classroom teaching. They also tried to teach the farmers better farming methods – especially to introduce hybrid rice strains from the International Rice Institute (IRI) in the Philippines, to teach better hygiene, to help people with health care and maternity issues, and to explain the rudiments of self defense for the villages and hamlets. The RD teams were supposed to take care of themselves in the field and to help protect the village but they very quickly became prime targets of the VC because they were keeping the VC from getting at the local population.

At one point in Ba Tri we had, I would guess, as many as eight to ten Revolutionary Development cadre teams spread out in the district. By the time I left in January 1970, all of them were gone and had been gone for at least half a year. By that time, we were considered to be secure, a model, a showplace, and for the last several months I was there, it was a place to bring officials from other parts of the delta to see what could be accomplished. As the Vietnamese altered their presence in the district to rely more and more on local self-generation, the U.S. was engaged in a similar program which we called Vietnamization as we tried to reduce our footprint in the country beginning in the latter part of 1969. As I said before, I had a very large American advisory team. At its pinnacle, the team had as many as 35 Americans, counting the little five-man teams I had scattered around in the district and my headquarters team. By the spring of 1969, I had brought my classmate from Saigon to work as my civilian deputy, thus making us probably the only district team in all of Vietnam with two civilians running most of the programs. With Vietnamization underway, we first dispensed with the teams working with the regional forces and then began reducing the headquarters team. This was the project I wanted to complete before I took on the proposed job with Ambassador Bunker. By the fall, we were down to two civilians and a military advisor who worked on intelligence issues. The lieutenant did such a poor job I kicked him out of the district and he was sent back to Saigon to work at the airport. At the end of 1969, my civilian deputy succeeded me and remained as the only American advisor assigned to the district. He stayed for several more months and was replaced by another advisor who was there by himself. I don't believe he was replaced.

Q: You were really presiding over a success?

HARTER: Yes, at the time we certainly saw it that way.

Q: How did you find these revolutionary teams of young Vietnamese?

HARTER: By and large they were very good. They were very enthusiastic, particularly the newest ones. They had problems dealing with the peasants, because many of them were city kids

and they tended to look down on the rural people. There were attitude problems from time to time but as they got more acclimated to the rural areas they became a lot better. And, this was a better alternative for them than being in the military. By and large they wanted to be seen as doing well at what they were doing so they didn't end up getting drafted. In the end I think a lot of them did get drafted just simply because the war situation got so much worse over time for the Saigon Government. But, I found by and large these kids were really, really quite good. I call them kids but they were probably only five to six years younger than I was.

Another Government program designed to assist the rural areas came out of the Education Ministry. The Ministry recruited teachers as part of a national service plan, mostly young women, and sent them to the countryside to help set up school programs for the villages. As I said, when the Revolutionary Development (RD) cadre, came to work in a village they started up some basic education classes in whatever facility they could find. They had elementary text books and basic teaching materials to work with. The idea was that once you got people started on the education front you could try to get the villagers to pitch in and build a small schoolhouse which could pull in students from the various hamlets in the village. Further, as the GVN operations extended services into these areas when they were more clearly becoming "pacified" the Government program would help build regular school buildings out of concrete and rebar. At that point, the Ministry of Education would begin to dispatch regular teachers from outside the area to serve in the schoolhouses. This was not an easy transition. You had these young women, fresh out of some kind of educational training by the Ministry who probably had never been away from home and family before and they were terribly home sick. Some of them were college graduates, but most of them were high school graduates who were anywhere from 16 to 19 years of age, city dwellers, being sent to rural areas to lives of hardship and poverty. Looking at Ba Tri, we had lots of people that lived very close to the poverty line, particularly among the farming community. Because we were a coastal district there was a lot of salt intrusion that affected the rice fields and we had a lot of problems getting really good rice crops. Because there were very few trees, we had no coconut industry and fishing to produce income for a family was difficult because there was a lot of expense to put together a boat, motor, fuel, nets and other supplies before you could even start getting any fish. So, those people who made their living off the land didn't make a very rich living. There was no big push for big vegetable growing efforts to supply cities because of the security questions, the lack of good transportation, and again salt intrusion didn't make it easy to grow vegetables except right next to people's homes where they raised vegetables for family food and not much for the market. Salt, however, did create an industry for the district because we had some people who lived close to the coast who made their living by scraping dried salt off of the fields after the salt water had evaporated. This salt was used to produce nuoc mam and it was used to salt and preserve fish.

Nuoc mam is the Vietnamese fish sauce. It's made by simply throwing salt and water in with a bunch of anchovies in a large ceramic jar and letting the mix ferment in the sun. Then you take the liquid run-off from the fermentation process, and bottle it and sell it as "anchovy water", the translation of nuoc mam, for cooking.

Q: If you'll look at the ingredients of Worcestershire sauce, there's an anchovies base to it.

HARTER: That's interesting. I'd never noticed that on the label. I think there's a lot of those

kinds of sauces throughout the world, I mean it's not only Southeast Asia, where they make sauces from fish. I'd guess they do that also in parts of Africa and South America too.

Q: How did you get on - I mean here you are, with no, you know, this is your first real experience of this nature.

HARTER: Yeah. I was a neophyte in all of this. Many of my classmates had been in the Peace Corps, had lived abroad with their families. Some only had academic-year-abroad experiences in college, but even that was more than I had. I'd visited EXPO when it was in Montreal (1967) and had been to that city for a college debate tournament at McGill University. But my travel to Parks College in Missouri was the farthest west I had ever been before stopping in California to see Disneyland on route to Vietnam. Each CORDS class had a week's training in Taiwan to become more familiar with rural agriculture in Asia before we reached Saigon. And I took a couple of days to help a friend of mine settle his wife in Manila before we both went on to Vietnam. That was the extent of my international experience. And, here I was in the countryside in Vietnam supposed to assist the local government run better programs to help the people.

Q: Well, how did you find yourself - you're not a country kid anyway.

HARTER: No, not at all. Not at all.

Q: How did this work and how did you work with your Vietnamese counterparts?

HARTER: Well, it was all a combination of things, trying to put into practice the lessons you picked up in the classroom and trying to do things that seemed to be sensible for the situation at hand. The district environment was also pretty confining at first. When I first got to the district my office and my bedroom was a bit smaller than this room and I shared it initially with Major Lizardo and his military deputy, a Captain; the three of us lived in it and slept in it. The room was part of the District headquarters and was the District Chief's house as well. When Major Lizardo left we were only two in the room, but within a couple more months we had expanded the advisory team's part of the building and the Captain could move into that section across the small courtyard with the other military personnel. And all of them at that point had individual small rooms of their own and I was by myself in the room attached directly to the District offices and the District Chief's house.

Q: You're talking about a 20 foot by 20 foot room or something?

HARTER: Yes, it was smaller than that, maybe 12 by 12, and it had no windows. It had a wooden door that opened onto a small courtyard and a screened door you could use to get some air into the room. So yes, that's where the Major, myself, and the military deputy all worked and lived. On the other side of the courtyard was a smaller building which comprised our kitchen and dining area and there were a couple of rooms shared by the NCOs and the enlisted men and our radio communications room. We had a latrine at the back end of the building with an indoor toilet and a shower that consisted of a pull cord that released water from a 55 gallon steel drum on the roof of the building. You could get hot showers in the evening after the drum had baked in the sun all day long but an early morning shower was always cold, cold, cold. The overall

compound headquarters building thus had a wing for the U.S. Advisory team, a main entrance area for the official business and offices of the District – where the public came to do business – and then a wing where the District Chief was housed. My room was between his house and the tactical operations center for the district, the military communications and battle planning area, which operated 24 hours a day and which coordinated night-time artillery fire whenever there was some report of VC activity within range of the District's 105mm artillery pieces. Originally everything was inter-connected but they made it all work by sealing off some of the connecting doors so you couldn't go from one section's living area into somebody else's office or home.

Still, it was a compound with the district headquarters and our living quarters in the middle. This was surrounded by a small group of multi-room bamboo and thatch houses where the District compound military men and their families lived. All this was enclosed within an eight foot high berm of mud that was topped with barbed wire. The compound inhabitants were all around us and we had generally good relations with all of them. There was one incident, however, that I will never forget. I told you Norris Nordvold had come down from Saigon to be my civilian deputy. He had been a classmate at FSI and was a former Peace Corps volunteer who had served in Africa. Norris brought with him a wooden statue from Africa which he kept in his foot locker in his small room in the district team living quarters. One day that statue disappeared and it was obvious that only someone living in the compound could have stolen it. Norris decided he would try to get the statue back by claiming it had magical properties. That night after dinner he went back out behind our house to an area facing most of the other compound houses where the Vietnamese lived. He proceeded to offer prayers and small offerings of fruit and cigarettes to a fire which he had built. He told the curious Vietnamese onlookers that he was praying to the missing statue and asking that it punish whoever had been responsible for stealing it if they failed to return it to its proper place. After about ten or fifteen minutes, he finished and we all went back into our respective houses. Early the next morning, a small boy was found drowned in the concrete well which was immediately behind our house. The child was probably not yet five years old and the sides of the well were probably three feet high so no one could understand how he ended up falling into the well. Shortly thereafter the child's father returned the wooden statue which he had stolen the day before and asked Norris' forgiveness. That's a bit of a digression from my description of the compound and how the team lived, but it certainly had a big impact on all of us. It certainly created a much deeper appreciation for the power of superstition.

Q: First place, what about during the time you were there, the supervision from Saigon or elsewhere?

HARTER: Supervision from Saigon was negligible. Supervision was primarily from the province and occasionally from Corps. We did, however, get visitors from Saigon and occasionally from the U.S. One of our VIP visitors was Secretary of State Rogers. He came for a short visit and the District set up a briefing and a bit of a Potemkin Village tour which I conducted for him as I drove a Jeep through various set demonstrations of local activities. These included driving into a village where he could see a local market, stop in and see the school and maternity clinic and then drive by a rice field that was being cultivated and watch a group of People's Self-Defense Force members undergoing some basic training. The latter view was interesting because all these older men were in their traditional black pajamas and were engaged in an exercise with their old rifles. Secretary Rogers turned to me and said, "They're all wearing

black pajamas. I thought the VC wore black pajamas. How do you tell them apart?" I'm not positive I kept a completely straight face but I know I tried when I told him "That sir is the big problem, telling them apart."

Q: Where is the Corps, Can Tho?

HARTER: Can Tho was the CTZ (Corps Tactical Zone) headquarters. But it only got really active when John Paul Vann was transferred to IV Corps. Before that the Corps leaders would occasionally ask some of us in the districts to go to meetings in Can Tho, but after going there for one set of meetings I tried to avoid them. I thought at the time they weren't very useful. Now, John Paul Vann was a very different story. He was a real activist, a totally involved individual. Where his predecessor largely stayed in Can Tho and held meetings and "pushed paper," Vann got out into the provinces and districts to see what was going on and to give personal instructions to the people on the ground about how he wanted things done. Unfortunately, I got on the wrong side of John Vann the very first time he and I met. Although our relationship later on was fine, and, as I said earlier, he nominated me among all the other civilian advisors as the IV Corps candidate for a job in Ambassador Bunker's office and then Ambassador Colby's office, we certainly started off on the wrong foot.

Q: How did that happen?

HARTER: Well, as I told you the Province Senior Advisor who put me in Ba Tri was Nick Thorne. A few months later, after having too much to drink, he wandered out of his house in Ben Tre in the middle of a mortar attack and received shrapnel wounds. He was medevaced to Saigon and then to Bangkok and never came back to Vietnam. He was replaced by a man from my large, starting class at the CORDS Training Center. His name was Albert Kotzebue, but everyone called him Buck. He joined CORDS after a full career in the military which started during World War II. He was the first American officer to meet the first Russian officer at a bridge in Germany when the two eastward and westward marching armies came together in 1945. During the first eight weeks of the CORDS training he and I were bridge partners doing our breaks at lunch time. We got to know each other pretty well and I guess he basically had a lot of confidence in what I was doing in the district. He did not try to manage the district from Ben Tre and did not get involved in any of the things I was doing. I don't know how he managed the other District teams, but with me he just basically said, "Let me know when you have problems."

And, the first problem I had of any significance, at least as far as CORDS activities was concerned, resulted from an early instruction issued by John Paul Vann. Shortly after Vann arrived in CORDS IV Corps Headquarters, he said, "I want every senior advisor once a month to write a letter to his counterpart and tell that counterpart exactly what he has done right and wrong during the previous month." I went right to Kotzebue and said, "You know who I work with; you know his big ego and his feelings of being looked down on by other ARVN officers because he was an NCO. You know, I cannot write a letter to him and expect it to have any possible positive results. He'll stop working with me completely and try to get me removed."

Q: This is a Vietnamese?

HARTER: Yes, this is a Vietnamese. He's diminutive, maybe 5'3", and I'm six one. He's come up through the ranks; he feels very important in his position; he's doing a pretty creditable job; he is very active, very involved and gets out and around the district to show the flag and find out how things can be made better. I continued talking to Kotzebue saying, "He's not as corrupt as a lot of the other people around here; he is not going to respond positively even to a letter that includes positive things if I say something negative to him in writing." At this point, I looked Buck in the eye and said "I cannot do this." Kotzebue agreed and said, "You're absolutely right, he is the wrong person to do this with. Don't do it, don't write the letters. I'll explain to Paul Vann why you're not doing it."

At that point, I went back to the district and promptly forgot all about the issue. Unfortunately, I think Buck did too. Some weeks later Vann came to the province for his first visit and he wanted particularly to come to Ba Tri as the pacification showplace. The district chief welcomed him and did part of an overall district briefing on what had been achieved and where there were still some problems to be overcome; Major Thanh left and I did a second part of the briefing describing the overall situation from the American perspective. Vann appeared to be very pleased and complimented me on the presentation and on how everything appeared to be coming together very well in Ba Tri. Then, after looking again at the briefing maps he turned and said to me "can I see the letters you've written to your district chief?" And I simply said, "I've never written any letters to the district chief", and, before I could say another word, Vann went through the roof. Vann fumed, "Who do you think you are? You're no different from anybody else who's under my command. When you get an order, you obey that order; you follow the instructions to the letter. For the next three months I want a copy of every letter you send to your counterpart on my desk the same time you deliver it to him." He stormed out of the District office where we were doing the briefing and, along with Kotzebue and a few others from the CTZ Headquarters he got back on his helicopter and left.

The next day, I went back to my boss in Ben Tre and said, "What happened? I thought you were going to explain this to him?" He said, "I never got around to doing it, so Vann didn't know why we had decided it wouldn't work to give Major Thanh the letters." At that point, I said, "O.K. I'm going to write those letters and I'm going to deliver them to you and to John Paul Vann, but I'm still not going to give the letters to the district chief. I still think if he gets a letter from me he'll go off his rocker and it won't accomplish a thing. But, I'll write the letters for John Paul Vann." Kotzebue agreed that was the best way to do it and he kept my secret for the next three months, after which Vann told Kotzebue I didn't need to send Vann copies of any more of my letters to the District Chief. After that Vann and I had a good relationship but I don't know if he was ever aware that the letters he read during those three months had never been handed to my counterpart. When I say we had a good relationship, it wasn't that we had a lot of direct communication or that we were personally close. Vann was never in any one spot all that long. He came in and out of the district a couple more times while I was there and we always had good communications and understanding when it came to talking about what was going on. I think Kotzebue also gave him favorable reports on my performance.

Q: I might add just parenthetically that this job, I mean the aide to Bunker was considered a great plum and there were certain people who use to call this the beauty contest, because very personal people like Walt Cutler and others would be offered up. This is a very prestigious place.

These are people who have been in the field and serving.

HARTER: I think Bunker was also very interested in trying to get someone who had been more involved in Vietnam programs working in his office. What I mean to say is I think what probably impressed him more than anything else about me as a candidate was that I had spent, close to a year and a half in the countryside; I knew the pacification and war issues, particularly the Mekong Delta issues, quite well. I had direct first-hand experience with the political and economic and social consequences of the war. The people in the embassy who did political and economic reporting on the situation in Vietnam didn't travel that much and when they did, they were largely in and out of the bigger cities. I don't think an Embassy political reporter ever came to Kien Hoa during my tour because they would have naturally gravitated from Ben Tre to Ba Tri and none ever came while I was there. I think Bunker probably found it refreshing to think he'd have someone in his office with that kind of local background. And, although neither of us ever mentioned it in the interview he conducted, Bunker had visited Ba Tri twice while I was there so I had gone around the district with him and talked about what was going on.

Q: What was the political situation in the Delta as you saw it? How was the government's reach there from your perspective?

HARTER: Again, I got to see probably the best of what there was to see, because Ba Tri was a showplace and we got VIP visits and we got the resources to make the programs work. President Thieu came to the District a couple of times – which is why Ambassador Bunker was there -- while I was the District Senior Advisor. I think it would have been pretty rare for the President of Vietnam to go to a small district more than once. There were forty provinces and if all had several districts like Kien Hoa, that would mean maybe 250 districts to visit, but he went to Ba Tri twice during the 18 months I was there.

I was impressed by the President, because he had a very common touch about him as he traveled in the district. I had no idea how he performed elsewhere and especially not what he did in Saigon. Although he was in a very nice starched, well-pressed uniform he didn't put on airs. On the other hand he didn't try to appear in farmer's clothing and pretend he was the same as everybody else. Nonetheless, he had an easy and common communication with the people in the countryside. I'm sure they were all in awe of him as he arrived and they got to see the President of their country but he didn't just march on through for photo-ops. He had done some homework and had an idea of what was happening in his programs.

One of the programs that he visited, I guess it's a tried and true Revolutionary Development, Peace Corps-type project, was the piglet loan program. It was a tremendous example of how a small investment in a rural environment could lead to a very dramatic change in an individual's or a family's life. Under this program, the government would give a family a couple of female piglets to raise. When the piglets got bigger the government brought a boar around to impregnate the young female pigs. After the next generation of piglets was born and weaned, the family was allowed to keep some of those piglets and I think under the program they also got to keep one of the original pigs they had raised. Then the government took the rest of the piglets and at least one of the original pigs and lent them out to other families. But, this was a way in which a family all of a sudden went from being a subsistence farmer to somebody who had the opportunity to earn

income by raising animals for sale. Income that they could continue to generate through each successive generation of piglets. It was a tremendously successful program.

I can remember Thieu coming down with Ambassador Bunker and other visitors to talk about this program in the villages and hamlets. Seeing him go out and look at the program and talk with the families who had the piglets. And hearing the farmers in return just honestly expressing -- hesitantly, a little in awe of the President being in their village and in their house -- how this had changed their lives. It's the kind of program you could use today in rural Iraq and Afghanistan though you'd have to chance the animal to something other than a pig to match Muslim sensitivities. This is the sort of opportunity that gets a family's whole economic situation turned around. You can do it with chickens; you can do it with a variety of different animals. The pig program was just the one that was the most successful in Vietnam.

Q: How about the green revolution, the rice?

HARTER: We got the opportunity to promote that as well, but this was a tough sale for the peasants in Ba Tri. Introducing the IR-8, and IR-9 varieties of rice at that particular time was really tough, particularly because Ba Tri district was a district largely filled with subsistence farmers. Moreover, because of the salt intrusion problems, we didn't get two or three crops a year on a regular basis like some of the prosperous inland areas could get. We could only count on one rice crop a year, and any more than that was considered a real blessing. So, telling somebody to try a new brand of rice that would produce greater returns in a shorter period of time and maybe give them a chance to try for a second crop or a third crop in the same fields was a very, very risky sale. If the weather and the other factors essential for the rice crop didn't work out, the farmer had nothing to show for his experiment. And, that meant a very difficult time for the farm family. You could only get a few people each growing season to try the new rice and a big success on one crop was only that, a big success on one crop. It didn't necessarily convince the same farmer, let alone his neighbors, that this new rice was worth a full time commitment in his fields. Each crop season only a few farmers would agree to plant the new rice in their fields in Ba Tri, or at least try it in a small section of their fields. In other districts where the conditions were intrinsically more favorable, farmers were more willing to take a risk and they did find the new strains from the Philippines were very productive in Vietnam. Of course, not everyone agreed that the rice tasted as good as the traditional varieties so you couldn't always get complete agreement to go with the new rice.

Q: What about fishing?

HARTER: Fishing was generally small scale and confined to the rivers and the immediate coast line. Nobody went out for more than a day and usually always in sight of land, even though that land was flat and got out of sight pretty quickly as you moved out to sea. It was a particularly profitable enterprise for only one of the 16 villages in the district. This village was on a river and near the mouth where it entered the South China Sea. It was never a really prosperous village, but it was the one village that did make money out of fishing. Thanh Phu, the district across the river on Ba Tri's southern border was much more active in fishing both the river and the ocean. But it was also a much more active site for the VC. And so, eventually quite a number of fishermen from Thanh Phu fled across the river

The arrival of the refugees in the district created a couple of new and interesting problems for me. First, I was targeted for assassination by the VC as a result of work I tried to get started in the refugee community which was focused on teaching refugee women how to use sewing machines. Secondly, I planned to set up a fishing cooperative using the boats the fishing families had abandoned in the neighboring district when they fled across the river to Ba Tri. Neither of these efforts really got off the ground, but they provided some real challenges and in both cases threatened to get me killed. In the first instance, being targeted directly by the VC and in the second case getting shot at by the U.S. military aircraft.

I had become acquainted with three young Vietnamese school teachers who had been assigned to teach school in the village where all the refugees were located. After determining they knew how to use sewing machines, I asked if they would agree to teach the skill to some of the refugee women if there was any interest. They agreed and I used my AIK funds to purchase a sewing machine and several women agreed to learn. I am not positive, but I believe they had already held a couple of classes when an armed VC unit entered the village one night and gathered a number of the residents together for a propaganda session. Although the VC did not specifically say they were going to kill me because of the plan to teach women to use sewing machines, when they came into the village they told the villagers they assembled no one was to get involved in anything that I was encouraging because the Americans could not be trusted. The VC also said they would kill me the next time I came into the village.

Word of the event reached the district headquarters the next morning and I was told about the threat by district officials. I was initially very upset because I thought the VC had not considered anything I had done up to that point to be worth a threat on my life and I certainly didn't think a small sewing program merited so much attention. But, after I got over that little bit of ego, I realized I could not simply let the threat stand unchallenged. So, contrary to the advice of my military colleagues I waited until it was relatively late in the day – after 5:00 pm – and it would be getting dark within a couple of hours, I got in my International Harvester Scout that only USAID civilians used and I drove alone down to the coastal village about 20 minutes away from the district headquarters. I went directly to where the school teachers stayed and spoke with them and told them not to be concerned about the VC threat and that I intended to continue to support the school and the sewing program. I made sure I walked around in the area and said I was there because I had heard of the threat and wanted to know where the VC were who were unable to come out to confront me. Although this was all a bit theatrical I'd guess from the Vietnamese perspective, I wanted to make sure the local residents knew I was still going to try to keep active in their village. After about 30 or 40 minutes of walking around and talking to people, I got back in my vehicle to drive back to Ba Tri's district town. It was only then, as I was driving back, that it dawned on me how potentially stupid my action was. Along the road back to the district town, there was a rather large bend in the road where all vehicles had to slow down to make the turn. As I approached that area, I noticed a Vietnamese woman in typical black pajamas standing off on a rice paddy dike about ten or fifteen yards from the road. She had one hand on her hip – but no baby in her arm – and I thought this seemed like an unusual position in which to be standing. As I slowed to make the turn, her arm dropped to her side and I immediately thought – That's a signal to the VC to ambush me on the road – but it turned out to be nothing more than my imagination and I drove back to the district compound perhaps a little more considerate of what

my life might mean and I tried to avoid doing stupid things like driving out alone toward dusk. And, no, I wasn't carrying any weapon. I had decided soon after I arrived in Vietnam if I was seen walking around with a weapon all the time, the village people weren't going to have much confidence in the local security situation. So aside from a few occasions when I had to drive to the provincial capital for early morning meetings and I basically was the first vehicle on the road – it was still pitch dark and the road barriers were up at all the PF checkpoints – I never carried a weapon. Like most of my colleagues at the CORDS training center I purchased a personal weapon – a Walther PPK – because the AID instructors told us we wouldn't be issued weapons in Vietnam. While that might have been true if we worked in some advisory offices in Saigon, all of us out in the field virtually had our pick of weapons. I inherited a folding stock M-2 carbine and a Swedish K 9mm sub-machine gun from my predecessor, Major Lizardo. These were weapons he had acquired from CIA personnel who were working in the province capital. Anyway, I am digressing from the second part of my story about the refugees.

When I learned the refugees from Thanh Phu District had largely left their fishing boats behind I kept trying to figure a way we could get them over to Ba Tri so the people could resume fishing. Discussions with the Vietnamese military didn't produce any interest in a cross district military operation just to liberate some fishing boats and risk people getting killed. I thought if I could get the boats I could set up a cooperative which would maintain control of the boats but allow the fishermen to use them to earn money and eventually buy them back with the objective of using the money they provided for renting the boats to start small capital funds for other needed projects in the village.

Then all of a sudden a different opportunity arose through the U.S. Navy. One of the outlying teams in Ba Tri was a U.S. Navy advisory unit that worked with a Vietnamese Navy riverine patrol force set up near the mouth of the district's southern river with the South China Sea. These units would patrol along the coast and along the river to try to prevent the VC from re-supplying their troops by sea, since we were a long way from the Ho Chi Minh trail supply lines. They would stop the local boats and make sure they were licensed and not carrying contraband and try to maintain control of the coasts. Anyway, the U.S. Navy unit got word that a U.S. Navy PT boat team was prepared to come to the base in Ba Tri and conduct a joint exercise with the Vietnamese Navy designed to search for signs of VC riverine activity in neighboring Thanh Phu. I saw this as my big chance to get into Thanh Phu and to arrange to tow out the fishing boats. So I arranged all this with the Navy advisors in the District and we started off early in the morning to enter the canals on the other side of the river. Our District Advisory Team had a 16 foot long fiberglass Boston whaler that had been ordered through Saigon for a lot of the districts that were located around the delta. It was supposed to provide us an emergency "vehicle" to get out of the District if there was a major military fight. So I took one of the team interpreters and one of my NCOs and we got in the Boston whaler and attached ourselves by rope to the back of one of the Vietnamese patrol craft. As we entered the canals I began to see the fishing boats moored along the docks where some of the local village houses were close to the water. I started marking the boats on my plastic map overlay with my crayon marker. The idea was we'd finish our patrol run and then pick up the boats I'd marked on the map and tow them back across the river.

Unfortunately, all of that proved to be a pipe dream. About half-way into the operation, a single VC soldier came up from a spider hole along the side of the river and fired a B-40 rocket that hit

the Vietnamese boat that was towing me. The VC immediately dropped back into his spider hole and was completely invisible. But that was the signal for all hell to break out on our side. As soon as the B-40 struck the boat every Vietnamese and American weapon on board the various boats was turned on the shore and fired on automatic. The din was amazing. When the enemy rocket hit the boat, a Vietnamese sailor fell overboard into the canal, although at the time we thought he might have been wounded by the shot. I instructed the interpreter to cut us loose from the Vietnamese ship and directed the sergeant to move our boat so we could get the sailor in the water. We did so and got him back on board his ship but by that time the U.S. Navy OV-10 aircraft decided to get into the action. They had come along on our operation to serve as spotters for potential enemy activity and to provide air support in the event we ran into a large concentration of VC. As my Boston whaler and its crew was maneuvering around in the water to stay out of the line of fire and to avoid the milling patrol boats, the OV-10 aircraft started strafing runs to hit the river bank area where the VC was likely to have fired the shot. The result was machine gun bullets hitting the water on both sides of our little boat until the U.S. Navy patrol boats could get the aircraft to back off because there was only one VC involved in the action and he had long since disappeared. Once the shooting had stopped, the U.S. Navy advisors conferred with the Navy PT boat team and they agreed we would continue on with the patrol. But, they quickly decided we would not go back out of the District on the canals we had come in on so we wouldn't risk a return ambush by a reinforced or at least alerted VC force. So, all the boats I'd marked on my map just stayed where they were in the canal and the other route we followed to get back to the river produced not a single wooden candidate for liberation.

Q: What about, there wasn't much U.S. military in IV Corps?

HARTER: No, the U.S. military was largely excluded from the delta. A part of the US 9th division was based in the province immediately north of Kien Hoa just outside My Tho, the big river trading city of the northern delta. The U.S base was west of the city at a place called Dong Tam. That province was actually in III Corps, but since Kien Hoa was the northernmost province on the coast in IV Corps, the 9th division sent a company of U.S. forces to help in clearing out the Vietcong in Kien Hoa. This unit was based in the district immediately north of mine on this central island in the province. As I said earlier the districts that made up Kien Hoa were totally surrounded by rivers and canals that connected the rivers. We had been connected to the mainland by the bridge that had been blown at Tet in 1968. All the time I was there, the bridge did not get rebuilt and we had to cross the river on a temporary ferry that had been brought in once order had been restored after Tet. This district, it was called Giong Trom, and my district Ba Tri were on the middle island and the other districts in the province were arranged above and below it like jaws around the middle island of the district. The other district names I remember were Thanh Phu and Mo Cay which I mentioned earlier, Truoc Giang District where Ben Tre was located, Ham Long district in between Thanh Phu and Mo Cay and Binh Dai which comprised the whole upper jaw around the middle island which would make a total of seven districts in the province. Anyway, the 9th Division was sent down to assist in the destruction of the Vietcong military forces that remained after Tet. When the unit was based just north of our district, my NCOs used to go up there and trade or scrounge U.S. food from the mess sergeants. That way we'd occasionally have U.S. steaks and other frozen meats and we'd get trays of eggs and other items that were hard to find in the local markets. I actually developed a taste for duck eggs and Vietnamese noodle soups for breakfast.

Earlier, I said Kien Hoa was one of the most insecure provinces in the entire country and even after the Tet offensive failed in the province there were still a lot of main force VC units, including one in Ba Tri, and forested areas where the ARVN forces didn't go to challenge the VC units. The province was so dangerous that I was the only civilian to spend an entire 18 month tour in a district there without being medevaced for either war injury or severe illness. One of my civilian colleagues in Giong Trom died from disease, he was from CORDS 2. Three other civilian deputy senior advisors were injured in mine incidents in their districts; their vehicles were blown up on district roads. The 9th Division was there probably six or eight months of the time that I was in the district, operating in Giong Trom and occasionally in other parts of the province. And then, they too were pulled back as part of the Vietnamization process in the latter half of 1969 and they did not operate in the delta anymore. The division did not have a very good reputation and their commander was considered to be one of the big "body count" advocates. He didn't seem to care about civilian casualties and chalked up everyone in black pajamas as VC. He was known for sweep operations that produced lots of "death and destruction" but not much to help the pacification process.

Q: Did you have much conference with fellow, district advisors from other places?

HARTER: No, there was no real interchange that way. The folks in Can Tho may have been trying to encourage that by having periodic meetings in the CTZ headquarters but the meetings were so boring I didn't go. We had good monthly meetings in Kien Hoa where the province assembled the senior advisors and the provincial department heads to talk about provincial issues and programs. You'd get the latest instructions from Saigon and have discussions about the results from the Hamlet Evaluation System to see where additional emphasis need to be directed. We could also go around and have individual meetings with the different provincial offices – New Life Development, PsyOps, Military Intelligence and Operations, Public Affairs – and try to get your district ducks lined up in the provincial pond; figure out what you needed to do; what other supplies you could beg, borrow, or have your NCO steal; and who you could talk to in the various other divisions of the advisory team to cajole the extra support you needed for your local programs, things like that. Because I was the only civilian District Senior Advisor, I didn't get to talk with the other civilians because my counterparts from the other districts at these provincial gatherings were all Army Majors or Captains. It was actually only when I got to Saigon and I was working with Colby that I was able to help bring some of these civilians into a dialogue in Saigon with Colby and with other people in the senior CORDS management so that they would have a better idea of what CORDS civilians were actually doing on the ground. We would do this sometimes over dinner at my house or sometimes just in meetings in Colby's office. But, that was the only time I can recall really having a bunch of other civilians who were working in the countryside exchanging views with one another.

Q: Dennis, you've came to Saigon. You've already talked about that you did not go as aide to Bunker. But, we'll talk about working with Colby. You were in Saigon from when to when?

HARTER: From January of 1970 until late June, maybe early July.

Q: I don't know if I asked, but this goes way after you were there, really at the end. But, I

interviewed a long time, Terry McNamara who was Consul General in Can Tho when he had to evacuate by sea. He had some scathing things to say about the CIA and how they sort of got out all the Americans and left their other people. I mean, they didn't do a very good job. What was your impression of the CIA operation where you were, or did you have any impression?

HARTER: We didn't have any CIA personnel in the district. When I first arrived in the province, I did meet some CIA people who worked on intelligence issues there but we didn't have any regular connections after that except for an occasional beer together in the club when I came up for provincial meetings. The CIA was involved in creating a special program designed to target the underground VC government structure called the Phoenix program. Together with the military intelligence people they pulled together all the information we had on individuals and units and funneled that information into local District intelligence units called DIOCC's – I believe that stands for District Intelligence Operations Coordinating Center. These centers were designed to bring intelligence together for the district and for the province and then the local military and intelligence personnel could try to collect more information to enable them to locate these individuals and capture or kill them. Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), a hard-nosed Vietnamese military strike team, and other units were used to go out and get the VC cadre. In a sense, the idea was to instill a sense of insecurity and fear among the VC so they could not operate as freely as they had in the past. Of course the goal was also to eliminate them, not just make them afraid. But, by making them afraid of being caught in the villages, the VC were far less able to operate. So I had one of these DIOCC's in my District and a US Army lieutenant was assigned to work with the Vietnamese military in the district and help them develop a good intelligence collection and targeting system. But while this was a CIA program at its inception, it wasn't being staffed or run by the CIA at the district level. When I first got to Ben Tre, I did hear some stories about the way the CIA people in the province during the Tet offensive had gone off on their own instead of staying in the compound with the military advisors. But, I didn't have any dealings with anyone from the CIA when I was in Ba Tri.

Q: O.K. You're back in Saigon. What were you doing?

HARTER: Well, I was one of the special assistants or executive assistants to Ambassador William (Bill) Colby who was in charge of the CORDS program and the deputy to General Abrams. There were three assistants in the main office. The senior man was Colonel Sam Smithers and he was in charge of our group and liaison with the military both on the advisory and the combat side. An USIA officer by the name of Everett Bumgardner was the second assistant. He had been in and out of Vietnam for at least a decade. He spoke Vietnamese and had contacts throughout the Vietnamese hierarchy and society. Just before I left the office, Ev, everybody called him Ev, was replaced by Frank Scotton, another USIA officer with a long association with Vietnam. I was the third assistant and I came in to replace Bill Stewart another FSO who was probably my grade level, I guess a (FSO) six or a five. Bill subsequently left the Foreign Service and joined Time Magazine, spending several years in Asia as a correspondent. Bill was also the one who introduced me into the famous house at 47 Phan Thanh Gian, the house that originated the light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel parties.

Q: Did you go to that New Year's Eve party?

HARTER: Yes, that's the one I'm referring to. But, no, I did not go to the one in 1970. I arrived a couple of days after New Year's to begin work in Saigon.

Q: I went to the 1970 one, yeah.

HARTER: Bill Stewart introduced me to the house, but I didn't just move in when he left. Bill's replacement in the house had already been identified and I had to wait my turn, as well as to see if the other roommates would agree to let me join the household. When the next member left, I moved in. Fortunately, I didn't have to wait very long. And so, for probably five of the six plus months I was in Saigon, I lived at 47 Phan Thanh Gian. As an aside, Phan Thanh Gian was a leading courtier of the Nguyen Dynasty who negotiated early agreements with the French which resulted in the French eventually taking over the southern part of the country in the middle of the nineteenth century. He committed suicide when the French invaded the areas in the south which were under his leadership.

Q: Could you talk a little about that and your feeling, I mean using David Halberstam's sort of the best and brightest in the Foreign Service, young officers, which is a different dynamic than the older ones, of which I was a middle age representative. How did that work and what sort of things were you talking about there? How things are going? Because, young people, you know, provide a different feel than I think you get as you're farther up the ladder.

HARTER: Well, we did have an interesting mix of people doing a variety of different things but all very much I believe looking to be involved in government service, though I was the only one of that immediate group who actually stayed with the government. One of the people in the house and the one I actually replaced in the house when he left Vietnam was David Sulzberger, son and nephew of the New York Times Sulzbergers. David was an AID direct hire and worked AID's new life development program, trying to translate national program objectives into something which could be used in the provinces. I think he was responsible for the house being sort of a magnet for young journalists who were in and out of Saigon all the time trying to follow the war. Another of the roommates was Seton Shanley. Seton was a Foreign Service officer on loan to AID and was a civilian member of the coordinating group in Saigon working on the Phoenix program. Like me, he worked in MACV Headquarters at Tan Son Nhut Airport.

Q: Seton had studied to be a Jesuit?

HARTER: Yes, that's correct but it's my understanding he left the Foreign Service shortly after Vietnam and returned to the seminary. I believe he may have entered an order.

Q: I think he's married to a Vietnamese, but maybe I'm wrong.

HARTER: Not while I was there and not as far as I've heard. He certainly left Vietnam single. The other roommate who was there while I lived in the house was Gage McAfee. Gage was from a well-to-do family of lawyers in New York City. Actually, I think Seton's father also was a lawyer. Gage was trained as a lawyer and he was Ambassador Colby's special advisor on legal issues. He was working with the Chief Justice of the Vietnamese Supreme Court. The Chief Justice was involved in writing a new constitution and particularly a Bill of Rights for the

Vietnam and Gage was his advisor.

Although I was not living in the house in January 1970, I often went there after work to talk and to get to know my future roommates better. We did have a lot of conversations about what was going on in the war and about what we were all doing. At that time, quite a number of my civilian friends and associates were skeptics and often quite sarcastic when we talked about the war. But I think there was still a great deal of optimism among the people who worked in Saigon. And, we certainly did not slack off in our commitment to trying to make our programs work better. Although there was a lot of posturing among the members, it did appear as though the National Assembly was beginning to function as a legislative body and not just as a rubber stamp for the Executive Branch. We all thought the Executive Branch was too dictatorial but we could see some of its power being tempered. Based on what Gage told us, there was also progress on the constitution and legal reform to protect civil rights was underway. Those of us who had come from the countryside like myself or who had other contacts with people in the countryside, felt there had been positive changes after the Vietcong failed in their takeover efforts at Tet two years earlier. Unfortunately, we were really out of touch with what was happening in the United States. So, we didn't realize that the United States mood had totally changed. And, even our young journalist contacts and friends didn't talk much about that, preferring to try and ferret out comments from us about what we saw happening or talking about the military operations they had accompanied. The journalists though, because they had been on these operations, had a much more jaded view of the battlefield success that was being reported. They had no respect for the MACV press briefings "the five o'clock follies" and very little confidence the war could be won militarily. Their conversations with the ordinary soldiers gave them a different perspective about how much of the fighting to take over territory from the VC and North Vietnamese rarely resulted in any real gains and how one unit after another seemed to be fighting on the same battlefields month after month against enemy units that always were able to reclaim the territory when the U.S. units moved on.

Q: I was there at the same time, of course. My feeling was, they're doing as well as the Lincoln government during the Civil War, you know. Things were operating and I thought they would bring it off.

HARTER: Yes, and the civilians who had an understanding of how the Phoenix program was to work felt it was the right way to go, taking the fight directly to the VC cadre who were trying to create a parallel government operation in the hamlets and villages. We saw this as a big morale booster for officials in the countryside and a real worry for the VC, making it harder for them to move in and out of populated areas to try to propagandize and collect taxes. And, in many cases the Vietnamese and US units that went after the VC were going into areas where the VC ate and slept and felt they were safe. Once they too had to face the threat of a midnight wake-up call, it was felt they would be a lot less active in GVN controlled areas. If the GVN could do that effectively, it would be a major tool to re-establish its own presence in the countryside. Now when I say this, it's important to acknowledge that some of the younger people in Saigon saw the Phoenix program as a real danger and felt that it would make the government as brutal in its handling of the enemy as the VC had been toward those working for the government.

Q: Now when you're working for Colby - first place, describe how Colby operated and the

atmosphere he generated around him.

HARTER: He was probably one of the most serious and yet open people I have ever worked with. When I first joined his staff and we were discussing my role, he sat me down in his office and said, "This is MACV Headquarters, all the military go home at 5 o'clock. Unless you're working on a special project for me that doesn't require you to interact with other people in this building, I want you going home the same time that everybody else does. And," he said, "don't feel that just because I'm here you have to stay. I can take care of myself." And, from time to time when I was still working on a project that he had assigned, he'd stop by my office and ask me if I was sure I needed to still be there after 5:00 pm. Colby was also very open and receptive to new ideas and he was constantly trying to get more feel for what was going on in the countryside.

Whenever possible he'd try to leave town on Friday night to visit various provincial and Corps headquarter areas. And, he'd usually take one or more of his staff members with him to give him more eyes and ears on the ground. We'd fly out at the end of a Friday's workday, come in to a province or district and spend the following day talking to people, Americans and Vietnamese. We'd have meetings, visit projects, try to have informal sessions to learn what was going on in the area and particularly look for things that needed fixing. Because so much of his time in Saigon was tied up with meetings and high-level sessions, Colby rarely had a chance to get a real feel for programs as they worked on the ground without these trips. But, here too, he also was a prisoner of his rank and status and was constantly dealing with the top officials in the areas he visited. On these trips it was rare for him to get a chance to talk to the people who had direct experience in advisory efforts with the Vietnamese at the "basic levels." So, one of the things I tried to do was to get lower level civilian advisors from the districts to meet and talk with Colby when they came to Saigon.

Q: You didn't feel that - the military assistant can get pretty nasty. Lieutenants report to captains, captains report to majors, etc. Each level is more aware of what's up the people at top want to hear and it tends to stifle, particularly the captains on down from getting out and around. But, this wasn't happening on the CORDS side?

HARTER: I don't think that was happening on the CORDS side, particularly not where Colby was concerned. Colby wanted to hear what was going on from as many different people as he could. So, sometimes when we were going out into the provincial meetings, I would try and get in touch with some of my CORDS colleagues and try to see if it was possible to have an informal meeting with some of them beforehand or after he'd had his regular briefings. Colby met regularly with people at the embassy to talk about what he'd learned in the countryside. I know he had regular meetings with Ambassadors Bunker and [Ed: Samuel] Berger and with the other people who were focused on the political developments in Vietnam. He also was very quick to meet with top officials of the Vietnamese government and to use his influence to try and get things changed. He was the one who assigned McAfee to work with the Vietnamese Chief Justice on the new constitution and he kept pushing Thieu and others in the leadership to make this a priority.

My job at MACV Headquarters was mostly focused on the advisory effort and involved working

with other people in the headquarters. I didn't have any real dealings with Vietnamese officials very often. The only Vietnamese I had any contact with, and that was fairly irregular, was the President's personal advisor, Hoang Duc Nha. Bill Stewart, my predecessor used to see him more regularly. Sometimes, however, when we felt it would be useful to give some program a push from the top, I'd go and talk informally to Nha about some of the CORDS issues and see if he could give some momentum to Vietnamese efforts in the provinces and districts. So, he was my primary contact with Vietnamese government officials at that particularly time. The rest of the work was mostly internal coordination with Colby and with the various people at the CORDS headquarters. I'd occasionally be asked to review some program reports and get comments from different offices and then prepare reports for Colby that he would use in meetings.

Q: How were we treating the accusations, perhaps well-formed problems of corruption at the highest level?

HARTER: The corruption issue wasn't part of my portfolio and I never worked on any issues involving Vietnamese official corruption. My friends and I talked about it but, I didn't have any first-hand knowledge of how that was being handled either in CORDS or through the Embassy. I know there were discussions at the CORDS headquarters about corruption and that was translated into proposals for the Embassy to approach the Vietnamese government. I know Colby talked about corruption problems and pointed out individuals who were weakening the GVN image when he met with President Thieu. Colby also asked about corruption problems whenever he visited units outside Saigon. He was interested in corruption and malfeasance as a local issue and on whatever information the localities could provide about how it affected the resources available from higher levels, most particularly from Saigon. Colby never hesitated to tell Saigon officials about what he learned in the provinces, good or bad.

Q: Talking about CORDS - I mean, here we were recruiting young men and some young women, you know, pass the Foreign Service exam and all. I mean, these are people who sort of rate high intellectual endeavors as opposed to the Peace Corps or military life. I would think there would be some problems of people, who were just plain, not ready for living in bunkers or getting mortared and all of that.

HARTER: I don't know anyone personally who got to Vietnam and then threw it all in and said, "This isn't for me, I am leaving." I gather there were some who declined the invitation to join the Foreign Service when they were told, their only option was to go to Vietnam. And, it was people in this group who complained about the recruiting process and got it changed so that incoming classes didn't all end up in Vietnam. I suspect there were more people in this group who said, "Forget it, I'm not going" as opposed to people bailing out right after they arrived in Vietnam. But, most people I knew who went out to work in Vietnam had at least one harrowing experience during their tours. It wasn't always necessarily as bad as living in bunkers, but there certainly were times when you did end up in a bunker, or where you ended up in situations in which your life could be at risk. Like I said the last time, where you drove roads early in the morning and you had to get from point A to point B you really had no idea whether those roads were safe or secure or if you'd have any opportunity to protect yourself in the event there was a threat. All of us, of course, had the option to have guns for self-protection. I mean we had weapons available to us outside Saigon. I don't think anyone in Saigon ever offered me a weapon and there were no

weapons at 47 Phan Thanh Gian for us to use in the event we had to protect ourselves there. When I was in the District, I didn't think that gave me the right image as an advisor and so I did not carry a weapon and certainly I never let it be seen that I had a weapon with me or in my vehicle on the occasions I did have a weapon there. There were a few occasions when I made sure I did have a weapon with me, but by and large I didn't travel with one.

Q: Were there any particular issues that you found you were engaged in?

HARTER: During the time that I worked with Colby, I don't recall any specific program or issue I was asked to develop, but then it was a pretty short tenure, only six months or so. I came up with some ideas and some suggestions like getting Colby together with civilians from the countryside. I mentioned when I was in grammar school, I was a member of the school safety patrol. I thought that a safety patrol would be a good thing to introduce in Vietnam. If you remember, traffic in Saigon was terrible, even though it was nothing then like it is now. I saw a safety patrol as a way to cut down on traffic accidents and eliminate some of the traffic chaos around the schools at arrival and dismissal times. I saw it too as a way to develop respect for the government and a respect for law and order among the school kids. Colby liked the idea and it got proposed to the Vietnamese and it was started up in Saigon a couple of years after I left.

Q: Well, you were there when we had announced the Vietnamization thing and essentially you were there when the first sort of major troop withdrawals were taking place. Was there disquiet concern about this?

HARTER: I think there was a certain amount of concern in the headquarters, particularly about whether or not the South Vietnamese military would be able to stand up to the same kinds of challenges that the American military had. People were concerned whether ARVN would be willing to move out to react to a threat or an actual attack or whether it would just sit in defensive positions and wait for something to happen. I think the initial responses and reactions from a number of the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam and particularly from Vietnamese Marine units were viewed as positive. These units did not just wait for something to happen.

The Vietnamese marines, at the beginning had a pretty good reputation and so did the Vietnamese Airborne units. Given proper supplies and air support they were capable of engaging in operations that were successful and I think some of the Vietnamese military leaders were surprised their units would get out of the barracks and actually do something. There were always exceptions -- units that didn't do well at all, but that was usually the result of poor leadership rather than inadequate troop performance. As I mentioned in the previous session, Vietnamization started while I was still in the district and affected the advisory program as well as the U.S. combat forces. Over half a year, my team went from over thirty persons down to two civilians, and when I left, only one civilian. The only other group still in the district was that naval advisory group down on the river working with the Vietnamese Riverine Forces.

Q: Were we concerned in CORDS and all that among the Vietnamese staff that there might be a significant undercover North Vietnamese, sort of spies?

HARTER: I guess there was always a certain feeling that was possible and that loyalties are

bound to be stressed in any kind of a conflict where families were split on both sides. I still don't want to call it a civil war, as many of the critics did and still do. Yes, the people involved were all Vietnamese, but they had very different political and social systems involved on both sides. And, once there was no chance for reunification based on an equitable balance of sharing power, two very different states came into being. Historically, there had most always been two or three different regimes operating in the territory that was Vietnam. The Vietcong were not independent actors; they were directly run by Hanoi. Many of them were from the old anti-French resistance, but they were also followers of Ho Chi Minh. After the North's victory in 1975, those who didn't respond to Hanoi's beck and call were moved quickly out of the way. Those southerners who were among the top Communist leaders stayed with leadership group and some eventually got to have important positions at the top, particularly on the government side. But getting back to your question about spies, I guess one always had the thought there could be spies operating around you, but I never paid a lot of attention to that as a day-to-day issue. Moreover, MACV Headquarters was almost entirely comprised of Americans.

Q: How about the press, the American press? Were they sometimes setting the agenda on what tissue Colby might be responding to or concerned about?

HARTER: Well, I suppose there was a certain amount of that. The 47 Phan Thanh Gian house I lived in was a sort of gathering place for young journalists. And, a lot of the young stringers, people who were not regular employees but who wrote stories that they tried to sell to the news organizations often congregated at our house when they came in from their various trips with the US military. While these journalists were not "employees" they often were affiliated with one of the news magazines, Time or Newsweek or US News, or with some of the newspapers and worked exclusively for them. They just didn't get any of the regular employee benefits and for the most part, they had arrived in Vietnam on their own and latched on to jobs only after arrival. From this group, you'd hear grumblings about the military orchestrating this particular trip or that. The U.S. Military would take the press out to see the troops in the field and some of that turned out to be too orchestrated for the younger journalists. Because these journalists went out with main force U.S. units, they were out in the real combat zones. So, you'd hear their concerns that the security situation was really pretty tenuous when you got out of the bigger provincial cities and towns. And, a lot of them would talk quite regularly about how difficult it was to see the South Vietnamese government forces being able to prevent the North from invading the country and taking over once the U.S. troops were gone. Where a lot of the advisors at MACV seemed to have positive feelings about the Vietnamese military's capabilities, the younger journalists had no real confidence the South Vietnamese would be able to stand up to Hanoi's regular troops. Most of them felt the only thing that was keeping the South in the fight was the U.S. presence. Once the U.S. forces left, the South Vietnamese would have to depend upon the US commitment to provide weapons, supplies and air support in order to survive, and the young journalists didn't seem to think that would be possible.

Q: What was your impression of young correspondents? Once there were some demonstrations against the government, I can't remember what it was about, and the demonstrators had black arm bands on or something. A bunch of young American press people put black arm bands on and were in the crowd. Anyway, they got arrested. One of them, I think was John Steinbeck's son. And, I had to go and such and bail them out. It just seemed kind of, I mean these weren't

serious folk, they were having fun.

HARTER: Yeah. Well, I mean some of it was like that, sort of kicking back and blowing off steam when they were in Saigon. I know that some of the guys in my house grew marijuana in flower pots in the back yard and so there was always a supply of marijuana available when the journalists came around and they also brought little packages they had purchased on the streets or in the countryside. There was also a lot of music in the house and a lot of that was from the hippie scene in the US and sometimes the dialogue got a little fuzzy. But, by and large the people I met and dealt with in this group were all very sharp. And even the ones that didn't stay with major publications beyond a year or so -- I'm talking about the stringers, not the regular journalists -- these young reporters were really good journalists, good investigative reporters, people who were interested in what was going on. Some of the more serious ones continued on to very responsible positions. Bob Kaiser of the Washington Post started out in Vietnam as a junior reporter.

He later was in Moscow, in a number of different places there and later a senior manager in DC. Some of the old Washington based reporters came through too. When I was in the district, one of the visitors who came in on his own was Joseph Alsop. I'm still not sure how he got directed to Ba Tri on this particular visit to Vietnam, but he came in late one afternoon and I took him around to see things in the district and talked to him about pacification. He wrote a column about his visit to the district and about me personally as part of the series he produced from that trip to Vietnam. You did have a feel that the journalists, while critical -- I'm not referring here to Joe Alsop, because he supported the war -- were really quite serious about what they were doing. Dan Sutherland was a Christian Science Monitor correspondent and he came down to the district too. I later used to see him regularly in Saigon.

He stayed with the (Christian Science) Monitor and then later went with the Wall Street Journal and I ran into him again years later when he was covering China. Karen House was there then too and she was just getting started. I can't recall whether she was with the Wall Street Journal then or not.

Q: You mentioned that things were going relatively well. This is the post-Tet period. But, you weren't picking up what was happening back in the states. Was anybody coming back to you and was taking you aside and saying, "You know, things aren't going well back in the United States."

HARTER: No, I didn't get that feedback. Even talking to some of the journalists, I don't recall there being a lot of that information coming through in any of the discussions we had. Of course, some of the stories about the demonstrations in the U.S. made it to Armed Forces Radio or the Stars and Stripes, but I think the military would not have played that up too much. So I guess we were largely unaware -- I should say I was unaware -- of how divisive the war had become and how people in the US were pushing the government to get out of Vietnam.

Q: You left when?

HARTER: I left in the summer of 1970 to get Chinese language training at FSI so I could get

back into a China focused career.

STAN IFSHIN
USAID Officer
Saigon (1968-1970)

Mr. Ifshin was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1942 and graduated from John Hopkins University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1967. He has served in numerous posts including Saigon, Taiwan, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and Phillipines. He was interviewed by David Reuther in 2001.

Q: That was August...

IFSHIN: August of '68. We'd just arrived in Vietnam. First of all we are getting our debriefing and a bomb goes off. A motorcyclist with a bomb, just outside one of the office buildings where we were being briefed. We heard it go off and we thought, ok. Then we went out to this hotel and we were having a few beers, we were on the roof of this hotel as I recall and the lights were flickering across the street. A couple of the guys said, "Do you think those are signals? It looks like signals to me. I think somebody's signaling something there. Anyway, somebody called, I don't know who, some sort of security authority saying he thinks he sees somebody signaling. And they asked how long he'd been in the country, and he said he'd been there a little less than 24 hours, and they said, okay, thank you. [laughter].

And then we got our assignments. We were told what parts of Vietnam we were going to.

Q: So you didn't get that information until you arrived?

IFSHIN: Until we arrived in the country, yes. I was assigned to Three Corps, which was subsequently to become third military region, which is the area basically around Saigon. I was assigned to Thu Thua district in Long An Province. First they sent me to Bien Hoa, which is the corps headquarters and John Paul Vann was the head of CORDS in Three Corps.

Q: Just to get this straight, Three Corps extends from the ocean to the Cambodian border. It's a horizontal stripe almost.

IFSHIN: Well, I think of it more of a blob, frankly. But it's on the ocean, yes, and it goes right up to the Cambodian border.

Q: How many provinces were...

IFSHIN: I don't remember. 8, 12, I don't remember. It was the area around Saigon. Long An was about 20 miles south of Saigon. John Paul Vann wanted to interview everybody before they went off to their assignment. He wasn't there when I arrived so I sort of had to sit around Bien Hoa. And he also had a program where he wanted people to go out and observe CORDS activities in

three different locations before they went to their assignment. I remember the first place he sent me, I can't remember the name of the province right now, anyway I arrived in a chopper or small plane that set me down at this isolated airport. Nobody is there. The plane takes off and leaves, and I'm standing there with a suitcase in the middle of Vietnam on a runway. When I say runway, this was PSP planking, a rudimentary type runway. There was a building but nobody was around. And then a jeep came scooting up and they said, oh, yes, sorry we're a little late, and they took me off and they said we have a civilian here but he's not here right now. But you can watch what we do. I really didn't think they were doing much of anything, but I watched them for the day or 48 hours or 72 hours or whatever I was supposed to watch them for. I got picked up and flown back to Binwa.

And then they sent me to the city, a fairly big important place, and I flew in at the airport, mass confusion, no one's there to meet me and I hear there's VC in town. I have a contact number or I get one from some of the American personnel, this was a big airport and there was lots of American personnel around and I got some number to call the CORDS office there. And they said, well, we have VC in town and you better just go back. So I go back to the air traffic people and say can I get back to Binwa. No, there's no flights to Binwa. Are there any flights to anywhere? And there was a flight to some place I'd never heard of, and I asked, well, is that a big place, and they said yes, and I asked am I likely to get a flight to Binwa from there. Yes. So that's what I did in fact and came back to Binwa. I went in and I'd had two of my three trips and I said, "I think I'm prepared, I think I'm ready to get out there and do my thing. I've seen enough of what everyone's doing and how it's going."

So I went down to Thu Thua, where I was the lone civilian on a team that consisted of a major, two lieutenants, about 4 or 5 senior sergeants, when I say senior I mean 06s and 07s, and a couple of more junior specialist type, corporals, 03s and 04s. Basically, Thu Thua was not a bad little place with a population of about 50,000. It was about 20 minutes ride from the provincial capital. I got to the work as the lone civilian sort of getting into the civilian areas of the pacification program. And there were a number of things going in the civilian area.

Q: Were there teams assigned to each city? How did that team come to be assigned there?

IFSHIN: Yes, CORDS assembled the largely military teams.

Q: Yes, 80 percent were military.

IFSHIN: Right, and in the district, as I say, I was the only civilian.

Q: So this was a district in the district town.

IFSHIN: Right. In the province there were 6 or 7 districts, and there was a CORDS team in I think 3 or 4 of them, and a CORDS headquarters in the provincial capital with all kinds of advisors advising in this area and that area and doing that and this. Everything was going along reasonably, I think... I want to make a comment about the hamlet evaluation system. You've heard about that?

Q: Yes, oh, yes.

IFSHIN: We used to assign these letter grades, a whole string of letter grades, to each hamlet in our district.

Q: This was an attempt to sort of standardize what everybody was seeing.

IFSHIN: Right, and also to measure progress. You could see where it was last month, and this is where it is this month.

Q: What are some of the categories of things that are being observed?

IFSHIN: Were there VC in the town during the day? Were there VC in the town during the night? Were there tax collectors with VC infrastructure, when is the last time they were there? Had we carried out this program A, program B, was this instituted in the town? What's the last time there was a military incident? I can't remember exactly how many hamlets I had in my district... maybe 30? And we carried a couple of so-called VC-controlled. These are places we didn't go, except in force. And then we had a lot that as far as we knew, the VC weren't there and hadn't been there for a while, and we assigned them their ranking on that basis. One of the things that I was very determined about and felt strongly that nobody was every going to catch me exaggerating these things and I was going to call them as I saw them and be just absolutely accurate. This is the point I want to make: after you'd been there three or six months and you're evaluating things and you are working hard, and you say, "well, you know, things must have gotten better after all the hard work I'd put into this, so where this used to be a C, maybe it's become a B, in this particular category, and this one is now this. So there's a certain amount of grade creep in all this.

Q: How much of these evaluations... are you going around to the individual hamlets and chatting up the either the government people or tribal father, although that's not the right term?

IFSHIN: I wouldn't say...village chief... I wouldn't say that I got to each hamlet every month. Certainly the ones that we carried that were VC controlled I didn't get to. But I got around. I was assigned an International Harvester Scout, that was the vehicle that CORDS assigned its personnel. And I'd go driving all over the place and get into these various hamlets and talk to people. I spoke Vietnamese fairly well at that point, and about what was happening and how things were. I'm skipping ahead here. There's another point I wanted to make. This was much later in my stay.

We had what we called what we called our pacification offenses where we'd come in with military forces and then bring in all the Vietnamese government's services, these were the so-called VC-controlled hamlets, and we'd move in in force and be out to make them government hamlets. It was interesting, in many ways this was the first time I had visited these places and I'd talked with people. I think they were being honest with me and I'd say, "When's the last time the VC were here?" And they'd say, "Tet, 1967." What happened then, they rounded up a bunch of our young men and they marched them off to Saigon and they never came back.

Q: You mean Tet '68?

IFSHIN: Yes, you are right. I'm talking about in '69 actually when we were doing these offenses. Basically, it's quite true, after Tet, I don't know if it's conventional wisdom now, but it certainly widely acknowledged that while Tet was an enormous victory for the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese in the United States, a tremendous propaganda and psychological victory, it was in fact an overwhelming military defeat. The Vietcong at least in my part of Vietnam was essentially wiped out in that period. And from there on in, we were fighting North Vietnamese, largely North Vietnamese regulars.

Things were going rather well in my district, and the decision had in fact been made that I would become the district senior advisor, instead of the Army Major, that is when he was replaced and I would be the senior person on the team with the Army Major as my deputy. And just about this time... I smile, but it's kind of a very sad business... My district stretched all the way up to the Cambodian border, although basically there was no population and this was a free fire zone for a number of miles toward the Cambodian border and the population was all concentrated in the south of the district. And two, well, I don't know if it was two Vietnamese battalions, it's all become foggy, but in any case the North Vietnamese force infiltrated through this free fire zone and attacked a couple of hamlets that we'd always considered quite secure, and with a great deal of destruction. The American Colonel, Asa Grey, who was our province senior advisor, landed in a helicopter near the battle zone and was killed. On reflection, this is all quite sad. In any case, when he was replaced by another Army Colonel who thought this was a really rough district and bad things are happening and of course the whole plan that we could possibly have a civilian as the senior advisor there was thrown out. So I continued as the deputy in Thu Thua and was sort of unhappy about that situation, and was subsequently moved to the province capital as part of the pacification team there and had some province-wide responsibilities.

Q: Speaking of responsibilities, when you are in Thu Thua, what are you doing on a daily basis?

IFSHIN: I was on the road a lot, visiting various hamlets and trying to discuss the functioning of the civilian side of the Vietnamese government, and were they getting the services they were supposed to get. If they weren't, I would try to follow up to see that they in fact did get some of these services.

Q: That means that you hooked in to the Vietnamese government, at that level you are attempting to stimulate them to produce...

IFSHIN: Or I'm contacting an American at the next higher level asking him to get his Vietnamese contacts to produce for my Vietnamese contact who claim that they can't do what they're supposed to do because they don't have the inputs.

Q: Are your Vietnamese contacts suggesting that you are going to have more clout if he needs a sack of concrete or some bricks or whatnot?

IFSHIN: Oh yes, sure, right. He's convinced that he's not going to get anywhere if he goes to his next higher level and asks for it but if the Americans tell them to deliver it maybe it will work.

You could argue that we weren't really building government there.

Q: That's the next question, because if the decision is up to him to circumvent his own organization then his own organization isn't learning anything. On the other hand, CORDS guys were reporting at all kinds of levels that this one official is simply incompetent or crooked and he's the bottleneck...

IFSHIN: Well, in fact, after I'd been in Thu Thua for a while, we had the Vietnamese district commander who I recall was also a major, was replaced by a Vietnamese lieutenant colonel, who was terribly corrupt. I was aware of the corruption and was doing something about it and trying to get him to stop building some of the private projects he had going on using government materials for that. A fellow named Ev Bumgartner, was a longtime Vietnam hand who was based in Saigon, got in touch with me and said supposedly there was some sort of a contract out on me. [laughter] That I was interfering and they were going to get rid of me. I thought it was all a bunch of nonsense really, and Ev did, too, but he wanted to let me know, rather than...

Q: Just in case things looked suspicious from time to time. Are you armed or with an armed escort?

IFSHIN: Normally, I went out on my own. I had, by this time, acquired quite a bit of weaponry. I bought a Walther PPK. I don't know if you are a handgun enthusiast, I am not. But that was James Bond's weapon, after he got rid of his Beretta. So I figured if it was good enough for James Bond it was good enough for me and that was my personal weapon. But in fact, I also acquired an M16 and a shotgun and various other weapons of one kind or another.

Q: Did you practice with any of these things? [laughter]

IFSHIN: No, I never fired in anger, and seldom.

Q: Did you fire in practice?

IFSHIN: I might have shot my Walther PPK a couple of times just to see how it operated and what I had to do to shoot it. I guess I fired an M16 and some of the other weapons, but I don't recall practicing with them. We came under mortar fire occasionally in the district headquarters. You know, they can stand off 20 miles away and lob mortars, so that would happen. Once, walking across the fields with another American, he claimed that a bullet had whistled between us. I did not in fact notice that, but I don't ever remember coming under individual hostile fire of that kind.

Q: Some of the other people in CORDS remark on the resources they had to distribute. Was that something you were in, could you control concrete or had funds or had administrative resources or were you prodding and poking rather than providing?

IFSHIN: I think I was prodding, poking rather than providing. We would get some resources and we could access things, but I wasn't in the direct chain of providing. It was more or less trying to get someone else to provide.

Q: So basically you are performing a reporting role. When I was next door in Thailand about the same time, that's what Tom Barnes had us do. We went to every district and most of the villages and talked to the police chiefs and the village chiefs and what's going on.

IFSHIN: We were doing that, but I'd go back to the province and say we need such and such for this hamlet. They've got a project, they want to build a footpath and they need so many bags of cement and some rebar. Can you get that for me? And eventually, usually, we'd manage to get it for them. I remember that there was a Navy Seabee detachment in the province for quite some time, and they'd put in a walking bridge, a hanging bridge across a large canal we had that was quite impressive, really, and there had never been a bridge across that canal before. And then they also put in a road for me toward one of the hamlets that we carried as VC controlled. That might not have been the greatest project in the world because shortly after that there was a command detonated mine on that road that sort of let us know it wasn't really safe to use. Putting in a road wasn't going to be sufficient to make this a marvelous safe hamlet. But I was convinced that if we just tie them into the market, we could do this, we could pacify them, win their hearts and minds.

Q: So, you went from the village level back up to the province, or the district, you...

IFSHIN: I was at the district.

Q: You started out at the district.

IFSHIN: Yes, usually I was trying to tie the hamlet to the province through the district, trying to get each to perform their functions and get them to do what they were supposed to do.

Q: From time to time, were CORDS people brought up from the district to the provincial center and discuss their problems... sort of a staff meeting?

IFSHIN: Yes. I'm trying to remember how many civilians we had at the district level. I can only remember myself and John Zerolis. I don't know if you know John.

Q: He just retired.

IFSHIN: He was in the neighboring district right next door. Then a fellow named Bruce Kinsey was at the province level. I think he had been in a district before that. Bruce had been in a district and then went into the provinces. I forget what title he was given, but it was an important title at the province level. I used to work closely with Bruce as we got along well together.

Q: This is not the right time, but it occurs to me... what were you told as to why there were foreign service officers in CORDS.

IFSHIN: Because LBJ (Lyndon B. Johnson) had said that he wanted the foreign service to participate and I think that was the only reason. Now, subsequently we were told that this was going to be a great experience for us and we were learning all about rural southeast Asia and we were seeing a really unique side of things that would stand us in good stead throughout our

careers. And all that was of course crap. But the bottom line was that LBJ wanted the foreign service there and rather than deliver officers who had by dint of hard work acquired a lot of experience and they said, well, let's send some young guys out there and hope they survive.

Q: My research suggests that about 10% of the foreign service was in CORDS at any one time or that 10% of the slots were for foreign service, 80% were military and then other agencies. But there's a book, I can't think of the author right now, it's called Pacification and he suggests that with Tet and literally the demise of the Vietcong, CORDS then put on a big push to really move the program and move pacification in the absence of the Vietcong which had expended itself in Tet. That was basically the period you were there. Was there a sense that now's the time to make some hay?

IFSHIN: Well, as I say, when we started our pacification offensives, which was after I'd been there for some time, but when we started that, we went into open areas and found that they were quite ready for our efforts. There were no Vietcong around.

STEVENSON MCILVAINE
Province Advisor
Camau (1968-1970)

Born in Pennsylvania of Foreign Service Parents, Mr. McIlvaine was raised in Washington D.C. and abroad. He graduated from Harvard University and served in the US Army before joining the Foreign Service in 1967. His assignments abroad took him to a number of posts in Africa, including Kinshasa, Bissau, Dar es Salaam, and Lusaka, where he served as Chargé d'Affaires. At the State Department in Washington, Mr. McIlvaine dealt primarily with African issues. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: How did you deal with this?

MCILVAINE: I told them what I told myself, which is what I believed at the time, that I had to see it myself. I wanted to know what was going on. They would argue, "Yes, but you're actively supporting a dead policy." Well, I didn't buy the argument that everything we were doing was wrong. I thought the basic premise that we should help the country avoid being taken over by force was reasonable. Once I had been there nearly 2 years and come back, the first thing I was persuaded of is that the government we were backing had no credibility with the Vietnamese people whatsoever and therefore that would not work. That was never going to work. It would stay afloat only as long as we could prop it up and when we left it would collapse, and it did. I also, unlike most in the anti-war movement, came away even more persuaded than before that the other guys were also bad guys and that they had no virtue that I could see except that they were better organized and better disciplined than the guys on our side. I was in a province where I worked basically with villages, convinced that the victims in this were most of the Vietnamese people, particularly the rural people, who were being preyed on by both sides. I pretty well committed myself to doing whatever I could and finding whatever means I had to help protect

them from both sides, not just the other side. I was working long and hard to protect my villages from predatory district chiefs and corruption and government abuse as much as I was from the VC. But it was a fascinating time.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MCILVAINE: I arrived right after the Tet offensive in June of '68. I left just before the Cambodian invasion in the spring of '70.

Q: What were you doing?

MCILVAINE: I was a province advisor in Camau, the southernmost province in the whole country in the Mekong delta. It was the province where the Viet Minh originally started, but it never really had the main force war. It was still very much a war of hamlet squad against hamlet guerrilla squad, and mortars, ambushes, not giant main force battles. We didn't have any of that.

Q: What sort of organization were you coming into in that area?

MCILVAINE: There were 2 American USAID civilians because I was detailed to the CORDS program, so I was essentially USAID detailed to the province advisory team, which was all American military. We were the only ones who spoke Vietnamese. There was a team of 30 or 40 American military outside the province headquarters in a little tented compound on raised flats. They had all these little walkways over the mud. Then they had district teams of 4 or 5 in each district, or each district we could get to. Some of the districts we could never get to. We were the only Vietnamese speakers, so we basically had a free hand to deal with the whole civilian side of government. They were just dealing with the military issues. We worked with all the province officials on land use, agriculture, school building, everything, development issues. We were given a free reign and no supervision. John Paul Vann was running things in the IV Corps at that time. That was very exciting. There was a senior official that you heard about and read about actually coming down and asking you what you thought. Unheard of in those days, that a senior official would actually ask you and listen to what you said. That was part of the legend of John Paul Vann, that he really did listen to people. So, it was again like my Congo experience. The intensity of a war environment where any mistake can get somebody killed. You do the wrong thing at the wrong time, it's not just a mistake, it could be fatal. I thrive on that. It seems to be something I really like – not all the time, but for spurts. So I very much enjoyed that.

In Vietnam a village would be up to 24 hamlets and 10-15,000 people. I worked with 3 villages that I could reach from the capital by sampan or whatever where I found village chiefs who seemed to be reasonably interested in actually helping their people rather than helping themselves. I would do whatever I could to help them.

I also got into all sorts of interesting adventures. I'd be very careful to take a sampan out without any advance warning, without telling anybody where I was going or when, and just go down to the market and pick at random one of the sampans and take off. You wouldn't tell them where you were going until you got out of town. All the precautions you had to take. I carried a Swedish submachine gun that I got from the CIA Phoenix Program, borrowed. It was a strange

time. We'd get mortared 2-3 times a week. The town would get mortared.

Q: What were you picking up from your contacts about how they felt about things, the Vietnamese?

MCILVAINE: "Please leave us alone. Everybody leave us alone." This was the Mekong delta, where the living was good in any kind of peace. It was all paddy land. The whole province, 2 feet above sea level was about the highest point. Going upstairs was a big deal. They had rice paddies and a cyclical life where you plant the rice, the rice grows, you harvest the rice, and then you have 3 months of drinking until it's time to plant the rice again. Because it was perfect rice growing country and there was always plenty of water in the Mekong, they always lived well until the war in these villages. Further up in the bush, in the more jungle portions, there was real support for the Viet Cong, but there was no support for the Viet Cong in my area. Increasingly, there was no support for the government either. The government simply preyed on them. It took. It didn't give. It didn't provide anything except maybe through us.

Q: Did you get much feeling of dealing with the government officials about the problems you were mentioning?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. There were a few. There was a refugee chief who seemed to be trying to do his best. You always wonder afterwards who was really working for the VC who had another line out. Nobody posted a scorecard after it was all over saying, "Fooled you. This guy wasn't and this guy was." But some of them were obviously adventurers just making a buck. Those guys you tried to cut out and keep out of whatever you were doing. Some of them were trying to do the right thing within the limits of the system they worked in and you tried to figure that out. But it was an intense experience for a 23-25 year old to try and understand the pressures they were under.

Q: Did you get involved in any classic conflicts between calling a province chief "corrupt" and the people above you not being very happy with that?

MCILVAINE: No. The thing I remember as most interesting was the portable rice mills, a really vivid explanation of what was going on. One of the things that kept coming up in this village that I most enjoyed working with was that they had to take all their rice to the one rice mill in the province capital run by a Chinese businessman, pay the fixed price, and get their rice milled there. About the same time, I heard about these little Honda portable rice mills. I found out USAID had some, so I got them to send me one. I took it down to the village and said, "Let's try this." It was a smash success. The village set it up and everybody was bringing their rice and waiting in line hours to get their rice milled. They did it because they didn't have to take the rice to the province and pay the province price.

Well, in short order, the rice mill was confiscated by the province government and the national government issued an edict banning portable rice mills. I hit right at somebody's rice bowl. This was a national thing. Monopolies on rice mills were set up. It was bought, it was paid for, and it was not to be messed with. This kid had screwed it up and boy did they shut that down as fast as they could. That was illuminating.

Then after a year of working in the delta, I was pulled back to Saigon and spent 9 months working for a little office called the Pacification Studies Group in MACV headquarters that Colby had set up under Craig Johnston, who later became ambassador to Algeria and a few other things. He had about 8 or 10 Vietnamese speaking junior officers and 8 or 10 ex-Viet Minh Vietnamese, Chu Hoi, and the idea was that Colby would say to Craig: "Something's going wrong in Province Y, but the reporting's not giving a very clear picture and maybe they're covering something up. I don't know what's going on. Can you find out?" A team would be sent out. We would pair. We'd get to the province airstrip and the Vietnamese Hoi Chan would disappear into the Vietnamese community and I'd go deal with all the American officials and then I'd deal with the Vietnamese officials. Two or 3 days later, we'd meet and compare notes and see what we figured out was really going on. I loved it. It was being an investigative reporter, which is something I've always liked. I was good at it.

Q: What sort of things were you finding?

MCILVAINE: There was always 3 levels of stories below the official story. I remember different trips. I would write these 2 page things to Colby that did explain what the real problem was. There was always something. Unfortunately, I can't remember a good example. You have to understand the relationship between the province chief and the senior American advisors and the province chief and his family and maybe the Chinese or whoever else. In one case it was the community of Catholic refugees that had come down and settled in my old province in Camau off in the corner and built their own little Catholic enclave and how they were dealing with the provincial government. Another one was in III CORPS in Ben Hoa. I got all over the country. I got to see places I hadn't seen. I remember Street Without Joy that Bernard Fall wrote about. It was the first time I had ever gotten up into the north, into the big war country. It really expanded my understanding of Vietnam and the problem. Those people were so bitter. It was the delta taken 10 times worse. They had been tramped on and killed and shot at by both sides over and over and over again and they hated everybody. The hostility rang out at you from people along that stretch on the coast. They had just been through it too many times.

Q: Did you run across any problems of Americans getting involved in corruption?

MCILVAINE: I didn't. We always admired the wheeler-dealers. In Camau, we cornered the market in VC flags. We had most of them. They were very good trading material. I remember one NCO who managed to trade a VC flag for this giant generator that was too big and he couldn't get it into the province and if he had, we didn't know what to do with it. It would have electrified the whole province. But he couldn't pass up the deal.

Q: There you would have been part of the young FSO mafia.

MCILVAINE: Yes. I'd get up to Saigon for a weekend. Many of the future stars of the Foreign Service were there.

Q: As you were there, what feel did you get about whither Vietnam by the judgment of the young officers?

MCILVAINE: I think it was almost universal that this was going wrong. We were there.... After the Tet offensive, there was a lull. The VC had really been knocked back. So, for a while there, things looked like they were really moving. But if you were working at the grassroots level, you came away with the impression that the guys on our side are hopeless, that if this is what we've got to work with, it isn't going to work. I think that was widespread with the guys who went to language class with me and went out to districts at the same time I did. We would meet back in Saigon. Higher up, those who went to the big jobs in MACV and provincial headquarters might have been a little more optimistic. The embassy seemed to be on a totally different plane. I had one friend from the A-100 course at the embassy for a while. It was like they weren't in the same country.

I don't think I ever even got in the door of the embassy. USAID I and II and all those places, yes, but I don't think I ever got in the door of the embassy.

Q: My consular section was an adjunct. I was consul general. It sounds fancy, but we were dealing with consular matters.

MCILVAINE: Which were plenty.

Q: Yes.

MCILVAINE: And they weren't interested in your views on policy. The embassy did have a reputation of being very closed to the outside world.

Q: I remember looking at the diplomatic list. Here I was, consul general, which sounds fancy. I made the upper half of the American diplomatic list by one. There was something like 80 people on that thing.

MCILVAINE: They had so many bigshots.

Q: Yes.

MCILVAINE: Double ambassadors and all the rest of it. That embassy did not serve our government well, I'm afraid.

Q: Well, the pressures on it were such that...

MCILVAINE: Well, nobody wanted to hear...

THOMAS MACKLIN, JR.
Youth Affairs Officer
Saigon (1968-1970)

Thomas Macklin, Jr. was born in Texas in 1935 and educated at San Diego State and the University of Maryland. He entered the Foreign Service in 1965. His career included posts in The Hague, Saigon, Bridgetown, Algiers, Tel Aviv and Moscow. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: You got to Saigon when in '68?

MACKLIN: It was late July. Because I was in training with a guy named Lionel Rosenblatt in the Vietnamese language training and we were both having trouble with Vietnamese and Ted Kennedy had gone off to Vietnam and discovered there was a refugee problem there and had criticized the State Department and the State Department said, "No, there is no refugee problem" or did something to deflect Kennedy and said, "In fact, we have several trained officers going out now to deal with the refugee problem," they came to the Vietnam Training Center and said, "Anybody want to go early?" So, Lionel said, "Yes, I'll go. I want to go over there and get it over with." So, he went to Vietnam. I thought about going then, but I didn't. There were four or five guys from my Vietnam Training Center class who went. Instead, I went off and did this master's thesis and then went off in summer. But the guys who were there were there for Tet and mini Tet and had some really hair raising stories. One of the guys who was killed was captured by the Viet. Cong in Hue, a guy named Bob Little, who was really a nice kid, a Harvard graduate, smart, and really liked the Foreign Service. He was captured by the Viet. Cong and was murdered in an extremely brutal way. Lionel was trapped in a building in Saigon during the last Tet. So, I went out over the summer with a group of CORDS IV. I didn't know any of them very well, but they took us to Taiwan first for two weeks to work with rural communes to see what it was like in a rural atmosphere where there was no security problem or insurgency. It was pretty interesting. Then we flew individually into Saigon.

Q: When you were in Taiwan, what were you expected to learn?

MACKLIN: They took us around to rural communes and they had us speak to village chiefs. They had some agricultural organizations for purposes of marketing or just channeling agricultural produce back to the city. Farmers didn't do it individually. It's kind of like a dairy association with rice and ducks and other things. So, we talked to those people and just got a feel for it.

Q: You arrived. How were you received and where did you go?

MACKLIN: That was actually kind of interesting. Normally when you go to a diplomatic post, there is somebody at the airport to meet you and say, "Here is where you're going to live," etc. There was a hurricane or a typhoon in the area at that time. We had gone from Taiwan to Hong Kong and then from Hong Kong into Saigon. I noticed all the other guys were staying in Hong Kong two or three days longer than I was. I figured, "Well, if I get there sooner, maybe I'll get a better job or a better something." So, we wound up flying through a hurricane, which was awful. The plane dropped 2,000 feet and went up 2,000 feet. There was food all over the inside of the fuselage. It was pretty messy. So, I arrived in Saigon a little bit rattled. Hong Kong had been a little bit mild and Saigon was typically about 105 and sweaty and the airport was just kind of a mess with a not very effective loudspeaker system and there was nobody there to meet me. So, I

got off the plane. I had a bag. I got my other bag. I looked around and there was nobody there. I wandered all over and asked some people. I asked some military people and they didn't know what CORDS was and they didn't know what the embassy was. It was a holy mess. So, I didn't know what to do. So, I finally found a military phone, which was basically a phone that you pick up and then you ask a Vietnamese operator to put you through to someone, kind of like rural America in the old days. Terrible connection. I said, "Give me CORDS headquarters. They'll know what to do." So, there was a lot of squeaking and squawking and somebody picked up the phone at that end. I said, "Hi, my name is Tom Macklin. I'm in the new CORDS group and I've just arrived and there is nobody here at the airport. I'm happy to grab a taxi and go on into town, but I don't know where to go. If you guys could let me know which hotel to check into, I would be grateful. I'll just head on in on my own." He said, "Buddy, you did the right thing. Just sit tight and I'll come get you." I said, "I don't mind taking a taxi. You tell me where to go." He said, "No, sit tight, old pal." So, I sat down and about 10 minutes later I hear a string of names being announced over the loudspeaker, including mine. So, I go over and there is this young babe about 20 with a clipboard with some names on it. I said, "I'm Tom Macklin. Did you just call my name?" She said, "Yes." I said, "That was quick." She said, "What do you mean, that was quick?" I said, "I just called you guys and you're here already." She said, "What do you mean, you called us?" I said, "Well, there was nobody here, so I called CORDS headquarters and asked what to do and somebody said, 'Sit tight. Somebody will be there to get you in a minute.'" So, we hung around there for about half an hour looking for people and nobody else showed up, so she said, "Come on" and we got on a jeep and drove back into town and went to one of the USAID/CORDS personnel offices. So, I'm sitting there with this babe in this hot, steamy office filling out forms and some guy walks past me with a big cigar with kind of a New Jersey accent and barks out a couple of orders to this babe and says to her, "Has anybody seen that asshole, Macklin?" I said, "I'm Tom Macklin." He comes up to me with his cigar, starts poking me in the chest, and says, "Look, listen to me, you son of a bitch, the next time you call up General Coors and ask him for a lift, you damn well better stay at the airport until he shows up!" I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "You called up General Coors, the head of the whole aid program and asked him for a lift and he went out there to get you and you weren't there." I said, "I didn't know who I talked to. There was nobody there to meet me." He handed me one of those, "We'll fix you, son of a bitch" look on his face and walked off. So, eventually, the other CORDS guy showed up. We were parked in a hotel. It was a smelly, rundown hotel with no air conditioning. The lights were constantly blinking on and off. They had Vietnamese staff in the hotel who pretended they didn't speak English most of the time. The other guy spoke Vietnamese. I hardly knew a few words. For about a week, we were kept there. They took us to various places to eat and started processing us through. It was still, you'd go up on the roof of a hotel and look at the city at night and there was shelling off in the distance. In fact, we got shot at on the roof the second or third night. A handful of us were up there. This was over by USAID I someplace. Just a seedy little small place. We heard a bullet ricochet off the concrete wall behind us. So, we ran like hell and got to the exit and there were two more shots. We ran downstairs and told the people in the hotel and they said, "Ah." They couldn't have cared less. We assumed it was a sniper. I'm sure it was just some drunken serviceman saying, "Let's scare those assholes over there." But you don't know at the time. It was kind of nutty like that. About the fourth night there, George Tuttle, with whom I had roomed in Washington, who was working at a district just outside Saigon, came out to get me and said, "Come on, spend the night with me out in the country. You'll like it." So, we went out there. He lived in a trailer about 20-30 miles from

Saigon next to a small army unit which was next to a large complex of gasoline tanks. It was kind of a small refinery and storage area. Of course, if they ever mortared that, the whole area would go up, but that's where they parked him and that is where he lived and he never complained. It was kind of interesting. The trailer was supposed to be air conditioned but really wasn't. It was kind of hot and steamy. At night, you could hear and feel the B-52 raids off in the distance. It was like an earthquake.

Q: These were searchlight strikes.

MACKLIN: It was off in the distance and you could hear a distant rumble, but the ground would constantly shake. It was a lot like being in an earthquake in California. Then in the middle of the night, George when he went to bed said, "If there is an attack, this is where we go. That is our bomb shelter." The far end of this trailer had a bunch of holes in it that had been plastered over and it was kind of like somebody had taken a shotgun and went bam, bam. There must have been 200 little holes. He said, "That's where a mortar landed outside the trailer." So, in the middle of the night, wham, there were three or four right outside the trailer. I jumped up, ran to the little bomb shelter, and the noise kept up. You could see the flashes. I saw George standing in the door of the trailer. He said, "Tom, you asshole, come on back." I said, "George..." He said, "Tom, those are outgoing. That is not incoming. There is a difference between outgoing and incoming." I said, "Well, you could fool me." He was next to a mortar unit and three times a night every night they would fire off a few rounds just to keep anybody around there ill at ease. I don't know how he slept through it.

Anyways, I went back the next day and they started dividing up jobs. They wanted to send me off to one of the border provinces. The guy was still kind of peeved. They wanted to send me off to Kunminh or something. But at the same time, there were three jobs in USAID Youth Affairs working out of Saigon. So, I went over and interviewed for one of these jobs, which kind of peeved the guy with the cigar because he wanted me to go off to Kunminh or someplace. So, I agreed to accept this job. In retrospect, I would have probably been better off in Kunminh, but I accepted a job working in Youth Affairs with an organization called CPS. It's a long Vietnamese term. CPS was an organization that AID funded to organize high school teachers in the provinces in new committees and then those committees of teachers were to organize their students into civic action projects. The educational system in Vietnam was based on the French system. The upper classes went to an elite school and the lower classes learned a trade. So, these upper classes who went to these elite schools tended not to identify with the guy in the provinces or the farmer or the urban worker. So, the effort was to get these high school students to identify with the problems in the countryside and to organize civic action programs. There was resistance to it from the Vietnamese side but then they simply saw it as a source of money. We'll do what you want us to superficially on an organizational level, but we don't believe in this, so we're not going to really follow through with it. I spent the next year and a half trying to make some sense out of it. I traveled a lot. We had committees all over Vietnam. So, I traveled around the country on Air America. I had a couple of Vietnamese working for me. I just couldn't speak Vietnamese well enough to communicate with anybody. So, I had big problems with my boss and my boss' boss and I had problems with the Vietnamese. The end result was, I really didn't do very much.

Q: What were the problems with your boss and your boss' boss?

MACKLIN: It was more bad luck than anything else. There had been a collection of fairly dynamic young guys working on Youth Affairs a couple of years before I got there. There tended to be a lot of people in Vietnam who went out there and fell in love with the place and stayed on for a long time. There were three or four guys who had gotten involved initially in Youth Affairs and saw this as a great opportunity, kind of the Bobby Kennedy approach to things. Half the population is under 18. The Viet Cong are mobilizing these guys; why can't we? So, they had gotten involved in Youth Affairs programs and achieved some limited success and then decided that the Vietnamese bureaucracy was so stodgy and had such an emphasis on age that they were not really going to support any real effort in Youth Affairs. So, they said, "The hell with it." I found this out about a year later, too late. So, they didn't close down the program. They just withdrew and went off and did something else. The two USAID directors whose directorate included Youth Affairs felt Youth Affairs was a waste of time and money and the only reason they maintained the office was because there was pressure from Washington to do something with Youth Affairs. My direct boss was a guy named Charlie Reed who was a nice fellow. He was stupid. He had been a superintendent of public education from Oceanside, California. Charlie had gone through a terribly ugly divorce in the late-mid-'60s. In those days, if there was any scandal connected with your person, you could lose your job in the public school system in Southern California. In fact, he had been encouraged to move on. So, he had gotten a job somehow with USAID. But his background was in education administration. That is the paradigm he used for everything. You had to have extensive lesson plans before you could do anything. My view was, we were dealing with an alien culture who didn't want to do what we wanted them to do and we were going to have to wing it. He said, "No, you can't waste government money by traveling on these Air America flights with everybody else and their goats and chickens unless I see an outline of what you're going to do." I said, "Well, Charlie, it's hard to give you an outline if I don't know what the situation is there. I can give you an outline that says we will set up a committee, this is what the committee will do, this is how many people are going to be on the committee. I can do all of that, but it doesn't mean anything." He just looked at me like I was lazy or naive. So, I eventually won him over. I didn't get poor efficiency reports, but the frustration was monumental. There were a lot of people within the USAID structure who felt that the real answer to the youth problem was organizing Little League baseball. The Vietnamese weren't interested. There were constant problems. I traveled a lot with my Vietnamese assistant and we did organize a lot of committees. Occasionally, they would do something worthwhile. My counterpart at the Ministry of Education was sacked after I had been there for about a year because his family fell out of favor with the family who sort of controlled the ministry at that time. We were sort of awash in excess resources. Everybody was going off in a different direction. There was no cohesiveness. It was just kind of stupid. We would get together and whine about it.

Q: Did you find that you were up against the cultural situation where no matter what youth said, youth was something to keep quiet about and do the bidding of elders?

MACKLIN: The Vietnamese are very good at external emotions. They are very good at putting on the right face, but it's a very hierarchical society. Kids are supposed to go with their parents. Administrators are supposed to obey their seniors. Their seniors were always people who were older. The higher you went, the older they tended to be with the exception of some of the army.

So, students were expected to obey these teachers. Again, the teachers tended to be cynical about this. There were some NGO groups that I dealt with a bit and tried to get them involved in this and they said, no, this was tainted, that these were kind of tainted because “you have money from the U.S. government. If you can do this without money from the U.S. government, we’ll support you.”

Q: Where were the NGOs getting their money?

MACKLIN: I don’t know. I think they were being paid salaries by their NGO organization but they were operating without a budget or with some sort of a local budget or maybe from scrounging stuff up. But I found them impossible to deal with. The people at the Ministry of Education were supportive and they’d smile and didn’t do anything. My boss kept wanting more and more lesson plans. His bosses kept trying to figure out a basis for abolishing our office. My direct boss kind of went through what several older divorced men and some not divorced men went through in Saigon. They discovered young chicks. So, he’d go off trying to pick up chicks. It was kind of embarrassing. There were all of these people from organizations like PANE and the other big contractors who were there making millions of dollars and guys would volunteer to come over and work for them and they’d love it. They were fighting the communists, making tons of money, and the Vietnamese girls were very willing. It was a great opportunity for these aged warriors.

Q: You and I met quite often while we were there. I was there from ’69 to ’70, about 18 months. What were you getting from your fellow officers as they’d come into your place?

MACKLIN: We had an apartment in Saigon, Lionel Rosenblatt and I. Then eventually Lionel left and went back to the Ops Center. His place was taken by a guy named Stan Jorgenson. Then Stan left after about three months and a guy named Jan De Wilden moved in. Because we had a big apartment in Saigon, there were a lot of people who would come to Saigon who would camp out at our place. Mostly young officers like to complain and there was a lot to complain about. They’d complain about excesses and about corruption. One of the really big issues that people would complain about was the suppression of any negative reporting by the embassy. The embassy leadership in the Political Section and in the front office didn’t want to see reporting that was negative. People would come in with documented proof of corrupt officials in the provinces and it was just suppressed. You were supposed to get out there and support the policy. Martin Hertz was the worst [chief of the Political Section], but he was by no means alone. That was the biggest complaint I heard, that there was corruption, there was a lot that was wrong, and the embassy wouldn’t report it. There were complaints over the military but very few complaints over local military units. Most of the guys that I know who worked in the provinces found the U.S. military reps out there as very concerned and very sensitive to the problems of the peasants and not inclined to go up in a gunship and blast anything that moved. Although that went on, it was something that both the military and the FSOs tried to discourage.

Q: What was your feeling while you were there and by the time you left about how the war was going?

MACKLIN: Almost uniformly, I found the USAID people expected this to follow the World

War II model, that we would win militarily and that we would then go in with an even larger assistance program and rebuild. We kept saying, “I don’t know. The Vietnamese are divided and as bad as the government is from the North, they don’t seem to like their own government either. We’ve got to figure out a way to disengage. It’s kind of frustrating.” It was a nice place to serve. It was a pretty country. It is green. The architecture, French provincial, is lovely. There were places like the 614th and some of the avenues that were very pretty architecturally. The food was absolutely wonderful and was cheap. The girls were beautiful and compliant. The politics were Byzantine. You could constantly find Vietnamese who would say anything. We used to make fun of people in the Political Section who spent inordinate amounts of time cultivating people, Vietnamese leaders in parliament as if these parliamentary coalitions actually meant something, and spending lots of representational funds trying to get to know somebody from the Chamber of Deputies or something. The younger people there spent a lot of time having fun and a lot of time whining and complaining.

Q: By the time you left, did you see the light at the end of the tunnel?

MACKLIN: No, it looked like more and more of a morass. You left after I did.

Q: I left in July of 1970.

MACKLIN: About a month after I did. Security had improved a lot at that time. By the time I left, you could drive a bullcow without running into a roadblock. Charlie Salmon and a couple of other guys drove from Saigon up to Dalat and back. Those kinds of things were unheard of. There was a feeling that maybe it was getting better militarily, that somehow security was really improving. I’m out of my element. I had a feeling in retrospect that it was just a function of the number of American troops. With that many American troops, security would improve a bit. But when we left, it fell apart again.

Q: Did you have any impression of Ambassador Bunker?

MACKLIN: Very nice guy, a real gentleman. A lot of people had dealings with him. I never did. I never went on any of the support flights to Nepal with him. Some of the guys did. Wonderful guy. Very gracious. Didn’t have a terrier like personality that all of his deputies had – Sam Berger, deputy ambassador [later National Security Advisor to President Clinton]; Martin Hertz; and the rest of them. He was a nice guy and I think he had a pretty good appreciation of this, but that is only intuitive. I have no real idea what his own private thoughts were.

Q: You left there in early 1970?

MACKLIN: Yes.

I did a lot of traveling and saw a lot of the countryside.

Q: With these youth groups, who was running them?

MACKLIN: They were run by teachers. The ones that I felt were really making a contribution

were run by, particularly up in Second Corps, we had two or three committees that were pretty good. They were organized by high school teachers who seemed to have dynamic personalities. One time in Kue Young, we went up there and they had organized a group of students to go out over the weekend and help clean up a refugee camp. They went down where the latrines were and dug new ditches for the water to flow away and tried to help clean the place up a little bit and probably didn't make any difference in the long run in terms of the camp, but it certainly exposed the students to what life was like for refugees. Whether or not that had some long term impact, I don't know, but things like that can't hurt, for the rich class to see what the poor class is doing and for the poor class to see somebody from the rich class come out and do something for them.

The worst trip I ever had was the one to Dalat. Dalat is a pretty little town almost 4,000 feet high with a pretty lake. It's a lovely little French resort town. I went in there and there was supposed to be an active committee. They had a committee that did nothing other than spend the money we sent them, had never organized a program. We spent most of the day running around trying to find the people in the committee. Although they were supposed to have known we were coming, there was nothing set up. We didn't get to visit a school. Nothing. At the end of the day, we needed to find a place to spend the night. Then there was a hotel in town, but it was full so we went up a big Army compound there. I was accompanied by three Vietnamese. They looked at me like I was from Mars and said, "You can't stay here." It was a huge compound with barbed wire and bunkers and watch towers and stuff like that. I said, "Well, where can I stay? Do you have any idea?" They said, "No, we don't care. Just get out of here." Well, the province senior advisor was a friend of mine from Holland, a guy named Hawk Mills. I knew he lived someplace, so I found out from somebody where he lived. It's kind of like I've always imagined parts of Colorado to be like. Four to five thousand feet with lots of pine trees. Very pretty up there. We found Hawk's house. Hawk was on an R&R out of the country, but he lived in a huge house that must have been 12 bedrooms. He had a guard out front, an old guy who would sleep all night long in front of his house, mostly to ward off thieves. But I said, "Look, Hawk is a personal friend of mine and he said I could stay here if I ever came to town." They said, "We don't care." So, I slept in Hawk's bed and the three Vietnamese people I brought with me slept downstairs. It's funny about Hawk. He was in Key Minh himself for a long time. The first time I saw him in Saigon, having come in to Key Minh, while he was gone from Key Minh, they mortared the compound and they hit his trailer with mortar and basically blew it apart. But he was in Saigon, so they didn't get him. Then the next time I saw him in Saigon, he was always going out on night patrols with a group of rough, tough, Special Forces guys, routinely going out. I learned later that the guy who was standing in Hawk's place in the formation (Hawk was always second or third man back) took a bullet right in the chest, killing him. So, there was this association of "lucky Hawk." Every time there was danger, he had the good sense to leave town. So, I was staying in Hawk's house. About 2:00 am, a fire erupted outside the house. Hard to tell how close. The way you could always tell, they said, if it was just people firing at shadows or a real fight is if you could see green tracers and whether or not it went on for more than 30 minutes. Well, it went on for about two hours. There were green and red tracers. I'd look out the window and it was impossible to tell. It sounded like they were in the backyard, but they were probably about two miles off. Hawk's house was just... There were rifles and grenades. He had enough stuff there to arm Pancho Villa. What was I supposed to do, supposed to break out a window and start shooting? So, I did nothing, which was really the right thing to do. But frankly,

I was uneasy. The next morning, it finally died away. It was a beautiful day. The sky was blue. I went downstairs, not having slept much, and there were my three Vietnamese all red eyed and kind of shaky. I figured, well, "If they were scared, let's not stay a second time. Let's get the hell out of here." So, we went on and got a flight back to Saigon.

WILLIAM A. WEINGARTEN
New Life Development Program
My Tho (1968-1970)

Mr. Weingarten was born in New York in 1936. He received his BA from Colgate University and his MSFS from Georgetown University. He served in the U.S. Army overseas from 1958-1961. His postings after entering the Foreign Service in 1962 included Paris, My Tho, Belgrade, Brussels, Canberra and Ottawa. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 29, 1999.

Q: *How did the Vietnam assignment come about?*

WEINGARTEN: I volunteered for it. I thought that I ought to for a variety of reasons. I thought that I was probably going to be selected for it anyway.

Q: *It was certainly the -*

WEINGARTEN: I would get some credit by volunteering for it. And the other thing was that it was the big event - not of my generation, but the generation behind me - of that period, so I thought I should go and see what it was all about.

Q: *I also went to "see the elephant" - I mean it -*

WEINGARTEN: That's a good way to put it.

Q: *Well, then, you were in Vietnam from what, '68?*

WEINGARTEN: To '70.

Q: *To '70. What were you doing there?*

WEINGARTEN: Well, I was in charge of what they call a New Life Development Program. And this was all a translation from the Vietnamese of all of the civilian programs that we put in there to try to make their government work better - agricultural programs, public safety, budget, public works, every aspect of a local county government that you can think of we probably had a counterpart to it. We did have a counterpart to it.

Q: *When did you get there?*

WEINGARTEN: I got there in August.

Q: *Of '68.*

WEINGARTEN: August of '68, last part of August.

Q: *By this time Tet had occurred.*

WEINGARTEN: Yes.

Q: *Did you find things in pretty much disarray? What was your impression of Vietnam when you arrived?*

WEINGARTEN: When I arrived, I spent three days or so in Saigon, and Saigon was being hit by rockets at the time, and there was a good deal of tension in Saigon. And these were big rockets.

Q: *Not these little -*

WEINGARTEN: - little ones with 107 mm things. They were pretty inaccurate, but they made a lot of noise. So the impression I had of it was kind of a tense city, and then when I got out to My Tho, which was not the most appealing place I had ever seen. I remember coming down by helicopter and looking at it and thinking, What in the world have I let myself in for? Happily, it was just a far more relaxed, far easier kind of place than Saigon.

Q: *You were in the Delta, then.*

WEINGARTEN: Yes.

Q: *That's M-y T-h-o, two words?*

WEINGARTEN: M-y T-h-o, two words in one.

Q: *Were you there the whole time?*

WEINGARTEN: Yes.

Q: *Could you describe both your briefing, what were you told to do, and how did things work out? What were you doing there?*

WEINGARTEN: Well, I think we pretty much weren't told a hell of a lot of what you were supposed to do. You kind of pick it up. All of these guys who were experts in their job, and you were supposed to help them with it, make sure that they got their shipments and so on. You became kind of an overall controller-expediter, and you had to develop good relations with the provincial government and with the U.S. military that was there. So we got involved... One thing I really got interested in doing was public works, building bridges and so on. We had this idea in the fall of '68 that if we could build little bridges across drainage ditches and tiny streams and so

on into villages that were otherwise cut off, that they would be able to get their produce to the main road, to the market, and the corollary was that the government would be able to come from the main road into the village. And so we first talked to the Ninth Division, and the Ninth Division said they noticed once that they had a whole lot of metal lying around that they weren't using. I asked about it. It almost looked like bridge sections. They weren't bridge sections, but they were pieces that could go into making bridges. So I said, Can we use these, and they said sure, welcome to them, just haul them away. We couldn't haul them away - they were too heavy - so we got a helicopter. A big helicopter should do it. And then we had a Seabee team.

Q: *Construction Battalion team.*

WEINGARTEN: Yes, Navy Construction Battalion, a team of about 12 guys who were all really good, cross-trained in all their specialty. And so we got these things together and we went out and talked to villages and said, "Would you like a bridge to make things easier for you?" And most of them said sure. So we built the bridges, and then in March of 1969 they all got blown up.

Q: *What happened then?*

WEINGARTEN: Well, they had sort of a Tet II offensive in late February or early March, and all our little bridges got blown up. And so we went back and said, "How come..." By this time we knew that the Vietcong never just turned up suddenly. They always sent a guy out before hand with a little notebook and he'd measure the abutments so they'd figure out how much C-4 plastic explosive they'd need. So we said, "Why didn't you tell us when this guy comes around standing by the bridge making notes measuring the abutments? Why didn't you let us know?" Well, the basic reason boiled down to they didn't really think it was their bridge. It was the American bridge, and they were not going to get into trouble over the Americans' bridge. So at that point we said, okay, if the bridge is going to be rebuilt, it will be by you guys. So I told the village chief we'd provide some money for it, but apart from that we'd have nothing to do with that. He would have to get the labor himself. So I probably learned from that experience what every advisor before me and after me had learned, that you can't do it yourself.

Q: *No.*

WEINGARTEN: You can't do it as an American project. But then we did another one which did last. It's a big bridge, about two hundred feet long, a pretty good-sized bridge. It was across one of the tributaries of the Mekong, and it opened up an area that we hadn't been in before. The Seabees built it, and one of the things that I was able to do was to steal a pile-driver for them - intercept a pile-driver - an old Eiffel. You know, Eiffel built the Eiffel Tower, but Eiffel also even then was selling machinery in Southeast Asia, the Eiffel Company. It was a little one-lung pile-driver with a two-stroke engine - *bum-bum- bum* - that would pull the pile up and drop it - *bang*. It drove the piles, built the bridge, and that still was standing in 1970. Might still be. I don't know. I may go back and take a look for it.

Q: *How did you find relations were with the Vietnamese, both the military and the civilian?*

WEINGARTEN: Vietnamese?

Q: *Yes.*

WEINGARTEN: It depended on the military unit. You had your elite units, your Vietnamese Marine or Airborne or Ranger outfits were just different as night and day from local troops. As it was in the Army. Have you been in the Army?

Q: *I was in the Air Force, enlisted man.*

WEINGARTEN: I think the units that we worked with were mostly the popular force and regional force. The regional force were the companies that could be used anywhere in our province, and the popular force were restricted to their village for operations.

Q: *What was your time like that you were working with?*

WEINGARTEN: We had a large team with about, oh, I guess maybe about 100 people or so, and maybe about 15-20 civilians and the rest military. So I think we got along pretty well. There were sometimes towards the end there, when I remember I got my orders to go back to Washington, and I couldn't get out for a while. What I was going to do, my wife and I were going to go to Phnom Penh and then down to what is it, the big... you know, where the...

Q: *Angkor Wat?*

WEINGARTEN: Angkor Wat. And we had our visas and everything for that, and then we had to cancel that because of our invasion in 1970, April, '70.

Q: *It was May or April.*

WEINGARTEN: April, yes.

Q: *April, '70.*

WEINGARTEN: So then I said, well, I'll get out of here in June and we'll go back through Europe for a month or so and then I'll come back to Washington. Well, I had my orders to depart, but because it's a military outfit they wouldn't let me go until my replacement turned up, so that caused a little strain. I went to John Paul Vann and I said, "I've got my orders and I'm supposed to get out of here. I've been here two years." I was getting a little antsy, and because by that time we'd gone through what seemed like three different sets of military advisors and they all were able to get out when their time came up... So I had to wait and finally got a replacement. At the replacement, I threw my stuff in a box, put it in the back of a Scout and left for Saigon.

Q: *Well, I take it your wife was where, was she in Bangkok?*

WEINGARTEN: No, she was in the Philippines.

Q: *In the Philippines. Were you ever under attack, or not, there?*

WEINGARTEN: In Vietnam?

'Q: *Yes.*

WEINGARTEN: Oh, yes, yes. It was pretty mild stuff. There were mortar attacks basically. We got mortared fairly frequently, and we got ambushed once, and I still like to tell that story of our ambush, and I had to get out of the Scout and jump into the rice paddy, which is not such a benign place to jump into if the rice paddy is just full of human waste basically, and fired back. And then we got out of there. There was a truck in front of us with a .50 caliber machine gun, and somebody got up and was working that. And we got about a mile down the road and there was some kind of officer - a U.S. Ranger officer - and we were kind of dirty and a little bit shaken. He gave us each a beer, a cold Budweiser. This was probably at 11 in the morning. And I lit up - I smoked at the time - I lit up a Marlboro and took a drag on that, and I swear to God, the smoke went all the way down to my toes and back up - the best drag I've ever had on a cigarette - and the beer tasted as good as anything I've ever had - better. I guess at the time the greatest fear I had was driving down a road that was on a berm. I could see far enough ahead. There was a roadblock, and the guys on the roadblock, I couldn't see what kind of weapons they had, but I could see the weapons had banana clips, which was a feature of the AK-47, and I thought, I'm done for. So I had the M-16, had that loaded, cocked, and I was going to drive on and see if I could drive on through. And it turned out they were our people, our Vietnamese, who had welded or soldered the magazine so it wasn't a square magazine, but a banana clip on the M-16. That was a big relief. So anyway, we left.

Q: I'm trying to portray this life. I mean, here were a bunch of essentially civilian diplomats out driving jeeps in very dangerous country.

WEINGARTEN: Yes, but it was interesting times, anyway.

Q: Were you getting some of the new officers? You were getting young Foreign Service officers coming in, weren't you? I've often thought, you know, we were getting some of these guys had been protesting or demonstrating in the streets in the United States against the war six months before, and then they went to be nice cushy diplomats and the next thing they know they were in My Tho or some other place like that driving around. What was the spirit, morale, or whatever you'd like to talk about?

WEINGARTEN: I don't recall that we ever got anybody down there. Howard Gross and I were the only Foreign Service officers in My Tho. Then we had one guy also a Foreign Service officer down the road in Vinit Kiem, and then everybody else was an AID officer. And it was an AID Foreign Service reserve, but I never ran into anybody who thought, My God, no, I went into the diplomatic service and here I am. And the Foreign Service officers up at the embassy always struck me as pretty dedicated to the effort. So I never ran into anybody like that.

Q: You mentioned Howard Gross. Howard took me on a tour of his bridges. I remember this. I came from the embassy to My Tho, and Howard and I had served together in Yugoslavia. We probably met at that point, but Howard took me out to see his bridges. He was very proud of

these. I was very antsy because I was a Saigon type, and I hadn't been out in the-

WEINGARTEN: He called them *his* bridges, Howard did?

Q: *Well, I know, his bridges - I mean I just remember he took me to bridges.*

WEINGARTEN: Yes, those were *my* bridges.

Q: *Oh, they were your bridges. Well, he took me to bridges.*

WEINGARTEN: Okay.

Q: *And showing me.*

WEINGARTEN: Well, I used to have the exact opposite impression. I was more at ease in the country than I was in Saigon. I'd get up to Saigon and have the feeling of being a country boy in a very big and bustling city. I didn't know my way around, and I didn't like it very much. And I'd go to the embassy or go to AID headquarters and think, what am I doing here? What are these guys doing here? You remember that AID complex? They had guys there that I don't think knew what they were doing. They'd come down every once in a while to My Tho, which was close in, and want to take a look at a village. It might be the chief of the Village Development Division of AID. You know, "That's a village, eh. That's what it looks like." But they were interesting times.

Q: *Well, when you left there in 1970, how did you feel things were going? Whither Vietnam in your opinion at that time?*

WEINGARTEN: I was pretty confident that we had turned the tables on the war, that the Vietcong had hurt themselves tremendously in 1968, and many of their cadres had been killed in this tremendous uprising. The Vietnamese Army never looked particularly good, but at least it looked as if it was big enough, heavy enough that it couldn't be overturned, and it seemed to be there was more peace in the Delta most of the time. Some exceptions where they'd have a hard-core Vietcong or NVA battalion would come through, and they were very, very tough and very difficult to... They could really inflict damage on our local troops. The consequence was that we would have to have South Vietnam Marines or Airborne or Rangers down to match them. And we were the first, the Delta was the first part of Vietnam from which our troops were withdrawn, beginning in '69, and so it was a sort of a cockpit of Vietnamization. And it really seemed as though things were going pretty well. I left there and figured I'd never have to go back.

Q: *What about corruption? How did you feel about that, or what did you observe?*

WEINGARTEN: Oh, yes, there certainly was corruption, but it didn't affect... It was really pretty much a Vietnamese thing, Vietnamese demanding money from other Vietnamese. But we would... There were things we didn't know. We didn't know, for example, why the budget had been proclaimed up in Saigon and yet our province didn't have its budget for months and months and months. As it turned out, it was either being lent out along the way at exorbitant interest rates or it was being ripped off. But where I was the corruption didn't seem to be all that much. I mean

it was not... This was really out in the country, out in the sticks, and we didn't seem to have as much there. Now I guess up in Saigon you must have had a good deal of it. It must have been endemic, but I never had the impression that it was really affecting daily operations.

Q: What did you want to do, and how did you want to sort of direct yourself when you were getting out in 1970?

WEINGARTEN: Well, Howard had told me a lot about Yugoslavia, and I wanted to get back to Europe, so about that time, sometime in early '70, John Burns, the director general of the Foreign Service came out, and he saw everybody.

Q: I remember that trip.

WEINGARTEN: He came down to this little room I was in, and he said, "Well, where would you like to go after Vietnam, after your tour here?" And I thought, Wow, that's a pretty nice offer. And I said, "Tell me, where do you have me pegged to go now?" And he had a guy with him, and he asked the guy, and the guy says, "Indonesian language training." And I said, "I'd much prefer to go back to Europe." At that time, I had thought that I had done my overseas service. And I thought, well, one of the ways I can beat the rule that requires domestic service is to go back for hard language training and then go back overseas. And only years and years later - I think you'll like this - I discovered that as far as the State Department was concerned, service in Vietnam counted as domestic service.

JAMES J. GORMLEY
Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Da Nang (1968-1970)

James J. Gormley was born in New York in 1932. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964 and served in Mexico, Thailand, Paraguay, Vietnam, and various assignments in Washington, DC. He was interviewed in 1992 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: After that you came back to Washington?

GORMLEY: Well from Mérida I was assigned, got orders to go to Vietnam, which I did not welcome.

Q: Were you married at the time?

GORMLEY: No.

Q: Did you get some training before you went to Vietnam?

GORMLEY: Yes, I got a whole year at FSI.

Q: What did the training consist of and what did they tell you you were going to be doing?

GORMLEY: The bulk of the group was assigned to CORDS, there may have been one or two persons who were going to work at the Embassy but most of us were all going to CORDS. CORDS wasn't that old an organization by that time, although it was a successor to another alphabet organization, OCO I believe. We were all being prepared for rural development. The language course was good, not all of FSI's language courses are good, and I thought the area studies component was quite thorough, quite good.

Q: Here you were taking training for a year, this would be 1967, 1968?

GORMLEY: Starting in about August of 1967 and ending July 1968.

Q: Tet was when?

GORMLEY: Tet was January of 1968.

Q: What was your feeling and the feeling of your colleagues about going to Vietnam at the time and our involvement there?

GORMLEY: Very few of us had volunteered for it, as a matter of fact I suppose the bulk of the class was a junior officer pool going on their first tour. I think a lot of them when admitted into the Foreign Service had had to preagree to go to Vietnam, so there wasn't much enthusiasm for the idea of going there. I think virtually everyone in general approved of the main thrust of the policy; you could disagree with a tremendous amount of the execution but there was no one in the group who I recall who actually thought that the major thrust of this was wrong. Everybody thought it was right.

Q: What about the area studies, were you getting people coming back talking to you with enthusiasm about what was going on?

GORMLEY: Again, here you get to the point of execution. So much of what the administration was doing in there was kidding itself and so much of what we were getting very often was propaganda and what we thought were lies. You could not believe most of what we were getting, unfortunately.

Q: What type of thing -- because I am trying to recreate the spirit of the times -- when you say getting lies, at that point struck you as not being correct?

GORMLEY: Now we are going back to a long time ago.

Q: Oh, I know, I understand, and this is hard.

GORMLEY: I wish I could recreate it. I remember -- let me start with some random things and maybe I will make some coherence out of it, although I doubt it. I remember one time we were

being instructed or getting something from some Army people on interrogation etc., etc., and this guy was basically approving the use of torture. I remember one of our group who was a lawyer got up and said, "But isn't this all in violation of due process?" At the time all of us tough minded types laughed and said, "So what." But in retrospect I think that was one of the leading questions of the course; the United States cannot operate that way. That is one of the people I still see, I was just talking to him the other day on the phone.

Q: *Who was this?*

GORMLEY: His name is Harry Quillian. He wasn't in the Foreign Service very long. It was his second or third tour and he was assigned to the consulate in Da Nang instead of to CORDS. He was very opposed to the Vietnam war and was my roommate for a very short time in Da Nang. He had gone over a short time before I got there and he said when he was leaving for what was purportedly leave that he wouldn't be back and he quit the Foreign Service. A person who I have a great deal of respect for.

Q: *How did you find the military? I suppose it was a mixed course with military with you?*

GORMLEY: No, not in the language and area courses; they would be participating as trainers and we had to go down to Fort Bragg upon one occasion to the Green Beret school. And there were military on the staff, but there were no military in the course.

Q: *Well here you were, a boy from Queens, you're not a country boy and you are going out for rural development. What were they trying to teach you, what were you going to bring to Vietnam?*

GORMLEY: They did a lot of very elementary things; we weren't going to dig out any wells but as it happened I ended up in a city, in Da Nang where I didn't have to worry -- well there were rural areas even in Da Nang. The idea was more to influence and report on what the Vietnamese were doing and to see that there was some connection between what the policy was and what was happening down to a very low level of governmental unit in Vietnam, the district.

Q: *What was your feeling in going to Da Nang? What was your feeling about -- this was the time of the great anti-war protests on the college campuses -- these and were they having any repercussions in your training ranks?*

GORMLEY: Actually there weren't many great anti-war demonstrations in 1967, 1968. I think Tet really began it. Up until then, I think most people thought that we were winning. General Westmoreland had come back about November of 1967 and talked about how everything was going our way and we were going to wrap this up in a year or so. It was a time of great upheaval but it was not upheaval caused by anti-war sentiment. The assassination of King was during that time and you stood on your balcony in Arlington and watched the fires in Washington; you went into Washington and even on Connecticut Avenue you had troops.

Q: *I recall on Wisconsin Avenue seeing the 82nd Airborne with flak jackets walking up and down the streets. I never will forget it.*

GORMLEY: So there was plenty of upheaval but at that point it hadn't focused on the war.

Q: *It was more race.*

GORMLEY: Race and the whole Berkeley thing I think had started in about 1965.

Q: *At the University of California.*

GORMLEY: And there were the race riots in Watts in 1965. So there was a great amount of upheaval but it wasn't focused on the war during the time we were in training.

Q: *Then you went out in the summer of 1968 to Vietnam?*

GORMLEY: Right. Oh, I might mention that the group was really upset by Tet in the same way that the American people were. I was very emotional about it. I remember somebody was staying with me, I had a little tiny apartment in Arlington, and it was Saturday morning and I turned on the radio -- I had no television in those days. The reader of the news was reporting the Tet attack, obviously not understanding himself the significance of it, and he started reeling off where attacks had taken place. This person was a Mexican and she didn't speak English and she asked what was the matter. I said, "They've attacked every fucking city in Vietnam." We were furious and the staff was shattered. Of course, one of their contentions was, once they had recovered their balance, that the Viet Cong had shot its wad -- which was correct -- but we didn't appreciate that at the time.

Q: *You had been told that here was a place where things were really under control and yet all these places supposedly under control had had significant fighting.*

GORMLEY: And there were symbolic things like the Viet Cong getting into the Embassy and the taking of Hue -- it was ferocious to try to get that back.

Q: *Then you went over when?*

GORMLEY: We probably had some leave because I think we had a week in Taiwan before we went to Vietnam and that week was basically to see the work of the Joint Committee on Rural Reconstruction that had occurred in Taiwan. We got sort of a Potemkin village tour of Taiwan which was very impressive. I visited in Taiwan last year too and that was a lot more impressive.

Q: *So you got out to...*

GORMLEY: We didn't know where we were assigned until we got to Saigon. I learned later that they had been thinking of putting me into the Embassy-USAID joint economic section, which they did not do. They sent me up to Da Nang.

Q: *So you were up in Da Nang at about what time?*

GORMLEY: I would have gotten there in September of 1968 and I stayed through February of

1970.

Q: What was the situation in Da Nang while you were there?

GORMLEY: As far as security went we were under a pretty constant threat of rocket attacks. Not the area I was in because it was mostly aimed at the airport which was to the south of us. You got so that you just slept through these rocket attacks; you didn't even hear them, except on one occasion when they decided to change their target and they hit -- we were right on the river -- a boat carrying fuel right near. That got me out of bed!

Q: When I was in Saigon a little later, you would turn on the radio in the morning and hear where the rockets fell, in what district, and it was like the weather report. If it wasn't your district or the Embassy's district, you know -- isn't that interesting.

GORMLEY: I remember staying in a hotel near the central market in Saigon when the central market was hit by rockets. It was interesting.

Q: What type of work were you doing?

GORMLEY: I was the deputy to the senior advisor for the city and our problems were city administration and refugees. Da Nang had been before the war, say in the last days of the French period, say 1939 or 1940, a very pretty little city of about twenty-five thousand people. There were about 250,000 or 300,000 people living in Da Nang when I was there, a lot of them in very squalid refugee camps. One of our projects was the relocation of refugees into more decent housing. The other was just improving city services. We had a very, very great resource in the city, the Seabees.

Q: The construction battalions of the Navy.

GORMLEY: Right. And they had a strong commitment to civic action. We had a committee, the mayor, the head of the navy civic action group, and ourselves. We did an awful lot of work on small building projects, road projects, that were very positive.

Q: How did you deal with the Vietnamese officials? What was your impression of them and how successful were you in working with them?

GORMLEY: There were two mayors when I was there. The first one was a man whom nobody much liked, who had a reputation for being corrupt. I remember his name, Le Chi Cuong. He was assigned as province chief in one of the delta provinces shortly after I got there. Very amusing man though; at his farewell there were tears in his eyes and no one else's. Every Vietnamese in that room was saying, "God I'm glad to see you go, you bastard." He was followed by -- of course all the people who headed provinces were military men -- a colonel who had been head of Diem's palace guard, a Catholic, who, as a matter of fact, had to plead for his life back in 1963 and had succeeded in staying alive and was hustled off to some inconsequential posts in the highlands. Of course Thieu was in power now and this group was back in favor. He was then assigned as mayor in Da Nang. He was very personable and I found him a man very

easy to work with. I still kept contact with him on my second tour in Vietnam in 1974. Of course his counterpart was my boss, the senior advisor, but I had a lot of direct contact with him and I felt very flattered when I left. He had a custom for departing Americans of having a dinner for them in City Hall. The mayor had the best chef in Da Nang. When I left he had my farewell at his house which I thought was quite a compliment. With the mayor I always spoke English because the mayor spoke better English than I spoke Vietnamese. The deputy mayor, who in all the provinces was a civilian and usually a graduate of the public administration academy and much younger than the general run of colonels who headed provinces, and I got to be very friendly. He was a very decent man and with him I always spoke Vietnamese because he spoke no English.

Q: How did we work with the Vietnamese? You were trying to resettle refugees for one thing and work on city services, but what was our role?

GORMLEY: In large part we were intermediaries between the city and those in the U.S. military who had resources. But also by the fact that we did control access to resources we could also have a say in what was to be done. I remember that sometimes this was not so well handled. My first boss in Da Nang was a total incompetent; he was a USAID type hired especially for the Vietnam program whose forte had been public recreation; he was allegedly a city manager though I could never determine any city that he had ever managed. He was totally unable to operate in an Asian context. He had, on a specific refugee relocation program, this grandiose idea for more or less Texas style public housing, which was insane -- there was no money for it, there was no way of doing it -- he was pushing this. The mayor wanted a much more modest thing where mainly we would provide the materials and the people would build their own houses in a certain area which he had selected, which was in a sensible place. Upon one occasion the mayor was briefing on his ideas and my boss was challenging him. Of course he challenged him in English. The mayor completely ignored him, didn't even respond to what he had said. We had on our staff a number of young draftees who because of graduate degrees in various things were lucky enough to not be sent to get shot and were sent to our staff. One of them was a young guy with a degree in architecture, really a terrific, smart young man; of course he was only a corporal and the Vietnamese are extremely rank conscious, for that reason all our people always wore civilian clothes although the mayor knew the guy was only a corporal. After ignoring my boss this young corporal raised certain objections to the mayor's plans and the mayor defended it, showed why he believed this and that; it was such a put-down of my boss it was tremendous.

So our relations were mixed. Some of the Americans were pretty poor at any kind of relations with the Vietnamese.

Q: This is one of the things that all of us who served there as Foreign Service officers thought -- God, what are we doing, after all these people have been around for a long time and in many ways know how to do things better. We sort of came in there like a bull elephant.

GORMLEY: Very often, as in that specific case, we would have our own more grandiose ideas and not really listen to people. In the end we did because we got rid of my boss, partly with my machinations, and we got a new senior advisor. The mayor's plan went through and we supported it and it was very successful.

Q: What about the problem of corruption? I Corps, which Da Nang was in, had a general who as I recall was renowned for having warehouses full of his things -- I think at that time, I may be wrong on this.

GORMLEY: Well certainly General Lam had a very unsavory reputation. He was still commander up until the time...I believe he was dismissed after the Lam Son operation, the invasion of Laos. But he was still corps commander up until that time. He was a political general, a businessman more than anything else. There was no one there who showed him much respect except for the Marine general who was his counterpart. No one took him seriously as a military man.

Q: What about the problem of corruption? What were your instructions dealing with corruption?

GORMLEY: I am not sure we ever had instructions. Obviously we were to report anything that we saw that was untoward. What I believed in doing was working with the Vietnamese officials who you thought were honest until proven otherwise and cutting off those you didn't. There was, I thought, very little corruption in terms of diversion of materials or that kind of thing. A lot of money was made by those who glommed on to Americans for things like renting property and they were usually pretty unsavory types. I know the leading landlord in Da Nang was a woman who owned seemingly almost everything in town that the Americans rented; she was a lady bountiful to the American colonels in town, she set a great table. I was invited to her house twice until she figured out that I wasn't going to do her any good. When you speak of corruption, there was an awful lot of corruption, in a real sense, of Americans there, both of abusing our control of resources and of living awfully well in a time when other people are living pretty badly.

Q: I agree, it is disquieting. What was your impression of USAID as an operation in the unique situation there -- wartime, sky's the limit type of thing.

GORMLEY: Of course so many of the people were hired specifically for Vietnam and had very little experience with USAID before that, so they were there to fill out this enormous organization that was built up. Some of them went by the book as far as how to do economic development in the country and it was totally irrelevant to what we were about. There were plenty of good people. Certainly the USAID officer in charge, he was called deputy for CORDS, that was the head civilian in our corps, deputy to the commanding general of the Marines up there. When I went there it was an FSO, Charlie Cross, who later became Ambassador to Singapore, and, I believe, to Taiwan at one time though I don't know whether we still had an Embassy in Taiwan. Cross really was not engaged, he just sort of coasted hoping that no one would notice how things were going up there. So you shouldn't report much, just report enough to keep everybody off our backs -- until I manage to complete my tour and get the fuck out of here and get an Embassy job. His successor was a USAID type who since has died, his name was Alexander Firfer. He was flamboyant and he was active, and in general shook things up. I thought he was a much more vital presence than Cross had ever been; he was erratic, he was cold to most people, his nickname was "mad Alex." I think he was a vital force.

Q: What about relations with the military? Da Nang was under a Marine officer, wasn't it?

GORMLEY: Yes. The U.S. commander for I Corps was the commander of the III Marine Amphibious Force. I guess General Walt had had that job previously and when I was there it was a guy named General Nickerson. Nickerson was sort of a Pattonesque type, at least in his own mind.

Q: A couple of revolvers?

GORMLEY: Yes. He certainly could not tolerate talk of corruption about General Lam and he certainly tried to stifle that. Another taboo which we never could criticize was the Korean Marines; again this one wasn't directly concerning us, the people in Da Nang, because we didn't have the responsibility for monitoring General Lam or the marines. The Korean Marines could never be criticized.

Q: They were basically an inert force, weren't they?

GORMLEY: They were super at making sure that they got their share of PX goods and they certainly held their own bases very strongly and terrorized the Vietnamese around them, but that was about it. They were above criticism as far as Nickerson was concerned. They were our great Korean allies.

Q: What I am getting from you is that there was at the top a lot of going along with the situation and not trying to analyze what was happening and setting up concerns.

GORMLEY: As for the big picture, by early in his administration Nixon was beginning the troop pull down and I think at that point the North Vietnamese, very wisely, said well they're getting out and we will not push for a while. So after the end of those mini-offensives that followed Tet in 1968 things were really pretty calm for the rest of the time I was in Vietnam. Oh there was the general low level of guerilla attacks, the rockets, but there was no great battle fought. I think that they very wisely thought that as long as Nixon was under pressure to pull out American troops it was in their interest not to interfere with that. I know Firfer claimed that the low level of activity in I corps was proof that we were winning the war but I held that it was proof that the war was lost, that we were getting out and once out we would never be back. Obviously the people who were here and whose whole aim was uniting their country would succeed; they had the will and we didn't. I said that to the mayor the first time I talked with him; I think I was the first American official who told him that "You can't rely on us." He was a little stunned but it turned out to be right.

Q: Did you have any dealings with our consulate there?

GORMLEY: Mostly just on a social basis. I would write up biographical material on officials I was dealing with but it was mostly social. There was a good friend, Don Westmore, and I liked Terry a lot, Terry McNamara; those were the two that were in the consulate that I...Jim Mack came for a little bit late in my tour. They were all good people.

Q: You left there when?

GORMLEY: In February of 1970.

Q: Looking back at it at that time what did you feel, any accomplishments? How did you feel about it when you left?

GORMLEY: One, I never wanted to go in the first place. I still recall flying in and looking at the bomb craters in September of 1968 and saying, "Gormley, you ass hole. You had a year and a half to get out of this and you didn't do it." But when I was there it was the central event of the time and I felt excited to be a part of it. I never did anything that would violate my own conscience and never did anything that would cause me to lose sleep; I felt good about what I had done, even though I felt it was an absolute losing cause. It was a very positive experience; I liked the country and I liked the people.

Q: I must say this reflects somewhat my feeling. I was consul general in Saigon from 1969 to 1970, about eighteen months there. It was seeing the elephant, this was the big event of our time and I think I feel much better about having seen it rather than not. I certainly wouldn't want to go through it again; I liked the Vietnamese, wished them well. My concern was that I thought we got too much involved in everything and I was concerned about our staying power too. One last thing about this -- did you get any feel about what the CIA was doing there and their effect on all of this?

GORMLEY: I had very little contact with Agency people, although there was one whom I knew from the States who was in Saigon and whom I saw when I initially came to Vietnam. I forget whether I saw him again during my tour, maybe I did. He was the one who emphasized to me that thing that I emphasized to the mayor, you can't count on us. He was very pessimistic about our staying power. In Da Nang itself, Cross's deputy when I arrived was CIA, I even forget his name now. They were concerned with the Phoenix program.

Q: Which was basically the elimination, in polite terms, of the communist cadre.

GORMLEY: There was much less extermination in that than the peaceniks would have you believe, but yes, that was it. I did not have much contact with the Agency people, not that I can recall now; reading some of their material, that was about it.

Q: Then you came back for two years, into personnel, is that right?

EUGENE ROSENFELD
Chief of Mission, Press Center
Saigon (1968-1970)

Eugene Rosenfeld began his government service in the Census Bureau. When the 1940 Census was over, his background in journalism led him to a position in the Office of Emergency Management (later called OWI). He has also served in India, Tanzania, London, and Ethiopia. His interview was conducted by Jack O'Brien on November 28, 1989.

ROSENFELD: I had talked to Ambassador Bunker, who had not gone out there yet. I had talked to Harold Kaplan, who had just come back. This was before I went into treatment. Bunker said, "You had better get that thing taken care of before you can even think about going out there," which is, of course, what happened.

Meantime, I was temporarily assigned to IPS, in with Nat Glick, to get out the first issue of Dialogue magazine. I had edited and produced a similar intellectual quarterly in India when I was there. Nat had been working on Dialogue for about two years, so following orders from Tom Cannon, IPS' Number two, I nudged Glick and we managed to get it out fairly quickly, before I left for Saigon. We had some problems with the art department and with some other things, but it was a successful effort.

Once that was out of the way and I felt sufficiently well, I went off to Saigon.

Q: What was your assignment there?

ROSENFELD: I was to become Chief of the Mission Press Center. Barry Zorthian was the head of that whole operation at that time but was clearly about to phase out, because he had been there something like four years, I believe.

So the decision was made that I should handle the Mission Press Center and Ed Nickel would take over the JUSPAO operation, which was for the in-country program. The Mission Press Center had to deal with mainly foreign correspondents, although there was obviously some connection with the Vietnamese press which was not really a significant media operation at that time, but nonetheless it had to be paid attention to, even though it was largely government controlled.

We arrived, I think, two days after Tet 1968, of ill fame, and it sort of went downhill from there. It was not too long an assignment. I was there for about eight or nine months. It was not a happy one.

Zorthian was phasing out, supposedly in perhaps two or three months and as we were housemates I quickly got to know an awful lot of the press people, TV and so forth, but the overall situation became increasingly bad.

I think it hit its nadir when we all sat around my office waiting to hear the broadcast of President Johnson's speech, around the end of March, where he indicated that he was not going to run again for the presidency. Some people thought it was a good idea and some didn't. I was unhappy about it, not just from the psychological viewpoint, but it was one of the things that you had to live with and it intensified a very difficult and unhappy situation.

There were a lot of very good USIS people there, even though they came out for different reasons. Looking back on it now, maybe it wasn't as bad as I felt then, but at that time my reaction was that people volunteered to go to Vietnam because they figured if they didn't volunteer they were going to get sent anyway. You had to have it on your record and it was good

to have on your record because it would lead presumably to promotion. I think that was one of the first reasons people went out there.

The second reason is that you got these special allowances and perks and things where you could go back every three or four months and where your family could be set up in Bangkok or in New Delhi or in the Philippines or whatever.

The third reason was that maybe you were having trouble at home with your wife and it was a good way to get away and not to worry about it since dependents couldn't come to Vietnam.

The fourth reason was that you really believed in what the U.S. was trying to do there. I am not trying to be a hero about this. I did believe and I did feel that USIA, our people had to participate, had to provide their skills and do their share. And as former newsmen you wanted in on the top story of the decade.

I did what I could. It was not a wildly successful effort on my part. I can remember one particular story, however, which I think may have had a little bit of effect on history.

The Mission Council was the top brass. It consisted of Ambassadors Bunker and Berger -- Sam Berger was the deputy ambassador -- Bill Colby was CIA station chief. General Westmoreland was the chief of the military assistance thing. Chester Cooper, I think, was the economics guy then. Don McDonald was the AID chief. Ed Nickel was on the Council where Barry had been from the beginning of his tour, I believe.

Barry was away, so I sat in for him at this one particular session. I sat in on maybe two or three MC meetings altogether. I felt this was a piece of history going on there and it was worthwhile remembering.

This was around the middle of April, 1968. Tet, as we know, was a very important turning point. This particular meeting climaxed with a report by General Westmoreland who was a brilliant briefer. This was the key group, the inside inside, in the inner sanctum when we had these meetings, protected in every possible way. The walls were covered with maps and charts of different battle areas.

Westmoreland got up to give his briefing -- it took him about twenty minutes to a half hour -- about what was going to happen. The intelligence that they had was that there was going to be an attack by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong around the first of May and they were going to hit not the hundred-and-twenty-eight places that they hit at Tet but the, oh, maybe about five or ten key areas as another unexpected major assault. MACV had the full intelligence on NVA attack plans. The general did not say how his people had obtained it. It was generally known that they had captured a Colonel Dac and that he had given them a lot of information about this forthcoming attack and they were basing a lot of their planning, defense and counter-attack planning on this.

At the end of Westmoreland's briefing he said, "This is the way it is going to be and I don't want this to go one inch outside of this room. This is totally top secret at all times. Nobody is to know

anything about this at all. You have got to hold this extremely tight." Everybody nodded except me.

I said (cautiously), "Well, it seems to me that, since while we may have had a military victory at Tet we suffered a very severe psychological defeat because people did not expect it and people did not think that they had this kind of strength. Therefore, I think it might be a good idea, that we give the press a briefing -- within limits -- about what was going to happen and bind them on it that they could not file anything until the action started." I was convinced that the press, while not totally reliable, was reliable enough so that if we threatened them with expulsion if they broke the confidence rule, they would play along.

Everybody around the room sort of looked at me aghast. Westmoreland turned to me and said, "Oh, I thought of that but I rejected it." I said, "Okay. I just think that it is a possibility that we might be able to do something to get a psychological edge at this stage of the game." End of meeting.

About three or four days later I got a call from General Sidle, who was Westmoreland's chief PR man, a wonderful guy, very good, who said, "Gene, why don't you get some of the guys together -- you know, five or six, you know the right guys, guys that we can trust."

I said, "What's up?" He said, "I can't tell you anything." I said, "Well, okay, when do you want to do it? Three o'clock? Three o'clock Wednesday, right?" He said, "That's fine."

So at three o'clock Wednesday some 35 guys I had asked to come to the meeting with Sidle were in the briefing room. Sidle was astounded when he saw this mob. He said, "What the hell are you doing?" I said, "I'm not sure what you plan to tell them, but it is a briefing, and if you are just going to tell five or six guys the others are going to get sore as hell, so you are going to have to bring them in on this thing one way or another. You might as well do it in one shot."

I had a pretty good idea of what he was going to talk about -- the upcoming "mini-Tet." His sanitized version of the Westmoreland briefing to the Mission Council was a first-class job on a very tight off-the-record, hold-for-release basis and nobody broke it. Everybody was aware of what was supposed to be happening. It turned out to occur almost exactly the way he had predicted and we scored quite a few points. It didn't change the course of the war but it was, in my view at least, a turn-around from a public relations standpoint, which is what I was there for and which is what JUSPAO and USIS were there for.

When it came time to leave, I said my goodbyes to Ambassador Bunker. I took the opportunity to ask him if he had had anything to do with General Westmoreland's mind-change about the mini-Tet briefing. Bunker looked sort of blank at that but when I refreshed his memory he said, "Oh, yes, I remember now. Yes, I urged Westy to do it." Frankly, I didn't believe him. Although Bunker was a man of towering integrity, I preferred to give Westmoreland the credit for having the good sense to follow my sterling advice!

CHARLES S. WHITEHOUSE
Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Saigon (1968-1970)

Ambassador Charles S. Whitehouse was born in France of American parents in 1921. He joined the Foreign Service 1948 and served in Turkey, Cambodia, South Africa, Guinea, Vietnam and as ambassador to Laos and Thailand. He was interviewed by Roger Ernst in 1989.

WHITEHOUSE: The jobs Foreign Service officers had in CORDS, Vietnam, were really very unusual. I had about 1800 people working for me in the part of Vietnam called III Corps, which was the nine provinces surrounding Saigon. There were teams in every province and sub-teams in the districts which made up the provinces. Very often there would be a senior Foreign Service Officer, a Class-2 or 3 officer, in-charge or a colonel, or lieutenant colonel, as his deputy or vice versa. I worked for the three-star general who was the commander. He had a major-general as one deputy and me as the other. Our teams were going into the villages on intelligence, on refugees or police matters, on agriculture, on building roads and bridges, etc. These were very, very exciting management jobs. We were working in an atmosphere of constant crisis, but we had a remarkable degree of harmony between the military and the civilians. The best man in this field was Jean Paul Vann, who I succeeded in III Corps, Neil Sheehan has written a book called "Bright Shining Lie" about his life. I think all Foreign Service Officers who worked in CORDS, got a lot out of the experience because it was so much more challenging than working in an embassy anywhere in the world.

Q: Do you see some current or future applications of this type of inter-service interdisciplinary coordination now applying in a more peaceful world where the coordination between diverse conflicting political and economic interests is important.

WHITEHOUSE: I do. I think for example if you take Peru or Colombia, I think you could make a very persuasive case that the classic American structure of an American Embassy is not appropriate to the kinds of problems we confront there today. You have a major cocaine-growing problem there in the Upper Huallaga Valley and a very savage insurgency run by the Shining Path guerillas. I think that there should be a far more integrated up country operation than we have today. The classic elements can do their traditional work but at the same time you've got to have dynamic leadership given to activities that are up country and to the mechanics, the military trainers, narcotic agents, AID people, peace corps who work there. All of this has to be pulled together and treated as one effort. You can't have narcotic agents go off in their corner and do their thing, the military trainers go off in their corner and do their thing. It has to be, in my view, centralized and centrally directed and centrally supported. Your communications support, your food, your medical support and air support is all harmonized and centrally directed and shared among the interested agencies.

Q: I can see what you're saying.

WHITEHOUSE: It all has to be an integrated team effort and that is what we finally learned in Indochina. We did it differently in Vietnam than we did it Laos. But then in Laos you had an

extraordinarily close-knit country team. The CIA station chief, AID director, and the senior military officer and I went around like an eight legged animal. We were in touch with each other every day, all day long. We had staff meetings every day and we all recognized that what one person did instantly influenced the programs of the others - there was no such thing as independent action.

Q: You didn't feel the separatism that existed and still exists I guess in the agencies in Washington. The field was unified or had the opportunity to have a common view and then could get its act together.

WHITEHOUSE: The lines to the field in Indochina had become so complicated because of the financing and the management arrangements that there was nobody in Washington who could keep it straight at all. Therefore we had a lot more autonomy in the field than people would have today.

In Laos, for example, there were two young men in Washington who were our desk officers. They didn't have a clue about the petroleum procurement problems that we faced, in 1974 and this office had all our activities. The AID people understood their programs and what they were funding and financing, but were only dimly aware of the degree to which military aircraft or military supported programs were in fact being used to support the refugee programs up country. You cannot have bookkeepers who will be able to say, this airplane is going up to landing site 219 and it's carrying bullets but it's going to come back with six refugee families and therefore the price per agency is so minor. You can't get into all that. We're one country and one government and I think we did remarkably well in Indochina in overcoming that kind of nonsense.

Q: I have to interject. I can hear Ambassador Bunker for whom I have the highest respect, saying to me, "Roger, what you need to think about is what is the national interest, not that of your agency. If we get the national interest right, your agency will be taken care of." You'll do the right thing. You're saying the same thing.

WHITEHOUSE: Yes, Ambassador Bunker felt very strongly that there was a clear national interest and this sort of interdepartmental nonsense was something that just got in the way. In Indochina the programs were vast, the amount of money being spent was huge, but the amount of authority given to field was happily sufficient so as not to have to push questions back and forth to Washington all of the time. Under my predecessors, Bill Sullivan and Mac Godley -- very, very good, arrangements had been made. I don't think I broke any new ground. I kept interdepartmental relationships that had been created before and in which everybody was very, very comfortable. It required, and I say this in all modesty, a good deal of personal leadership and vigor on the part of the ambassador to keep the lions on their perches and to keep them from scratching one another sometimes, but we had a very, very good group in Laos as we did in Vietnam. There are always situations in very large enterprises in which people do get a little cranky with each other, but in Laos, we really didn't.

Q: I really saw your approach in Bangkok, in Thailand. The country team was a very much unified operation, and I don't want to say, whoa to the person who fouled the nest and got out of

step, but everyone knew in fact, that there was one representative of the president, that was yourself, and we all had to carry a national responsibility.

WHITEHOUSE: I think there is such a thing as operating style. I think it is important to deal right off the top of the deck with everybody and not take the AID mission director off in one corner and whisper something in his ear and then have a separate conversation that might be a little different with the CIA station chief, and saying something different with the senior military officer. I'm a great believer in staff meetings and everybody hearing what the other fellow has been told and having a chance to get his nickel in. I think that was one of the great flaws of Graham Martin, the man who succeeded Bunker in Vietnam. He was a great fellow for conspiratorial type relationships. He would say something to one fellow, and then to somebody else, and then don't tell so and so that I told you this. You create an immense web of complications operating that way, so I'm dead set against that.

GEORGE A. ANDERSON
Political-Military Affairs Officer
Saigon, (1968-1971)

Mr. Anderson was born in Nebraska and raised in Iowa. He was educated at the University of Missouri and the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He also pursued studies in Brussels, Belgium. Entering the Foreign Service in 1957 Mr. Anderson had several assignments at the State Department in Washington, DC. His foreign posts include Copenhagen, Oslo, Saigon, Brussels and Vienna. During his career, Mr. Anderson became an expert in labor affairs, serving as Labor Officer and Labor Attaché at a number of these posts. He was interviewed by Don Kienzle in 1996.

Q: Should we turn to your next assignment?

ANDERSON: My next assignment was out of function, and out of the geographic area. That's when I went to Vietnam. I went there as Political-Military Affairs Officer for two years.

Q: You want to describe some of your activities there, since this tape will be available to a broader audience than just those interested in labor?

ANDERSON: I arrived there right after Tet, the first days of March 1968. The most interesting job I had... Well, at first I got into study of herbicides and warfare, and Dave Carpenter and I together did the definitive study on herbicides and warfare, as a result of which we concluded that a lot of it was totally ineffective and no longer of any use if it was effective, and we cut the program to less than a third of what it was. But by that time it had become a terrible political football in the U.S. And I worked on it for the rest of the time I was there as well as when I was on Laird staff, what they called the Vietnam Task Force, which was a little under-layer that dealt with and handled military/political aspects of Vietnamization there.

Q: Do you want to just to back up a bit and explain what the main issues were in the herbicides stuff?

ANDERSON: The herbicides were, of course, at that time dioxin and the agent orange. This was mainly a political issue as whether it was hurting the farmers and was it doing any good. The idea that there was dioxin in it was little known by anybody and it was not an issue. The issue was that there was drift involved and it was killing the forests, it was an environmental thing, and it was hurting the peasants, and so forth. So they were really concerned on the eco-system and what its effect was going to be. We had dropped over Vietnam at that point approximately over half of all the herbicides manufactured in the world. People know very little about what kind of herbicides were involved, they don't know the difference between orange, white and blue, they don't know the difference between the herbicide and desiccant, most of the paver that you hear out there talked about is totally uninformed. Coming from an agricultural area, and having been at that point the owner of farms, and my brothers and I used herbicides on farms that we'd bought together, I knew quite a bit about herbicides, but I learned an awfully lot more about it there. And we put out a book, it's about 3/4 of an inch thick, and it is the definite study.

Q: What was the title of the book?

ANDERSON: I just don't know whether it is "Herbicides in Vietnam" or what it is. I have a copy of it because it's been declassified, and I got myself a copy of it. At the time we came to the conclusion that only about a third of it was effective, and only for certain things. For the same things that it's effective in the U.S. Farmers had to put in their ditches, for example, to keep on noxious weeds and for visibility purposes at corners. They were using agent orange at that point, on all of the parklands in Washington, D.C., in the parkways three times a year. The entire state of Wisconsin, all the cow pastures, they were using agent orange on those; this is an herbicide, broadly, and the senator from there was a big complainer, but you couldn't buy a quart of milk that wasn't taken off of land that hadn't been sprayed with it.

Q: Was this Proxmire?

ANDERSON: No, the other one, I forget what his name was. No, not Proxmire, he never got involved in this fight. But anyway, we did cut it back. I handled all the politically touchy problems. For example, they had CS gas and whether you could use it or whether you couldn't, to flush people out of underground networks, or whether you should blow buildings apart was preferable to gassing them, using teargas; that's the only gas that was ever used. These kind of problems. Incursions into Cambodia, incursions into Laos, spraying rice lands in northern Laos, all of these problems, which kind of weapons you could use; all those were questions that came to my desk in Vietnam.

After that I had responsibility for approving every herbicide mission, so I had to determine if we would allow it or not, and where it was going to. We also in that study plotted every single herbicide drop in the country and all the aborts. So we knew where this had taken place. The only one that had a health-risk problem with it came to be agent orange, which was always; it's a herbicide that takes a minimum of six weeks before it starts to act. The idea that you go in and spray the troops with this while they are attacking is an absurdity. You sprayed six, eight weeks

in advance of an operation. And very often they sprayed and then the leaves would drop; the cover was gone and you walk through there just like you walk through a bean field or corn field in the U.S. with broad leaf herbicide. No difference at all.

We handled all those things, but the most interesting aspect of the job for me otherwise was that I read all of the intelligence reports everyday. And I picked out what the ambassador saw about the military situation, so I got a very thorough view of what was going on militarily in Vietnam. We worked very closely with Mick Dee, I was in every province under attack several times; it was rather an interesting, to say the least, digression from labor.

Q: Did you volunteer to go?

ANDERSON: I volunteered to go, because we had more or less held the lid on the problems in Norway very well. We never had the trouble with the Norwegians that we did with the Swedes and the Danes. And partly that was because of our closer relationships and lot of the work that I did with the labor unions, and they were much better to deal with. But I really wanted to see what was going on out there. Having come into the tail end of the Korean war, here was a war going on that I had been talking about and looking at and I was interested in going out and seeing what was really going on. And I really did get to find out what was going on, and I do not think that definity of work has yet been written about Vietnam. I think practically everything is written from a totally biased point of view; one way or another, today either pro or con. I did that for two years, and when I came home, I really wanted to go to the Air Force Academy to teach. I needed a rest; my boss out there wouldn't give me a drop on my assignment of three months necessary because I was too important, and then he took a nine-month drop on his to become deputy chief of mission in another country in southeast Asia. And I was rather surprised that an FSO3, or I was a 4 then, was more important than an FSO1.

Q: Before we go into your next assignment, you want to backtrack and say what perspective you think should be contained in the definitive work on Vietnam?

ANDERSON: My view of the entire post-war period is that what we were in was something almost ideologically equivalent to the 30-years war in Europe. Vietnam was a single battle that we lost, in a war that we won. I do not believe that any event in the conflict between Soviet socialist command economy on the one hand, and the West and us on the other side can be looked at in isolation. Whether it involved Chile, or whether it involved Ghana, or whether it involved Vietnam, these were all part of a seamless web of conflict that was rooted in an ideological difference between the Soviet Union and eventually China, and us. Some of it was hot, some of it was cold, but there was always, constantly probing. It was done under the umbrella of a nuclear threat, which had never existed in a similar situation, which put a cap on how violent we allowed this conflict between the Soviet Union and the U.S. to take place. So that eventually with the fall of Russian communism and the Soviet Union, we won the war. But we have lost that battle. I think that trying to look at it in isolation as either right or wrong is totally inappropriate. Because in international affairs there is a dynamic that develops. As it did with Hitler prior to World War II, and as developed with the Soviet Union after the war, they probed, and they won some places; at points you have to check things.

You don't know - everything contributes to the dynamic, or inertia, one way or another; either in movement or in stopping something or preventing something from starting, so that what we really ought to look at now is step back from the entire post war period and recognize that we were in, of all of the four-five reasons that people have fought through the history of man, ideology is one of them. And the other is just trying to take what the other guy's got. Booty, or whatever you want to say. Sometimes it's merely for the idea of control, certainly Caesar, some of the things he did were that way. But all the way through the history of man there had been about four or five reasons why men fight, one of them was ideological, and this was an ideological war.

And, therefore, Vietnam had a role to play in that. And the fact that we didn't just let it collapse in '54 or in '59 or in '62 or in '65, or even as late as '70, because Allende came along later than that. And he very nearly turned Chile into a Cuban situation. He was within an ace of doing that, and I played a role in preventing that as a labor attaché, believe it or not. Which was quite fortuitous, nothing particular on my part, it was an accident of my being at that place at that time. Nobody really knows what would have happened, had Truman doctrine not been developed. And Greece gone, or if one of the Berlin things we had faded on. Or Korean thing we had not stood up for it.

All of these probes that were done one way or another, and they were not equally important; it depends whether you have live frontiers or not, you can tolerate Cuba for another 500 years probably because you don't have any live frontiers, but it would have been quite different if Chile were Cuba. There you would have live frontiers that change the whole equation. Anybody who has ever studied diplomatic history knows that live frontiers are a significant factor in diplomatic history and warfare. I think that we have to take a whole new perspective on it and recognize.. But people who were involved and wound up in it, they are completely blinded by their own personal experience, they are not able to step back and look at that in the context of the total conflict that existed, the struggle around the world between the Soviet Union and the command economy, the authoritarian form of government and the democratic market economies of the West. But we won the war with all but maybe a few notable institutions in the U.S. who still have a bent to think that there is still something better than a free-market way of ordering economy.

Q: If you had to step back on Vietnam, should we have been engaged the way we were?

ANDERSON: Yes. We went at it all wrong. It's much better if you are going to engage yourself, to engage yourself fully and get it over with quickly. Our people cannot tolerate a long, extended war, and will eventually turn against it. Where the British could put up with ten years of struggle in Malaysia and finally win it. Because it was in their nature to accept that. Our nature is to get the war over with, and go back to doing what we were doing. And we have totally different, and we are not patient. And we won the war several times, and we lost it several times. Until eventually, whether we won it or lost it, by other events elsewhere, it became irrelevant.

But had it gone communist early on, then what would have happened to Malaysia, what would have happened to Thailand, what would have happened in other areas, that's part of the dynamic that was checked. As I said in that study I did a long time ago, you put your fingers in the dike

and hold long enough, the Soviet Union was going to come apart. Yugoslavia was going to come apart. Nigeria was going to and still will come apart yet. India may eventually very well come apart. I don't think South Africa can survive as a unitary state; not without serious bloodshed. I don't know how, blacks against blacks, whites against others; we tend to lump all the blacks in as a unit, we don't do that with the Europeans. We recognize the difference between a Norwegian, a Swede and a Dane for God's sakes, but we don't notice the difference between the Bantu or Zulu, and that they can somehow get over this... Look at what happens in Nairobi, Kenya, or what went on in Congo, or what went on in Rwanda, Burundi, or what's the other one where Idi Amin was...?

LAWRENCE J. HALL
Deputy Director, JUSPAO
Saigon (1968-1972)

Lawrence J. Hall was born in Jersey City in 1920. He attended both New York University and the University of Wisconsin. He began his career in journalism in Twins Falls, Idaho, with The Twin Falls Times-News. His writing took him to Paris, where he worked for the International News Service. It was in Paris that he developed an interest in international affairs. He applied and received a job with the Economic Cooperation Administration (The Marshall Plan) as an assistant writer/editor. He also served in Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, India, and Morocco. He was interviewed by Hans Tuch on August 23, 1988.

Q: Things may have even gone downhill from there when you went to Vietnam in 1968 and spent two years in Vietnam. What was your job there?

HALL: I was the Deputy Director of JUSPAO (Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office) and for a great deal of the time I was the acting director, since Ed Nickel was frequently away.

Q: This was during Ed Nickel's time?

HALL: Yes, I volunteered for Vietnam. Alan Carter said I could stay on the job in Iran as long as I wanted to, but I wanted to be out from under his thumb, for one thing, and I also had had no war experience of my own and while this looked like a sad case for a war, I decided I should know first hand what war was like.

I told Dan Oleksiw, who was the area director for the Far East and an old friend of mine, that I would go out there but I would only do it if Ed Nickel completely consented and wanted me there.

Dan lied to me, as he is sometimes wont to do, so Ed Nickel was rather chagrined that he had to let go of Keith Adamson in order for me to take the job. I got along very well with Ed because he had a high regard for tight administration and operation and so did I. He also, once he got to trust me, let me have a free hand in doing pretty much what I wanted to do as long as I kept him

informed.

He played the role of keeping the liaison with the embassy, with the mission council, of which he was a member, and the top brass in the military command.

Q: JUSPAO at that time was a very controversial, well, a huge operation and also controversial in terms of USIA. What were your views about our mission there and our job at that particular period?

HALL: Our mission there, of course, was to do whatever we could to try to make the world look with sympathy on our conduct of the war and the fact that we were there at all, an impossible task. We tried to do this in many ways, one of which was providing material for Washington to give to the media. The U.S. official contact with the press in Vietnam was a whole separate operation which was not under JUSPAO's purview at that time.

Q: With the international press?

HALL: There was no other press to speak of since local media was under tight control. We had one project which was hosting visits by PAOs from all over who came in groups for a one-week orientation.

Q: I was one of those.

HALL: You were one of those?

Q: I think shortly before you got there.

HALL: Yes.

Q: JUSPAO at that time also was really doing the information work for the Vietnamese?

HALL: That is right. Not to the degree that it had been handled in the immediate past, but yes, in terms of psychological warfare operations which we were doing directly with their military PSYOPS (Psychological Operations) programs.

We were also doing our own classified PSYOPS programs, as well, creating the leaflets that we dropped over not only Vietnam but Laos as well.

Q: Were our efforts, in your own personal view, I would say they were honorable, but were they worthwhile?

HALL: To a small degree, but then I think all of public diplomacy only weighs in the final balance of support for foreign policy to a small degree. I think it is a legitimate operation even when you measure it in percentages that might range from two to fifteen or twenty.

I do not believe public diplomacy -- with certain narrow, very narrow exceptions -- is a telling

portion of the American government's effort to promulgate special aspects of foreign policy. It supplements negotiation of policy, perhaps creating a more receptive public attitude for it.

Q: Certainly not in an area where we were so involved with arms with the military, I mean, where possibly I would think maybe public diplomacy has a bigger chance of making a more substantial contribution to our foreign policy process where we are not involved militarily or where we have a relationship that enables us to have an impact on the population in a democratic society or in a developing society.

Would you agree with that?

HALL: Yes, if you define foreign policy very broadly. If you define it narrowly, no. It is a very difficult thing to do, with or without public diplomacy, to change public attitude to favor a specific aspect of foreign policy. Therefore, it is very difficult for public diplomacy to have more than a marginal effect in such cases.

Q: You said earlier that the relationship, the operation with the international press and with the American press was handled separately.

Who did that? Was it also a USIS operation or was it completely outside of the USIS purview?

HALL: In about 1968 -- I maybe wrong on the exact date -- the then Associated Press correspondent in Saigon found that he was being briefed on the war from the American side by a USIA officer and he asked his organization to protest that, since he felt the function of USIS was to propagandize. He felt that it was the wrong thing for us to be doing.

Q: Who was that?

HALL: I think it was Peter Arnett, the Australian who did such outstanding coverage of the war for AP. I am sure he had a lot of support from other American newsmen. In any case, it was analyzed back here, I guess by the White House and State Department, and they decided there would have to be a cut-out.

So, a foreign service officer was named as the head of the briefing section. I am not sure what the term was. He was appointed to the embassy staff under the Deputy Ambassador, given a little box there, and his assistant was the USIS officer who did the briefings, just as he had done before. But now he was seconded to the State Department.

Q: Was this part of the 5:00 o'clock follies?

HALL: Yes. I think it had been the 5:00 o'clock follies even before, but that is right. There was always a military briefing and a civilian briefing.

Q: So, the deputy to the then spokesman was a USIS officer and he was the one who did the briefing.

HALL: Who did the briefing and who continued to do the briefing -- Gene Rosenfeld at that time.

Q: Oh, Gene, of course, yes.

HALL: Then he was succeeded by our Vatican expert, from the Herald Tribune, who wrote a book on the Supreme Court.

Q: McGurn?

HALL: Yes. He was succeeded by Barrett McGurn. Before him, there were several.

Q: Rappaport?

HALL: Rappaport was an assistant. There were more than one press assistant who was USIA people, but that was, in effect, outside of JUSPAO, except for administrative support.

Q: You said earlier that you received visits regularly from PAOs from other countries, I being one of them on a USIA program to acquaint PAOs from other countries with what we were doing in Vietnam. I came from Berlin at that time.

That was an effort on USIA's part to get our own officers propagandized, so to speak, to be able to halfway intelligently try to explain our policies in their own home countries.

HALL: You remind me that after I was back in the Agency about 1970, maybe the middle of 1970, there was a PAO meeting held in Brussels for European PAOs, attended by Frank Shakespeare and by Frank Shakespeare's press spokesman, Frank Gavin. Do you remember Frank Gavin?

Q: Right.

HALL: Frank Gavin was a very -- I was going to say right wing, but very conservative person, even more conservative, I think, than Frank Shakespeare.

Q: Which is difficult.

HALL: Exactly. During that meeting -- oh, Bruce Herschensohn also attended that meeting and he was also very conservative.

Q: Oh, yes, I remember that.

HALL: At that meeting, Gavin was given the floor and he berated all those stalwart PAOs for their inability to convince the world -- in this case, Western Europe -- that our cause was just and that we were fighting the good war, to get them on as allies.

He went so far as to say, "I think when this is over, there should be an investigation, a

Congressional or a high level investigation of you people to find out why you didn't do your job" or words to that effect.

Q: I remember that.

HALL: He almost implied a conspiracy.

Q: I remember that. I came from Berlin. I was PAO in Berlin at that time. I was quite upset about that, I remember, because I remember I had spent three years in Moscow, two years in Sofia, and now had been in Berlin for two or three years, and I really felt that I knew what the program was.

HALL: Two of us denounced him at that meeting. I asked for the opportunity because I had been most recently in Saigon working there and after I was finished cutting him up, Pat Van Delden stood up and gave him hell.

Q: She was able to do that, yes.

HALL: She was a lovely woman.

Q: In 1972, you retired.

HALL: Right. At that time, I was bored with being head of research, which in a way is an impossible element. Henry Loomis refused to give me a field job, at least immediately, and I had the necessary twenty years to retire.

THERESA A. TULL
Political Officer
Saigon (1968-1970)

Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1970-1972)

Theresa A. Tull was born in New Jersey in 1936. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland in 1972. Her career included positions in Brussels, Vietnam, Washington D.C., Philippines, Laos, and ambassadorships to Guyana and Brunei. Ambassador Tull was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 2004.

Q: Before we get to that even though it was a short period, what were you getting, was there a sort of a sizable group that was going out in the training process when you were back in Washington getting ready? Was there a real program to get people to Vietnam?

TULL: Oh, very large numbers of students. The CORDS program, I forget what the acronym stands for, Civil Operations Rural Development or something like that. They were getting a lot

of people military as well as Foreign Service, AID people, USIA to learn Vietnamese and they would go out and they would be staffing embassy offices in each of the provinces of South Vietnam. We'd have a CORDS office in each of those provinces and maybe it even had suboffices in the smaller administrative units within the province itself. There might have been other small offices. There were a lot of people taking Vietnamese language in 1967. Not all were taking 44 weeks. Some of them were taking shorter periods, but most of the Foreign Service people were taking it for 44 weeks.

Q: Was there a cadre within those going out there of junior officers like yourself and all who were dubious about this, or were they enthusiastic about this, were they opposed to the war? Did you get any feel, was there any sort of movement going on?

TULL: I got no feeling of that whatsoever. The people that I studied with and ended up working with over there for almost three years in Saigon, I think they were like me. They viewed Vietnam as the hot issue of our time for the U.S. government. It was exciting to be involved with it. I didn't detect any sense that we shouldn't have been involved. Most of the Foreign Service people I met were willing, maybe even volunteered, but were definitely willing to go. Probably that might not have been the uniform case of say older officers who were sent over, I don't know, but this group that I went with, most of whom either ended up in the embassy or at provincial offices were junior officers, or, were one or two promotions up from junior officer. There was not a lot of feeling of what a waste this is. What am I doing to my career? This is a total waste. No, let's get over there. This is the exciting issue of our day. I guess this is probably a similar sentiment that a lot of our Foreign Service people might feel today about volunteering to go to Iraq, God bless them.

Q: Yes. Well, when you got there, I mean this is before the Tet Offensive, how was the situation explained to you and all when you got there? What were you doing?

TULL: I was assigned to the internal affairs unit of the political section. We had a very large political section. There were close to 20 officers. I believe that might have included the political officers who were assigned to each of the four military corps areas. There might have been one in each Corps area who actually technically belonged to us in the political section, but I believe we had five or six in the internal affairs unit, which followed the internal Vietnamese developments, particularly political developments. There was the external affairs unit which dealt with Vietnam's relations with foreign countries and ultimately with the peace process with the negotiations in Paris; the political/military section; a labor office with a couple of officers. When I first went there and here I'm drawing on a memory to try to pull a name out, there was a very famous retired American general who had a little operation in our political section. He shared the space. He didn't report to anybody except the ambassador, but this is frustrating. He had been very active in the Philippines. I've got it: General Lansdale, I think it was Edward Lansdale.

Q: Oh, yes, he was the man who, he had been a colonel and very much close to Magsaysay.

TULL: He was very close to Magsaysay, in combating a communist insurgency in the Philippines. He was very well known at the time. He wrote a book and he was regarded as an

expert in counter insurgency warfare. He was fascinating. We had the head of the political section who was on our floor and then there was a political counselor on the floor above me. It was a large operation. I believe I was the first woman officer ever assigned to the Saigon political section.

Q: Who was head of the political section, the political counselor?

TULL: The counselor when I first went was Arch Calhoun and he was later, when his tour was finished, Martin Herz. The head of the political section when I first went was Laurin Askew and he was replaced by Galen Stone. Both very nice people.

Q: Very competent.

TULL: Yes, they were.

Q: Again, prior to Tet, what were you getting, were they saying we're winning the war. The government really has extended its control or were they saying this is very problematic?

TULL: I don't recall. I definitely don't recall that there was any hyping of progress, certainly not in the political section. The sentiment was pretty strong and again whether it was before the Tet Offensive that I got this or after, the sentiment was strong that our military, the military components were under extreme pressure from McNamara to do body counts of dead enemies to show progress. In the political section this approach was ridiculed.

The first couple of weeks I got there, it was a question of finding your way around Saigon and being assigned certain duties. I as the junior-most person in the section got a lot of the grunt work. There was a daily publication put out by the Vietnamese government in Vietnamese, French and English and it was my job to scan that for items of information. You had to look at all three because the one that had the meatiest coverage and the thickest number of items was the Vietnamese, but you would also maybe see an item in English and then check it in the Vietnamese and find out there were four or five more sentences that gave you more information about who was doing what or what the Vietnamese government would be up to. That sort of thing. I was pushed into doing that. I was also made the biographic officer, one of the "fun" things that junior officers get to do. I also perused Vietnamese newspapers. Saigon had about 35 daily newspapers, most of them in Vietnamese, a couple in English. I skimmed those daily to find out who was attacking whom. The average American did not realize the variety of opinion that was allowed to be freely expressed in South Vietnam. So, you had different groups that had their own newspapers and they could attack government policies pretty strongly provided they did not support the communist policies. They could criticize bland issues, they could criticize this, that and the other, so there was a lot to look at there and they were vying for their audience. There was many a night, not in the first couple of weeks, that I would take home newspapers, home being the hotel and I would work to 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning writing cables summarizing some of the key editorial comments in these papers that reflected fledgling political party views. I had hardly gotten my feet wet when the Tet Offensive struck.

Q: How did it hit you personally?

TULL: I was in this hotel.

Q: Which hotel do you remember?

TULL: Let's see, the Astor on Tudu Street, but we would pronounce it Tudu, T-U-D-O, Tudu Street and it was about a block around the corner from the Vietnamese naval headquarters. It was around maybe 2:00 in the morning and I heard tremendous blasts of what I thought were firecrackers going off, but major sounds of firecrackers. Not being totally stupid I slithered to the window and cracked a Venetian blind of the hotel room and saw some people shooting at each other in the street, running around the corner. Were you there for the Tet Offensive?

Q: No.

TULL: No. There were strings of firecrackers hung from buildings and earlier in the evening people had been igniting them illegally because the government didn't want that, but you saw all the red strings of firecrackers hanging and in the street the paper red paper residue. So, when I heard suddenly at 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 whatever it was, this tremendous racket, I just assumed it was more of that, but it sounded stronger, so I didn't want to stick my head out the window obviously so I just cracked the blind. I could see some fighters, but they were scooting around the corner. Apparently they were part of the attack force on the Vietnamese naval headquarters. That was just as I say around the corner. I was pretty scared and decided I wasn't going to stand by the window. I remember being concerned naturally thinking well, now if these people take me over, they come into the hotel, they're right outside, if they come in the hotel, should I acknowledge that I speak Vietnamese? Would it be better if I didn't? You know, these thoughts are running through your head. At any rate they did not come into that hotel.

We got through the night and when daylight came I put the radio on. Armed Forces Radio was announcing that the embassy had been attacked and that there was a widescale offensive going on in sections of Saigon and it said that personnel, embassy and military personnel should remain in their quarters until further notice, but keep the radio on. It was in the middle of the Tet holiday and so I went on the roof of the hotel, it had a rooftop restaurant, because I wanted to see what was going on. You could see tanks going back and forth and bodies in the street. You could see helicopters and still hear fighting and shooting. This would have been maybe 7:00 a.m. or something like that. While I was there two army majors who were billeted in the hotel, they had not been there in Saigon very long, they came up and they were astounded to see me. What is this American woman doing here on the roof? Because the hotel staff, most of them, were off. They were not serving breakfast; the restaurant was closed and we knew that it would be closed.

Q: It was Tet, yes.

TULL: It was Tet. These two fellows, they were really antsy. They wanted to get to MACV and see what was what, but the radio was telling them to stay where you are unless you're called. We watched, the three of us watched the show, from the roof. At one point I looked across the street. We were on about the sixth or seventh floor of the hotel. There was an apartment house across the way and I looked out and here's a middle aged Vietnamese man coming out on his rooftop in

his undershorts, which is what they'd wear all the time, no problem with that. He comes out and he starts feeding his chickens on his rooftop terrace, just oblivious to the noise and the military action.

After a while, these two majors got hungry and they thought we could take a chance. They were looking down the other side of the hotel roof and they saw a restaurant across the street that seemed to be open. This was on Tudo Street. They said, why don't we give it a shot? I said, well, we're supposed to listen to the radio. They said, yes, but you also have to get something to eat and that restaurant's open. You don't know how long its going to be open. I thought hey, with these two guys I'll go, and we went and got breakfast. No problem. Went back to my room, got the radio on and suddenly there's an announcement that says, all the employees of the American Embassy should report to the embassy immediately, but USIA personnel and AID personnel should stay in their billets. Well, I'm thinking, what am I going to do? I was brand new. How am I going to get to the embassy? It was feasible walking distance; I had walked daily up to this point. It was the equivalent of maybe 10 blocks, but am I going to be walking over bodies or dodging bullets? I thought it was kind of stupid myself, but needless to say I was also very curious and I'm brand new, the first woman in the section and I'm not going to be hiding behind my bed in the hotel. I did use a little commonsense because there was an apartment building around the corner about a block away where I knew two of the secretaries from the political section had apartments and I thought maybe if I go around there if the three of us decide to go to the embassy there will be safety in numbers and we'll see what's what. Anyway, I screwed my courage to the sticking point and went out on the street, went around to the apartment building. They were very happy to see me because they had heard the word, too, but they were concerned about just walking, getting out and walking up to the embassy. They wanted to obey the order, as did I. Well, also in that apartment building were a couple of USIA officers who had been there for a while and they had a Jeep between them and they were just champing at the bit because the instructions were State Department should go to the embassy, not USIA and other people. They said, we'll take you in our Jeep. That gave them the excuse, if they were challenged to say, oh we were just taking these embassy girls, these embassy women to the embassy. We agreed and they drove us to the embassy. The trip was a series of sights I'll never forget, with streets with a sprinkling of dead bodies in the gutter and shooting in the background. When we got to the embassy itself they had not yet removed the bodies of the Viet Cong who had been killed in the embassy front yard, caught I guess inside the compound, the front lawn you might say. These bodies, so young, were there and I remember the images are so vivid. I remember being so struck by how red the blood was and how it was so red on the white concrete surface of the embassy steps and, huge flower pots.

I went in. One thing I absolutely would not do under any circumstances was take pictures. I just felt that was beneath contempt. I didn't even take a camera although I know other people were there snapping. I didn't do it. I got to my office. First I reported to the section chief, Ted Heavner, he was the chief of the internal affairs unit. He was startled to see me. I said, "Well, the order came out over the radio that we were supposed to come and we had a couple of secretaries with us, too." He thought it was a mistake to call us all in.

In my office, there was some concrete debris on my typewriter and on my desk from rounds, I guess mortar rounds that had been launched against the embassy. It had a concrete screen

outside, probably set back maybe a foot or so, but still some of that chipped off.

Q: An ornamental screen, but the idea was to detonate any rocket-propelled grenade.

TULL: Right. So, there was obviously some debris there on the typewriter and the desk. Can't say that I did much work because everybody was just trying to figure out what was going on. There was still fighting in the streets. The Viet Cong had taken over part of a building across from the embassy. It was a substantial distance across. It wasn't like from here to there, but it was probably with this other apartment building, half a football field or something and the Viet Cong were occasionally putting out sniper shots. I guess about the only thing I was able to do was to send a cable to my family telling them I was alive and well. We were all doing that. They said everybody can send one short cable to have the State Department call your family. Before too long I guess a few hours after that it was decided that most people should go home. There was not a whole lot we could do that particular day. I don't think I went in the next day. I think the day after that they sent a vehicle to pick us up.

Q: Did you get any feel for what's going on or well, this is a big surprise?

TULL: The element of surprise was clear. Yes, it was a great surprise, but very quickly within a day or so it was clear that it was a massive defeat for the Viet Cong. Absolutely massive defeat because they had risen up quite confidently all over the country and after the initial shock was over they were mowed down. They were really mowed down. It was a tremendous setback for the Viet Cong military. For the U.S. however, psychologically I think it was the turning point of the U.S. involvement because the idea that these Viet Cong had actually gotten into the embassy courtyard, they never got into the embassy building, they might have actually gotten in the door of the consular section which was next to the embassy, a separate building, but the idea that they had gotten there was just so shocking and was played up so much in the press that nobody ever believed, I don't think the average American ever believed that it ended up as a defeat for the Viet Cong. Adding to that the fact that, George Jacobsen. He had a position at the embassy.

Q: He was an administrator.

TULL: Some sort of a mission coordinator. I think he handled aircraft and whatever the ambassador wanted. He lived in a house on the embassy compound and he actually at point blank had to kill a Viet Cong who was coming up the stairs to get him. Somebody I think threw a gun up to him or whatever and so that got tremendous play on television and all. That really did steer things away from the fact that so many Viet Cong had been destroyed. It really set them back immensely, but the VC won the offensive psychologically.

Q: I would have thought that being in internal affairs this must have put quite a load on the whole internal affairs unit, what the hell does this mean within the Vietnamese society? I'd talk to people and find out how what the effects of this were.

TULL: Yes, we were so large that we, individual officers had individual political parties that they followed. Following the Viet Cong and their doings was not something we did in the internal affairs section. The external affairs people had someone who was pretty expert on Viet

Cong operations, but was principally it was CIA that dealt with that. No, I was quite a shock that they had managed to come into the city and they held sections of it for a while. It was wild and woolly.

Q: In Cholon there were a couple of fights there.

TULL: Oh, major, yes, major. It was after a few days the hotel opened up again for food and all and there were rocket attacks and various things. It was surreal. You work all day literally through the lunch hour in that case and get back to the hotel where I lived for such a long time, go up to the roof because life has to go on. You have to feed yourself and you have to give yourself enough strength to go on the next day. You'd be sitting up there, a friend would come and join you, you'd have a drink and a meal. It's dark at 6:30 or so in that part of the world and you'd watch the pretty tracer bullets and the patterns flares would make. You would think I'm looking at lethal fire that could be killing people on the ground and I'm thinking isn't this making an interesting pattern against the night sky.

Q: Star shows going on. Yes, I used to go later to the Rex Theater, but you would still see some of this. Not the Rex.

TULL: The BOQ.

Q: The BOQ up at the top.

TULL: It was a different experience let me tell you.

Q: Did you have contacts within the various parties that you went to see and if you were what were you getting from them?

TULL: No, at this stage of my embassy career shall we say I was not having contacts to speak of with Vietnamese outside the embassy. The political parties were divided among other officers and I was the junior person and I think there was a feeling that well, let her prove herself and then maybe we'll let her have a political party or something like that. Eventually I did get the job of following a political party, but it took a long time, several months.

Q: Did you feel that being a woman was a problem? You know sometimes.

TULL: It might have been a problem with my male colleagues, or male superiors. I think they felt protective.

Q: Yes and also sometimes there's a feeling well, playing the game, well, its fine we accept her fully as an equal, but will the foreigners do this? This has often been the excuse.

TULL: I don't think that was an issue in my experience in Saigon. I think it was more, I'll be very kind and generous. I think I was more concern about my physical safety. For example, I didn't have, I was not put on the embassy duty roster. As I indicated in Brussels after three weeks I was on the embassy duty roster. I found out I was not on the embassy duty roster and

when I inquired about it I was told it was because the duty officer had to sleep in the embassy every night. They had a little room with a bed and bath. You had to physically be there and they just felt it wouldn't really be appropriate for me to be there alone and then of course the officer who was there in the embassy on the night of the Tet Offensive he was a little bit under siege. He did a fine job. Allen Wendt was his name.

Q: I've interviewed Allen. He didn't have a weapon.

TULL: No, nothing.

Q: He was an economic officer, an expert on rice and the duty officer.

TULL: That's right. After that I did not push for the idea of getting on that duty roster. I did push to try to get out and do what I regarded was real political work. It took quite a long time. In addition to the work I was telling you about with the newspapers, anytime President Thieu gave a speech, there was a voracious appetite not only in the embassy but in Washington to get a verbatim account of what he had said. Usually two really superb Vietnamese language officers in the section recorded the speeches and did a highlights cable.

Q: Who were they?

TULL: Hal Colebaugh and Harry Dunlop. Particularly Hal. Hal spoke Vietnamese like a native. So, when there was a speech, they would listen to the speech on radio or television, but also record it and then go through it and do a highlights cable, put together a cable saying President Thieu expressed strong support for blah, blah and expressed concern about the lack of whatever. I remember this one occasion I had gone to dinner at a friend's house and the next thing I know there's a phone call and I was told that I would be picked up. We had a curfew at this time. I was going to spend the night at this friend's home. If you went to dinner you spent the night during this period of a curfew, a 7:00 p.m. curfew, whatever it was. I was prepared to spend the night, but I was told I had to go back to the embassy it was around maybe 8:00 when I got the word. We were gathered up, the three of us who spoke Vietnamese, and taken to the embassy because the word that we got was that the highlights cable of this particular speech had aroused such interest that President Johnson wanted the entire text word for word, an hour-long speech. The three of us spent the night going over it, we each took a section of the tape, and did a word-for-word translation from Vietnamese into English. I will say that this was a little later on, maybe it related to preparations to go to Paris for the peace talks I'm not sure. I remember Galen Stone was there by that time. I think Galen came in the summer of '68. It was around then. Anyway, he very nicely, since he had called his officers in he came in to the embassy, too. He didn't know Vietnamese or anything, but he felt that he should. I remember that. Then he insisted we go home I guess around 9:00 or 10:00 when we got the cable off and have a couple of hours sleep before we came back in. We did that sort of thing. I wasn't given a political party to follow until later in the year.

Q: Did you get any feeling this early on, you know, there were several sort of American points of view. One there was a CIA point of view and two, there was the embassy point of view and three there was the field point of view. I mean, were these, did you see sort of the clash of

interpretation?

TULL: I can't tell you much about the CIA point of view from the low level that I was working at, but definitely there was a lot of fresh air brought into the discussions at the political section meetings by our officers who were out in the field who were with the CORDS program or our regional provincial reporters. See I had wanted to be a provincial reporter. I neglected to mention that. I thought I would be assigned to be a provincial reporter since I had the language, but at the last minute the political counselor decided that, no way should a woman go out and do that job so I ended up in the embassy. The people in the provinces would come in and they would just tell it like it is at our staff meetings that it wasn't going well in the provinces. We're talking after the Tet Offensive of course you know. It wasn't going well. The body counts were ridiculous. There was a lot of corruption. They would talk about Vietnamese, and Korean, corruption and I know the political counselors weren't too thrilled to hear that, particularly Martin Herz. Of Arch Calhoun I don't have strong memories, I don't think he was there more than six or eight months when I was there, but I had great respect for him. He was the one who allowed me to come to Saigon, allowed, notice. The non-women's liberation point of view. He let me come. Wasn't that nice? These young officers were very bright and very capable. They would come in and they would give an account of what was going on in their particular province, and what was wrong with the province chief, or what was right. It wasn't totally negative. They were not there with a point of view to push, but they did want the facts to get in. I remember Martin Herz was concerned about what they had to say and they were concerned that their point of view was not getting through to the ambassador and it was not being reflected in embassy reporting which they thought was too upbeat about the overall situation. He arranged for periodic dinner meetings with this group of young officers with the ambassador, which the rest of us were a little bit jealous of because it did give them a wonderful opportunity to discuss in depth what their perceptions were. At least they knew that the ambassador was hearing their concerns and their point of view. It at was useful for the ambassador to have their input.

I don't know when you talk about a different point of view from the CIA. We're talking 1968 and what I recall most is that later when I did start to be following political parties and preparations for the Vietnamese elections that the CIA officers who were my counterparts in grade or maybe a little above me would come down and pick my brain about what was going on politically. Of course I cooperated. I figured we all worked for the U.S. government, but then you'd see one of their classified reports would go out and sometimes it would basically be what I had said or what the other officers had said. We were not, I don't think, at odds at that level. Now, at the senior level, you know what the station chief said to the ambassador or vice versa, I don't know. I didn't see a divergence at my level. The divergence was in the reluctance I think to report too negatively on the situation.

Q: Well, then how did things develop? You were there all of three years.

TULL: It was about two and a half years.

Q: A long tour there. As time went on, you were able to get out and around more?

TULL: Yes, eventually. I had an 18-month tour. That's what most of us had and then home leave

and then I returned for a year. A very fortunate thing for my experience there occurred when the director of the Vietnam working group came over.

Q: Who was that?

TULL: John Burke. He ended up, poor man, being ambassador to Guyana when Jonestown took place. John was the director of the Vietnam working group. He had been in Saigon in the political section before and he had good contacts. There had been an election, again I'd have to refresh my memory on dates, but I did get involved in following the election of the Senate and House. I'd have to check the dates, but the president of the national assembly was Senator Huyen, H-U-Y-E-N, and he had known John, John had known him on a previous tour when he hadn't been a senator yet. John had called on him and Senator Huyen commented that he wished that he could have some English lessons. He wanted to improve his English. John mentioned this when we were at a luncheon maybe at Ted Heavener's or the political counselor's and I was there, too. He said, "How about having Terry give him English lessons?" Now, Harry Dunlop followed the senate at that point and Hal Colebaugh followed the lower house. I suddenly had this opportunity to become the English teacher to the president of the senate. I wouldn't be reporting on the daily activities of the senate, but at any rate I was delighted and because I guess it was mentioned so publicly that why don't we have Terry do this, it was approved. So I then started going over to the Senate. I began my day there. I would go to the Senate from my home, the hotel, whatever it was and I would meet with Senator Huyen and "teach him English." He had some English, but there were some formulations that he needed some help with, and vocabulary.

Gradually we developed a very close relationship. He was a dear, dear man. He started volunteering a lot of information that was of interest to the embassy, particularly later as the relationship developed. I didn't go in and say I'm Theresa Tull, we're going to have English lessons. What action are you going to take on the such and such bill? I didn't do any of that. It was just a slow gradual building up of confidence. For example, the U.S. government was very interested in having the South Vietnamese pass a land reform bill, figuring giving land to the tiller would help dampen enthusiasm in the countryside for Viet Cong promises that they were more caring of the peasants. This was quite a controversial bill. Not everybody wanted to take their mother's and father's land or their own land away. I was able to monitor the progress of that bill through the legislature from the word go with Senator Huyen as part of our English lessons. I actually had some workbooks and I got some information about teaching English as a second language and we would work through some phraseology and drills. But our conversations focused on current issues facing the government and the National Assembly.

From the lessons we developed a close friendship and it was very helpful for me, and I believe to him, as well. It gave him a regular means to communicate with the Embassy. When Harry Dunlop's tour was finished, I was given the job of following the Senate; reporting on the Senate. This was a very enjoyable and exciting experience, because Huyen was the third ranking person in the country. There was the president, the vice president, and then chairman of the senate, as I recall.

Q: Looking at the situation then, sort of the feeling has come out that somehow this was a

dictatorship and all. How did you see the political process? I mean you were sort of inside it.

TULL: I think that Thieu got a very bad rap in the U.S. press because the Vietnamese people were not being offered a choice between Thieu and Thomas Jefferson. They were being given a choice between Thieu and a communistic dictatorship. I say looking at the situation there they had a national assembly that was freely elected, slates of candidates, competing slates of candidates. The municipal and provincial elections were also vigorously contested. In fact I wrote an article that ended up in a book about those elections. It was part of a compilation of studies on electoral developments in Vietnam. It was edited by Joseph Zazloff from the University of Pittsburgh. They had 35 newspapers in Saigon with competing points of view, but if the paper advocated a position that the government, the South Vietnamese government thought echoed the Viet Cong position you were thrown in jail. That was all there was to it. There was a wide area of freedoms and then beyond that you could not go, you could not advocate a communist takeover.

I had one episode for example of this with Martin Herz, the political counselor. There was a very controversial member of the "lower" house, how I got so involved in it I don't know, maybe Hal was away, whatever. He was left leaning, extremely left-leaning. He was accused by the Thieu government of advocating Viet Cong positions, I forget which specific position, but he made a speech, the speech that they eluded to was made on the floor of the House in which he should have had immunity, but the word got out that he was doing this. He had a newspaper, which he put his views into, but on this occasion he was on the floor of the House and security goons came and dragged him out and took him away to jail. Well, I don't know how I got the job of writing this up, but I did. I drafted the cable on this episode and I remember Martin Herz wouldn't approve it. You had several layers where you had to get approval for cables and if something was going to be negative it definitely had to go to a higher level. So this cable was rejected. I was very upset because this is what happened, it happened, Washington had a right to know. I didn't put a strong comment in the cable, but I said clearly this is what happened here. The man was taken from the assembly floor. He was bounced down the steps. I had witnesses who told me this and I think one of them was probably my principal contact, Senator Huyen. I thought it was important that this be told. The cable was rejected.

Well, it happened the very next day after I had finished this cable late in the day and was told it wasn't going, there was the big political section staff meeting, all 20 of us there, and Herz chaired it. He tried to explain to me why we couldn't send that cable because he felt that obviously it was exaggerated, we can't exaggerate these little difficulties they have from time to time. I just wouldn't budge. I just stood by what I had written. I said it's up to you to decide to send it, but that is what happened and I'm standing by what I wrote. They bounced him down the steps and his head hit the steps once or twice, according to what I was told. Well, we can't send it, he insisted. Well, everybody around the table is kind of looking like, good grief, because here is the counselor going back and forth with me. By this time the head of the Internal unit had changed and he was not a very forceful individual, but Galen Stone, the head of the section, spoke up quietly and said, well, I think Terry feels pretty strongly about what she wrote, Martin, and she's been a pretty reliable, no, she's a reliable observer, something like that. So, we simmered it down and I was really ticked off, but okay. You follow orders, you know, I'm not going to get on a plane and go to Washington.

To Herz's credit, later that day I got a phone call saying that Mr. Herz wanted to see me and Galen and so the two of us went up to his office. We went in to see Herz and he says, "I'm signing off this cable. I've given it more thought and you're right, it should go. I really appreciate your explaining it forcefully and standing up for your principles and your beliefs on this issue." I was impressed by his willingness to rethink the issue. I think the fact that I did stand up to him on what I thought was an important issue caused him to respect me. He was a man who appreciated that. He would roll you over with a bulldozer if you would be wimpish, but if you would stand up, and make a reasonable argument, he would listen. He was supportive of me after that.

Q: You were there when Nixon announced the Vietnamization and the gradual drawing down weren't you or not?

TULL: I was in Washington I think.

Q: Were you there, well a way we can figure this out was.

TULL: I was in Da Nang or getting ready to go. Maybe I was there, yes.

Q: I was wondering whether you, where were you when they went into Cambodia, we went into Cambodia?

TULL: I was in Saigon.

Q: Saigon.

TULL: I was in Saigon January '68 to September of '70.

Q: Yes.

TULL: I think it came out in '70 didn't it?

Q: Yes I do, I think so.

TULL: When was his election?

Q: Which election?

TULL: It would have been '72.

Q: '72.

TULL: So, I think he did it before that election.

Q: I'm quite sure he did.

TULL: Maybe '70 or '71.

Q: Yes.

TULL: I might have been there. I was there when we went into Cambodia. I'm pretty sure I was. I'd have to double-check the dates to be sure.

Q: Yes, well the Cambodia thing was the spring of '70.

TULL: Okay, well then I was in Saigon.

Q: How did that play in the political section?

TULL: I think we were supportive. I didn't hear a lot of negatives about it among my colleagues at the embassy. I guess we were pretty hawkish.

Q: I was, I thought its about time we did it. I was sitting there running the consular section and I thought yes, right on, you know?

TULL: Well, you know that the Communists were using Cambodia as an open backdoor into South Vietnam. There wasn't a lot of rebelliousness among the officers when I was there except that the provincial reporters were determined that their picture of what was happening in the provinces had to be told to the embassy and particularly the ambassador and they did get that the opportunity for meetings with the ambassador. Whether their input was incorporated into the ambassador's reporting or not is another thing.

Q: What about the media, I'm talking particularly about the American media? They were all over the place. Did they go after you?

TULL: We, the political section, had pretty good relationships with American media. I remember specifically Dan Sutherland who was with...

Q: Christian Science Monitor.

TULL: He might have started off with the Associated Press, but he ended up definitely with Christian Science Monitor. I got to know him socially as did some of the other officers. He didn't speak Vietnamese. Occasionally he would give me a call once we got to know each other and say there's a demonstration on such and such a street. I just thought you'd like to know. I'm going to go down and I'm going to pick up whatever I can, whatever information I can. He occasionally, this is not every day, but he would come back and maybe he would have leaflets that he had picked up that were in Vietnamese and I would look over the leaflets and tell him what the leaflets said and he would tell me what happened. It was a fruitful interaction. You could tell, there were certain people you would trust. Now there were others you wouldn't. Quite frankly, Ward Just was there. Just has made a very good reputation as a novelist, but I didn't have the same feeling of trust toward him. I felt that he had more of a "gotcha" approach. Talk

about heady things for a young officer: Bob Shaplen, Robert Shaplen who wrote those wonderful books about Vietnam, occasionally visited Saigon. One night, Shaplen, Hal and Harry and I and maybe a couple of others, went out and had a wonderful meal, a Vietnamese meal under the stars and went back and forth trading ideas and views and experiences on Vietnam.

Another media experience, using your phrase loosely, involved the columnist Joseph Alsop. One Thanksgiving a lot of junior officers were planning to get together for dinner and I got a call from Ambassador Berger. He was the deputy ambassador.

Q: Yes, Sam Berger.

TULL: Sam Berger. He invited me for Thanksgiving dinner and I thought, gee, I already have an invitation, but I'm not going to turn down an ambassador. In those days you had certain training along those lines. I went and I was very glad I did because it was just about eight or ten people and one of the guests was Joe Alsop and it was fascinating because I'd read his columns for years. After dinner Berger excused himself and we were all set to leave, but Alsop wanted us to stay and talk so he, myself and probably Harry and Hal, sat around and exchanged views and impressions with Alsop on the war, disagreeing with him at times, and it was a very interesting occasion.

Q: By the time you were ready to leave there in the fall of 1970ish or so, what was your impression of how things were going whither in South Vietnam?

TULL: Okay, I'll back up just a second. I just thought of another item when Vietnam was preparing for elections, I forget whether they were the senate elections or what. I was thrown to the wolves. You recall the "5:00 Follies" which was the embassy's press conference at 5:00 p.m. and I was sent down to brief the happy reporters on the election situation and they were shall we say a little skeptical about the whole idea, but that was fun. At any rate if you wouldn't mind repeating the question. How did I feel at the end of the tour?

Q: Whither yourself in South Vietnam?

TULL: At that stage? Well, it wasn't doing badly at that point at all. It was 1970, a pretty good year. In '68 of course you had the Tet Offensive and you had the mini Tet Offensive and you had a very successful period of achievement and expansion of government control. I left feeling pretty good about it. They were gearing up for new elections, presidential elections as well as the senate and lower level elections, but definitely presidential elections were coming up. I was confident they'd be reasonably free elections. They had been before, they really had been. Granted the Vietnamese military had had a lot more resources and impact and everything else than the civilians candidates did, but other people had a voice and did their thing. I went back to Washington and was put right into the Vietnam Working Group, as the internal political affairs officer. That was a very interesting experience, too.

Q: Well, had there been any reflection on what you were doing and your fellow officers and all of the demonstrations in the United States mainly student demonstrations and all. How did these affect you all?

TULL: Well, I was concerned. I thought it was unfortunate. I don't think the war had been properly explained and I thought the emphasis on body counts was probably aggravating the situation, but I felt that we were there because we were invited to be there to help South Vietnam forestall the communist takeover from the North. I had idealistic views that eventually perhaps the North and South could work out some reasonable accommodation, maybe a federalist type arrangement where there'd be some freedoms in the South that didn't exist in the North and I also thought that perhaps the South which has I believe some oil deposits offshore might eventually be able to even finance their own continuing strife if that's what they had to do. Yes, it was distressing to know that what you were doing, was opposed by so many people. My own family was very supportive, but I had friends in the Foreign Service who weren't in Vietnam who opposed the whole business of the Vietnam War and who couldn't understand what I was doing there and why I would think it was worthwhile. It was something I thought was worthwhile.

Q: When you came back, I assume you were back, what the fall of '70?

TULL: Yes.

Q: And you did the Vietnam working group until when?

TULL: I did that for two years.

Q: '70 to '72.

TULL: Yes and then I went back to Da Nang. No, I did it for two years and then I went to the University of Michigan for a year of graduate studies thinking I would get out of the Vietnam game, but I didn't. I ended up going back to Da Nang.

Q: When you came back, did you find was there a different feel for Vietnam, you know, sort of the departmental feel for this group that was dealing with it that you had at the embassy or was it?

TULL: In the Department itself? I don't know. In the country I think attitudes had hardened, as a result of what I believe was the misinterpretation of the Tet Offensive. We knew that the Viet Cong had been devastated by that, yet that was not the perception. The perception was it was a major U.S. and South Vietnamese defeat and we ought to get out of there. I know in retrospect we were just trying to hold back a wave with a bucket, but you couldn't fight against that opinion, but things weren't looking bad in September of '70.

Q: When you got back to the U.S. during that time, what were you picking up during this two year period you were dealing with internal affairs?

TULL: At times I made speaking trips to college campuses and to media outlets, and that was quite interesting. I have to say I was a little concerned at first; the first time I was going to go to a college campus I thought we'll see about the questions. A lot of the questions were based on

ignorance and when you could explain specifically what was going on or answer a question with specifics I didn't get as much hostility as I would have thought. These young people had been fed a lot of slogans and they didn't want to go and be drafted, and I don't blame them for being concerned. It was a wretched situation. My own personal view is that the conduct of the war from the way the U.S. government managed the draft was so unfair. It was absolutely absurd. Because you could afford to go to college you would be out of the draft or you could come up with some phony baloney like Cheney did, get four or five different deferments, or you could go to graduate school or you could say you're going to be a minister. It was just so wretchedly unfair. Only those who couldn't afford college got drafted.

Q: The National Guard.

TULL: Oh, yes, like the National Guard nonsense of our current beloved leader. It just was not right. I have a personal view that a lot of the antagonism toward the war by the young college people stemmed from guilt. They claimed they were opposing the war because it's an unjust war, etc. I think part of it was they had to oppose it on those grounds because otherwise they would be opposing it because they were afraid to go and fight in the war. They justified their resistance by saying this is an unjust war. They did not want to say I don't want to serve my country. They said this is an unjust war, therefore, I am virtuous and anybody who does go is not virtuous, therefore I am not guilty of shirking my duty. That attitude contributed probably to the poor treatment that some of our veterans received when they returned to the United States.

Q: Oh, yes. I agree with you absolutely. Just shown by the fact that as soon as the draft stopped the protests stopped. Nobody cared anymore.

TULL: It's a shame it wasn't corrected a lot sooner where you have a draft number and you knew right away you were going to go or you weren't going to go. Just changing the mechanisms of it so that you had your magic number. They had a draft lottery after that. That made much more sense. It did. It just defused the whole business. It was wretched and of course horrible mistakes were made here. I mean at Kent State, that was so stupid, and tragic. It's so sad that these young people were killed while protesting. It's crazy that people would have reacted that way, but meanwhile I'm trotting along and I'm going, making speeches on local television stations and going to college campuses.

Q: Do you remember any of the universities you went to?

TULL: The University of Cincinnati, Pittsburgh; (Joe Zazloff had me come there) and some other places. The media tour would go say to a certain section of the country. I went to Birmingham, Alabama and to Columbia, South Carolina, Palm Beach, Florida, go on local television stations be interviewed sort of their version of the Today Show in the morning or give a little speech at night, so I did a fair amount of that and that was okay.

I had a couple of interesting experiences leading up to the Vietnamese elections in the fall of 1971. Since I had been the internal affairs officer in Saigon and doing the same work, back in Washington, I had acquired an extensive knowledge of the Vietnamese constitution, which had been written maybe shortly before I got to Saigon. The South Vietnamese were getting ready for

presidential elections. Bill Sullivan was a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the East Asia bureau at that time. He asked Josiah Bennett and me to come to his office to brief him for a meeting he was having the next day with Secretary of State William Rogers on the Vietnamese elections. The two of us did so. Sullivan asked a lot of questions, and I provided a lot of information to him – both orally and via documents. We went back to our offices and a half an hour later his secretary called me and said Ambassador Sullivan wants you to accompany him to his meeting with the Secretary, Terry. I was delighted. A little later, the Ambassador, knowing the protocol also invited Joe Bennett to attend the meeting. The next morning, Secretary Rogers was going to meet the next afternoon with President Nixon on the subject of the elections. They were really concerned about the alternatives, if any, in the constitution, if the election were not contested. A likely opponent to President Thieu, Duong Van Minh, was threatening not to run, and there was the prospect of an uncontested election.

Anyway, the next morning I was a very excited individual, going up to Secretary Rogers' office. The other folks there were like the head of INR and the head Policy Planning. It was a small group and the only person who brought anybody with them was Bill Sullivan. I'll never forget this. We walk into his office and a very courtly William Rogers is there and Ambassador Sullivan says, "Mr. Secretary, I'd like you to meet Theresa Tull." The Secretary says, "Oh, you've brought your secretary with you. How nice." or something like that. Sullivan said, "No, sir, no, Terry is our, she is our expert on the Vietnamese constitution and I thought it would be helpful to have her here for this discussion." "Oh certainly." Then the Secretary invited me to me sit next to him, and the discussion began. I didn't open my mouth unless spoken to. Before long Rogers asked Sullivan a question and he said, "Well, that's really something that Terry could handle better than I." So, I gave the answer. After that Rogers just spoke directly to me, He asked a range of very intelligent questions.

Q: He's a lawyer.

TULL: Yes, so it was exciting, let me tell you. I have great admiration for Bill Sullivan. His approach is one that I tried to follow in my own career later. He didn't have to pretend that he knew everything. He had to present the person who did. It was not up to Bill Sullivan to know what Article 7-A of the Vietnamese constitution said. That's what he had me for, and he had enough confidence in himself that he could share that opportunity. It was really very smart. It was quite an experience for a young officer.

Q: Well, also it shows another side to William Rogers, sort of his lawyerly side which often gets lost. People talk about how disinterested he was and all that.

TULL: He was very involved in this discussion, definitely.

Q: I'm sure he really engaged on something of substance and that is elections.

TULL: Absolutely. I had another fun experience. Remember Congresswoman Bella Abzug?

Q: Oh, God, yes, from Brooklyn was it?

TULL: I think Brooklyn and very much a woman's liberation advocate. And a vocal opponent of the Vietnam War.

Q: She also had a great polka dot outfit or something.

TULL: She always wore a big hat of some kind, right. Anyway, again the Vietnamese elections were coming up. She sent word that she wanted Bill Sullivan to come and brief her committee in the House on the Vietnamese elections. Sullivan said, well, he couldn't make it, but he would send the expert on the Vietnamese elections and constitution up to her committee and that would be Theresa Tull. The word came back that no, she wanted Bill Sullivan. She didn't want anybody junior to him. I think Sullivan maybe called her himself at this point and said, gee, you know, I'm really surprised that a person with your background and your reputation would want it known that you turned down an opportunity to have the woman who is the expert on the Vietnamese elections come and testify before your committee. Not wanting to turn down a woman, Abzug agreed and I did go up and testify at her hearing on the elections. She was a piece of work, but it was funny because that was Sullivan's angle, gee, you don't want a woman to come? At any rate it was wild. I didn't change any minds on that committee. I recall that Ms. Abzug told the press that I had been thoroughly unresponsive to their concerns.

Q: You did that for what?

TULL: A two year tour.

Q: A two year tour. That takes us up to when?

TULL: Let me see. Let me see here. You know I have another item that I meant to mention with regard to my Saigon experience.

Q: Yes, well, why don't we put it in now?

TULL: We'll back it up because one of the leaders of the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem was Duong Van Minh. He was believed to be a very popular South Vietnamese general - politician and he had been living in exile in Thailand when I arrived in Saigon in January 1968.

Q: Was he known as Big Minh?

TULL: Yes. He was Big Minh. The U.S. was trying to get the Thieu government to allow him back to Vietnam so that he could play a role politically, broaden the range of the political players. The word came that he was coming back to Vietnam apparently this had been worked out at a high level. The embassy wanted to have somebody at the airport to cover his arrival, but they didn't want to send anybody high-ranking because it would look like the embassy was paying entirely too much attention to Big Minh. So word came to me that Terry Tull was to go out to the airport and meet Big Minh. Off I went to the airport. It was quite interesting. All sorts of reporters were there. His fellow coup generals, including Tran Van Don who was a big shot in the senate at that point and several other senators were there. I was principally trying to get color, what's happening, who's there, and that kind of thing, but I felt I should at least let Big Minh

know that the embassy was represented. I did manage to have a minute and say welcome back, General Minh. I'm Theresa Tull from the American Embassy. We're pleased that you've returned to Vietnam. He looked like, who is this?

Minh settled into his old home, not far from the embassy and it was arranged then that I would call on him. I frankly think that it was General Lansdale who arranged our meeting.

Q: The Philippine, kind of like the ugly American somehow.

TULL: Yes. I was sent to have a meeting with Big Minh, the first meeting he'd had with an American official in many years. We had a good discussion, which I wrote up as well as I could. I think I had two meetings with him in all. After a week or two, I went back to see him again and he was obliging and again told me what his thoughts were candidly. After that he apparently decided that he was entitled to a little more than a third secretary at the American Embassy as his contact and the word quietly got back to the embassy. In the meantime, apparently the Thieu government having had not gone into total conniptions at the thought of the embassy having contact with him, so a high ranking officer -- probably even the political counselor -- might have taken him on. It was exciting to be the first U.S. contact with an historical figure like that.

Q: Yes, well, of course this is the fun of going where the action is.

TULL: Yes. That was very interesting.

I mentioned that I had come back in September of '70 as the internal affairs officer for the Vietnam working group. That was the job I was supposed to have, but at that point the director of the group was Jim Engle. He was a very nice man personally, but he was one of the few officers I've encountered in the Foreign Service who could not get past my gender and I found that I was being given assignments that I felt any secretary could do. He'd like me to rearrange the library shelves; they had a few books to rearrange. Maybe I could look at the files and see if I could reorganize them. This sort of thing. In the meantime he's talking with Steve Johnson, who was a very sharp, nice fellow who had been in Saigon with me. In Saigon Steve did the external Vietnamese affairs and then later Steve went on to the Paris Peace Talks. So Jim is talking to Steve and wants to bring him into the office. The next thing I know Steve was in and Steve was basically doing the work (although that wasn't the title for his job) that should have been my internal affairs responsibilities. I spoke to Jim about it and said this was not the job that I was brought back to do. Did he intend for me to do this job and if he did not, if he wished to have the other officer put in the position, that would be fine, too. I'd be happy to go to personnel and request a transfer. No hard feelings, but let's move on. Well, no, no, he didn't intend that. I guess he didn't want on his record that someone was complaining. I said, I'm not being utilized to the extent that I should be. No, no, he didn't want that. I should calm down and it would be okay. We would work it out. Well, one of the beautiful things about Foreign Service work is that you're never in any one place too long nor is your boss. So, you can ride out difficulties sometimes. Fortunately, Jim was asked to accompany a high ranking Department official who might have been, maybe somebody named Kennedy, who was an undersecretary, on an orientation tour.

Q: Well, there was a Richard Kennedy who was, yes, he had several things, at one point he was for political military or something.

TULL: No, no. This man was commercial in some way, economic, but he was very high ranking in the Department and he was a political appointee, newly brought in and he wanted to take an extensive Asian trip and the Department wanted to send someone with him. Jim was given the job to accompany him and they went off on this long trip. The man liked him so much, liked having his expertise (Jim was a very bright, nice person) that he asked that Jim be assigned to him and Jim was replaced by Josiah Bennett. With Joe there it was no question whatsoever that I was the internal political officer. I settled into the job and it worked out well. Joe was a good person.

FREDERICK Z. BROWN
Province Advisor, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Vinh Long (1968-1970)

Consul General
Da Nang (1971-1973)

Frederick Z. Brown was born in Pennsylvania in 1928. He entered the Foreign Service in 1958. He served in France, the Soviet Union, various posts in Asia, was spokesman for the Department of State, and was a staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In Vietnam he was with CORDS from 1968 to 1970 and then consul general in Da Nang, 1971-1973. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

BROWN: During my time in Moscow, I became very interested in the "pacification program" in Vietnam. I had always had a very deep interest in the concept, the theory and practice of revolution. That was one of the things that attracted me to Soviet affairs. And I had gotten into that in Thailand, in terms of role development. How do insurgencies occur, and what you do to combat insurgencies. The question of social reform. Social equity. Why systems are oppressive and why the people we work with in many cases, the United States is friendly with, tend to have governments that are repressive, and create within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. Of course you may say that this happened in Vietnam.

But in any event, I was struck, I remember very clearly in about mid-1966 with some of the material that was being published at that time in the State Department Bulletin, and the Foreign Service Journal in what was then the OCO or CORDS program (Office of Civilian Operations) in Vietnam. The CORDS program was Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support. It was the same thing. Mainly the pacification program, which in Vietnam only got going in 1966-67 and really took off in 1968 at the time when the political decision was made to get out of Vietnam. Only then did we begin, in serious fashion, to put into place in the countryside of Vietnam, the kind of nation-building on the civilian side that should have been done many years before. This of course is part of the theme of Neil Sheehan's book on John Paul Vann.

Q: *It was called A Bright and Shining Light-America and Vietnam.*

BROWN: I am finishing the book now. It does not tell all the truth, in my view, despite its 800 pages. It tells a lot of the truth.

In any case, I became fascinated with the concept of taking Vietnam, the Vietnam that we supported, the South, and working with the people to defeat communism, to carry out the social revolution that I felt had to be carried out if our effort there was to be successful. I became very interested in this in an intellectual fashion but also in terms of getting out into the countryside. I have always been one to get out and work with the people, to get my hands dirty. I saw this as a great opportunity. I always believed that you had to learn the language if you were to really understand what goes on in a country.

In Thailand, I picked up a great deal of Thai. I studied Thai and was able to acquit myself fairly well. In Russian, I did okay in Russian, but I volunteered for the CORDS program. And was accepted. And it came about, two years to the day after serving my Moscow tour. I could have - the logical thing for me to have done, actually, would have been to go to an Eastern European post. Or back to the Department to work in INR on the Soviet Desk. I think I could have done that. But instead I volunteered, in the spirit of John F. Kennedy, to go save the world in Vietnam. Again, a bit behind the power curve, I guess. But in any event, I started Vietnamese language training with CORDS class number five. The 5th class. In August of 1967. I graduated from the CORDS program with an S-3 in Vietnamese in September of 1968. Went off, again the oldest person in the class. Most were kids. I was then forty. Forty years old. My ear was not as good as some of the other kids. Most of the people in the class were in their twenties.

Q: *What motivated the people?*

BROWN: A lot of the kids off on a lark, not knowing really what they wanted to do. They were foreign service reserve, limited appointment people who came in to get on the action and go to Vietnam and fight the vicious Cong. Be with the beautiful girls. Get out in the countryside. There was some of that. There was also some very idealistic, highly motivated people who felt that this was the way to serve the country. We had to help the South Vietnamese win their battle. There was a very pronounced strain of that. I can tell you that when the Tet Offensive came along in 1968, right in the middle of our class, it knocked the hell out of our morale. We thought, "Jeez, what are we doing?" "Why should we be involved in this?" And then you add, all this other turmoil going on, the anti-war movement was getting going in the spring, you had the assassination of Martin Luther King, the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, Washington burning. I remember having to walk back from Arlington to my place in Washington, because the bridge was closed. They were burning things in Georgetown, burning things on 14th Street.

Q: *You probably saw the same thing I did, which was troops of the 82nd Airborne, in black jackets and helmets, walking through the main street in Georgetown.*

BROWN: That's right. I remember them pushing me off the sidewalks, saying I can't walk there. "What do you mean, I live here," I said. "Get out of here." I remember that very clearly.

So that had a big impact on a lot of us, and many of us felt in going to Vietnam at the time, "Why are we going there?" But also, the feeling, "Let's get the hell out of Vietnam" became more and more pronounced as I stayed. I stayed on that tour of duty until April of 1970. Of course, Johnson declined to run again, Nixon was elected. The announcement was made that we were getting out of Vietnam. The Paris talks were proceeding, etc., etc., so this whole momentum was going in that direction. None the less, the motivation was very very strong in 1967 and really carried through. Those of us that went to the provinces in the fall of 1968, happened to get in on what turned out to be the most successful era of the Vietnam involvement. In the countryside. Largely thanks to the terrible communist losses suffered during the Tet Offensive. Which, particularly in the Mekong Delta, where I was assigned, and we can get to that in a minute, and in Vinh Long province, in MR4 which was comprised of thirteen provinces (Military Region No. 4, which was the most southern of the regions in Vietnam). My province was Vinh Long Province, right in the middle. At any rate, during the Tet Offensive, it was in that area that the Viet Cong infrastructure had been absolutely devastated. Probably to a greater extent than in MR3, which was the area around Saigon, to the north. Or even in MR2, which was the largest military region, in the center of Vietnam.

In the Delta, much of the activity of the Tet Offensive was carried out by local Viet Cong battalions, as distinguished from the North Vietnamese battalions that were so prominent in the center and northern part of South Vietnam. They were badly torn up. Badly torn up. Not only in the Tet Offensive itself, but in the second wave which took place in May of 1968. As a result, what you had was a vacuum beginning in the summer and fall of 1968, into which was thrown immense American resources. And I was part of those resources. Virtually everybody in my class, of CORDS 5, were posted in the Mekong Delta. In my province, Vinh Long province, of 500,000 people, we had deputy province advisors 11 young civilians. We had a civilian Vietnamese- speaking bright, shining new officer in all of the districts. Amazing. In addition to a very heavy contingent of province headquarters, which was where I was. I started out there as head of the revolutionary development program, the second ranking civilian in the province, American civilian, and was moved up to be deputy province senior advisor, the ranking civilian. Head of all of the civilians. Frequently a chief of a 200-man joint military-civilian team. Provincial Advisory Team No. 68. At that time it was the golden era of pacification. I prefer to call it rural reconstruction.

What we were trying to do was take many of the precepts of communist political and social organization, and apply it with American resources and democratic twist, and a participatory twist to the South Vietnamese environment. Vinh Long was one of the places it worked fairly well.

Q: *What was the capital?*

BROWN: It was Vinh Long town. Then there were seven districts. The capital had a population of 50-60,000.

Q: *What was the economic basis?*

BROWN: Vinh Long was a very well-endowed province from many respects. Geographically, it was located -- it is now Cuu Long Province. I visited there, by the way, a year and a half ago. Went back and saw my old place -- between the two branches of the Mekong River. So the Mekong River flows on either side. So you had an excellent water system on either extremity of the province. Then you had a canal, called the Mang Thit Nicolai canal, built by the French, at the beginning part of the century, which traversed it right down the middle. Then you had National Road No. 4 constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which connected Vinh Long to the capital of the Mekong Delta, Can Tho. You had some very strong anti-communist religious minorities there. In addition to the Catholics, you had the Hoa Hao, which controlled one district, and then you had the Cao Dai, which controlled another district. These were assets to the rebuilding of the province. It was very fertile ground, alluvial soil, as most of the delta is. But this was particularly good, because it had been cultivated and canaled and developed during the years. It was one of the favorite provinces of the French, and indeed in the Diem eras, Ngo Dinh Thuc, had been the Archbishop. His cathedral there dominated Vinh Long town. Vinh Long was traditionally a province of absentee French and rich Vietnamese landlords. Interestingly enough, one of my Vietnamese teachers at FSI was the daughter of the man who was then the president of the Vietnamese Senate and later to be Foreign Minister, Tran Van Lam, and later to be president of Vietnam in its waning days.

In any event, Tran Van Lam's wife came from Vinh Long and they were representative of the landed, monied absentee Francophile Vietnamese aristocracy which as we both know, were part of the problem in South Vietnam. Part of the problem why we lost. Why the government was never able to fully capture the allegiance of the people who, basically were very hostile to the French era.

Vinh Long was really one of the provinces that exemplified this particular aspect of colonial French society and post colonial era. The province chief that I worked with very closely during my entire time there Duong Hieu Nghia, a full colonel in the army. The army of the Republic of Vietnam. He was a dangerous man. Dangerous to Thieu, the president. Nghia was a dashing, armored officer, who knew how to run a tank and an armored personnel carrier as a major in 1963. Gosh, five years earlier. He was the man who commanded the armored personnel carrier that escorted Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Nhu from their hideout in Cholon in Saigon, to their death. I am not sure Nghia fired the bullets, but he was sitting on top, commanding the APC while one of Duong Van Minh's special agents actually fired the machine gun into Diem and his brother who were bound, lying in the APC, helpless. And later they were also bayoneted and messed up badly. Anyway Nghia was the guy who commanded the APC that carried out this operation in November 2 or 3, of 1963. He was considered a man too ambitious by half by Thieu and was never trusted, for some reason. Of course this is another one of the reasons why the generals who took over after Diem's downfall, and the whole era of the coups and counter coups, '63, '64, '65, and it was only because of the Tet Offensive, which destroyed most of the countryside that Nghia was brought from relative obscurity to go down there and command that province. He did a magnificent job.

He was a tough son of a bitch. But very enlightened in many ways. Very personable guy. In my view, the kind of province chief that, had this kind of individual been running the provinces of Vietnam all during the war instead of the sycophants that Diem employed as province chiefs, the

course of the war would have been very, very different. I worked very closely with him.

Q: You left Vietnam and you went back to Washington for a very short tour. Could you tell us what you were doing?

BROWN: In the winter of 1968-69 I received a visit from the then Director General of the Foreign Service John Burns, who spent a day or two in Vinh Long Province as part of his tour around Vietnam, for the purpose of recruiting officers and strengthening the State participation of the CORDS program. It was one of the great ironies of the whole American effort that it was only in 1969 when the political decision had been made to get out of Vietnam, and Vietnamization was in full swing, that the State Department finally realized the importance of having a strong State representation in the CORDS program. I cannot recall how many State officers were in the CORDS then but I do know by 1970, when I got back to Washington, and was given the assignment people for the CORDS program, junior officers mainly, that by the end of 1970-71, the CORDS program, State foreign service complement, had increased rapidly. I was given a mandate. Burns came out to Vietnam to survey this question, and when he left I subsequently got a cable from him asking me to come back to Washington to enter Personnel again and be his CORDS person. Which I did.

Q: Give me an idea of how Burns and the institution see our participation in CORDS at that time?

BROWN: This is a whole volume unto itself because the participation of the regular foreign service really should be the subject of a very detailed analysis, because what I think some people in our service finally realized was the rather extraordinary opportunity for political activism that was offered by the CORDS program. It was the only place in the service that you could really get into nation-building and revolution-making, to be honest with you. And a lot of us were in it for that reason. Or felt called to be involved for that reason. Up until that time, it was strictly a volunteer program. Some people raised their hand and went. I remember Terry MacNamara for one. Steve Ledogar up in Military Region One. Frank Wisner and some other people had gone in. But basically it was not a program that people sought out.

With John Burns as Director General and his special assistant Jim Farber, who came with him to Vietnam, the attitude had changed. In fact the mandate had come down from Robert Komer, and elsewhere in the White House that the CORDS program, the pacification of Vietnam, was an essential element of American policy in Vietnam. But of course at an even higher level, the decision had been made to get out of Vietnam. The thought was, as Nixon took over the presidency, as I understand correctly and from reading his memoirs and other memoirs such as Neil Sheehan's biography of John Paul Vann, there was a feeling that the United States could remain in Vietnam in some degree of another three or four years. Which actually was the case until 1973. During this period there would be a certain intensive effort made in the countryside to bring about the political, economic and social revolution that had been distinctly lacking in Vietnam until that time.

In any event I was called back to Washington and entered on duty as I recall around June or July 1970 as John Burns' special representative for the CORDS program. My sole responsibility was

to recruit mainly junior officers. The decision was made by then under secretary for management Macomber, to first assign people to the CORDS program and a massive effort was made to pack the program full of junior officers, generally Class 7, Class 6 some Class 5 people. And my responsibility was to do exactly that. Several new classes of FSO-8s and FSO-7s were brought on board in the '70-'71 period only on condition that they go to Vietnam on their first tour. A number of people turned down the appointments to the Service at that time.

Q: This was a period of great protest. So to say this was to be much more specific than even in the military. Because if you enlisted in the military you might end up in NATO or something like that. Whereas we were saying, "Go to Vietnam." Not everyone did but....

BROWN: It is one of the great ironies.

It might show a certain consciousness-lag in the American Foreign Service. In my personal view, had the State Department understood the importance of bringing about political change among "our Vietnamese" in Vietnam, instead of relying upon big battalions in the Westmoreland Search and Destroy strategy which is so well documented in the Neil Sheehan book, if we had done that in 1963, '64, '65, to a much greater degree in the predecessors of CORDS, OKO and the provincial reporting program, etc., which were good but very, very small, adjuncts of policy at that time, if we had adopted a different attitude at that time, then the course of the world might have been very different. Of course you would have had to have a corresponding de-emphasis of the military aspect of the war which I don't believe would have happened.

In any event I was responsible for the forced assignment of a number of officers. Interestingly there was no lack of volunteers at the senior levels. By that time it had become known that being a CORDS province senior advisor in Vietnam was first of all a fascinating assignment because you got to be number one or two on a 2-300 man provincial team doing very very interesting as we euphemistically call it program direction in the Foreign Service.

Q: Which means having executive responsibility.

BROWN: Which means running something, being involved in the war and often in fascinating provinces. By that time frequently working with Vietnamese senior officers who were rather good, finally. So we had no lack of what were then FSO-3s, FSO-1 now or Senior Officers.

Q: Foreign Service Colonel level.

BROWN: Yes, Foreign Service Colonel level. We had no lack of volunteers. But there again, the people who volunteer, in many cases in my view, in my recollection, people who were sort of desperate for a good assignment. We didn't really get the top notch, with a few exceptions, we didn't get the people such as we had gotten before. Like Frank Wisner, who was a province senior advisor, and some others of that caliber. We often got people who were somewhat older - no disrespect for age, I was quite old when I entered the program - but people who were rather anxious about advancement in the Foreign Service took this as a possibility of getting promoted.

Q: Wasn't this also held out as saying extra credit will be given on promotion panels?

BROWN: That became a very, very difficult question. I have not done a detailed study, and there again I think some thought is required on this.

Part of my mandate was to get good onward assignments for people coming out of CORDS. So during that year period, I not only assigned people to CORDS, I made sure that people coming out of CORDS were given good assignments. My recollection was that I was fairly successful in doing that because I had Macomber's and Burns' backing. So the Personnel Division would be talking to the regional personnel saying "Hey look, we have this young guy FSO-6 coming out of a year and a half of the CORDS program and he's done a great job and we want him to get a good desk job. As I recall we were fairly successful in that. Later on however in 1972, '73, as people finished up their tours subsequently, I am not sure that was the case. Certainly for senior people coming out of the CORDS program it was not always possible to get them good jobs as I recall. But in any event, these promises were made to the incoming classes in 1970 and 1971, during my time there and as I recall, scores, I can't remember the precise figure, but certainly as many as a hundred young officers went into the CORDS program, including women. The famous Alison Palmer case, you probably remember. Alison Palmer was in the CORDS headquarters as I recall, in Nha Trang, MR2 (Military Region Number 2) and she, as I recall, requested a CORDS assignment. Any way, there is a long tale of what happened in her struggle for equal opportunity for women in Vietnam. There were many problems associated with the CORDS program. A lot of these young officers were married, and had one small child, and the question of whether or not their family could either accompany them to certain places in Vietnam or had to be put in Bangkok. We had a large number of young families temporarily housed in Bangkok. There were special visiting privileges in the same way that the military had. My job during that year was to get the whole program going. I should mention another bureaucratic aspect of this. It is indicative of the way Vietnam operated going on its latter years from the American perspective. There was resentment among the AID FSR career AID types and the career Vietnam types.

Q: Language officers?

BROWN: No. I am talking about people who had made a career out of Vietnam. Who by 1970-'71 had been involved in Vietnam affairs, in some cases, for ten years. I'll mention a name fondly, George Jacobson who by that time had become a de facto head of the CORDS program below the Ambassadorial level, be it Komer or Colby. Jacobson had been in Vietnam for many, many years. He was a retired Army colonel. I refer you to the Sheehan's book which gives a lot of background on him. In any event Jacobson was a classic bureaucratic manager and he looked upon this influx of young and particularly senior level Foreign Service Officers who stayed as a threat to the rice bowl of many of the people who were his colleagues. Who were retired army majors, lieutenant colonels and colonels who had gone into AID on the civilian side of the CORDS program and made a career of it. I remember going to Vietnam after I had been in the job a couple of months. I went over for a tour, and my presence in Vietnam was actually resisted by the CORDS bureaucracy because they felt that I was too energetic in assigning State Department officers to billets that would normally be reserved to these career Vietnam types, not these young political types coming in from the Foreign Service. That is an interesting aside to it; particularly true for province senior advisor positions which were very much sought after. Part of the deal that the State Department made with the White House was that the State Department

would not be regulated to simply supplying the infantry. They wanted the officers. So for every three young district senior advisors, we wanted one province level officer, and this was resisted. Resisted very strongly. And Jacobson and the whole CORDS bureaucracy as a whole said, "No, no, no, you've got it wrong. What we need are these bright young guys trained in language who go out to work in the field. That's where they can really do some good. We don't want them up there in the program management level." So this presented interesting...

Q: Let me ask you something here. About this time I was serving in our embassy. My impression, please correct me if I'm wrong, was that many of these career men were not very successful officers in the military and probably would not have been relatively moderate-ranking people in almost any organization. And they had seen this as an opportunity -- this often happens during a wartime situation -- to entrench themselves. Many had mistresses. They had really set themselves up very nicely. Was this your impression?

BROWN: Absolutely. There were some very fine officers in the CORDS program both military and civilian, but by and large the retired military guys that converted over subsequently, and took appointments with AID often at very, very fat salaries, plus all the special things, 20% extra for hazard pay, family allowances and visitation and all the accoutrements.

Q: Visitation that their families could stay in Manila or Thailand or back in the States.

BROWN: So that they could enjoy a very nice life in Vietnam. This was not always the case. A number of people I worked with were first-rate ex-military guys or career AID guys, but there was a large complement of losers, mediocre people who were attracted to remain in Vietnam -- John Paul Vann was a quintessential example of it -- by reason of the beauty of the women, deliciousness of the food, the proximity of danger and adventure but not too close, and the opportunity to be involved in a rather remarkable undertaking even in its waning days. (Vann, please understand, was a superbly effective individual despite the side that the Sheehan book emphasizes.) Particularly because it was in its waning days. Because after 1971-72, there were very few American units in combat, in fact the last American combat unit left sometime in 1972. A lot of Air Force remained. As you recall the Easter Offensive of 1972. But the last American combat units really for all intents and purposes, were withdrawn during 1971.

I'm getting ahead of my story a little bit. I want to move back up to Da Nang, but the hey day, the golden days of provincial work in Vietnam was from the summer of 1968, the post-Tet period, through 1971 into 1972, when the government of the Republic of Vietnam, was reaching its peak of effectiveness, and the government's control of the countryside was probably the greatest it would ever be. This is when the Foreign Service officers were really also at their peak of effectiveness. I guess the peak number of FSOs in the Vietnam program, the CORDS program, probably was reached sometime in 1971, maybe early 1972. And your figures will reveal more accurately than my memory but it strikes me that at one point we had 300 Foreign Service personnel trained in Vietnamese. Not all of them were in the CORDS program.

I'll give you two specific examples because I think they are interesting, of how the CORDS program operated in 1970-71. One of our very senior members of the Foreign Service still on active duty, M. Charles Hill, many years later special assistant to George Shultz, now a career

minister. I can recount the situation with Charlie Hill, a very dear friend of mine. He was at Harvard in 1970, studying in the Chinese program. He was a linguist and he had taken a year at Harvard. He came out of Harvard as a very well regarded middle level officer. He was ripe for the CORDS program. His profile was everything that you wanted. He was a strong manager, knew Chinese very well, knew Asia very well. He was considered to be one of the most up and coming officers that we had, and he got on the CORDS profile. He received word that he was assigned to CORDS. Well he refused to go. His case became one of the very first test cases of the forced assignment policy. Macomber got into it and so did John Burns, obviously as did Cleo Noel, then director of personnel for John Burns. To make a long story short, Charlie Hill was given three choices, go to CORDS, or take an assignment to the American Embassy in Saigon, to prove that he was not against going to Vietnam. His third choice was to resign. Well, Charlie Hill chose to take a position in the Embassy in Saigon. He said that he had nothing against going to Vietnam, but "I do not believe in the CORDS program. I do believe in the Foreign Service and going where I am assigned, but this is out of the Foreign Service, so to speak." So Charlie Hill ended up in the Embassy in Saigon as special assistant to Ellsworth Bunker. Charlie Hill stayed on a long time. He stayed on three or four years and came to be one of the solid supporters of the Mission Direction. He ended up as executive director of the mission in Saigon to Bunker and then came back to Washington and of course the rest is history. He was special assistant to Bunker during the Panama negotiations, he went to Tel Aviv as political counselor, came back as executive director of the department, etc. etc. onward and upward, in our system to become career minister. Charlie Hill was the test case of the forced assignment policy.

Another example was the young man that I picked to go to Da Nang with me in 1971 as vice consul. His name is Craig Dunkerley. Who also has risen to senior officer status now, mainly in European Affairs but also in Japan Affairs too. Craig Dunkerley was somewhat hesitant about going to the CORDS program. He was not hesitant at all about serving in Vietnam. He ended up first as vice consul and then as political officer in the American Consulate General in Da Nang in the 1971-1973 period. Craig did a brilliant job as a very young officer. He was the kind of individual who was part of the protest movement in college. He came right into the A-100 course, I interviewed him. He was an actor, a drama major in college, and he was recommended to me by the director of the A-100 course (the junior officer course). In any event Craig Dunkerley had serious misgivings about our policy in Vietnam. Nonetheless he volunteered for about six or eight months of Vietnamese language training, and picked it up quickly. He ended up in Da Nang where he, and I've seen him recently (this is now twenty years later), had really the seminal experience of his life as vice consul and then political reporter of Central Vietnam. So I am sure you could multiply these examples by several hundred as to how people fared.

Q: We had a considerable number of the young men and women coming in. Most of them were...Foreign Service essentially recruits an elite and the elite in those days was usually in the protest movement. Against the war in Vietnam. Was there some soul searching or brain washing? What was going on that got these young civilians to go into Vietnam?

BROWN: Well, I will never know how many potential officers were lost, frankly when they were given this letter, which said you are hereby appointed an FSR-8 on condition that you accept as your first assignment, a CORDS assignment. There were always exceptions to that, of course, but it was a general policy for about a year or two. I don't know how many people were

lost because of that. I think one could infer from the way the program operated that people who accepted the letter of invitation to join the service, to take an appointment, were generally willing, although reluctantly, to take an assignment in the CORDS program.

The forced assignment of junior officers did not last very long. My recollection is that there were not more than three or four incoming classes of FSO-8s and 7s that were subject to this. It lasted until and through 1970 into 1971. The program, for several reasons, was dropped. One big reason was the handwriting was on the wall. That if you appointed an officer to the program in 1971, and he took a year in training, that he wouldn't get there until 1972, and the thought was that if we stayed in Vietnam in the provinces through 1973 that was probably it. That was correct. Because many of the people who went into training after I left that personnel assignment, many of those people were the ones who ended up in Vietnam in 1973 and 74 and were the political reporters in the consulate generals around Vietnam up until 1975 when the place collapsed. But many of them were the ones who came in the program in 1971-72, because of the long lead time.

Q: What sort of feedback were you getting? Our generation had learned how to live with the military, and many of us had served with it, but you were getting a new group that was coming out that was very suspicious of all these things. How did these young people relate to them. And the military relate to them?

BROWN: It's hard for me to make a generalization on that. I do know in many cases some of the most unlikely people, the ones I was in training with for example, in 1967, I was fifteen to twenty years older than them. Some of them I would classify as hippies, or protest movement people or simply adventurers. Some of them were AID employees, not regular State people. So these people who I would have considered very unlikely ended up being excellent officers with a capital O in the provinces of Vietnam and got along very well with the military. Others did not do as well. It is hard for me to generalize. But I will say that if I could make this generalization, the top notch FSOs of middle grade, when they were assigned to the provinces as district senior advisors, deputy province advisors or province senior advisors, found that working with the U.S. military had a lot of pain, a lot of difficulties, but by gosh was a rather rewarding experience in that CORDS environment because of the unique relationship between civilians and military. In my province, for example, we had eleven or twelve civilians. I was the ranking civilian in Vinh Long as deputy province advisor, and frequently acting as province senior advisor, and I worked with between 100 and 200 military men under me. Majors, captains, first lieutenants, by and large. I found it a most rewarding experience. I think my experience was not unusual at all.

Q: How were things going then? What was the atmosphere in Washington?

BROWN: When I got back in 1970 we were still deeply involved in the war. By the time I got to Da Nang, as principal officer in 1971, the Vietnamization program was in full swing and the units were being removed. Perhaps we ought to move to that period.

I left this particular personnel assignment in July of 1971 and arrived in Da Nang the same month as principal officer there replacing Francis Terry MacNamara, whom I had replaced, oddly enough in Vinh Long province in 1968.

Q: When I was in Saigon, Da Nang's consular affairs were handled by my department in Saigon and so Terry was technically under me. It was purely a paper relationship however. By the time you arrived, Da Nang was a consulate.

BROWN: And it did do a good bit of consular work. But its real purpose was political reporting and I had two vice consuls under me, one of whom did nothing but consular work. There was plenty, marriages, notariats galore for citizenship purposes. Occasionally a protection problem. But it was the other vice consul and my job was 99% political, in terms of reporting and representation. As the American presence dwindled down, the consulate became more important, and in 1973, in January of 1973, of course, the CORDS program ended and all the CORDS program people who stayed on for development purposes, AID administrative purposes, were shifted and put under the consul general which I then became. By that time, when I arrived in July of 1971 there were 100,000 American military personnel in Military Region One. 100,000. I said goodbye to the last military man on January 30, 1973. His name was Colonel William Walker and I'll never forget watching him get on the last DC-7 leaving Da Nang airport and waving goodbye and thought, "Jesus, that's it. There's no more American military in Da Nang." Absolutely incredible to think. Actually there were American military who stayed behind to operate the quadripartite military commission and these were American helicopter units that were put under control of the ICCS (International Commission on Control and Supervision which was set up under the Paris agreement of January 1973) in effect. So these were helicopter units that had something else painted on their helicopter. They were replaced eventually by Air America units which were virtually the same helicopters, and in our consulate general in the 1973 era, we had a number of Department of Defense personnel in civilian clothes who were there for intelligence gathering and reporting purposes. Then we had a large contingent of CIA which was under the consulate general which had not been the case before. When I arrived the CIA had a huge station in there which reported directly to Saigon but when we became a consulate general the CIA was moved out of its rather luxurious quarters and moved into the consulate general building there in Da Nang.

In any event I went there, to a five US personnel post, myself, two vice consuls, an administrative officer and an American secretary. And it stayed that way until January 1973 when it was upgraded to consulate general, because of the peace accords, and I stayed until July 1973. At that time my colleague, the deputy for CORDS, each one of the four military regions in Vietnam had a deputy for CORDS who was an American civilian. In many cases they were retired military, but in the case of when I arrived, in fact here is another example which I should have cited along with Charlie Hill and Craig Dunkerley, is John Gunther Dean, whom we all know is one of the grand ambassadors subsequently of the American Foreign Service. I think he's had more ambassadorial posts than any Foreign Service officer that I can remember, six or seven now. John Dean came out of the Bowie Seminar at Harvard in 1970. He was looking for a job. (Have you interviewed him yet?) He has just retired after being Ambassador to India, and before that to Lebanon, Denmark, Cambodia and Laos. But at that time John Dean, and he would be the first to confirm this, was a placement problem, because he was so bright and cantankerous and so ambitious. John never hid his light under a bushel, but I remember John Dean flying down from Cambridge in 1970 and Burns said, "Hey Fred you've got to find a job for the hot shot from Harvard. We're having a little bit of a difficulty finding a job for him. He's been to the Paris peace talks, he's a real go-getter. See what you can do."

John Dean flew down from Cambridge and I described the CORDS program and he said, "Wow, that's sounds like just the kind of thing I would like to get involved in. How can I get a job in that program." "Well," I said, "It just so happens that I have a job..." He ended up as deputy, the number two job, to a senior AID fellow in Military Region Number One, Da Nang, and then when that gentlemen left, John Dean took over as number one. He was my colleague during much of the time that I was there. Did an excellent job. He had a propensity for this kind of job. Military organization in a war zone, basically, and John took to it like a duck to water. We saw a lot of each other and indeed suffered through the Easter Offensive of April, May 1972 and flew together and tried to get into Quang Tri Province, the capital city there that was on the verge of falling, north of Hue, right on the DMZ. On the way back, John and I were riding along in the helicopter and we took a number of rounds and were forced to descend in the helicopter very rapidly and almost crashed. But we went through quite a bit together and John left in the summer of 1972 to become DCM in Laos, DCM to Mac Godley, I guess. Then he stayed in Laos and did a number of things there including trying to contain counter coups on the part of the conservatives in Vientiane. For his good work he was made Ambassador to Cambodia as I recall, replacing either Coby Swank or Tom Enders and became famous for carrying the flag out of Phnom Penh in April of 1975. But this all began with John Dean's initial assignment to the CORDS program where he became well and favorably known to people like Charlie Whitehouse, to Sam Berger and Ellsworth Bunker and Bill Sullivan, the people who were basically running the American involvement in Indochina.

The CORDS program in central Vietnam in Military Region Number One was moved over under the program direction of the newly established American consulate general in Da Nang. And the same thing obviously happened in the other three military regions. Tom Barnes became consul general in Can Tho, Monty Spear became consul general in Nha Trang, and in Bien Hoa, Military Region Number Three, I forget. In any event foreign service officers were there by statute I guess. To be a consul general you had to be a career foreign service officer. And there were a lot of problems in that regard. I had a terrible problem in Da Nang because I took over an organization which at that time was being run by a retired army colonel. The deputy for CORDS. He thought he was going to become consul general. Well it was not to be. I was appointed consul general by Ellsworth Bunker and the guy that I had been number two to, became my number two. And he did not like that a bit. He saluted and did it for a while but it was a painful experience for him. He was a former army colonel who had been in combat and he was a heliborn assault pilot. Knew how to fly helicopters and all that. He was, I think this happened in many places around the country, as the American presence changed radically in 1973 with the Paris peace accords. I was succeeded by Paul Pople, former consul general in Milan, Italy, and I left.

Q: What was the situation there and what were you doing?

BROWN: For the first year and a half, while I was principal officer I was doing mainly political reporting dealing with some of what was left of the political party system in central Vietnam. Where it was strongest in all places in Vietnam. The VNQDD, the Dai Viet, the Tan Dai Viet, all the small nationalist parties that were the residue of the anti-French struggle, and the anti-Viet Minh struggle, and the anti-Viet Cong struggle in the previous decades. They all had their

headquarters in central Vietnam. My duty was relate to them and also to the An Quang Buddhist movement in Hue. You recall the American consulate had originally been in Hue and it was burned down in 1964 during the riots there and was moved subsequently to Da Nang. More secure environment. My job was to relate to the Buddhists and I regularly paid calls to all the An Quang pagodas in Hue and in Da Nang. My job was mainly that and to increasingly relate to the senior Vietnamese officials in Military Region One which comprised of Da Nang, Hue and five provinces, Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, where probably the bitterest fighting in the entire place had taken place in the period of fifteen years. The Street Without Joy, etc. The nature of the job changed radically with the Paris peace talks. I became principal officer of some two hundred people in the consulate general. We had small subsidiary posts in Hue, Quang Nam, in the city of Hoi An, in Quang Tin for a while in Tamky and in Quang Ngai city itself. So it was a consulate general with as I recall four constituent listening posts, generally one or two Americans with four Vietnamese working in those constituent posts. As consul general I had supervisory responsibility for political reporting which then took on immense importance. We were beefed up during that period. We had six or seven officers on detached duty from Washington. A lot of them were old CORDS types.

BROWN: So a lot of our political reporters who came back in January of 1973 were usually assigned usually on a six-month duty, were former CORDS types, former political reporters, political section people from the American Embassy in Saigon. Again this was a forced assignment for many of these people, other accepted it with great pleasure. As I recall we had six or eight people in our political section of our consulate general, including a political reporter in Hue and one part time in Quang Ngai.

Q: You have a government run by a former army general, Thieu. Democracy is a pretty fragile flower and so was this just feeding Washington or what good did this do. Couldn't one person do the job, "the political situation was chaotic..."

BROWN: It was more than the political situation, it was the security situation. To be perfectly honest with you, I spent a minimal amount of time in the political reporting of the closed sense. It was reporting on the geo-political situation in MR1. It was quite clear in 1971 that the North Vietnamese were not going to abide by the Paris peace accords and my job was to report on the security situation in every district, every province under my jurisdiction. And my reports were not just about the political party maneuverings in MR1 but about how the morale in the western district in Quang Nam was holding up. Whether or not the government of Vietnam was doing what was necessary to organize the people. It was basically the job of reporting the prospects for survival of the Republic of Vietnam. I became increasingly convinced that the prospects were very very bad.

Q: How were the peace accords viewed by you and your Vietnamese contacts. Was this considered a sell-out, a graceful way of getting the hell out?

BROWN: I suspect the situation in my military region, central Vietnam, was different and more precarious than the rest of Vietnam. In the Mekong Delta, MR4, you had a very very different situation, where the government had de facto control over the majority of the people and the territory in MR4. The situation changed in MR3 and 2. But in MR1 you had a precarious

situation, with the Demilitarized Zone, a World War II-type battle zone with three or four divisions on each side heavily equipped with artillery, well-honed fighting forces facing each other across a phony military dividing line, you had the North Vietnamese army anywhere from fifteen to twenty miles to the west of the major populated areas. You had a geographic situation which was intolerable, in which the mountains in many cases came down to within a few miles of the sea, the Que Son Mountain Range, south of Da Nang was a spit of mountain territory that stuck out and almost cut the main road going south from Da Nang to the three provinces to the south. It was an intolerable situation. You had the Vietnamese military units, ARVN Divisions, 1st and 2nd, and 3rd, plus the paratroop division and the marine division, a total of six divisions assigned permanently in defensive positions to defend the major centers of Da Nang, which by that time, a million, a million and a half people, a big city; Hue which probably had 500,000 people, not to mention the four other provincial capitals, which were quite large provincial towns. To me it was an intolerable and untenable situation. I think the military people realized how untenable it was in 1973. My counterpart became in 1973 Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, now a broken man, a computer programmer in Arlington, Va. At that time I used to see General Truong every day for a briefing, I sat next to him in the military briefings to which I was privy. In his headquarters, and one of the changes that I suggested, was that instead of my sitting next to him, in the front row, as we had these daily military briefings, to move the Americans to the background. That was quite a traumatic thing. The daily briefings to which all the officers went, etc., etc., finally the ranking American officer is moved from the front row, sitting at the right hand of the Vietnamese to the back row. I'm told that later on, my successor was excluded from that briefing entirely, which I think was an excellent idea. Because the name of the game at that time, as I discussed with General Truong, was to get out from under the Americans in a hurry, to the extent that you could. That's nice to say but the Vietnamese were flying American airplanes, they were driving American APCs and tanks, they were using American M-16s and they relied on Americans 100% for ammunition and oil. So it is one thing to say, divorce yourself from the American presence, psychologically, politically, geo-politically, it's one thing to be able to say that and another to be able to do it. In material terms. This was the basic dilemma, in my view unsolvable dilemma, of Vietnamese between 1973 and 1975. It proved to be their undoing. But General Truong and I talked about this quite a bit and I said, I remember my last meeting with General Truong when I left in July 1973, I said, "Under no circumstances trust the Americans. You are in the process of being abandoned." He said, "I know that." I said this in the context of a number of rumblings that Thieu was not doing what was necessary to make the Republic of Vietnam stand on its own two feet. There was talk about who would replace Thieu. Would there be a coup. General Truong was one of the few people looked upon as potential presidential material. And another coup. I was a great admirer of General Truong and often said to him, "If you are going to make a move, you'd better make it soon, because this country... The Americans are leaving. Don't count on the United States to come back." At that time, Watergate had not broken, although it was in the process of breaking. I claim no clairvoyance at that time to predict what would happen to the ability of the American president to support the Vietnamese as we had been. But I had the uneasy feeling that the whole thing was going to fall down. From the geo-political point of view, if you looked up at those mountains, you could see where the North Vietnamese divisions were. I'd go up in my airplane on the way to Saigon and divert a little bit to the west and you could see the clouds of dust as the North Vietnamese were building their four-lane highway south, putting in their 16 inch fuel pipeline that would lead all the way south, hundreds of miles to the south, which would fuel their tanks

which eventually took Saigon. The hundreds of tanks which eventually defeated the ARVN in the south, they were not dropped by parachute and they were not manufactured by peasant guerillas, they were driven down the main highway through the Ho Chi Minh trail after getting off Soviet vessels in Haiphong. There is no mystery about how the north finally beat the south. But at that time I had an uneasy feeling that this whole thing was very very unstable. If only because the population center of Da Nang was within easy reach of North Vietnamese rockets and we were rocketed all the time in 1972. There were no rockets in 1973 during the peace agreement. But all during 1972 after the Easter defensive we'd get rockets coming into the CORDS compound. There were a number of people killed, not CORDS people, but Vietnamese in the vicinity. They had the total ability to do it. In fact they had the ability to launch those rockets while there was still 50,000 Americans sitting in Da Nang. They still could rocket the place.

Q: In Saigon, the morning weather report would also include in which districts rockets fell. What was your experience during the Easter Offensive.

BROWN: Charlie Whitehouse was then the deputy ambassador, he'd replaced Sam Berger, to Bunker. He was sort of Mr. Outside, having been dep-CORDS for Military Region 3. He was Mr. Outside. He did all of the relationships with the people in the countryside. In any event, I remember very clearly getting the word from Saigon, that an offensive was imminent and indeed it took place in a matter of hours after that.

First of all North Vietnamese divisions came across the DMZ, north of Quang Tri. They also came across to the west of Hue and attempted to capture Hue. They did capture the province capital of Quang Tri and drove down to within thirty or forty miles of Hue. They were stopped by massive American bombing and by the mining of Haiphong harbor and by bombing of Hanoi itself. The United States replied in massive form in a way that nobody, nobody expected to be honest with you. American naval vessels stood off the coast of Quang Tri and bombarded the North Vietnamese. Aircraft carriers were in action. Arclight strikes by B-52s were used (saturation bombing by units of three, six or nine B-52s flying wing to wing dropping 75 to 100 tons of bombs each) against North Vietnamese. Concussion type bombs, parachuted bombs, fire bombs, everything you could imagine. The first division of the ARVN, the paratroopers and the marines fought very very well, and with the American support managed to halt the North Vietnamese offensive in the Hue-Quang Tri area. The ARVN 2nd Division was decimated as was the 3rd Division and retreated in panic. It had to be reconstituted completely after the Easter Offensive which lasted several weeks and then there was a period of stalemate and General Truong was appointed the new commander of MR1 and took over job of reconquering a lot of land that had been lost in Quang Tri which he did but he never got back to the DMZ. Never got back. He did recapture, barely, the province town of Quang Tri which I remember had been leveled completely. There was no pile of bricks higher than two or three feet, which had been a town that housed 50,000 people.

Q: Yes, as I recall. I visited there before.

BROWN: Did you?. Yes it was built by the French, by and large, and it was completely destroyed. There was a huge influx of refugees. We received 500-700,000 refugees, the numbers

are pretty amazing, into Da Nang. We had to, the CORDS people, John Gunther Dean, set up emergency feeding sites. We took over the old marine and army camps north of Da Nang, you recall where the marines had landed in 1965, huge expanses of military barracks were turned into refugee camps. I remember escorting Ellsworth Bunker there, and there were 2-300,000 refugees in the camp. I remember going with him to visit the refugee areas there in 1972. So we had a massive problem of taking care of the refugees who had fled, remembering the Tet Offensive in 1968 which after all, was only four years only. Everyone fled. One of the little-known massacres, these are the kinds of things that our friends the North Vietnamese never get due credit for. Everyone will remember the Mai Lai massacre but nobody will remember the convoy of death which took place in April of 1972 when the last remaining inhabitants of Quang Tri City were retreating south. They were mainly ARVN dependents, men, women and children (ARVN being Army of the Republic of Vietnam), people in the 1st and 3rd Divisions that had been garrisoning, marine corps division that had been garrisoning the northern military sector there. They and their families were retreating south along the highway from Quang Tri and were ambushed by the North Vietnamese who slaughtered, I don't know what the final count was, but you're talking 10-20,000 people slaughtered by small arms fire and mortar fire. The communists used their favorite tactic of knocking out the lead vehicle and rear vehicle and stalling everybody and slaughtering everybody in the middle. The blame for that is 50% for the North Vietnamese and 50% for the government of Vietnam for having conducted such an inept convoy. I remember going up to that highway and driving along and subsequently taking pictures and smelling the death all along the highway. This was little reported. One man who did report it was Josiah Bennett who was then in the political section in Saigon and Joe Bennett, to his great credit, went up and reported it and tried to make a big thing of it, and didn't get anywhere. People didn't want to hear about it in 1972-73. I think the Vietnamese component of the effort was increasingly overlooked by the American side. We wanted to get the hell out. You recall Nixon and Kissinger had gone to Shanghai, the Shanghai Communique was about the same side, he had his summit meeting with Kosygin. Rapprochement was in the cards, the United States kept up its rapprochement with the Soviet Union. At the same time we were opening up to China. The famous Shanghai was in May of 1972. Kissinger had gone on the secret trip to China in 1971. So the word was, get out of Vietnam. I think the North Vietnamese were rather unhappy that the Chinese would receive Richard Nixon at virtually the same time that he was bombing the hell out of Hanoi and mining the harbor of Haiphong, and causing massive damage to North Vietnam. Likewise the Christmas bombing of 1972, the Chinese sat still while the United States bombed the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table. Some people will claim that if that bombing at Christmas of 1972 had continued another week, North Vietnam would have surrendered on almost any terms. That is an unprovable assertion but in any event I was very much involved in the reporting of the progress of the Easter Offensive back to Charlie Whitehouse. I did it every night by phone. I sent in cables and this got me in a little bit of trouble with John Dean who was reporting through his channels and there was an interesting dual-channel arrangement here (back channel, etc., etc.).

Q: *Were you reporting the same thing?*

BROWN: Sometimes not. I would report, my reports as I recall, were far more alarmist than John Dean. And John Dean had to go through his CORDS channels, everything had to be more upbeat. "We've met the enemy and they're ours, and all that." As I recall, my reporting was more blunt. Because I went out and would talk to the French priests who had come with these

Vietnamese villages in 1953 and had settled in Quang Tri and had lived there from '54 to '72. They were forced to flee for their lives into Hue. I remember very clearly talking to these old French priests who had stuck with these parishioners all these years. What they had to say was just terrible. I guess my concern was my fear that Vietnamese society would not be able to reconstitute itself as a result of this cataclysmic event in the north.

This was the time when John Paul Vann was killed, leading the defense of the highlands, Military Region II and III. He was killed in June of 1972. This was really a watershed event because the North Vietnamese were able to make inroads into the territory theretofore controlled by the government of Vietnam, ARVN. This was very important because it set the stage for the peace agreement of 1973 and people on the ground realized that the North Vietnamese would do this again. No respect for agreements. It was really a race against time. And it was clear that the Americans were getting out of Vietnam. Thieu was forced to sign the Paris peace accords in 1973, and that was it. And then it began. So I was there for the first six months of that roughly two year period from '73 to '75 during which the Republic of Vietnam existed pretty much on its own. Albeit with immense American material support, billions of dollars a year, and a thousand men in what used to be MACV Headquarters. In '73 it changed from MACV to the Defense Attaché Office. The largest Defense Attaché Office in the world. So I was there roughly for the first quarter of that cease-fire.

Q: I assume you used to go down and meet at the embassy in Saigon.

BROWN: All of the time.

Q: Were they seeing things differently? Was Bunker still the ambassador?

BROWN: Bunker was still the ambassador through May or June of 1973. I could have stayed on. I was just as glad to leave. But Graham Martin didn't want me. He came in in April or May, because the lines of reporting changed. Up until that time I had the ability to send cables directly to Washington. That was stopped immediately, and all my cables were censored after that by the embassy. The ambassador has the right to do this. I do know that I began to correspond directly by pouch with the Vietnam Desk in the East Asia Bureau. My theme was that this was a no win situation. Central Vietnam is going to go. It is going to collapse. The psychological environment is such that anything can trigger the collapse of the military units and indeed that is what happened. It happened in a way that I did not foresee. Because central Vietnam went first. You recall Kontum, Pleiku. They defeated the ARVN there and that triggered the hysteria in MR1 because it was foreseen that we had the population in MR1 of 6 or 7 million people. It was perfectly obvious that MR1 was incapable of defending itself. Absent a huge deterrent strike on the part of the United States. It was the only thing. Because Thieu kept removing some key forces from MR1, paratroopers, for example, and one of the marine corps divisions. And it left MR1 hideously exposed. Even by the time I left, and my word was that the thing wasn't working. And that this was an untenable, extremely difficult situation.

Q: From your perspective the embassy was trying to put on a rosier hue.

BROWN: I felt that going down to Saigon and sitting in one of those mission council meetings,

where they'd call down the four consul generals and Creighton Abrams, senior military guy there at that time, and he was replaced by lower-ranking generals, I felt a sense of other-worldness. That modern air-conditioned, carpeted...

Q: I was in a not very air-conditioned annex with consular problems. A whole world.

BROWN: But in that building you went up to the seventh or eighth floor, and you saw how they operated. I felt that it was.... Particularly, Ellsworth Bunker, who was a man of a certain age, even then. I felt it was an unreal atmosphere. Very, very strange. Look, I don't claim that I knew then what was going to happen. I do know that I was terribly uneasy and that I felt that the world as we knew it was going to come to an end. I didn't know when it would be, whether it would be '74 or '75 or 1980. I had no idea. But I did know that we were on the edge of a tragedy. I did know that.

Q: You came back in the summer of 1973. I assume you talked to the people on the desk.

BROWN: Yes, I talked to Bill Sullivan.

Q: How did they feel about the situation?

BROWN: My recollection, and giving it not much thought, is that they didn't give a shit. Just interested in getting out. Get out. Our interests lie elsewhere. I felt that the Vietnam working group, the Vietnam problem used to take over the whole EA bureau, but my impression was that nobody was very interested. "Yes, very interesting, Fred. Thank you very much. Bye, bye." kind of thing. People really didn't care.

Q: So what did you do then?

BROWN: I entered the senior seminar.

CARL EDWARD DILLERY
Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Quang Ngai (1968-1969)

Ambassador Carl Edward Dillery was born and raised in Seattle, Washington. He graduated from Seattle Pacific University with a degree in history. One of his professors gave him an information pamphlet on the Foreign Service from the State Department. He did graduate from University of Washington and the University of California Berkeley, but received his master's degree from George Washington in Administration of National Security. In addition, he has served in Japan, Belgium, England, Greece, and the Fiji Islands. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 2, 1994.

Q: How did this Vietnam thing develop for you?

DILLERY: As I said, Chris Petrow roiled me up so strongly...he was a wonderful person who later became head of Mexican Affairs in the Department. He was just a real idealist. He was one of the people who was prepared to speak his piece at any given moment. Very liberal in his thinking. He was totally opposed to the war and it was driving him bananas. Then he proceeded to drive me bananas. So when a telegram came out requesting volunteers for Vietnam, the thought came to me that this would probably be the biggest foreign policy development that would affect our country during my time in the Foreign Service and I really should know something about it. Probably the best way would be to go.

Q: Going to see the elephant, I think is the term.

DILLERY: Something like that. So I sent in my request to volunteer and I remember Ambassador Knight called me in and said, "I know that Brussels is not Paris or Rome, but why would you ever want to leave Brussels?" I sort of wanted to say to him at that point, "Mr. Ambassador, I am not going to Paris or Rome." I explained to him what it was.

That was Christmas of 1967 and I came back and took the training course at old Arlington Towers training center.

Q: It was in the old garage.

DILLERY: Yes, the old garage. I started the training course and the more I thought about not wanting to do this it was too late.

Q: How did your family react to this?

DILLERY: Not well. My wife took this as desertion and said to me, "I would divorce you but that is the easy way out for you." They stayed in Washington, in Arlington where we had a home. I went out in March, 1968 and was in Quang Ngai until mid-December 1969. While I was in training the TET offensive of February 1968 occurred.

Q: What were you getting from your training? What was the attitude and how was the training getting you ready for Vietnam?

DILLERY: There were three different types of people in my training course. There were some like me, who were volunteers, not very many. There were a lot of junior officers who were being drafted and very unhappy about it. Then there were other people who were going out who had been hired to go to Vietnam to work for AID. Actually, all of us were going to be part of AID because we going to a program called Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). The training course was oriented towards that because this was CORDS training. In other words there was the embassy always at a much higher level and much more zippy than CORDS, obviously.

So this was strictly CORDS training. It essentially was to introduce us to Vietnam, give us a little bit of the history, the traditions and culture. Then there was a description of the CORDS program

and what we were doing and how it had evolved from the several pacification programs that had existed before. A little bit about AID procedures. And basically that was it. There was an option of taking language training which a number of people did. But I wanted to minimize the time I was going to be involved so I didn't take that.

We all thought we would be going to provinces so there was a mock provincial team exercise so you would have a sense of what the various aspects were. It was pretty much hands-on-training by people who had been there and came back to tell us what was going on. It was mostly composed of talking sessions.

Q: What were you getting about TET? There were two points of view about it.

DILLERY: Most of what we got was that TET was a bad thing for us. I know the Administration attempted at that time to portray this as the Communist having given their best shot and failed. Given the casualties they took it was terrible for them, but clearly the people who had been there did not see this as such a good thing and felt the psychological impact of it would be negative...and I think it probably was in the long run.

Q: So, you went out when?

DILLERY: I went out in March, 1968 directly to Saigon where I found total chaos. I dropped in on my friends at the embassy. Gil Sheinbaum was the executive assistant to the ambassador at that time. He was a member of my A-100 so I saw him a little bit. I remember flying in from Hong Kong and looking out the window at the length of Vietnam looking for battle smoke, but didn't see any. I thought it looked very peaceful.

Q: As a matter of fact when I flew in I saw a lot of smoke but was told it was actually rice stalk burning time, it wasn't battle.

DILLERY: Anyway, I landed at Tan Son Nhut and my first sight was a great big hole in the ceiling of the airport from a rocket during Tet. I think it was a Sunday. I watched people getting picked up by people sent to meet them and leaving the airport and finally I was the only one left - - no one met me. I found somebody who took me to the Oscar Hotel in downtown Saigon. I stayed through that night and the next day went out to the CORDS headquarters and got settled in. It was kind of a funny arrangement because we had to go to the embassy to do some personnel things and then to CORDS to do the rest.

It turned out when you got to CORDS that they didn't really know what they wanted to do with you. One hoped they needed you. Yet, it turned out they had no concept of what they wanted to do with you. So you diddled around, made calls and talked to people in the headquarters. I had gone with two buddies from my training course...Bob Emmons and John Blodgett, both of whom found jobs at MACV, at CORDS headquarters, so they never left Saigon.

At my hotel I ran into Jim May, who was the Province Senior Advisor in Quang Ngai and a well-known grabber of every resource he could possibly get for that province. He had more FSOs working in his province than any other. We met in the lobby and when he found out who I was

he said, "Why don't you come to Quang Ngai?" I said, "Well, nobody else has asked for me, sure. So where is it?" That was how I got to where I was going. There was no design that I could see.

Q: Where is Quang Ngai?

DILLERY: Quang Ngai is in I Corps which is the northernmost Corps of the four of Vietnam, and is the southern most province in that. It is two provinces below Da Nang.

Q: What was the situation in Quang Ngai when you were there?

DILLERY: Quang Ngai is a large province with a population of about 600,000. The mountains came pretty close to the sea there. The Americal Division was the American presence. It had been one of the areas of heaviest Viet Cong presence, always, traditionally. A lot of North Vietnamese officials came from Quang Ngai, including the then Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong. It had quite a strong political tradition. There were five non-communist political parties in Quang Ngai, although some with membership of only four or five people.

When I arrived everything was pretty much besieged, it was right after TET. The Province Senior Advisor's house was a compound with several buildings and lots of rooms, and I stayed in one of those. It had shell holes in the gate from a mortar that landed during TET. During TET the fighting was only a block away. So when I arrived there was a strong feeling of tension, in fact I think I made a trip to one of the district offices and it was the first time they had driven out since TET. A very, very, strong feeling of imminent danger.

Of the 600,000 inhabitants, 300,000 were refugees and one of our biggest jobs was taking care of them. My Lai occurred in that province before I got there.

Q: Had they started investigating that?

DILLERY: In a very desultory way the IG and a couple of other army inquiries had come, but they never found anything until the story broke in December, 1969. We didn't even know what they were investigating. They were casting their questions in such a way that you didn't know what they were talking about.

Q: I was in Saigon later on. I came in early 1969 and there were sort of hints around, because I was dealing with the Inspector General too, of them looking for something big, but they didn't say what.

DILLERY: We knew that the area around My Lai was the operating territory of the 48th Viet Cong Battalion, which was said to be one of the best Viet Cong military units in the whole country. That was real bad country out there. They were almost as formidable as the North Vietnamese army.

But the whole area was tense. We had ten districts and district teams in each one of them. Four

or five of them were Montagnard districts and the advisory teams were really manned by Special Forces people.

In one district we had Marine combined action platoons. Five or six Marines were stationed with a popular force platoon to defend a village. That was real rough. They did more fighting than most of the larger military units because the Viet Cong attacked them on a regular basis. I understood that they caused more VC casualties than Battalions. Their living conditions were terrible, right with the local peasants -- and they were very brave. We had eight or nine of those units in one of our districts. They were part of the Third Marine Amphibious Force (3rd MAF) operating out of Da Nang.

As to the US Army, we were in the Americal territory and we had a close relationship with the Division. Two brigades of Americal were operating in our province. This was when Colin Powell was stationed with the Americal, I must have met him at briefings and meetings as he was on General Getty's staff.

Our province team was big. We had about 160 Americans of whom about 30 were civilians. The headquarters probably had 75 or 80 and the others were scattered out in districts. We had about 150 Vietnamese employees. Quang Ngai had a hospital, so we had nurses and doctors on the team. There also was the Phoenix program (the intelligence presence), an educational advisor, a police advisor, two Volunteers In Service to America (Vietnam's version of the peace corps) teaching English. I was the "Revolutionary Development Support Officer" when I first came. This was the officer that managed the warehouse with building supplies, food distribution, etc. to refugees. We had two people working on refugees. So it was a big, big operation.

The US Military part of the team were advisors to the Regional forces (sort of like the National Guard in the US) and the Popular Forces (the local militia in villages). You will remember there was the regular Army of Vietnam (ARVN). They had their own advisory team in Quang Ngai which wasn't part of us. We had a kind of parallel government structure to the government of Vietnam all the way down. Our office was in the headquarters building of the province.

Q: Which was where?

DILLERY: Right in Quang Ngai city -- the capital of the Province. Several things happened there, not only My Lai. One or two of the Buddhist monk immolations in 1967 occurred in Quang Ngai. It was a pretty busy and controversial area.

Q: Let's talk about your first job dealing with the refugees. What were the major problems you had to deal with?

DILLERY: Our job was to get food, bulgur wheat and cooking oil, to the refugees, and to provide villages with building materials -- metal roofing, cement and reinforcing bars. We had a big warehouse which I supervised in an attempt to keep some control over the supplies. The biggest problem was corruption. My counterpart on the Vietnamese side -- an army major -- was pretty clearly a crook, although we never proved anything on him. His people commandeered supplies from our warehousemen and quite frequently we felt they were not going off to carry

out agreed projects. So we tried to stop that.

We also did the paper work and physical inspections of projects and approved the when complete. Because of all the refugees we were doing a lot of building of camps for them. We also did some building in villages that were not refugees. It was our job to work with the Vietnamese on these projects and to assign them out and monitor them.

The second Province Senior Advisor was Bob Burns, a wonderful person and also an FSO. The system in CORDS was that if the Province Senior Advisor was a civilian, the deputy was a military person and vice versa. Our Province Senior Advisor was Jim May at first and then Burns. Even under May it turned out that I was sort of the second civilian (I was an old FSO-4).

Q: Equivalent to a colonel.

DILLERY: A Lieutenant Colonel -- I got promoted to FSO-3 in 1969 after I became PSA. So I was really kind of the second ranking civilian in the province at that point. I was also kind of like a chief of staff, so I helped on a lot of other things. One of the things we did was the famous Hamlet Evaluation Survey or "HES" every month. You had to rate which hamlets were safe and which weren't.

Q: There was a whole matrix of things. Could you stay there the night? Are they doing this or doing that? It was then put into the great computers somewhere and out came a "how are we doing" type of report.

DILLERY: Yes. Then they produced beautiful maps with "our villages" in blue and theirs in red. I am afraid that we didn't do a very good job on this -- there was almost no place in the Province where we felt safe at night -- even in our own houses. So the HES probably wasn't a very good tool and overestimated GVN control.

Back to the organization of the advisory team. It sort of turned out that I was kind of like the second deputy province senior advisor because the first was the military one. He did that side and I was the deputy for the civilian things. So I managed all of the aspects...all of the civilians reported through me to the Province Senior Advisor and I coordinated the activities of the other agencies on the Team.

I continued in that role until the last six months. In June, 1969, I became Province Senior Advisor and was in charge of the whole shooting match.

Q: How did you find your Vietnamese counterparts?

DILLERY: Some real good ones and some not so good ones. The Major, I can't remember his name, who was my counterpart when I was doing a lot of development work was pretty clearly on the take. But the Province Chief and the Deputy Province Chief during the whole time were also army officers and terrific guys. They were really patriots, I thought. They knew what they were all about. They were good soldiers. I am sure they were quite honest. There were bad apples around. Some of the district chiefs were bad and some of them were excellent. So there

was a whole range of them.

The official I most admired was the head of the refugee section of the Province government. He was small even for a Vietnamese so he was a tiny little guy but with great personality. He insisted on refugees getting what they deserved. So he struggled with the Major to make sure the refugees got their food commodities, building materials and money. We actually paid a little stipend to the refugees. He would go out with our refugee officer (FSO Larry Colbert for most of my time) and actually make sure they got the money. He was scrupulously honest. That guy, I am sure, made not one cent on whatever he did. So, there were all types.

My favorite was the Province chief, Col Ton That Khien. I really liked him. He was very well educated. He had come from Hue and clearly from an important family. His wife was a school teacher. He and I worked one little sort of illegal deal. He got paid almost nothing -- and had no entertainment allowance -- and yet was expected to entertain all the time. The way that he did that was to use the officer's club at Division Headquarters of ARVN, about a mile from our own offices. So one of our "AID programs" was to donate 4 or 5 cans of cooking oil per month to the officer's mess, and that paid for his tab. That was not legal, but I am sure it was in the cause of good.

Q: You had a very effective Viet Cong military organization, a battalion...

DILLERY: The 48th was famous and found very effective ways to keep us off balance almost all the time I was in Quang Ngai. We also had a North Vietnamese division headquartered in our province so the military pressure was pretty strong for most of the 22 months I was there.

Q: What were you doing with all this enemy military around?

DILLERY: We were working with the Vietnamese authorities to try to provide normal and perhaps some abnormal services to the communities. We were trying to work with the farmers to help them with irrigation problems; we were building schools and developing teachers; we were trying to work with the police to provide security; we were training regional and popular forces so that they could provide military security.

It turned out that one of the things that really helped was to provide US military security to a hamlet or village for a short while to allow them to establish their own village structure and security system. During the last few months of my stay the Americal Division was very helpful in letting us use their units to just stay in a village for a few weeks. That gave the local authorities a leg up and really worked well.

Let me back up and say this. Clearly the Vietnamese peasant didn't care whether it was the government of Vietnam or the VC in charge in their area. What they wanted was to be let alone. So they didn't particularly like either side. We were trying to give them positive incentive to support the government by building roads, etc., while the VC was mostly punitive and would shoot people who didn't support them. The VC also collected taxes and the peasant didn't see much benefit from that money. Their big argument, of course, was that they were fighting against us and we were the foreigners. However, the peasants would have preferred not to have either of us.

So our job was to try to provide them with the wherewithal and training to carry out these positive activities. We were working with the bureaucracy. Mostly we weren't very much on the ground with the actual people, although in the districts our guys were cheek by jowl with them doing small AID projects like dams and water. In headquarters. We would be designing the projects and submitting proposals and getting money for them.

Q: We are talking about the time you were there. How effective did you feel you were?

DILLERY: I would say that we were beginning to figure out how to promote GVN authority and control over larger parts of the Province. One of the really important aspects was the American military and remember they were moving out. This was in 1968 and just after I arrived Nixon gave the speech about withdrawing the Americans.

But the Americal Division developed into a very helpful force. When I arrived in Quang Ngai, the Province Senior Advisor would go to Chu Lai -- the Division HQ -- about once a month to talk to somebody in the division to find out what they were doing. They would be curious about what we were doing. But basically they saw the whole thing as a military situation and all that they were doing had to do with "what do you do to deal with these military forces" and whatever happened to the civilian people and structures in between was too bad. They didn't think very much about the activities of life that were going on.

But this changed. By the time I left, and this is not necessarily due to me, the Assistant Division Commander was coming to visit us every week and he was finding out where we were building schools and where we were running agricultural programs and he was telling us where they were going have an operation or to do the B-52 strikes. We would say not to do them there because that is where we are building a school.

As you know, our military were very committed to the "body count" philosophy. They would do "Arc Lights", B-52 strikes -- which by the way we could feel in Quang Ngai City even when they were miles away from us. Then a big job for the Americal was sending out units to find out what the body count was -- this was called "exploiting" the Arc Lights. The VC was very happy with our military chasing around the jungle because they could take pot shots at our forces.

In the latter part of 1969, the Division changed their emphasis somewhat and gave us military support as I described. This did provide real security for villages and farmers and just kept the VC out so they couldn't get in at night and take money and give political harangues. The Division also set up Fire Bases with semi-permanent establishments and artillery which could be used over large areas.

As a result of this strategy, the VC appeared to become somewhat lethargic in the jungles and our area of influence kept going farther and farther out. When the VC could not move easily and didn't have the excitement of battle, they seemed to lose some zip. We would find that if we could provide fire support and fairly small American presence in some of these farther outlying areas, that we could neutralize it. The VC couldn't move around very much. Basically our fire power was such that whenever there were big units we could handle that.

So during my period we saw things from that very tense period in 1968 get quieter and quieter until 1969 when there was very little military activity. Maybe the VC were just waiting to see us leave. But during that period the Government kept going farther and farther out in the Province. I can remember the airport, which was about five miles outside of town, was so bad when I first arrived that the VC used to shoot at our little airplanes coming in. We didn't get many visitors because of that.

A little while before I left, the Province Chief called and said, "I want you to go out to a village with me." "Where is it?" "Fifteen miles past the airport -- It used to be even further into the mountains." None of us had ever set foot out there before. We drove out there and saw some of the structures being built with our materials. Col Khien said, "I want you to meet the Village Chief." I said, "This village has only been here for two weeks, who is this Village Chief?" "Oh," he said, "he's the VC Village Chief, but he has looked at the situation and decided to come our way." So I took that as a sign that we were making progress. Progress maybe should be in quotes because the point was that it required a sustained American presence to provide the security. So it was illusory if you had to depend on the ARVN to provide that security that the Americans did. The bottom line was that we did provide security for the time I was there.

Q: How did you find the young Foreign Service officers without their wives and family were responding to all this isolation?

DILLERY: We had about five of them. The youngest one whose first assignment was out there and who has done quite well was George Moose. He already had the language and became the Political Reporter for the Province. He was single as were most of the young officers. But several members of the team had families in safe-havens -- the Philippines, Thailand and Hong Kong. They visited them every couple of months.

Q: Moose is now the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs.

DILLERY: Yes, and several times an ambassador. What I tried to do was...first of all there was a little bit of Foreign Service kind of work to do. We tried to encourage internal political reporting on what was going on in the province. George did that and did a fine job. We used him because of his Vietnamese ability. Larry Colbert, who is currently our consul general in Tijuana, was another young officer there and was our refugee person. Paul Barbian was one of our district people. I think he left the Service. There was disillusionment because they didn't see this as what they had come into the Service to do. Because it was their first tour I tried to get together with them as Foreign Service officers and tell them that it wasn't going to be like this. But there were a lot of things that were the same as regular Foreign Service work. We were trying to get foreign officials who were sovereign to do what we wanted them to do what we thought was best. And a lot of what we do in the Foreign Service is that.

You have to remember that we were all assigned to AID. I don't remember what kind of arrangement it was between State and AID, but I remember getting overtime, the only time in my career that I got overtime. We did have one lovely time when Cecil B. Lyon, a real old-line FSO, came to be our inspector. He came to our province partly because we had four or five FSO's at

that time. He was staying at my house and we all gathered for dinner. I remember we scored points with him. He was getting along in years by that time, so about eight o'clock we were all sitting around after dinner and he said, "Well, gentleman, I will retire for the night, we have a big day tomorrow." He went upstairs. About 8:30 the Province Chief fired off a couple of illumination rounds from his mortar which happened to be right next door. Down came Ambassador Lyons wearing an elegant dressing gown and said in a somewhat excited voice, "What was that?" "Oh, that was just outgoing", we said. "Oh, oh," and he went back upstairs. Later each of us got a handwritten letter from him saying, "Really proud of you guys out there under fire."

Q: Everybody was reporting. No place has been reported down to the village level more than Vietnam on our part. You had the CIA doing it, the military doing it, AID doing it, your people and then the embassy people. Did you have province reporting officers coming out from the embassy to take a look around?

DILLERY: During my time we did not. I know that later or even earlier they did a lot of that, and possibly more in II or III Corps. Remember there was a Consulate General in Da Nang.

Q: I don't think it was a full fledged consulate general at that time. Terry McNamara was the consul and he was technically under me at one point, this was 1969 and it was sort of a consular office or something. It was raised to the status of a consulate.

DILLERY: There was somebody there when I first came and then Terry came at the end of 1968. So I had a lot to do with Terry. In addition to that we had CORDS regional office in I Corps. Chuck Cross was the head of that. He was a Foreign Service officer too. Russ Olson was his assistant. So there were several Foreign Service officers in Da Nang and we did quite a lot with them. And the consul did some reporting. That was our connection. There wasn't anything from Saigon.

Q: What was your impression in your area of the CIA operation?

DILLERY: Well, the CIA, of course, was heavily targeted towards the VC. They were trying to identify the VC cadre and agents through the Phoenix program. They had a lot of sources out among the VC. They really didn't intersect much with us. CORDS you will remember was founded from the old pacification program, the military advisor, the Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), etc. So while the Phoenix program was nominally part of CORDS, they were pretty independent in what they did. They did not brief us a lot on their reporting. We saw results from their actions and occasional reports from sources.

Q: But you weren't in the position of calling in strikes and that sort of thing?

DILLERY: Well I wasn't but our District Advisors, all but one was military, did call in artillery and air strikes to support regional and local GVN forces so the Advisory Team did in a way.

Q: Did you have anything to do with the news media? Were they around much?

DILLERY: We did when My Lai broke. We had a reporter once before that in early 1969. Around Christmas time 1968 we organized an operation involving the ARVN, the Americal Division and a Marine unit to try to flush out and surround the 48th Battalion. The concept was to use five battalions to surround the area of the 48th and then close the net. Our part of this operation was to avoid an incident like My Lai.

For this operation we tried to get all of the civilians out of the villages that would be impacted and move them to a temporary camp we built for them. We ended up with about 12,000 people in the temporary camp. After things quieted down a bit, we moved them from that camp out to the sea side, which was only five or six miles away, and then back to their own villages after it was all over. It was about a three month process. During this time the VC got a story out that we had taken these people out to sea and thrown them overboard with chains tied to them to drown them. A reporter came to look into that report. I talked to him and disavowed that as happening. I was on national TV for about 15 seconds as a result of that. A moment of fame.

And then when the My Lai story broke in late 1969, a lot of press came. The most notable was Henry Kamm of the New York Times who arrived in Quang Ngai just at the time that the My Lai story was breaking. He stayed in my house because there was no other place to stay. So he was calling in his stories from my house at the same time the story was breaking. It was a little bit sensitive dealing with him, but he was a good guy.

Q: What was your role during the My Lai investigation?

DILLERY: My own experience on My Lai was in mid-November, 1969, (I was going to be leaving Vietnam about the 15th of December) I was in my office doing some routine work, and all of a sudden one of the staff came in and said, "There is somebody here from the OSI." A Mr. Feher, a very imposing person, came in and I thought, "Uh oh, they have caught me misappropriating funds." I had a little slush fund of about a thousand dollars a month. You weren't supposed to use it for labor but it turned out that one of the better things we did was repairing pot holes. So I used some for that. That was the only thing I could think of.

Anyway, Mr. Feher came in my office. He had a dossier about six inches thick which were the pictures of My Lai and reports about the incident. Looking at those pictures caused me to...it was like a light bulb going on...in about a tenth of a second to remember all these rumblings about operations in Quang Ngai in 1968 -- the same ones you said you always had heard -- and I realized what had happened. I said, "I Better go talk to the Province Chief about this."

So I took the file and went upstairs to see the Province Chief. It happened that the Son My District Chief, that is the district in which My Lai is, was in the building there for a meeting. I showed Col Khien the pictures and said we had something very serious on our hands here. He called the District Chief out of the meeting and they began to talk. I didn't speak Vietnamese but I could tell they were saying numbers of casualties bigger than anything I had seen in the dossier. He said, "What should we do?" I said, "Well, my first piece of advice is don't try to cover this up because if you do it is going to be worse as it is out now. I can tell you in America you get into more trouble if you try to cover it up than if you just go with it and let people have access and find out what really happened, bad as it might have been." He actually followed that policy for

awhile.

Then it turned out that the investigator wanted to interview the people who had been involved. He did that at my house. This was a little bit of a drawing room comedy because Henry Kamm was there. I didn't want Henry to be in the room with the investigator and the district chief, etc., so I had to move one group into the living room and another gently out -- but it worked out OKAY.

Mr. Feher stayed for a couple of days. I hadn't been in Quang Ngai when the incident occurred the time of the incident, but it turned out that a number of my close associates were implicated, at least in the reporting on the incident. Our Deputy Province Senior Advisor in 1968 was Lt. Colonel Bill Gwynn, a good friend and a superb officer. He was cited in the final reports on the incident in connection with the reporting on the incident. He was a good friend and good guy.

There were a lot of questions about the "cover up" of the incident. I must say that it was well enough covered up in 1968 and most of 1969 that I didn't know anything about it. I did testify before the Peers Commission, General Peers, who carried out the investigation of the cover up. I told them everything I knew which wasn't very much.

I had been in My Lai several times because the Province Chief took me out there a couple of times in 1969. I remember being in a meeting with the My Lai villagers and listening to him talk to the people. It wasn't anything particularly different than being in any other village.

Q: Could you explain what My Lai was?

DILLERY: Sure. My Lai was the incident in January or February, 1968 where an Americal Company headed by Lt. Calley was on a mission in the Batangan Peninsula, about 15 miles east of the capital. The Americans came to the village of My Lai and for one reason or another killed a large number, said to be possibly over 500, Vietnamese villagers. The incident really was one of those things that led to the American public's final negative reaction to the Vietnamese war. It was a very, very powerful public relations event. It was a real tragedy.

To put it in perspective, it happened just a couple of weeks after Tet and this particular company was brand new having just arrived in Vietnam. By the way, remember the Americal Division was made up overseas, it had never been formed in the US and wasn't a traditional one. So everybody always said it lacked a little bit of cohesiveness.

Calley was not very secure in his leadership. The Company had been told they were going to run into strong opposition in this village -- from the 48th Local Force VC Battalion. They also had been told that there would be no civilians present since all would be at the market in another village -- but they did not go to market that day. It looked like panic just took over. The Americans just started shooting and it went on from there.

Then there was no reporting at the Division level about the incident. Members of the Company and a photographer who accompanied them did try to raise the issue but inquiries did not get very far. As I mentioned earlier, there were several investigations -- even Major Colin Powell

conducted one -- and there were questions afterwards, but the story didn't break until late in 1969 when it became a major political issue in the United States.

Q: Is there anything else you want to mention?

DILLERY: No, I think we have covered it all.

Q: You left when?

DILLERY: I left in December, 1969. I returned to Washington and was assigned to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

Q: One last question before we break. When you left Vietnam, how did you see wither Vietnam?

DILLERY: I guess I was discouraged because I did not see the will on the Government of Vietnam side that there was among the VC. There were really four groups, Vietnamese government/military forces, Communist security/military forces, VC supporters, and the peasants. Despite all the things we had done, I don't think there was a broad base support for the Government of Vietnam as such, whereas there was a small amount of support for the VC which was dedicated and passionate. So I left with the sense that the departure of the American security forces would have negative effects. I didn't see the total end of it at that time.

MORTON R. DWORKEN, JR.
Vietnam Training Center
Arlington, VA (1968-1969)

Military Assistance Command Civil Operations
Saigon (1969)

Member, Principal Advisory Team
Phoac Long (1969-1971)

Mr. Dworken was born in the District of Columbia and raised in Ohio. He was educated at Yale University and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). Entering the Foreign Service in 1968, Mr. Dworken served abroad in Taipei, Saigon, Phoac Long, Vientiane, Athens, Port Moresby, Ankara, Canberra, Wellington and London. In several of these assignments he dealt with Political-Military Affairs. In his several assignments at the State Department in Washington, DC, he also dealt primarily with Political-Military Affairs. Mr. Dworken also served on Capitol Hill as a Congressional Fellow. Mr. Dworken was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2008.

Q: Okay. Unless there is something else you want us to say about your period at SAIS, maybe we should talk about your coming into the A-100 class at the Foreign Service Institute, when was

that?

DWORKEN: It was in the summer of 1968, and of course the Vietnam issue was uppermost. I'm told by colleagues who saw me at the assignment session at the end, when many of us had our parents with us, that I appeared to them to be dumbstruck when I was in fact assigned to Vietnam, to the CORDS program, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, the AID piece of it. (I was detailed to AID and assigned to MACV/CORDS.) I guess I was shocked, because I still believed that this wouldn't actually happen.

Q: Even though there had been a lot of preamble?

DWORKEN: Yes. And I can remember as part of our class activities, we had a couple of meetings with Director General John Steeves. I can remember a session where we went over and over with him the fact that some of us did not want to go.

Q: To Vietnam?

DWORKEN: To Vietnam. And I can remember asking him, even though I had the ambivalence that I mentioned to you earlier about wanting to go and experience it, but not being sold on the activity. I can remember asking him, "Why is it that the Foreign Service didn't give officers a choice?" And I can remember him just looking up from his chair and saying to me and to those of us who had concerns, "But you do have a choice, you have a choice every day, you can go where we send you or you can leave." His presentation stuck with me to this day, and of course, it has become salient again with Foreign Service Officers being assigned to serve in the pacification efforts, the provincial reconstruction efforts, and the embassies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Q: In all of these oral histories that have been done over the years, there has been a lot of discussion about the A-100 class. I don't think you need to particularly go over that, unless there is something special you want to say about your experience in those 10 weeks. Did you have a foreign language when you entered the Foreign Service?

DWORKEN: I had French, to some degree. I had taken some at Yale and had spent a summer on a traineeship with a construction company in Toulouse. I think I took a year and a half, maybe two years at SAIS. I passed the French requirement for the Master's program.

Q: And you passed the Foreign Service language requirement after entering in French?

DWORKEN: Yes, I did. The course work in the A-100 class at that time led directly into another two weeks of consular training as well; it was pretty standard at that time that the two were combined. Not all of us obviously went off to do consular work. There was, I should mention, a fourth officer who was sent to Vietnam as a Vice Consul to the embassy in Saigon. There were 3 of us detailed to AID for field work in CORDS.

Q: So after you finished the A-100 class, you went into what was probably then called the Vietnam Training Center and learned Vietnamese?

DWORKEN: Yes.

Q: For six months or more?

DWORKEN: I did the whole 48 weeks of language training at the Vietnam Training Center in Arlington Towers in Rosslyn, just above the garages. That was quite a program. It was mixed military and civilian, inter-agency, primarily a language program, but there were also course work and instructors from area studies and country studies, culture, and music. We also did weapons familiarization across Key Bridge in Georgetown at the old car barns in the basement of the D.C. Transit Building. I don't even know if the building is still there.

Q: I think the building is there; I'm sure the firing range is not.

DWORKEN: I think it's part of Georgetown now, isn't it? I think they've taken over a lot there.

Q: Georgetown University?

DWORKEN: Yes, for some kind of community center and food court. In the basement were firing ranges, where we became familiar with M-16s, shot guns, pistols, and various other kinds of individual weapons. And we also had time at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

Q: How long were you down there?

DWORKEN: Less than a week. We learned about counterinsurgency from the military's point of view, at the J.F.K. Special Warfare School. I later took a foreign internal defense correspondence course from there. We talked with Green Berets, learned about various aspects of their training, and watched field displays, but the bulk of our training was in Arlington Towers and, as I said, the bulk of it was language studies.

They had an intriguing approach to learning a language. I had a very high language aptitude that placed me in the top cluster of students. We were divided by our aptitudes to begin with, and then thereafter, we were divided by achievement, tested on a regular basis. We stayed together as a group (the three, four, five, six of us students), and the teachers rotated around. Every six weeks, they would give an examination; if you passed the exam, whatever the cutoff level was, you stayed in the language course, and if you failed the exam, you went to Vietnam.

It was a wonderful incentive to do well enough to stay above whatever that cutoff line was. Even with my high language aptitude, I was by that time not all that interested in going quickly to Vietnam. I had another one of these attitude changes, and my position in the pecking order of classes plummeted step by step, until I needed to stay just above the line each six weeks; I succeeded in doing so until I finished the whole course.

Q: If you'd done even better, if you'd excelled in the six week progress checks, that would have shown too much commitment or enthusiasm for what you were going to get into?

DWORKEN: I don't know, I think I learned there was a certain measure of effort that needed to be done and that was sufficient, and I just went to that level. You're right, there wasn't any great prize for being outstanding. I later learned that there was a cost of sorts, or depending on your point of view, a benefit: the more foreign language fluency you had, the more employable and professionally competent you were.

Q: More effective?

DWORKEN: Yes, I did find that when I did get to Vietnam, I spoke well enough and more importantly, I understood well enough so that I turned out to be, of the civilians on the Provincial Advisory Team I went to, the most fluent. And so there were lots of occasions in which I interpreted for the province senior advisor, or at least I was present and able to tell him whether he was getting the full translation from whoever the interpreter was. I couldn't interpret myself, I wasn't that good, but I was good enough to monitor and to understand the stream of thought. I actually wished then that I'd had even more language training.

Q: But on the FSI scale, where were you when you finished training, do you remember, two or two/three?

DWORKEN: It must have been two in speaking, two-plus in reading. It was a hard, tonal language. I think I tested higher than that in both speaking and reading when I had been in Vietnam for a while.

It was funny, when I got to Vietnam, to find out that the Vietnamese I spoke was not just South Vietnamese, which is what we were taught, but it was even more particular. I was told that I sounded like a woman from a particular part of Saigon, called Cho Lon, which was the area of the big PX and commissary. In fact, I had been taught mainly by women who had come from that area and who had met American military officers, married them, come back to the United States, and become instructors at the training center. They had passed to me a way of speaking, forming phrases and sentences, and a vocabulary that indicated to South Vietnamese people exactly where I came from, or where they thought I did.

Q: In this period of training, 1968 to 1969, the Vietnam war was becoming even more controversial in the United States and American political life in Washington as well. To what extent were you and the other students hooked up in that, or were you kind of in your own little cocoon, your own little world, learning the language and something about the culture, or did the controversy about the war creep into the learning program?

DWORKEN: Oh, it definitely crept in, more than crept in. We were all residents of D.C., and we would have to have gone deaf and dumb not to register it. And over time, it probably crept into the way I approached my language studies, becoming more negative. I think the more I studied the history and realized that there were lost opportunities in and after World War II, and that we had under Kennedy interfered so much in their internal affairs with coups and secret efforts to influence people, the more my attitude turned negative toward our overall war effort. That's a side of history that was pretty well known at that time.

I guess over the course of my training for Vietnam, I became less and less positive about what we were engaged in as a nation, but I still had this feeling that I wanted to be a part of it, wanted to experience it, to see it for myself, and so I tried to keep enough of an open mind.

Q: To what extent were you at the Vietnam Training Center involved in other things that were going on at the State Department, or were you pretty much doing your training and very much interested and engaged in what was happening in Vietnam?

DWORKEN: I wasn't engaged in the State Department very much at all. We were, as you know, physically separate, and we effectively were not part of the bureaucratic structure in any particular way; people came to us and lectured and went away. I don't recall very much in any way visiting State, though I do recall between the A-100 course and the consular course and the beginning of the Vietnam Training Center that I had several weeks in the Department. I went in to the East Asian and Pacific Bureau, where I was an assistant to the staff aide, helping to run papers hither and yon, and if I'm not mistaken, the great crisis in Europe in August 1968 was Czechoslovakia, and a Bundy was in the White House and a Bundy was in the State Department.

Q: In the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

DWORKEN: Right, I think he was Assistant Secretary, and I can remember taking to him packages that I had assembled of telegrams and intelligence reports and papers from the Operations Center and reports off the various telecommunications machines. But other than that experience before Vietnam training started, I don't recall any interaction with the State Department.

Q: And, how about the rest of the Foreign Service Institute? Not really, you were a large but very separate –

DWORKEN: Because we were physically in another building, I can't recall any FSI connection to the Vietnam Training Center. We were FSI/Vietnam Training Center, but we could easily have been 50 miles away from FSI.

Q: And in the period that you were there, there were considerable numbers of military or Defense Department personnel doing the same training?

DWORKEN: Yes, and as I later learned, the advisory teams at district and province level in Vietnam and in the four corps areas were very integrated and mixed.

Q: Integrated from different agencies?

DWORKEN: Yes, the State Department, USAID, the U.S. Information Agency, the Department of Defense, and the Central Intelligence Agency all had representatives in those language sections, I believe. They were mixed in amongst us and there were all ranks. Anyone headed for the pacification effort from colonel on down, all officers and the civilian equivalents in those other agencies and departments were all mixed together. It was great. Those were connections we kept while we were in Vietnam together, and some of them continued afterwards, and it was

very good team-building.

Q: Actually you knew what CORDS stood for, I'm glad. So, say it again.

DWORKEN: Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. The 'Civil Operations' part of it goes without saying, especially since it is currently understood in the context of Iraq and Afghanistan. But the 'Revolutionary Development' term was a replacement for an earlier term, 'rural development,' and in effect was taken from the Vietnamese government, which had a specific program by that name. Now, whether we encouraged the Vietnamese to call what they wanted us to do 'revolutionary development' or not, I don't know. But we were supporting the government of South Vietnam's development effort. There was a military four-star general in charge of MACV, and one of the deputies was a civilian deputy commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam for CORDS, or DEPCORDS for short. That was Ambassador Robert Komer at the start. Later, it was Ambassador William Colby during my time.

I can't recall for certain whether we got our specific province and district assignments from CORDS Headquarters in Saigon, but I think that was the case. But we did spend some time in AID Headquarters in Saigon (now known as Ho Chi Minh City), some time in MACV military headquarters there, and time in the embassy as well.

Q: Now were you, you say "we," there were several of you that were part of the class, a group that had come out of the Vietnam Training Center together?

DWORKEN: Yes. Some of us were in the same numbered CORDS class; I think it was CORDS XIII. But there were also people who joined up with us so that we were all arriving in Vietnam at that point.

Q: But all of you were really coming out of the Vietnam Training Center?

DWORKEN: Yes. And we had specific training in what for me turned out to be a province advisory team job, and others had specific district advisory team jobs, and we also had training on internal political reporting, from a fellow named Cal Mehlert, who was in the internal part of the political section in the embassy in Saigon.

Q: Where was that training done?

DWORKEN: This was in Saigon in the embassy. They taught us what they wanted and made it clear that they wanted it from us directly, not through the CORDS hierarchy. It was straight political reporting, with an emphasis on biographic reporting, reports about the province and senior people in the governmental and social structure of the province or district that they were interested in.

Q: About how long did you stay in Saigon?

DWORKEN: About a week.

Q: And then you went to your province.

DWORKEN: Yes.

Q: Which was?

DWORKEN: Phuoc Long. The name of the province is usually the name of the capital city of the province, unless the locals use another name. Many people knew the name of the province and the capital city that I went to as Song Be, since the Be River ran around the edges of the province capital city and through a significant part of the province. Many Vietnamese called it Song Be Province rather than Phuoc Long.

Q: And where was this province in relationship to Saigon?

DWORKEN: I would say almost due north from Saigon about 100 miles, up near the Cambodian border at the southern end of the central highlands, but not in the military region that contained most of the central highlands. Vietnam was divided into four military regions from the demilitarized zone south, and I was in the northernmost corner of III, up against the bottom end of the central highlands and the Cambodian border.

Q: What was the terrain like?

DWORKEN: Not highland. There were some karst formations, limestone, that were sizeable in the northeastern part of the province as it abutted the central highlands, but it really was lowland and primarily covered with forest and jungle. There were some plateaus and some deep ravines and so on, and there was one mountain that was very prominent right on the edge of the province capital called Nui (mountain) Ba Ra. There was also a similar mountain in Tay Ninh Province called Nui Ba Den; they were sister mountains, and there were no other mountains like them, cone-shaped rising out of upland plateaus.

Q: And the river you mentioned, the Be River that went around the capital city of Phuoc Long?

DWORKEN: Yes, it curved around the capital city. The city itself was on a raised plateau, so there were edges and if you went over the edge, you were down in the river. It wasn't fortified, but it was defensible, and I recall, perhaps imperfectly, that the local airstrip was one of the streets in that part of the city. An airplane could run right along the edge of this plateau. [When I returned as a tourist in 2009, the topography of the area had been changed by a major dam on the Be River that created a large lake east of the city and Ba Ra Mountain and that altered the river's course away from the capital city.]

Q: Roughly what was the population when you were there?

DWORKEN: The whole province numbered just over 40,000, and the main concentration

(including the province capital and one district) had approximately 25,000, if I recall correctly.

Q: It was that small?

DWORKEN: I remember it being much smaller, but I checked my records and those were the numbers then. The province was the largest in land area of South Vietnam but the smallest in population. The people were clustered by that point in the war around the capital city plus a nearby district capital and the three outlying district capitals. They were all in little 'islands' that the government controlled with villages and hamlets nestled for security right up against them, and the rest of the province was very sparsely populated and owned by the bad guys.

Q: Viet Cong?

DWORKEN: Viet Cong for the most part, although North Vietnamese main force units were periodically, and later regularly, present in or moving through the province. The province was essentially one large set of infiltration routes south to the areas of Saigon and the regional capital of Bien Hoa. Those same units were much in the American news for battles in Tay Ninh and Binh Long provinces, which were our neighbors to the west in Military Region III.

There were French rubber plantations in outlying areas of my province, and when we flew over, you could see the straight rows of rubber trees, but it had been several years since anyone had been, on the government side, working those plantations. And that was all considered "Indian country."

Q: What was that region called that you were part of?

DWORKEN: It was just called MR III. (The military called it III CTZ or Third Corps Tactical Zone.) Bien Hoa was the headquarters for that. Saigon was in effect surrounded by Military Region III, and Bien Hoa was where we took our military and civilian instructions from, we Americans and the Vietnamese as well, because we were co-located and functioning inside their structure to a large degree. Ambassador Charlie Whitehouse was the senior civilian deputy in MR III (the Deputy for CORDS or DEPCORDS), later succeeded by Ambassador Funkhouser.

Q: You arrived there in late summer, early fall of 1969. Why don't you describe what the situation was? What did you find when you got to Phuoc Long, what did you do? Give us the setting.

DWORKEN: Well, our primary responsibility was to serve as advisors. We were a provincial advisory team, and the individuals whom we were advising were in the province government, from the province chief, who was a Vietnamese Army lieutenant colonel, on down. The U.S. had a parallel structure in Advisory Team 67, and we were headed by a U. S. Army lieutenant colonel. (It was Bob Hayden, as I recall, for most of my time, an artillery officer. Artillery was an important part of our military presence there.) I should add that in addition to the advisory team structure that I mentioned and a U. S. artillery unit that was specifically associated with a similar Vietnamese unit in the province capital, we had a brigade of the U.S. First Air Cavalry Division present in the province. It was in the nearby district that I described to you earlier

(called Phuoc Binh), and it also had a very large airfield on a Fire Support Base called “Buttons,” so there was a constant flow of aircraft in and out, and there were helicopters, helicopter gunships, and medevac helicopters based at that brigade headquarters.

We had those substantial American military forces very close to us, and in addition the Special Forces operated in the province, for two reasons: one, because of that North Vietnamese and Viet Cong presence I mentioned earlier, and second, because we were up against the Cambodian border. They were using, as I later found out, their bases in the province to operate cross-border. There were many things I didn’t know about our military activities in and from the province, until I was posted to Laos and was exposed more to the region-wide military, intelligence, and counterinsurgency effort that the whole U.S. government was involved in. I had a much more informed decision-making role there.

Q: In Laos?

DWORKEN: Yes. In Vietnam, I was quite a junior officer, pretty much in the dark. For example, whenever I was given information from an intelligence report about anything going on in the province, I was told it was from URSes or ‘usually reliable sources,’ and if I ever asked what a URS was, I was told that wasn’t any of my business. When I was in Laos, I was much more aware of who or what those sources were. For example, the Special Forces teams were in each of the outlying districts, with a B Team in the province capital area and A Teams out in the field. There was all this military activity, including combat patrolling, nightly artillery fire, and distant air strikes that we could hear or feel, and there was a significant amount of military attention paid to securing the province’s single land route south to Bien Hoa and Saigon. We civilians in the advisory team did not go on military operations and never used that road connection beyond the close-in district capital. When we left the province capital to visit the outlying districts or go to headquarters to our south, we always moved by helicopter or small aircraft, because the roads between the province capital, outlying district capitals and points south were just not safe.

Q: So what did you do and how were you able to do it?

DWORKEN: It was very difficult to move around, and that’s why I described that environment first; we were constrained and constricted by a whole variety of things, besides being culturally different and not speaking the language that fluently. Security was a big concern. Another was the disinclination of our Vietnamese counterparts to venture out much.

Our advisory team was focused on development and local security programs that the provincial government was tasked with performing. There was a whole range of things involved in development that we focused on, all the way from what now goes under the term good governance to agricultural production. We supported structures of government down to the lowest level of the hamlet and supported those activities that provided services from the national government to the people, such as providing local security and training security forces that were locally raised and locally equipped and that belonged to the villages and hamlets. That included the police but also a more substantial military activity involved with guarding the villages and hamlets, local self-defense forces backed by provincial military forces. And there was also a program to encourage those who had gone over to the other side to come back, to bring their

families back with them, and to support those people. And there was another program to take care of refugees from the rest of the province who had come in previous years and had clustered around those islands of government control that I mentioned earlier. This was designed to house and feed them, and to help their efforts to grow crops that would both support them and would eventually enable them to enter into the larger economy of the province.

That whole range of development activity was performed with the idea of not doing it ourselves but encouraging, prodding, guiding, and supporting the Vietnamese government officers, who for the most part were also military, into doing it themselves. The chief for development in the province was, I believe, a Vietnamese captain, and he and I were called 'counterparts.' I had lots of resources, including a civic action platoon that was under my guidance (not my command, of course), but I could guide it to work in a particular hamlet or particular village on a particular project, such as digging a well, putting up small school or medical structures, or rebuilding a hamlet, a bridge, a pathway, or whatever.

I had an imprest fund that was always replenished whenever it got low; it had several thousand dollars in Vietnamese piastres (dong) in it. We civilian members of the province advisory team had under our control stocks of bulgur wheat and cooking oil that could be provided. These were usually used by individuals or sold on the market to get resources to invest in other food that might be more likely to be used. I had irradiated rice seed to provide, as well as metal roofing, reinforcement bars, and bags of cement that we could provide for small-sized development projects like schools, clinics and so forth.

Q: Were you the first Foreign Service Officer, State Department member of this particular province advisory team, or had somebody been there before you that you'd taken over from?

DWORKEN: I must have had a predecessor in terms of having someone on the team providing development advice, but I don't remember knowing who it was, and it may have simply been an additional duty of others. I know I had a successor, but I don't recall meeting that individual either. There should have been handoffs, although that didn't happen with any regularity. We civilians were there for at least 18 months, six months longer than the military were there, in some cases it was longer than the Vietnamese military in that structure were there. There was more continuity in our small group of civilians.

Q: When you say a small group of civilians as part of this larger team, how many American civilians?

DWORKEN: The larger part of the team was composed of around two-plus dozen military. The civilians were led by Tom Wajda from State (and later, Ed Tolle from USAID) who was the deputy province senior advisor. We had a Chieu Hoi advisor (that was the 'Open Arms' program to get the enemy to come back from the other side), a public safety (police) advisor, a community development advisor, and a refugee advisor -- all from AID -- plus a couple of NGO people working on agriculture, refugees, and health and a couple of civilians who worked for military intelligence, but ostensibly worked for me on education, youth, and sports. That was about it. I was the Assistant Senior Advisor for New Life Development, the second-ranking civilian. Oh, we also got a civilian administrative officer from AID after I'd been there a while.

Q: So how many?

DWORKEN: Depending how you count, approximately ten. We were one of the smaller province advisory teams, and as I mentioned, there wasn't much population in the province, and the terrain mainly belonged to the enemy and was the responsibility of the U.S. military, not the advisory team as such. And from the Vietnamese government point of view, the province was not a high-priority problem. Mind you, at the end when South Vietnam fell, the province was the first province to fall to the North Vietnamese, because it effectively was a southern terminus of the Ho Chi Minh Trail after it had passed through southern Laos, the panhandle, and down through the eastern part of Cambodia.

The first province that the enemy conquered was the one I had worked in. At the time of that collapse, I heard that one village chief, with whom I had spent some time on various self-development projects, had been part of what was called the VCI (Viet Cong Infrastructure) all along -- for years, he had been playing a double game. This single village and its seven hamlets had been the total government-led presence closest to the Cambodian border.

Q: And you never suspected that?

DWORKEN: Never. I guess I had generalized suspicions about all kinds of things, but nothing specific, not at all.

Q: Did you travel frequently to the other districts; you say there were three outlying districts?

DWORKEN: I made several visits to them.

Q: And were there district advisory teams in each of those?

DWORKEN: There were. They were all military members and pretty small in numbers; there were no civilian advisors there, again a reflection of the security situation. I think there were Special Forces A teams as well in each of the three outlying districts. To go back into the history of the war, the southernmost of those district towns, at Dong Xoai, was largely over run in 1965 in a major battle that I was told was the basis for the movie, "The Green Berets." The other big incident was an attack on the province capital's joint tactical operations center in early 1969 during which the American province senior advisor and others were killed.

Q: Before you were there.

DWORKEN: Well before I got there. So, we went out to district capitals and the associated villages, my Vietnamese counterpart and I, and whoever else on the team needed to go on that particular visit. And I can remember in Duc Phong to the east eating food I don't ever intend to eat again, which was, I think, a great honor to be served. How shall I describe it? It was a duck that had all the feathers plucked off. It had been diced into the smallest possible pieces, bones, innards and everything, and then it was put into a kind of casserole and cooked for us. It was very crunchy to eat.

We civilians were not issued with arms, but as I mentioned earlier, we were basically familiar with individual weapons from the time we had at the Vietnam Training Center. We all felt we needed to be armed when we were outside the province capital and the adjacent district, particularly when we had to fly in helicopters over enemy-held territory, so we all made individual arrangements with military friends to get weapons that were no longer on property books. I was one of those who did that.

I found that we had advisory team things that were desired by the guys in the brigade of the air cavalry at the base near Phuoc Binh. One of those things was hot showers. And another was access to commissary goods, in this particular case, cases of frozen steaks. I should explain: The military members of the advisory team had a mess hall supplied through the military supply chain; we civilians could use that if we wanted to. But, their living compound and ours, while side by side, were not the same, and there was a fence between us. Mind you, we had an outer perimeter that encircled both of us and we had bunkers we could take refuge in if need be. However, our living and working spaces were not integrated.

We preferred our own small civilian mess, so we could have local-style food from time to time, and we contributed money to its operation, if I remember correctly, and also paid our own Vietnamese cook. With those funds, we went to the commissary in Saigon and bought supplies every couple of weeks (not our staples, because those were obtained locally or from the military, but fresh meat, frozen meat, some fresh vegetables, as well as canned goods and a variety of frozen foods and luxuries like ice cream and so on). And like in later diplomatic posts where being a nonprofessional courier got you out of a remote, isolated place into 'civilization,' the opportunity to take the "commissary run" to Saigon was something valuable that was rotated amongst us. We would fly down on a small Air America plane, a Pilatus Porter, which was the only civilian U. S. air service that came up there; the rest were all military controlled. One of us flew down to Bien Hoa, the regional capital, where we had made an arrangement with one of the staff to provide us with an International Harvester 'scout' vehicle. We would drive down the main highway to Saigon, spend the night in a hotel there, which was a great luxury, see a little bit of the downtown that evening, and then first thing in the morning, go out to the commissary in Cho Lon, where we'd buy a lot of frozen beef and chicken to last for a couple of weeks plus all the canned goods and Vietnamese produce (fresh, but all packaged). Most everything like that was frozen rock solid and crammed into this vehicle for a quick trip up the road back to Bien Hoa. We made sure to buy a couple of cases of beer that we provided to Air America staff to compensate them for making these additional flights for us, threw everything into the back of the airplane and flew right back to Song Be. The guys would be out at the runway in their vehicles, so we could get all this by then slightly melted stuff into the freezers in our compound.

I ended up trading several hot showers and cases of those steaks (that I bought) for a 38 caliber pistol, and the belt and ammunition to go with it, and an M-16, which I later discovered was actually made up of scrounged parts from several M-16s. None of these weapons was on anybody's property books, but we all felt it was better to have them for defense of our place or to take with us on helicopter rides in case we went down between districts. Most of us made a point of not wearing or carrying weaponry when we were in our advisory roles on the ground with people who were not armed; if they were armed, then we would take our weapons with us, and

we practiced with the weapons from time to time. There were two attacks on the advisory compound, both mortar attacks. I don't think there was any evidence there was a ground attack associated with those attacks, but we never knew whether or not that would be the case.

Q: Were there casualties?

DWORKEN: No, no one was killed; I vaguely recall there may have been minor injuries from one attack. There was some warning, and we were able to take cover in the bunkers. Our living quarters were not fortified. Some of us were in trailers, single or sharing; some of us were in the two prefabs that were divided into single bedrooms, each with a shower, toilet, and sink.

There was one very large incident which may have been an enemy attack, or I should say that we all thought it was, even the province senior advisor, the artillery lieutenant colonel. It was an attack on the ammunition for that combined artillery unit I mentioned earlier, and it set off the ammunition, so it was hard to tell from then on who was firing at whom, because all of this Vietnamese and American ammunition was 'cooking off,' and there were casualties from that. The U.S. province senior advisor awarded several medals after that night. It later turned out that somebody claimed that it wasn't really an enemy action, that it had been badly stored ammunition, so it was caused by friendly action, and the medals were supposedly not merited. That resulted in a visit by a Washington Post reporter who wrote about it, and there was a great fuss over that. I don't think anybody had a medal taken away, but it did not help the lieutenant colonel's career.

Q: We've talked about your assignment as development advisor with the CORDS Pacification Program in Phuoc Long province in South Vietnam from 1969 to 1971. What else should we say about that assignment?

DWORKEN: Well, there are a couple of things I would like to mention, about projects and activities that went on. One of the development activities I spent a significant amount of time and effort on, which was essentially part of that range of development activities I mentioned earlier, was specifically focused on the Montagnard tribe that was in the province. As with most of the central highlands and areas connected through the central highlands like the province I was in, there were Montagnard people, mountain people as they were called. They were not derived from the Viet Chinese invasion that occurred many hundreds of years before that pushed the people up into the highlands from the more coastal areas. The Montagnards were ethnically different -- more, if you will, indigenous to the area; noticeably discriminated against; less well off than the lowland Vietnamese; and more primitive in many respects.

There was in the province a small group of Catholic sisters that worked with the tribe, or the remains of the tribe, called the Stieng. [I checked in 2009, and there is still writing about them; they are in the country and also part of the refugee flow that has come and settled in the U.S.] But they were very primitive, and by comparison even with Vietnamese who had been rural and far away from Saigon and Bien Hoa for generations, still much less well off. The Sisters were trying to give them economic opportunities, and they had already started in their own very rudimentary way to take what was a Stieng custom of growing rattan and had tried to turn it into furniture that could lift the economic well-being of this tribe. Fashioning rattan is a very difficult

process, because it grows essentially straight and it needs to be bent, held, formed, and tied together in structures, and it also has to be treated so it doesn't fracture and destroy itself in very short order. They were doing all this by hand, and they were fashioning little side tables, little chairs, stools, and various things like that as well as very decorative things. They were also using rattan as the structure for some of their buildings.

There were more developed rattan-producing activities in other provinces, but they might as well have been in another world, because there were no safe roads, as I mentioned, to get product to market, and there certainly were no means by which the Stieng could go and get equipment. I was able through my AID connection to other province advisory teams to locate rattan-bending machinery up north in the second military region, up in Da Nang. So I flew up there and arranged for the shipment on U.S. military aircraft of rattan furniture-making machinery, and by the end of my tour, that machinery had arrived, and the Sisters were very pleased and were beginning to install and use it. I never stayed long enough to see the production stage, so I don't know whether the Sisters did accomplish that to benefit the Stieng. They were in an unsafe area and yet seemed to be safe.

Q: They were Vietnamese?

DWORKEN: Mostly, although I think there was one European woman there. It was a longstanding presence, but I never learned very much about them. They were dedicated to those people, and those people were dedicated to them. That tribe was also active in the local self-defense force that I spoke about earlier, so they were potentially a target, and they did have some bad incidents where they were attacked. They acquitted themselves quite well, the Sisters stayed safe, and hopefully this industry in some degree or another is still going.

Q: And you paid for the machinery out of the funds that were available to you for provincial development?

DWORKEN: Yes, and for the transportation, which was the other part of it, and for some supplies and oil that would hopefully keep it going for a while. The other thing that I should mention is that there was an effort to evaluate our progress. It was called the HES or Hamlet Evaluation System. It was a computer-generated listing of every village and every hamlet in every corner of South Vietnam, and we had our province's portion of it. It was an American project to get some numerical way of measuring progress or the lack thereof from a range of objectively observable situations. For example: Do the police sleep at night in the hamlet, yes or no? Of course, that required observation. Some of us advisors at province and the districts were from time to time obliged to make those observations, or when the situation wasn't secure enough, to take the word of the provincial and district government officials and other Vietnamese personnel who were there. In other words, there was a mix of not quite good data and reliable data that went into this. Every hamlet came out with a letter grade A through E (or F?), and there was a metric then to judge whether your pacification effort was making progress or not. Now this was formulated and assigned from on high; it wasn't adjustable by us. We had to make our local situations fit the criteria.

Q: And you would be the one to do that for your province?

DWORKEN: Yes, I was responsible for gathering the data and making the initial evaluation, but I recollect that the province senior advisor and his deputy were the final say on what the American evaluation would be. It was also a way of indirectly rating our counterparts, because this was our tool, but judging, in effect, their job performance. There have been many criticisms of that system, but it did gather data on a fairly regular basis.

Q: Once a month or something like that?

DWORKEN: I'm not sure, but it was frequent enough so that you could get snapshots, compare one to the other, and come to conclusions about the situation and needed assistance and training. I don't remember any earthshaking rises or falls in the HES evaluation for our province, but I think we were on a slow upward climb with lots of reverses, mainly dependent on the flow of enemy forces; at least it seemed that way at the time. When there were many North Vietnamese units in or moving through the province, when there was fighting and hamlets were being attacked, then obviously the security situation component of the HES and all the other associated pieces would go down. I think we had both ups and downs.

I should mention one other thing. While the battle during Tet of 1968 was the great shocking event internationally and in the United States, every Tet after that was a concern to us advisors. In addition to my South Vietnamese government counterpart (the head of development on the province chief's staff), I also had a local national Vietnamese employee named Muon who was my interpreter/translator and general guide and arranger, from the local community. He was with me or in my office every day, one way or another. He came to me before Tet of 1970 and suggested that it would be a good time to go on vacation.

Q: That you go on vacation?

DWORKEN: Yes. Of course, I didn't keep that to myself. It wasn't clear whether the threat was personal or more generalized, since all of us advisors were out and about, and we were vulnerable to targeting. I took advantage of that and traveled on leave to places I thought I would never see again. I went to Bangkok, Vientiane, Phnom Penh, Siem Reap (where Angkor Wat is), and to what was then called Sihanoukville, on the coast, with its port and unfinished hotel. Wonderful time.

There was a mortar attack on the advisory team compound and the province chief's compound while I was away. As I said, nothing on the ground, as far as we could discern, but that was good information he provided.

Q: Good time to be away.

DWORKEN: Yes, very much so.

Q: Say a little bit more about your relationship with your counterparts, there must have been several in the 18 months you were there. Was the Vietnamese army involved with development?

DWORKEN: Yes. The officers that I worked with were all from outside the province. Mr. Muon, who I mentioned earlier, was the head local national employee for me, and we had two Vietnamese women who worked in the office as well, in clerical positions. You might wonder what clerical work was going on and that gets me to the response to your question.

With my counterpart, a Vietnamese army captain, we were obliged together to produce English and Vietnamese versions of a province development plan, an American overlay on the French colonial practice of planning. It was a very intensive planning process, with a national plan, a regional plan, and a provincial plan. And we built from scratch the first provincial development plan for that in Phuoc Long Province. He had sections to write, the American advisors had sections to write, we each had to translate and conform the two language versions. We collaborated over many working hours in each other's offices on goals and objectives, what kind of inputs we would have, and all the other considerations. We produced something that was over an inch thick, with enough charts and graphs and what have you, and it was approved by the province senior advisor, the American lieutenant colonel, and the Vietnamese province chief, whose name was Luu Yem. In retrospect, it was more of a bureaucratic tool than a specific action plan that anyone followed up on.

Luu Yem was part Chinese. I understood that his family was in business, all in his wife's name, something to do with motorcycles, a Vespa agency in Saigon, and what have you. I don't know how much farther he got in the Vietnamese military; I believe he came out in the refugee exodus in 1975. We had a relationship that was more official than anything else. I was invited to the province chief's home on a few occasions, but I think I was there more as a Vietnamese-speaking American in the company of more senior Americans. I never went to my main counterpart's home; I was never invited. Nor did I ever visit my senior local's home, although I do recall a picnic at one point with our Vietnamese civilian staff.

We had visits from Ambassadors Whitehouse and later Funkhouser; those were the CORDS senior officers in MR III. I later worked for Ambassador Whitehouse in Laos; he was a great guy who I think is still around, but I'm not sure.

Q: I think he might have passed away.

DWORKEN: That's a shame. I went to those occasional senior U.S. officer visits to the province chief's house, so I had a fair amount of contact with the province chief in his area, but not much contact with other province officers than the development chief's staff and the development chief himself.

Q: You mentioned before there'd been little training when you first arrived in Saigon with the embassy in terms of reporting. How much political, biographical reporting did you do for the embassy? How much contact did you have with the embassy over the 18 months?

DWORKEN: Very infrequent. I had a little with the embassy, particularly with Hawthorne ('Hawk') Mills, who later figured in my work as well in Athens when he was DCM. Hawk was the Mission Coordinator in Saigon, a one-of-a-kind job as a super-executive officer underneath the two ambassadors in charge. I was invited to come down at one point to compete to be

Ambassador Sam Berger's staff assistant. I didn't get the job, but that was one time in the embassy. There were a couple of other times that I passed through Saigon and stopped in the political section, like when I went on that R&R leave I mentioned to you. I also went on an R&R trip to Hong Kong and another R&R to Sydney, Australia, so each of those times I was down in Saigon. The commissary runs did not provide much time for embassy contact, but I would make a point of stopping in to see Hawk and the internal unit of the political section when possible.

There were occasional bits and pieces that I picked up, biographics, information or evaluations of developments from this far-off province that had very little to do with Saigon. I gloried in the fact that we weren't anywhere near a flagpole. I didn't want to have all that much to do with Saigon, and there wasn't all that much reaching out on their part, either. There was one personal moment, when my parents decided they weren't hearing from me and called the State Department Operations Center. The next thing I knew, I had this radio telegram from the Embassy personnel officer saying –

Q: Keep in touch! (Laughter)

DWORKEN: Yes. That was a little embarrassing. I didn't write home as much as I probably should have, feeling it was enough to do the work from dawn to well past dusk. And a lot of it I didn't want to recapture on paper.

Q: I would suggest that we stop at this point, and when we start again, I would like for you to look back over the whole period and think of what it was like at the beginning and what it was like at the end and evaluate your impact or what, if anything, transpired in that longer period that we talked about. Does that sound okay, or is there anything else you wanted to be sure to say today?

DWORKEN: No. I will try and crystallize my views of that Vietnam period. The Laos period, I think we can do separately.

Q: Okay, it's now the 28th of March 2008. When we finished last time, we had almost completed our conversation about your assignment to the CORDS program in Phuoc Long Province, and I think you wanted to summarize a little bit your overall feelings about that assignment and what your view of Vietnam was when you left in 1971.

DWORKEN: Right, it was in the spring of 1971, and of course it's important to put one in that time frame, when the war was still going on and had several more years to run. I guess, as I look back at that time, I can recall a belief that what we were doing there was worth doing. It didn't seem futile at the time, just hard, even though futility, I think, has entered into the views of many since then. There were all kinds of difficulties, obviously, with security; there was some lack of popular support for the government structure that we were supporting, advising, and assisting; there were signs of corruption; there were signs of duplicity on the part of the people; and there was not, if you will, a national movement or resistance in the same strength and character that the North Vietnamese and their allies, the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, brought to the struggle. But as I say, it seemed doable.

General Abrams had come on board and had instituted a counter-insurgency strategy that did make a lot more sense than the strategy that General Westmoreland had been following. The CORDS effort was central to General Abrams's strategy, and we thought, those of us on the team, that there were signs of possibility and success. We undervalued, I think, the lack of support we had from the States, from the American people and the Congress; we undervalued the importance of that in terms of where things would be going. And we also, in a sense, lost sight of the power of the idea that the North Vietnamese and their allies in the South were putting forward, the idea of the unity of Vietnam and the exclusion of foreigners. That goes back to what I said earlier, when we talked about mistakes and the strategic errors we made, right after World War II in our dealings with Ho Chi Minh and with the French. There's a saying in Vietnam that when the elephants fight, it's the grass that gets damaged.

Q: Trampled.

DWORKEN: Yes. I know I left Vietnam with the feeling that we'd done a lot of trampling, no question about that. I also believed that by our involvement and actions, we had caused people who would normally have avoided the conflict to choose sides, that we'd been a catalyst to that choosing, and having done that, we had taken on obligations to the people who had chosen our side.

Now this is hindsight, of course, but the manner of our leaving a conflict like that is very important, and the manner of our going from Vietnam was flawed under President Ford and the Congress of that time. It was not part of any strategic plan, if you will. I have been troubled by that ever since. I'm still conflicted by it. I don't think in the final analysis that the United States should have been committed to Vietnam, but having been there, I wish that we had stayed with it in a more consistent manner. There's no question in hindsight that the manner in which South Vietnam fell to the North Vietnamese was a reflection of our past strategic errors and misjudgments. I don't have any hesitancy in saying that. I just wish that we had, as a nation, followed through more on our commitments as we were withdrawing, as we were in the process of Vietnamization over the course of the next several years after I left in 1971. Enough said on that.

In hindsight as well, I am afraid that we put all the whole-of-government experience and doctrine aside after the war and then unfortunately had to re-learn those lessons later when we fought in Afghanistan and Iraq.

JAMES B. ENGLE
Province Senior Advisor,
Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Phy Yen (1968-1970)

Director, Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1970-1973)

Consul General Nha Trang (1973)

Ambassador James B. Engle was born in Montana in 1919. He entered the Foreign Service in 1941 and served in Latin America and Europe, and was ambassador to Benin. He was involved in Vietnamese affairs both in the field and in Washington from 1968 to 1973. He was interviewed in 1988 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Now we move from Central America to what was then the hot spot of American foreign policy. This is 1968. You had gone to the Senior Seminar for a year, which is the State Department's equivalent of a senior War College. Then from there, you were assigned to Saigon. How did your appointment to Saigon come about, and what were you doing?

ENGLE: I was a volunteer for service in Saigon or somewhere in Vietnam. Actually, in February 1965, I responded to an appeal by LBJ to the Foreign Service for volunteers who could serve in CORDS. That was the pacification program, served mostly in the provinces, to assist in pacifying the Vietnamese population and organizing it so it could resist invasion by the North Vietnamese and the few Viet Cong that were left. I volunteered against the wishes of my ambassador, and it turned out I was the only senior officer in the Foreign Service who volunteered at that time.

A few months later, I was on home leave and went into the personnel department, and was interviewed as a nut, because I was senior and I wanted to go to Indochina. They asked me all sorts of questions about, "Are you getting along with your ambassador? Are you getting along with your wife? Any problems with your children? Are you in financial troubles?" Well, I apparently satisfied them on this score. They thought I was crazy.

The next day, they said, "AID agrees to take you, and we'll give you one of the four regional positions," which later were called Deputy for CORDS out in the country. These were the four leading positions in pacification under the U.S. ambassador assigned to MACV as the Deputy Commander of MACV, who was at that time Robert Komer. William E. Colby was his deputy after '67. I would have one of these senior positions, but they said, "You've got to get ARA to agree to release you," ARA being the Latin American Republics Bureau. "They've got to approve, which means your ambassador had got to approve."

I went to ARA and they said, "We'll let you go, but we have to get clearance from your ambassador." They consulted him, and then it came out -- something I didn't know -- that he was up for transfer to Guatemala as ambassador, and they said, "We can't let you go anywhere. You've got to remain there as chargé d'affaires. You've been there already two years. Until a new ambassador comes, and then when he comes, if you want to go to Indochina, you can go." So it snuffed that out right there.

When I got to the Senior Seminar more than two years later, I began working again to go out there on my follow-on assignment, even though ARA said they'd tried to get me back. I had to do this all on my own, working with a junior officer in personnel, and it was just this lack of

interest.

Q: *Why did you want to go to Vietnam?*

ENGLE: For several reasons, but one, I had been in military government in World War II, and I figured I had skills that I could use. I had a prominent role in the military government, even as a junior officer in the provinces. I could use these skills in Indochina. But besides, it was the old patriotic thing that I had had since I was a boy, of wanting to raise the flag, wanting to get into a war if we were in a war. I just had to be in it. And I even persuaded my wife and children to let me go, and I've got six children.

Q: *When did you go to Saigon, and what were you doing?*

ENGLE: I got there in July of '68, and the reason I was given the job was because Bill Colby was the head of CORDS at that time, had been in the CIA station at Rome when I was there, and we were friends and cooperated a lot together. He gave me a job, which was to be the head of one of the divisions of CORDS in Saigon. It was a reporting and analysis division that would analyze all the reports from pacification, put them together, send them to Washington, put them in a form that the commander out there could understand, and advise him.

After I arrived, it turned out I was only to be deputy chief, so I complained about this to Komer and to Colby, and when I left on visitation after four months -- you could come back twice a year to your family -- I said, "If this is not corrected, if I'm only going to be deputy chief of this division and kept in Saigon, you can count me out. I'm going to get another job. I want to be here, but I've got to have a more responsible position."

At that time, it was clear that when that lieutenant colonel who was in that job left -- he became a full colonel while I was there -- they were going to bring in another colonel to replace him, and I'd be deputy to the second colonel. I said, "Unacceptable." I was already a Class II. "I'm senior to him, and I want a more prominent role in the war."

While I was gone on visitation, Colby arranged for me to become province senior advisor in Phu Yen.

Q: *Where is Phu Yen?*

ENGLE: Military region two, on the coast north of Nha Trang. It was by far the largest military region.

Q: *You were working as a deputy on screening and consolidating these reports that were coming in. This has always been very controversial. There are all sorts of indices about whether a particular village was a class one, class two, or what have you. How accurate and how good a picture did you think was coming out of this? Or was this the typical bureaucratic thing, where everybody wanted to make sure that they looked good, so they were reporting what they felt was wanted, rather than a really accurate picture?*

ENGLE: The latter is more or less correct. The reports were usually too optimistic.

Q: This is almost an impossible tool to use, isn't it, to try to get real management techniques into a political situation, particularly when we have something at stake, would you say?

ENGLE: I wouldn't fault them for developing this device, which is called the Hamlet Evaluation System. It was a cleverly put together device, it was quite sound. I don't know that you could have done much better in putting it together, and it was done by Clay McManaway. He's since been in the Foreign Service; he's an ambassador now. You can't put together a bureaucratic device like this and expect it to work the way it should work if you've got a lot of the factors that influence the evaluation that you can't control.

The basic factor was that the Vietnamese counterparts, mostly the Vietnamese ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] officers, who were in the administrative posts and in the military posts that we dealt with for pacification, almost all the province chiefs were colonels or lieutenant colonels in the army, they were working all the time to look good. They wanted the evaluation to cover up the things that they weren't doing or not doing well.

One of the basic causes of their being able to continue this was that the American military and, I think, on the political side, too, we did not convince the Vietnamese adequately that they should be straightforward and should be doing their job. See, the Vietnamese more or less thought that the war was something for the Americans and the Koreans to conduct. This was the attitude of the province chief, for instance. They were just poor little Vietnamese, scrambling around to make ends meet, and to try to rake in money on the side, and to take care of the families and that sort of thing, instead of fighting the war effectively.

We were never able to persuade them effectively enough to do what they ought to be doing, to fight the war as well as the North Vietnamese were fighting it. There were a few South Vietnamese who were doing this, but the great majority, no. The few who were like that didn't fit in with their system and therefore, couldn't get ahead.

Q: When you came back and went out to Phu Yen, what did your job involve?

ENGLE: I was the head of a team, a military-civilian advisory team, and it had approximately 250 military men. A number of them were senior NCOs. The table of organization had 23 civilian positions, of which not more than ten were filled at that time, to advise mostly on the civilian side, the operation of the provincial government. Under me, I had six teams in the six districts, and the teams out there are within the number I gave you; that's the whole organization. They were with district chiefs. Each of these district teams under me was commanded by a major, and the last year, by a retired captain who was a civilian. Usually it was a major. Sometimes later we got captains. They had the same functions in the district as I had with my team up at province.

Our business was to help them conduct the war effectively through their military forces. The province chief controlled the so-called regional forces and so-called popular forces, and they were forces outside the regular ARVN. The ARVN was to deal with the main force threat, and

the RF and the PF, as they were called, were to deal with whatever threats came to towns and villages in the countryside. They weren't to be pitted against the NVA fourth division or whatever it was that was there, but with small units that tried to disrupt, and also to defend hamlets at night. Every hamlet was supposed to be defended at night when the North Vietnamese, with a few VC, infiltrated, trying to control the village totally just by being there at night.

The province chief controlled all the local forces, and then we also had the Popular Self-Defense Forces. All the rest of the men of all the villages and hamlets in the province were sort of conscripted into a force that was to help back up the RF and PF, because you ended up with maybe only four or five PF defending a village, and that wasn't enough. You needed other people who were armed, to support them. There weren't enough forces to go around.

So the total of these forces in Phu Yen province was 64,000 out of a population of 330,000. RF and PF were probably just several thousand; I can't remember the figure. The province chief commanded all this, and their effectiveness, in large part, depended on his command ability and whether he could get them to do the things they were supposed to do or not. This meant he had to be active militarily and give them proper instructions, give them proper orders, kick them in the behind if they didn't do their duty, and also to organize military operations to go out after these small units that were in the bush around hamlets, go after them, and provide intelligence so that we could get them with artillery fire. That required a lot of initiative, and the understanding and ability of the province chief was crucial to this whole thing.

Many province chiefs didn't have the understanding of this or didn't know how to command effectively, or took the view that was shared by so many other Vietnamese that really the Vietnamese shouldn't be very active in this thing at all, they should keep their casualties down, and not be aggressive. That was exactly the picture of my counterpart, who had formerly commanded a division.

Q: How long were you in Phu Yen?

ENGLE: I was in Phu Yen almost a year and a half.

Q: You came there just after the Tet Offensive in February of '68?

ENGLE: That's right. Then mini-Tet was in May. I arrived at MACV in July '68, and at the end of December or beginning of January, I was in Phu Yen -- '69.

Q: For the period you were there, what was the situation in the province? Was it under much pressure, or was it pretty much a matter of local pacification?

ENGLE: There were some pressures. At the beginning, there were less pressures than we thought there were. We thought there was a lot of pressure, but the pressure went down a great deal after Tet and mini-Tet, because there was large-scale fighting in Phu Yen. The Viet Cong infrastructure was almost wiped out. So therefore, their military threat was way down, and the North Vietnamese pulled back with our main force units. By the way, I want to make very clear

that the war was not a Viet Cong war; it was a North Vietnamese main force war, basically, and they used Viet Cong people just to infiltrate into hamlets and to form small units, usually having North Vietnamese soldiers with them to disrupt and to attack hamlets and things like that. It was basically a main force war.

When I first went there, they were still recovering from Tet, and we were trying to win back hamlets effectively. There was an organized campaign out of Saigon to do this in each of the provinces, and I arrived just as they were putting this counter-offensive into effect.

We very rapidly got hamlets back, to the point where in the end, only three or four hamlets out of 100-some we didn't have effective control over, at least in the daytime. So everything went well for several months, in spite of the ineptness of the province chief. This was, in part, due to the initiative of our advisory teams.

Q: How good were the teams that you had there, the military, and, particularly, the Foreign Service?

ENGLE: The team I had was generally rather good, but there were some persons of poor quality on it, both civilian and military, particularly civilian. These were civilians who managed to get hired off the street in various parts of the U.S. in the middle Sixties because we were desperate to have personnel out there, and we would hire literally anybody and send him to Vietnam at a good salary with allowances and a good life, and they weren't energetic enough and their quality wasn't high enough, in many cases.

I had to try to get rid of those people. It was hard to do, there were so many ways of self-protection. It was hard to get rid of them. The same way with the military. If you had a man who wasn't very good, it was really very difficult to get rid of him unless you wrote a report that would ruin his career, if he was a career military.

Q: Did you have any junior Foreign Service officers?

ENGLE: Yes, I had three junior Foreign Service officers, all of whom were absolutely first class. By the way, I want to say there were also some very excellent civilian and military officers there on this team.

Q: Did you have any problem within the Foreign Service of inspiring the junior officers to see what they were doing, or were they motivated? Was it difficult for them?

ENGLE: They were always highly motivated. There were three, including one young black officer. They were highly motivated, all of them were very successful, and they were all admired by their military colleagues on the team, those under them and those who were over them and those on the same level, let's say. They've done pretty well in the Foreign Service since they left.

Q: You left in 1970 to go back to the Department.

ENGLE: Yes, in May 1970.

Q: *What did you do in the Department?*

ENGLE: I returned to become Director of the Vietnam Working Group.

Q: *What did that involve?*

ENGLE: That was the equivalent of a country director, and it was, at that time, the most important country director in the Department. That managed the war from the point of view of the Department of State's responsibilities. Most of the conduct of the war, of course, was managed in the Pentagon, but we had important aspects. We managed the embassy in Saigon, for instance, which was on top of the whole structure. MACV worked for the embassy. General Hayden worked for Ambassador Bunker.

We had the relationships of America and its allies in other countries in regard to that war, and we had to put together the policy papers, and we had to deal with the congressional inquiries. As I recall, I was director for about eight months only, more than 30% of the correspondence in the Department of State with Congress, congressional correspondence, was on the Vietnam War. This directorate had to deal with all that correspondence, and we had only eight or nine officers to do everything. I had to personally do a lot of congressional letters myself.

Q: *How about the direction of the war from the State Department? Who was calling the shots, and what sort of shots were they calling?*

ENGLE: The most influential person was Ambassador William H. Sullivan, Bill Sullivan, ex-ambassador to Laos, who had had a lot of earlier Vietnam experience and worked with Dean Rusk on Vietnam back in the middle Sixties. He was the most important element in this whole picture.

Q: *What were we trying to do at that point? When you were there, how did you perceive the situation, and what we were going to try to accomplish?*

ENGLE: We were going to try to maintain aid to the South Vietnamese, and we were going to try to reduce American forces to the point where we could get out and leave them to manage for themselves. We wanted also to arrange an end to the war with the North Vietnamese.

Q: *In trying to work out policy and make policy recommendations, were you so involved in the day-to-day efforts, did you really have a chance to pull back and look at the big picture?*

ENGLE: We did. We probably should have concentrated more on the big picture than we did. We had a lot of fires to put out right on the spot. For example, we had to be involved with all the visits of the top dignitaries from Vietnam to the United States. That took a lot of time. We had to support visits by senior Americans to Vietnam, and literally everybody was going. I remember having to do many of the papers for Vice President Agnew when he went there. I think that was in the summer of 1970. This drained away a lot of our manpower.

Q: How about relations with the military back in Washington? Were you seeing eye to eye, or were there some different outlooks?

ENGLE: I would say more or less eye to eye. In part, this was due to the effectiveness of Bill Sullivan up above me, who usually dealt with a very high level in Defense, and sometimes with Secretary Melvin Laird himself.

Q: You had a short detour from Vietnam, working with David Kennedy.

ENGLE: Yes. When I was Director of the Vietnam Working Group, in February 1971, I was informed that David M. Kennedy, Secretary of the Treasury, was leaving that position to make way for John Connolly, and that President Kennedy was making him an ambassador-at-large, and the President wished to send him immediately to Vietnam and other places on a special mission. Marshall Green, I remember, called me. Marshall was over Bill Sullivan, actually. He said, "Could you go?" I said, "Marshall, that would take three weeks of my time, and in view of everything that's happening, I haven't got that much amount of time to spend on this thing. There would be great difficulty of this directorate in meeting its requirements." He said, "Yes, I agree with you." I recommended that a Class VI officer who was a staff assistant of Marshall Green be sent instead, and Marshall said, "Fine, that's what we're going to do."

Well, apparently he went back to Kennedy. I believe this is what happened. Or maybe it was decided high up in the Department by Alex Johnson or somebody like that. We couldn't possibly get by with this kind of a thing, sending a junior officer; it had to be me. So I was called up and told that I had to depart the next day for Vietnam and other points with David Kennedy in a special presidential aircraft. I hardly knew what was involved, except that we were going to spend a lot of time in Hawaii, Hong Kong, and Bali. (Laughs)

Q: You're really talking about moving Kennedy out and giving him a pleasant trip, for the most part, in order to get another political appointee, John Connolly, in?

ENGLE: No, it wasn't quite that simple. That's the way it began, but the ambassador-at-large was also to take on other missions for the President, and he went on from that, very soon thereafter, to conduct trade and currency negotiations. He was the first one to do what Yeutter and all those people have been doing just recently.

Q: So it was more important, but it started out as moving him to one side in order to open up a spot for another person?

ENGLE: Yes.

Q: Were you doing anything else in Washington or on these trips dealing with Vietnam that you think was of particular pertinence? You mentioned something about a site ops operation.

ENGLE: That was much later. At this time I was also in the special working group of the NSC for Indochina. In fact, I was the secretary of that working group. It dealt also with Cambodia and Laos. Bill Sullivan was the chairman of that working group.

Q: *What were your particular concerns?*

ENGLE: This was sort of a policy making group that reviewed the main developments in these three countries and made decisions as to what to do or recommendations to pass on to the President or the Secretary of Defense. It had Defense and CIA people on it; it had everybody on it.

Q: *What were the main issues you had to deal with?*

ENGLE: At that particular time, we were in the course of reducing our forces. That was perhaps the main thing.

Q: *So you were helping to monitor, to see how this was going?*

ENGLE: Yes.

Q: *This was the Vietnamization program.*

ENGLE: The Vietnamization program. By the way, I should have mentioned earlier that I was maybe the first one to implement Vietnamization. Back when I was senior advisor in Phu Yen province, I read in the papers that Nixon and Kissinger had adopted this policy to Vietnamize and, through that method, reduce our presence. As province senior advisor, I decided that I was going to Vietnamize right then and there on the spot, and I started Vietnamizing in Phu Yen by turning over responsibilities to the Vietnamese province chief and his forces. I got a lot of flak from higher headquarters. They said, "Just wait for your instructions." And it took a long time for these to get down there. Even months later, things hadn't been properly worked out up above. In the meantime, I was Vietnamizing all the time, for instance, turning over artillery fires from the Koreans to the Vietnamese. They would be responsible, and the Koreans wouldn't have that.

We had two Korean regiments, you see, in that province. By the way, I was the senior allied officer, so I was senior to their commanders. I could bring about joint operations of the Koreans and the Vietnamese. This is a way of teaching the Vietnamese how to fight. I'd be the catalyzer of this thing and, in effect, the person who brought it about and managed what they did, which was a unique situation in the country.

Q: *You went to Nha Trang. The peace initiatives had come after the cease-fire, which was when?*

ENGLE: The cease-fire was in effect January 27, 1973.

Q: *At that point, you were brought to Vietnam.*

ENGLE: I left the U.S. that very day, after helping Alex Johnson and Bill Sullivan draw up a plan that would involve expansion of Foreign Service posts out there. We were going to have four consulates general under the embassy, established at the headquarters of the previous four Vietnamese military regions. Among our responsibilities was to civilianize all U.S. interests in

each of these regions, and also monitor the cease-fire by observing the North Vietnamese, reporting how things were going in their contacts with the friendly side.

Q: You went to Nha Trang, which was the military district number two as consul general. What type of operation did you have there?

ENGLE: First of all, I took in ten TDY FSOs, junior officers, most of whom spoke Vietnamese, who served at least one tour some years before -- crackerjack, elite young men who were brought in from all over the world. I made one of them my deputy. We had to manage the phase-out of the U.S. military presence. We still had considerable forces there at that time. They had 60 days to get out completely, and we wanted to recover U.S. property that they had, and dispose of it properly, either appropriate it ourselves for civilian use, or turn it over by a systematic method to the Vietnamese for their use. In other words, not let it get out in the black market and things like that; do it the proper way to help the Vietnamese.

Then to establish a relationship with the Vietnamese authorities, mainly the military region commander who was a three-star general, and with province chiefs. I made the decision that I was going to maintain an American presence in every single one of the provinces, and that was 13 provinces. I had only ten FSOs to help me, so some of them couldn't go to provinces. A couple had to stay there. I had to use civilians inherited from CORDS to be present in the other places.

We phased down to the point where in some places, we had only one person. In of them, Quang Duc, I ended up with only one Vietnamese national as our presence, but under the American flag in the old headquarters. But I made that decision to stay in every province, and though there was pressure from the embassy at that time to get out of a lot of provinces, I didn't do it. I said, "It's psychologically important for the Vietnamese, if they're going to manage this whole show now, to have the American flag in every province and some place to go, with visits by me regularly to the Vietnamese authorities to reassure them. That's the only way they're going to stick together and have enough fortitude and will to resist the North Vietnamese who are still left there in position."

Q: How was it working? When were you in Nha Trang?

ENGLE: I was in Nha Trang from about February 1 to the middle of May, and then I was gone two months. I was recalled to Washington. I was to be chargé d'affaires in Phnom Penh. Then I went back for one week in July. But a lot went on in those three months.

Q: What were the major problems that you had to deal with?

ENGLE: First of all, I had to make the new Department of State operation credible to the Vietnamese authorities, make it clear that the United States wasn't leaving them totally to themselves, we were a capable organization, we could have liaison with them, they could come to us if they needed help, and we were there as an American presence.

I moved into the old commander's headquarters in Nha Trang, refurbished it to civilianize it,

improved its defenses, which were very poor under the military, with Nung Chinese hired civilian guards, and immediately established relationship with all the key Vietnamese in that region, whom I talked to about their problems. These were mainly military, regularly. That was one thing.

Another thing was the physical establishment, and that was to set up a new civilian organization with the Department of State at the core, and the Agency was there, too, and build their offices which were very secure, and build new communications facilities -- we brought Seabees in to do that -- establish a consular unit in it with a consular officer to deal with consular problems, and to make this work in a new Department of State framework.

We had property to dispose of. I should have mentioned that. All this property that CORDS and the military controlled, they left a lot of it just strewn around, without any accounting for it at all. We had to gather all that up and dispose of it properly. But I made this old military headquarters, which was a great mass of barbed wire, a very unattractive place, into a beautiful Foreign Service consulate general. You couldn't believe it. The resources I had that were already available, paint and paintbrushes, wire. I even had grenade screens built in with wire we had that the previous headquarters didn't have, and yet they were obscure. You couldn't tell from the outside that there were grenade screens there.

Q: These are screens to turn back a grenade that might be tossed into a window.

ENGLE: Yes. This was a very secure place.

Q: At the time you were there, were there any significant attacks within the district?

ENGLE: Yes, there was military action in a number of places, mostly in Kontum Province. One of my self-imposed jobs was to visit all of the armored garrisons behind enemy lines. I took a helicopter. Not even the Vietnamese authorities would do this. They were responsible.

I remember I had this columnist, Robert Novak. He's on TV all the time now, across from the editorial page of the Washington Post. He came to spend a couple of days with me, and I made a plan to give him all I could give him of what was happening, so he could get a complete picture. So he stayed with me, and I took him by helicopter to the 22nd Division and introduced him. I took him then to a combat zone in the northern part of Binh Dinh Province, where we had to be in shelters, and there was artillery fire going on at the same time. Then we flew back by helicopter to the 22nd Division and had another helicopter pick me up and take me to Kontum, where there was a lot of military action. We had Richard Mueller. He's now special assistant to the secretary. Richard was one of the junior FSOs who spoke Vietnamese well, and he actually rendezvoused with some North Vietnamese and talked to them and reported. They sent reports to me which I sent forward, and on the basis of that, I managed to persuade Washington to make him the junior officer of the year.

We picked up Richard Mueller who, in effect, was the counterpart of the lieutenant commander commanding Kontum Province, which was one of the most damaged provinces in the war, where an enormous amount of fighting took place. It was subject to a lot of B-52 action during the war.

We picked up Richard, and I went over with Richard to the province chief, a lieutenant colonel, and I persuaded him to go with us, to overfly North Vietnamese lines 50 miles back to Dak Pec, where there was a large garrison, isolated. Mind you, we were unarmed and we had too many people on this helicopter, and we also had a case of beer and some other things, I think maybe two cases, which I was going to give to the officers up there. We spiraled up like this and wanted to get above the range of the missile, and then we wound our way down to Dak Pec, which is very mountainous and you had these positions around in the mountains. I went around bracing up the officers, after having given them the beer, and talking to a lot of people there with Robert Novak. He appeared terrified.

This is one of the things I criticize the South Vietnamese for: the commander of those people asked for a ride back, and the province chief let him come out. He should not. He should have stayed there. That was one thing that was wrong with the way the Vietnamese did things. If you take the commander out, there was no morale at all left. He's chickening out, is really what it amounts to.

Q: After the Nha Trang experience, what happened to you?

ENGLE: I was recalled. I got a message from Ambassador Whitehouse, who was number two in Saigon at that time. He said, "I've just received a message here from the Department saying that Ambassador Swank in Cambodia, at Phnom Penh, and DCM Thomas Enders are both leaving. They want to know if you would be willing to proceed to Phnom Penh immediately and take over from both of them. We would merely have a chargé d'affaires." The background for that is that Nixon had just been defeated on the Cooper-Church Amendment, which was on Cambodia, and he was in the middle of Watergate, in a lot of trouble, he did not want to have another debate on Cambodia in the Senate, and so we were going to go with a chargé d'affaires.

I had to give an immediate response. I said, "Respond saying that I accept." They asked how long it would take me to extract myself. I said it would take me 24 hours in order to make my proper goodbyes to the Vietnamese authorities, and then I could go. Charlie said, "Wait 'til I get a response to your response."

MORTON I. ABRAMOWITZ
Staff Member, Senior Interdepartmental Group
Washington, DC (1968-1969)

Director, East Asia Division, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1972)

Political Advisor to Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command
Washington, DC (1974-1978)

Ambassador Abramowitz was born in New Jersey and educated at Stanford and Harvard Universities He entered the Foreign Service in 1960 after service in the

US Army. A specialist in East Asian and Political/Military Affairs, the Ambassador held a number of senior positions in the Department of State and Department of Defense. He served as Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research and as US Ambassador to Thailand (1978-1981) and Turkey (1989-1991). He also served in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vienna. Ambassador Abramowitz was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 2007.

Q: When you left E, you were assigned to the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG). How did that come about?

ABRAMOWITZ: That was probably the biggest break in my career. Sometime before I left E, this SIG had been established in the office of the undersecretary (later deputy secretary). It was an interdepartmental group consisting of all the deputy secretaries of those governmental departments and agencies working in the foreign affairs field. It was intended to oversee the coordination and implementation of policies decided by the president – not the development of policies although it was sometimes difficult to separate the two functions. The group was part of the National Security Council apparatus.

Nick Katzenbach was undersecretary at the time. He appointed as staff director Art Hartman, who had a lot of both intra and inter-departmental experience. He was an outstanding officer. Art got Claus Ruser to be his principal assistant; he was a GS employee with very good academic credentials as an economist. He had a wide ranging mind, who delved with gusto into many issues. He was like a vacuum cleaner. Claus and I had met sometime before and had chatted about a variety of subjects. When it came to filling out the SIG staff, Claus mentioned my name to Hartman, who then called me. This was probably early in 1968. We talked and Art subsequently offered me the job. For me, it was an unexpected gift; it opened up new vistas – Seventh Floor, interdepartmental issues, major policy initiatives involving the leadership of the Department and other governmental departments and agencies.

My job title was staff member of the Senior Interdepartmental Group, part of the undersecretary's office. One of my principal tasks was to participate in an interdepartmental study of our military relationship with South Korea. There was then increasing unhappiness in the USG with Park Chung Hee and his government. The working group was chaired by the DoD representative, Earl Ravenel, a deputy assistant secretary in the Office of System Analysis in the Pentagon. The work of this group became particularly important after the *Pueblo* incident. Our study started with an examination of DoD's requirements for the defense of South Korea. Somehow, I became involved in a study of naval requirements, particularly mine-clearing efforts. This allowed me to travel to a number of military bases in the U.S., looking at what clearing capabilities were available and thinking on the issue. I also got involved in an examination of economic issues relating to South Korea as well as beginning the study of North Korea.

My sub-group eventually got combined with that of another working group created because of the *Pueblo* incident. The administration, in light of that event, undertook a study of the general American defense posture toward South Korea. Joe Yager became the chairman of this working group which consisted of about five members from DoD and State. I had known Joe since he was

the DCM in Taiwan. I think that this was the first high level review of our relationship with South Korea for more than a decade. The questions posed were basic policy ones which was the reason it was under Seventh Floor supervision.

We finished our report in the spring of 1968 – I think. This was a time when our vision of Asia was essentially Vietnam. It permeated the Seventh Floor. We also had two divisions in South Korea and there was great concern about the potential for conflict on the Korean peninsula. The *Pueblo* episode was brought to an end when Cy Vance went to the Far East and sort of apologized for the “incursion” while leaving the ship in the hands of the North Koreans but getting the crew. Our report outlined and recommended consideration of a program for the withdrawal of our ground troops from South Korea over a five year period – no gentle policy. There were considerable differences over our recommendations, but I felt that the group had to issue a report which said something and caught the attention of senior policy makers to make them face up to the hard realities then existing on the peninsula, even if they did not accept the broad recommendation.

I spent full time with this working group for five to six months. As might well have been expected, the report went nowhere in great part because it ran into election season. It provided fodder for a lot of discussion; it was praised in various quarters, but the bureaucracy was certainly not going to do anything about it, particularly since it was the end of the administration. It was partly resurrected by the Nixon administration when it tackled the Korean issue as part of a NISM study. It may well have contributed to the development and implementation of the “Nixon doctrine,” whose biggest manifestation was the removal of one division from South Korea. The work of this group came in handy later on for me, when I attended the Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS) in London on a sabbatical, where I wrote an Adelphi paper urging South Korea to start negotiations with the North on normalizing relations between the two countries. I felt such a move toward dialogue would inhibit a U.S. effort to remove all U.S. troops while negotiations were ongoing – my theory being that the U.S. would not wish to undermine the discussions by withdrawing the troops making the South Koreans anxious about their future. I felt further removal of troops beyond the Seventh Division – much discussed at the time – was very dangerous.

Regardless whether our Korea report went anywhere, the process of writing it forced people to look at the situation in Korea, especially in light of a terrible incident – the *Pueblo* – which could have generated a war. Furthermore, our policy needed review in light of the sizeable Korean contribution to the war in Vietnam. It was likely the view of the undersecretary that the issues were likely to be considered from a fresher perspective than might have happened if the study was under the control of the regional bureau. I think in general that is the proper approach to issues that have been dormant, frozen, or unreviewed for prolonged periods. I doubt that people who have to deal with these issues daily can easily step back and analyze a situation with fresh eyes.

When not dealing with the Korean review, I spent my time dealing with minor policy issues which arose in the under secretaries’ committee. The staff would review it and submit some recommendations to Art first and then to the Deputy Under Secretary. I don’t believe that I worked on any really major issues during this assignment. Indeed, I felt somewhat underemployed initially, until the Korean study was launched. The undersecretaries’ committee

agenda was not filled with challenging items. Much was routine. Part of the reasons for that was that the U.S. government was falling apart at the time. Rusk was hardly talking to Katzenbach. Vietnam was absorbing everyone's time with much effort being devoted to defending one's views and attacking others'. The country was in ferment over the Vietnam War. The students were in a rage. It was somewhat akin to the recent atmosphere on Iraq. The exception today is that our military is highly regarded and respected unlike the situation in the late 1960's.

Q: How did you like working for Katzenbach?

ABRAMOWITZ: I did not see the undersecretary much until after the 1968 elections. After the elections, Larry Eagleburger, who was then Katzenbach's special assistant, and highly influential, was assigned as the Department's liaison to Henry Kissinger. When Larry left, Art Hartman recommended that I take his job for some uncertain time. (While a SIG staff member, I had an office on the Sixth Floor). I was happy to do that. I spent the last two months or so of Katzenbach term as his special assistant. Of course, I did not have Larry's cache during the ensuing two months, but I did what I could and had an opportunity to begin to get to know many of the senior officers in the Department and learn about some new issues. Since it was the end of an administration, it was not a very busy period; not much was happening. Indeed, the Seventh Floor was pretty dead.

My view of Katzenbach is limited. I don't know what role he played in the Department. But it was widely believed that he and Secretary Rusk had a difficult relationship, stemming from disagreement of what to do about Vietnam. Personally, I found him interesting, very smart, quite thoughtful, and a very nice fellow. I learned from just watching him operate even in this gloomy atmosphere. Since the Department was essentially dormant at the end of 1968, I could not observe his skills as a manager and generator. He had managed the *Pueblo* incident at the beginning of the year, but I was then not close enough to see how he did that. By the time I became his special assistant, the main role for the undersecretary seemed to be to insure that the transition team and members of the incoming administration got all the support that they needed.

Q: Did you find that your perspective of the Department changed when you moved to the Seventh floor?

ABRAMOWITZ: Absolutely. It was a different world in at least two ways: first, I began to look at issues in a much broader context, rather than the narrow confines of my previous job. I learned to neglect the unimportant side issues which often take up so much time and effort by a bureaucracy. I learned to focus on the key matters and what was needed in presenting an issue to the undersecretary and how best to get information and analysis.

Second, I learned how to operate and maneuver among the Seventh and Sixth Floor principals as I tried to help obtain some consensus among them on what needed to be done and how to do it. That was also necessary for my own position because the quality of my presentations was important if I were to be taken seriously. For any Seventh Floor senior assistant, that was essential if you were to be of any value to your own principal; furthermore, it helped to build a cache for future assignment considerations. Sitting in Katzenbach's office for a relatively undistinguished and less than challenging two months was really the stimulus for my Foreign

Service career.

Katzenbach was succeeded by Elliot Richardson, who decided to keep me in the position. I knew Jonathan Moore, Richardson's senior assistant to some extent – from my Hong Kong days – when he passed through (he was then Marshall Green's special assistant). We became friends. When Richardson was appointed undersecretary, he didn't know many people in the Department. So he offered me the job as his special assistant. He added that he only had one incentive plan. "One mistake and you are out!" He laughed; I must have smiled – weakly. But it was this opportunity that changed my whole career. It was purely fortuitous – completely unplanned and unforeseen. Others could have done what I did, but I got the chance and they didn't.

Q: Tell us a little about the staffing of Elliot Richardson's office?

ABRAMOWITZ: Richardson brought with him three people who worked for him for much of his time in Washington. Jonathan Moore, his executive assistant, was the main cog in the machinery; he was involved in all issues brought to the undersecretary; his forte was his ability to foresee the domestic political ramifications particularly as they pertained to Richardson's position in Washington, but his contributions to policy development went far beyond that. Jonathan was a very able officer, who had plenty of political experience and was able to interact effectively at high levels in and out of the Department.

Will Hastings, a lawyer, who worked for Richardson when he was the Massachusetts attorney general. He was brought in on many issues, but his major focus for the first year was on senior appointments – career and non-career as well as the undersecretary's relationship with the Legal Advisor. He also, like Moore, took great care that Richardson's reputation not be damaged.

Then there was a secretary, Cetta Leonardi, who was much more than that. She really managed his schedule and was a constant source of frank advice and counsel. She was his "protector" and knew him very well having been with him for many years. She knew his habits, his foibles, his moods, and served Richardson very well and was an integral part of his operation. She was totally dedicated to him.

I was the special assistant charged with culling out and presenting State Department issues to the undersecretary. I was to make sure that he was prepared for meetings and knew what was going on in the Department. I followed up on assignments that had been given to various offices, to assure that the assigned work was being done in a timely fashion and was satisfactory. I helped manage the undersecretary's schedule. All of these were functions that all special assistants normally perform. I had a Foreign Service Officer, John Stempel, as a staff assistant who reviewed much of the paperwork.

Richardson also hired a speech writer, Frank Seidner, who had been with the Department. Richardson used to give quite a number of speeches and remarks. Frank used to draft the first version, which Richardson would then edit to fit his style, and made all of his comments very much his own. He spent a good bit of time on his speeches.

This team worked together for all of his Richardson's tenure at State for 18 months which ended

when he became HEW (Health, Education and Welfare) Secretary. He had been an assistant secretary there during the Eisenhower administration and knew well both the substance and operations of the Department.

Q: In your role of special assistant, were you involved in deciding what issues were to be referred to the undersecretary?

ABRAMOWITZ: Richardson became sort of the super-manager of the Department. Secretary Rogers was quite laid back – some even said “lazy”. That left a vast amount of territory for Richardson to cover. Most issues ended up on his desk both because of Rogers’ management style and his “Henry” problem. Richardson and Henry Kissinger had developed a close relationship, although it turned out that the relationship was not quite as close as Richardson had viewed it. Richardson was very active in generating consideration of issues and got to know a good bit of the working level of the Department.

He became involved in almost every issue. Alexis Johnson, the deputy undersecretary for political affairs, handled most of the day-to-day issues that needed Seventh Floor attention, although Richardson was at least briefed on those as well and was in constant touch with Johnson’s assistants. As chairman of the under secretaries committee – part of the NSC system – Richardson was involved in inter-agency matters related to implementation of policy decisions reached by the NSC. In this regard, the one committee action that received most attention were the first steps which eventually led to the establishment of U.S.-Sino relations. I am referring here to the removal of restrictions on American foreign subsidiaries including with China and other actions of that nature. I remember this effort particularly because I drafted the memorandum which eventually went to the president for his approval of these confidence building measures on China. It was just by accident that we were moving in the same direction as the White House in changing China Policy, although, as far as I know, no one in the Department had any idea what Nixon and Kissinger were up to.

Richardson was also responsible for the Department’s nominations to the White House for presidential appointments. He interviewed every one of the Department’s final recommendations particularly the non-career, many of who were not known to him. A number of candidates who had deep pockets were seeking a presidential appointment after having made sizeable contributions to the Nixon campaign. Richardson examined them very carefully to make sure that they would not at least embarrass the administration in their new positions. He also played an important role in moving some career officers up the ladder.

Richardson got heavily involved in major issues such as Vietnam (of course, everyone was involved in Vietnam). He even hired a special assistant whose sole role was to follow Vietnam developments. That was Charlie Cook, whom Jonathan Moore had found in the Pentagon. That was a full-time job which assured Richardson of being current on fast moving developments.

One of the more effective channels in the government to get things done as well as to smooth ruffled feathers was Richardson’s relationship with Kissinger. If there were any problems between the Department and the NSC or if some action needed to be taken quickly by one of those organizations, Richardson would invariably take it up with Kissinger and vice versa. From

my vantage point, I never saw Rogers as a very effective Secretary of State – either as a policy developer or a manager. He was, however, a good judge of the American public and its receptivity to American foreign policy initiatives. He was an excellent advisor on how to get public approval, but in the policy development field – either as a creator, implementer, or defender – he was just not in same league as Kissinger. That became a real impediment to a good Kissinger-Rogers relationship, because it put Rogers in a second echelon which created resentment and anger on his part. Rogers was very much concerned about his personal status and his stature in the public's eye. I think you have probably discerned by now that I did not hold him in high regard, although I want to repeat and stress that Rogers had a better feel for the public's mood and views and how to handle issues publicly than probably anyone else in the government's national security apparatus.

Q: Would Richardson take actions on issues that might not have been on his agenda?

ABRAMOWITZ: Sometimes. A lot of this took place during his bi-weekly staff meetings to which all deputy undersecretaries and assistant secretaries were invited. Richardson used these meetings to discuss and assign actions on some issues which arose, which may not have been brought to his attention through formal channels. It was an opportunity particularly for the assistant secretaries to seek advice from their superiors and their colleagues and to bring the principals up to date on issues that were of current concern to them. I think these meetings were very useful to all participants. They allowed the assistant secretaries to raise issues that they might not have been able to get to the undersecretary's attention in the normal course of events. And it allowed Richardson to measure the competence of the senior staff. As I saw it, the assistant secretaries respected Richardson and frequently asked for his help.

Richardson also had a great interest in the workings of the Department, quite similar to those exhibited later by George Shultz. He was anxious to make sure that the institution worked, that the morale and excitement were maintained. His staff meetings were one of the management tools that Elliot used to monitor the workings of the Department. He was interested in effective process. That management interest also raised his curiosity about the Foreign Service. He liked most of the officers with whom he had contact. He was always on the look-out for the rising "stars"; he talked to many members of the Service and had a good feel for how it operated. This was a period of "reform" led by Bill Macomber, the deputy undersecretary for management. He established a number of task forces which together wrote a management-reform blueprint called "Diplomacy for the '70s." Richardson was very supportive of this effort. His notion was that the challenges of the 1970s required a smarter approach to diplomacy given the world's complexities. It required a U.S. State Department with very capable practitioners increasingly able to operate in much more complex settings. He was very interested in Macomber's efforts to build a better Foreign Service.

One matter in which the office was deeply involved was a huge passport problem. Americans were complaining bitterly, and rightly so, that they had to wait for months and months to get their documentation. Richardson was charged with resolving the issue. I suggested, and he accepted, that a commission be formed to quickly recommend solutions. It did so and the backlogs soon disappeared.

Richardson, of course, had a first class mind. He understood most issues quickly and would easily grasp the major details. He did not have a dominant personality and therefore would not always push very hard for resolution in many instances. He was always highly rational with a justification for all of his actions – especially when he was not inclined to getting involved. For example, he tried to stay out of issues that he knew were of particular interest to the secretary. He was very loyal to the secretary, and, as far as I could tell, never tried to up-stage or bad-mouth Rogers. Within the State building, Richardson was far more respected than Rogers, in part because he was always ready to listen to the assistant secretaries or the deputy undersecretaries. Rogers often mentioned how proud he was to have brought Richardson to Washington, but I suspect that he was also a little jealous of Elliot’s prominence on foreign policy matters, and his stature in the Department.

This is not to say that Rogers and Richardson were on different wavelengths. They consulted frequently and I never saw any indication that Richardson tried to undermine the secretary. Rogers was the boss and the final arbiter. Richardson’s relationships with the deputy secretaries – Alexis Johnson, Nat Samuels and Bill Macomber – were excellent. He and Macomber had been friends for some time and were very close. I liked Macomber a lot; he was forthright and even when he seemed to be out-of-step or off on a tangent, I respected him. I also liked Idar Rimestad, Macomber’s often reviled predecessor, who was entirely different from Macomber. In those days, the deputy under secretary for management “owned” the Department’s budget because starting with Bill Crockett, they were the creatures of Congressman John Rooney (D-New York), who was the chairman of the sub-committee that handled State’s budget. Rooney’s wishes were invariably followed; the Department spent a lot of time and effort to keep him happy. So one of the deputy under secretary for management’s high priorities was to keep Rooney and Wayne Hays happy (Hays controlled the Foreign Buildings Operations’ budget). Rimestad was sly, engaging, and exceedingly practical.

Q: Let’s talk about some specific issues. What work did INR do on Vietnam?

ABRAMOWITZ: I began in INR/EA just as the negotiations on a peace agreement in Vietnam were beginning. Our work was mostly concentrated on events on the ground – i.e., the fighting, its political significance, the impact on the government in Saigon, etc. We also focused on what North Vietnamese intentions seemed to be and what they would likely do. We were quite comprehensive in our scope of work. These analyses were also forwarded to our negotiating team. I remember that after one major military engagement, we wrote a paper entitled “Have we turned the corner?” I would describe our efforts as a continual watch of and interpretation of events unfolding in Vietnam – both north and south. The Paris talks were on-going and we tried to provide our negotiators with information and analysis we thought would be useful in their work.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to interact with the NSC staff?

ABRAMOWITZ: I had meetings and conversations with NSC staffers working on East Asia, particularly on China. My experience in East Asia plus my tour with Richardson had given me a

wide range of contacts which grew while in INR. I think by the time I had finished my INR assignment, I knew and had access to most, if not all, the EA players. I felt at ease in bringing issues to their attention – issues which they might not have focused on in a normal day, given their schedules.

I remember that after the Vietnam peace settlement, Bill Sullivan called a number of us together to talk about implementation. That was an unusual role for an INR member because it involved us in operational matters.

Q: Did you have some reservation about us withdrawing from South East Asia?

ABRAMOWITZ: Sure, but I knew it was over. We were facing a situation which was bound to end in many tragedies. Our withdrawal could not have a happy ending. The American people were withdrawing their support of our policy; Vietnam was collapsing; Cambodia was a true mess. I became involved in South East Asia when our position there was badly deteriorating. I watched both from CINCPAC and my subsequent assignment in DoD the end of a decade of war for the U.S. The question that was always posed for me was whether the deterioration could be somehow arrested. Ultimately, we ran out of political options. That became depressingly clear to me when I accompanied Deputy Secretary Bill Clements to Saigon in December, 1974. At that time, he assured President Thieu that we were prepared to provide all the funds and tools he needed to keep his country's independence. It wasn't that easy and Clements knew it. I could understand why the deputy secretary took that line; he could not tell him the truth. At this time, I am not sure the consensus of the U.S. staff working in and on Vietnam was that the war was lost; I thought so in December, but I may well have been a minority at that time. Secretary Schlesinger, by the end of 1974, was deeply concerned that the war was being lost, but I am not sure he had yet reached my conclusion. Clements was probably more positive. In any case, the deputy secretary could not deliver such bad news. The government could have fallen even quicker. We talked briefly about it after his meeting with Thieu. He was not about to further undermine the morale of the Vietnam government

The first issue I had to confront after assuming the DAS job was, of course, Vietnam. By then the situation was pretty grim. While first and foremost a military matter, ISA had many interests of its own in the whole issue besides military ones. We were concerned about the accuracy of the reporting from Saigon. This was a question both of coverage and understanding. Were the reports from Saigon providing sufficient coverage of what was going in South Vietnam or was it skewed by perceptions developed Saigon? Was it candid and a decent reflection of reality? I sent a number of my staff to South Vietnam to quietly examine the situation and get a broad range view of what was going on. I did not have a particular policy bent, but I did think that it was important for decision-makers to have as good and as objective view of the situation as possible. I had full confidence that the people I sent provided their candid views of the scene as best they could. I had of course had been aware of the Vietnam situation when I was the POLAD in Hawaii, but my duties were more those of an advisor; in ISA, I had operational responsibilities toward the Secretary which required me to be as knowledgeable as possible about the Vietnam situation.

One of our joint (ISA/EA and DSAA) efforts in Vietnam was to gather a team (of which Rich Armitage, later deputy secretary of state, was a member) which was charged with rescuing from Vietnam as much military equipment as it could, to keep it out of the hands of the North Vietnamese. Armitage had been a Navy Seal and was instrumental in removing a lot of naval equipment, including ships, from South Vietnam. Most of it was consigned to the junk heap. Some of the last acts of members of this team concerned the evacuation of both Americans and Vietnamese from Saigon. The key was to find sufficient number of helicopters which was a very serious challenge. Ambassador Graham Martin, to his credit, wanted to evacuate as many Vietnamese as he could get aboard. He just wanted the helicopters to keep coming; he tried to delay the final departure, but we were not able, in the end, to meet his desires. Schlesinger had to finally put an end to the evacuation, leaving behind undoubtedly a number of deserving South Vietnamese. Time just ran out, and the last days were nerve-wrecking with the Viet Cong at the outskirts of Saigon and during the evacuation helicopters arriving later than anticipated. I spent those last days in the MCC (Military Command Center) along with everybody else. It was a dark time.

When I first started in ISA, the issue was Vietnam. So my first effort to become educated was to go to Saigon. As a DAS, I was viewed by the military as the equivalent of a three or four star general. Sort of ridiculous in terms of the number of people who worked for me. I was given a plane to travel around the country. I saw most senior Vietnamese and American leaders.. There was one event on that trip I shall never forget. In Saigon, I stayed with Marshall Bremen, our PAO in Saigon. We had taken the Foreign Service entrance examination at the same time and remained close friends ever since. Marshall hosted a party for me which was attended by our ambassador to Vietnam, Graham Martin – a legendary figure at State in his own right. I had first met Martin when I worked for Elliot Richardson. Graham was one of those who “walk the halls” of the Department of State, to get a feel for what was going to get the latest news, and advance whatever cause he had. He was an unusual man, well known for his determination and his deviousness.

At the party he and I had a furious argument about the situation in Vietnam. He took the opportunity to attack all “doubters,” focusing in on Ted Kennedy. Somehow or other, even though I was working for a Republican president, I found myself defending Kennedy. All the guests were left open-mouthed at the vigor of the argument, particularly since Martin was an ambassador not to be trifled wit. I don’t think they had ever seen anyone talk to Martin as I did. The next day, I was at the air base leaving Vietnam, and Martin’s assistant came to see me. He had with him the book that I had written with Dick Moorsteen on China. He asked me to autograph the book for the ambassador, which I was glad to do. It was Martin at his best; he was making an overture, although I was at best a small mover or shaker in Washington. But Martin didn’t want me to leave Saigon with a bitter taste in my mouth; so he made his “peace overture” so that I wouldn’t inject my views based on a personal bias. That was Graham Martin. He also never feared to take unpopular stances.

I had frequent meetings with State Department officials like Marshall Green and Phil Habib who served also as Assistant Secretary. There was much focus on our military assistance program, particularly in an effort to provide the South Vietnamese with as much equipment as we could

and similarly with South Korea when we considered removing all our ground forces there. The mood at meetings was very bad, particularly among our military who were completely demoralized by events.

I would have to add at this point that I thought that the policy process to deal with South East Asian issues was a day-to-day affair, and invariable *ad hoc*. The sole objective was to keep the war going until a situation was hopefully created which would make the end of our involvement as palatable as possible. Eventually, after a series of battles, the general conclusion came to be that the end was in sight. By “general conclusion”, I refer to the sentiment both of the civilian and the military components of the Pentagon, although there was little tension between these two groups when it came to the issue of ending our engagement in Vietnam. Toward the end of that engagement in April, Schlesinger sent General Fred Wiant to review the whole military picture. The secretary asked for an honest, straightforward report. Wiant told him that the war was over and that there was no chance of the South Vietnamese regaining their lost territory. After that analysis, our attention turned to evacuation efforts, both of our military and civilian presence as well as those for those South Vietnamese that had been helpful to us.

What followed the Vietnam War was the successful effort to create an all-volunteer army, a turning point for our military, and for the nation. The move from a draft to an all-volunteer force, which enabled General Abrams to turn a highly demoralized army into one that has performed outstandingly since the early 1980s. This revitalization had another interesting result; whereas soldiers returning from Vietnam were treated shabbily by their countrymen and the military institution was viewed with disdain by the American public, those who today return from Iraq and Afghanistan are greeted with open arms and the military has a high standing in the American public. Today, every politician praises the military, even while most condemn the war. During Vietnam, both the war and the military were “bad.” The all volunteer force has also permitted us to fight for some seven years. That would not have been possible if a draft still existed.

As the Vietnam War was coming to a conclusion, my focus shifted to the issue of how to preserve American influence in East Asia. What should be our posture in the post-Vietnam era? What role would the Chinese military now play in the region, not only as a result of our withdrawal from Vietnam, but also in light of the Sino-Soviet split. How should we react to China? How do we better preserve the peace in Korea? These were probably the core East Asia issues that the administration focused in its last year. Our attention to East Asia was heightened by Sam Nunn’s legislative efforts to reduce our military presence and bases in the area. Secretaries Schlesinger and Rumsfeld thought that Nunn’s initiative was the wrong approach. I certainly shared their negativism. I thought the failure in Vietnam called for the maintenance of a strong military presence in the area; it was not – so soon after Vietnam – to further diminish our posture in East Asia. We were concerned that our failure would embolden communist efforts in Southeast Asia and we needed to show our strength and dedication to our allies.

We have discussed our efforts in Northeast Asia. We did not neglect Southeast Asia at ISA. We created considerable *angst* in the region with the withdrawal from Vietnam and our efforts to enhance Sino-U.S. relations. You have to remember that our Vietnam involvement spread far beyond the borders of that country into Laos and Cambodia and even into Thailand where we had five major military bases. By the way, when I was ambassador to Thailand, I had an

opportunity to talk with McNamara who by then was the head of the World Bank. He was very proud of the construction of those bases, pointing out that our military efforts had important unintended consequences. The establishment of bases had required the improvement – indeed the development – of a huge road network linking these facilities. In addition to enhancing our military capabilities, these roads opened vast parts of Thailand to agricultural production. The farmers could now deliver their products to profitable markets. These bases changed the nature of agriculture in Thailand.

Thailand saw Vietnam as its principal enemy and they were also fighting a domestic communist insurgency. ISA wrestled with two principal issues with Thailand: 1) what to do with our sizeable number of bases or perhaps more broadly, what should be our military presence be in that country and 2) how do we reassure the Thais that we were still pledged by treaty to assist them in maintaining their security and independence, particularly against Vietnam. Both of these issues required much interaction with the Thais to give them confidence in our commitments. They of course were concerned that our military reductions would detract from our interest in Thailand; we tried to give them as much military assistance as we could to offset the closing of the bases and help with their insurgency in the north. Military assistance to Thailand was a useful tool not only to improve Thai military capabilities but also to give visible meaning to our verbal assurances of continuing support.

ROBERT S. ZIGLER
Program Officer, USAID
Saigon (1968-1975)

Robert S. Zigler was born in Illinois in 1920. He received his bachelor's degree from Manchester College in 1942. During his career with US AID he served in Laos, Vietnam, Philippines, Washington D.C., Ghana, and Upper Volta (Burkina Faso). Mr. Zigler was interviewed by W. Haven North in November 1998.

ZIGLER: I went there in 1968. I had a short term of a year in Washington. Warren Ziegler, who was a Peace Corps director in Nigeria, was in charge of AID training. He had seen me out in Laos and thought that maybe I should come back and work on local employee training which I tried to do, but I didn't do very well.

Then a fellow named Abe Ashkanase came by. He was being sent to South Vietnam to head up an AID training program for American and Laotian personnel. He asked me to go out there with him. At that time I ran into a quote from Oliver Wendell Holmes which said, "A man cannot be said to be judged a man of his times unless he has been involved in the passion of his times." That hit me sufficiently. I figured that is where my passion is. You can debate that. Nevertheless, I went to Warren Zigler and told him that is what I wanted to do. He was an idealistic type; he appreciated that. So, off I went to Vietnam. This was 1968 just after the Tet offensive.

At that time the situation in Saigon was such that there were planes flying around the city at night and they would drop flares, so you had a curtain of light surrounding the city all night. The

idea was to prevent the possibility of infiltration. I stayed at the downtown hotel at that time, and you could go up to the top of the hotel and see dive bombers going down attacking different enemy sites in the suburbs. Rockets would come in from time to time. Curfews sometimes as early as 6:00. You would get out of work and you would go home. That was the nature of the life.

Now, some of the people that went through the Tet offensive were nervous and cautious. I went over to see a man after Tet and the lights went out in his building for some reason or other. I was going up the steps and he was coming down. When we met, he had two guns, one in each hand, and he was shaking like he had palsy. I tell you I tried to assure him very quickly that I was a friend indeed. Here was a person who was really jittery.

A lot of AID men lived two in a house. My buddy had a number of guns. He lived in the other. He came over to me and said, "Can I put my shotgun in your closet?" I said, "Okay." Then one night I heard a lot of shouting in his room. It was after curfew so what is going on here? I presumed for a minute he was being attacked by somebody and I should charge in there and help him because he was my house buddy. I should pick up that shotgun and charge through with it. Then I realized I had shot a shotgun only once in my life. I didn't know anything about that gun. I could trip and fall; you know all the possibilities, so I didn't. The place quieted down; so I stayed in my room. What happened was, my buddy met a Filipino man in a bar and it was too late for the Filipino to get home because of the curfew. He brought him home and said, "Hey, you are going to sleep on the couch." That was all right, of course, but the Filipino wanted to take a shower at midnight, which my friend didn't want him to do. That was the reason for the shouting.

Now, while we are on the human problems of presence overseas, one of the other aspects has to do with the relationships between men or women with local nationals. You have the issue of international intermarriage. As you may know, there was a lot of attention about American men marrying Vietnamese women. The same thing for Filipinas. I would say this, from a mission management point of view, it could be argued that it is a good thing for an employee to have a woman in his house staying with him. We are talking about men in their 30's or 40's or early 50's perhaps. It means he doesn't go down to the bars. That, as you know, is a questionable situation. Then you have the reduced problem of disease. From the point of view of having a man on the job every morning at start up time, if he has a condition like that at home, good performance is more likely. Another thing, too, I found that in Vietnam a lot of those women were very protective and assertive. In a sense, these guys weren't as free to roam as you might think. These women wanted to know where their men were and what they were doing.

Q: But they were not married to them.

ZIGLER: No, they were not married. I also noted that a lot of men went out there whose stateside marriage might not have been in too good a shape and they might have been divorced within the next one, two, three, or four years anyway. Then as you and I know, people change through the passage of time, so that could be a factor. Using the Philippine reference, I was involved for a short time at Grande Island in Subic Bay with the refugees out of Southeast Asia. I met some American women whose job it was to orient Philippine women who had met American

sailors and military personnel. Most of that was done in bars and places like that, public locations. It was their opinion that these women, once given a chance to go in an ordinary legitimate way, shaped up very well. They developed into good wives. Remember, I started out on this from a managerial point of view. If you wanted to have an employee go to bed at 10:00 at night and not run around in the bars and be on the job in the morning; this is one of the conditions that makes that possible.

Q: You didn't officially endorse it I suppose, or did you have to as a manager?

ZIGLER: No, that was an interesting phenomenon. I think the way it worked was nothing was said about it, but it was something that kind of oozed around you might say and was known. Nobody that I knew of got any kind of a deleterious or negative report from the point of view of work as a result of that.

Q: Tell us about the situation in Vietnam as you saw it.

ZIGLER: Of course, at that time the war was on. This again is where unrealism raises its head. The American presence there included trying to win a war, defend a nation, and also create a republic. That is hard to do in a wartime. Even in this country and you go right back to Lincoln; leaders use an authoritarian style. That is contrary to public administration or political science concepts. That made it difficult, and yet progress was made.

Number two is, and this was something that nobody knew but learned after the fall of Saigon. I knew two men who stayed on in Saigon after the fall, one American and one Englishman. The day after the fall, the American went down to his office, he was an American contractor. He didn't know about the Saigon evacuation from where he was located. Sitting in his office was a soldier dressed in the uniform of the North Vietnamese army. Who was this soldier but the man who had worked with him for the last four years as his chauffeur! The English man had a similar situation. His former colleague was now a colonel. We are talking about infiltration and the business of how do you maintain and control security?

Now when it came to travel, you had the standard situation of what was open and what was free. You could fly or you could drive depending on what the security situation was.

Also again in Vietnam, you had a number of groups of people. You didn't have just Vietnamese. You had the Montagnards in the north and the Cao Dai down in the south. Here again is the problem of all nations of the world, how to create unity. When you have these different, strongly ethnic groups who have survived because of that ethnic strength to begin to cooperate, tolerate, give up, is a tough thing to do.

As far as the food was concerned, and this was true for Laos, the American military was there. It was an incredible establishment. They had a supermarket there that was as big as anything you have seen in the United States. There was a PX which sold everything from golf clubs to tennis rackets, camping equipment and TV sets. From the point of view of personal survival, it wasn't a problem. You could always get fresh meat or frozen turkeys!

There was a problem with script, and at that time the American establishment had its own script, and you had to buy with that. From time to time then, they would change the script. Instead of yellow, they would switch to blue. At that time, you had a lot of this script that had floated out into the community and was owned by Vietnamese. They weren't supposed to have it. It was legal tender. The general mode would be for a person to accumulate some of this and then get an American friend who had access to the PX or the commissary to go in and buy. But you see, when the money was changed, that was a big surprise to everyone. It was never predictable. If they couldn't get it exchanged through someone, well, they just lost. So that was a control technique that was used as far as money was concerned.

Q: What was your job?

ZIGLER: I was head of an institution called the Staff Development Center. We trained Vietnamese adults who were employees of the US government and the government of Vietnam to be better employees. The subjects were English, typing, shorthand, accounting, data processing, management, and telephone techniques. We had a building called the Staff Development Center that was built specifically for that. There was a Canadian man, Bert Mills, who was the start up person. As you know, the start ups are so important for success, and he was an important start up, no question. Anyway, we had about 1500 students. We had an office staff of about 12-15 people and a faculty of 30-50. These were mostly returned Vietnamese AID participants. They had been in the United States and had earned their degrees and came back. They taught on a part time basis. For, example, in the English program, we had two Ph.D.s and about four masters in linguistics or teaching English as a second language.

Q: These were Vietnamese?

ZIGLER: Yes, and the rest of the faculty were Vietnamese who had degrees in agriculture, public administration, or education. It could be argued that when it comes to learning a language, that the best person to teach that language is a person who has had a similar experience. In other words, I would rather learn French from you in my beginning days than I would from a French person because you know the problems of learning French. You can help me over the hurdles. Now, when I get to a higher level, a switch is okay.

Anyway, we had the building; it had a language lab and classrooms. The faculty used to give monthly programs on the teaching of English. You thought you were in an American university with the level of the lectures given. Students were all employees of the US or the Vietnamese government. Some of the students were also taking English prior to going to the United States as participants. We also had a business section where we taught management, accounting, typing, shorthand, and telephone techniques.

Q: How long did this go on, what period of time?

ZIGLER: I got there in '68 and it was going on until the spring of '75. At that time it was terminated because the need had been considered to be met. The United States Information Agency had a tremendous English program. They taught thousands in their English language schools. That was really something.

Q: Considering the long term results, is the Center still there ?

ZIGLER: No. One of the tragedies related to that was the head of our business teaching program. Now she was an idealistic person, unrealistic perhaps, but anyway, she intentionally decided not to evacuate and stay and help the new country.

Q: Was she American?

ZIGLER: No, Vietnamese. Then when the North Vietnamese took over, they announced that all people who worked for the Americans should register. So, she registered out of integrity. What do you think happened to her? Well, they packed her up and shipped her off to one of these training programs which was more or less a prison. She actually broke down as a result and has never recovered as I understand it.

Q: Sort of a reeducation program in those camps?

ZIGLER: Yes. Now you evidenced an interest in Americans leaving. This you may or may not know, I would say there were at least 20 guys (I was one of them) who had a sense of responsibility and association with the Vietnamese. I was in the Philippines at the time of the fall, but I thought about it and others did, too. They were willing to stay on after; to stay with their comrades you might say. The American Ambassador at that time was able to make an appropriate, effective directive to them to leave which they did. There was a lot of personal involvement there with the Vietnamese people. You didn't want to abandon your friends and leave.

I also want to mention something else which would be of interest. We had a requirement to start a secretarial training program to take the places of American secretaries. We had two groups with about 15 in each. The courses that they took were in English, typing, shorthand, and different aspects of AID. Their requirements were the same as if they had been an American taking those courses here in Washington in terms of typing and shorthand. The English exam wasn't required in the USA, but we had one. We used it as an entrance test. It was from the University of Michigan. It established competency levels that could not be questioned. One of the interesting things we did was to teach something about the AID organization. We had two sets of cards. One card would say "director," and then a related one would say "John Smith" (he was the director). With two sets, you could pair them. Then one set would be agriculture, public safety, etc., GSO, etc. We had about 15-20 titles and the names that fit them. It was fascinating to watch these girls, they were all competitive. We'd shuffle up the deck of cards with titles and lay them out to be paired. We'd time them and see who got the best time. That was a good way to develop a familiarity. I had originally in my unwisdom thought that it was better, and this might have been true from the point of view of spreading the American presence, to not have any relatives or sisters in the program. I learned later on it was a smart idea because if you had a student in this program whose sister was already working someplace, you had a source of reference the student could use as another teacher, so that worked out all right.

Q: How were they as students? How did they succeed?

ZIGLER: Well, they did well except there were some of them had problems with shorthand. I then started a process where I would accept the failures in shorthand. They would work for me as a secretary and keep practicing. Then when they were able to pass the exam, they would be transferred to the open AID positions that they were being prepared for. The interesting thing there, now we are back to culture again, and difference and respect for age. A number of American technicians would write reports out on yellow paper, and the handwriting, of course, might be somewhat difficult and the spelling might be questionable. Once again, since they were the boss, these girls would type exactly what they read. Shorthand, as you can understand, would be troublesome because of unfamiliarity with the language, but we got them to take 80 words a minute.

Q: How long a course was it for them?

ZIGLER: As I remember it, it was three months. We gave them an IQ test. At that time AID had developed an IQ test for Vietnamese. These secretarial trainees were all over 120, as I remember, according to that test.

Q: In that three months they had to learn the language?

ZIGLER: No, they knew the language before. Now there was a selective process. We had a test and so there was a good language level, no question about that. They didn't start from scratch.

Another interesting program we had there was in cooperation with the Control Data Corporation and the AID data processing unit. We provided the facilities and some of the management assistance for training about 32 computer people, data processors and analysts. We tested over 500 people talking before we ended up with 32 candidates. Of course they all completed the training. Some of those who were in the secretarial as well as the data processing came to the United States. They worked for AID and the UN and other international organizations as well as private ones because of this competence they achieved while they were there in Saigon.

Q: What was your understanding of the rest of the program AID was sponsoring at this time?

ZIGLER: All right, now I am ready to speak with enthusiasm. I will generalize by way of introduction to say the United States has suffered and AID has suffered because what I am going to tell you is not well known. It is my understanding there was one AID man who was given the assignment to write up the history of AID Vietnam. He had three volumes completed. One went out to the so-called resources in St. Louis and the other two have disappeared so even those books have suffered.

Q: Do you know who that was?

ZIGLER: I don't know for sure. I think it was Robert Craig. Anyway, here are some of the results. By the spring of 1975, 90 agricultural development banks had been started. Now the old traditional agriculture methodology was for the farmers to borrow from the Chinese money lender. His interest rates could be up to 100%. What this meant was that these people with their

own money, this was self-funded essentially, had created a local bank and from that they got appropriate loans at a fair rate of interest. That was good. Also, when the French left Vietnam, something like 750 students took the baccalaureate exam, which is equivalent of high school. Now this was again part of the French colonial methodology of providing opportunities and reward for advancement to selected people. That was the way they did it. But the last school year, with AID support, which would have been the school year of '74, there were 75,000 students who took the baccalaureate exam. That was the same number of school years. Now whether it was exactly equal is something else. But that shows you the increase in the educational system both in teachers, buildings, facilities and numbers.

As you know, in the traditional French baccalaureate exam, you have to write out your answers, and the questions related to the previous questions. If you erred in some way on the first question, in terms of numbers, and you use those incorrect numbers for your second one, then that makes the second answer wrong. Well, anyway you still have to write, which I admit is a good way of determining language competence. But because of 75,000 exams, that methodology wasn't used.

Q: Did these 75,000 go to AID for their education system?

ZIGLER: Yes. AID had a test expert who developed a true-false, multiple choice test that used automated methodology to correct the exams.

Also that spring, the medical school which was run by the American AMA produced the largest graduating class of doctors in the world. Now that doesn't necessarily mean it was the best. They had the largest number. Also, the dental school had just finished the first year, and they might have had the same level in numbers. There was a public administration school that had about 1,000 students. There were some sad stories. One, I remember, was the president of the student body, on a wrong side ideologically, who was thrown off the third floor. That was the end of his student career.

Another significant achievement was rice sufficiency. The production in 1974 was enough to be sufficient for the entire South Vietnam if transportation was possible, but that you see, was limited or interdicted.

There were 5,000 returned AID participants. This is everything from a short term to a Ph.D. Another incredible human resource, there were supposed to be 180,000 Vietnamese who had worked for foreigners. This was a consequential human resource group because regardless of what they did, they learned something about difference or change or modernity which could be used and expanded.

Q: Where did you get these numbers?

ZIGLER: Well, I picked them up while I was there in one way or another. For instance, the man who was in the development of the ag banks program told me his experiences

Q: Do you know whether these institutions are still functioning?

ZIGLER: I don't know. You know, you run into some tricky business in trying to modernize. In my IVS days in Laos, I thought I would get our Laotian employees to put their money in the banks and that would be modern money saving. Since I was the boss, they did. We would go down to the bank each pay day. They had their bank books, and the numbers kept getting a little bigger. Then one day the Lao government shut down the bank. It was a French bank, and it was shut down for about three months. The savings were in there. When the bank finally opened up, what do you think happened the first day? Who was late for work? So here you have another uncertainty with the development banks. How they survived I really don't know. I know rice production is up. Vietnam exports rice now.

Q: What you are saying in effect is that wherever the program had a impact on the culture it opened up the society and the impact has carried over to Vietnam today?

ZIGLER: Absolutely. In fact, usually some of the important people regardless of what country, have been associated with AID. I would agree on that, no question. Now for inducements for change because we haven't talked about that. In a way, we did about Laos when we said, "If you want to build something or other, we'll provide you the cement and roofing sheets."

One of the strategies used in rural areas of Vietnam, particularly in the rice area when AID tried to get farmers to grow more rice or better rice or two crops was a plan make it possible for the village storekeepers to obtain consumer items like radios, bicycles - things that a farmer would want that he didn't have. There it was right in the store. He didn't have to go to far off Saigon. So this inducement was right there so he would try and do better, get more money so he could buy from the storekeeper. The storekeeper up to that time didn't have the capability of getting new supplies. An interesting development concept. Other achievements of AID were airports, roads, and bridges. I guess they are still there.

Q: How did you find working with the Vietnamese generally?

ZIGLER: That was an interesting experience of course. A couple of things, number one relates to the idea of learning the local language. Well, for me, everybody that I worked with wanted to speak English and hear English. It is true that if I knew Vietnamese and I walked through the office and heard the people speaking Vietnamese, I would know what they were talking about, which might be beneficial. But when I talked to them, they didn't want to speak Vietnamese at all. So, English was the language in the office.

Then there were a couple of other cross-cultural experiences that I will cite. This has to do with status and so on. I remember driving one time up to the school, and there were all kinds of students standing around. These were adults, of course. We had two or three men who were maintenance or cleaning men. I thought I would show these waiting students that even the big boss can carry the boxes in from his car. So I loaded up about two or three of them. It was quite a stack. I paraded through all these students waiting to go to class. Eventually my top Vietnamese aide came to me and said, "You know, that wasn't a very good idea." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Carrying those boxes in from your car." He went on to explain that what I had done, in a way I had insulted or demeaned or lowered visually my rating of these maintenance

men. They felt that the big boss, Mr. Zigler, didn't think that they could carry boxes.

And another interesting one: I had moved into a large house with another AID man who was head of the data processing section. He had his crew of about 39 Vietnamese people and I had my group of 15 staff and 30 some teachers. We'd have parties which was part of the goodwill program of course, so we sent out an invitation. Everybody likes a free meal and dancing and music. We did it on one of those old reproducing machines, remember the kind with the blue ink, ditto. We wrote it "come one come all," "hot dogs," "dancing," "drinks." We thought that was an informal, happy, congenial invitation, and distributed it to everyone. We found out that almost all of the Americans came and most of his Vietnamese, but on my side very few of the Vietnamese came. We had ordered enough hot dogs and drinks and everything for the total numbers. Anyway, when the next week came around I asked my assistant what do you think happened? Well I'll tell you I think it was your "invitations." I said, "What do you mean; it was friendly and happy." "Yes, but it was the wrong way. You should have had a properly printed formal invitation, and then they would have believed you were serious. You see, when you sent them that other one, they didn't think you were serious. So they didn't want to go. They didn't have to go. If you would have sent them something else, they would have had an obligation."

Then we move on to another aspect of interaction. The people I associated with were of an equal educational level as I. They lived, as you might presume, in the city, and I would invite them from time to time, along with other government officials, to my house. Sometimes they would come and sometimes they wouldn't. Eventually I learned that a number of the "no shows" was due to the fact that they thought they were expected to reciprocate. And if they reciprocated, they didn't have the ability to reciprocate at the same level that they thought they should. They didn't have all the same color cups, or enough plates, or enough money.

Another interesting issue had to do with the use of the toilet seats. As you know, there are many cultures that use the squat system and a hole in the floor. At the school we were outfitted with the American equipment and we had the standard commodes. Many times I would see heel prints from shoes right on top of the seat. They didn't lift it up; they just stood on the seat. Again that is a difference in lifestyle, and again these were people who had been educated for four years or more in the United States.

Another interesting thing I did relates to the cross cultural aspects of student life. On a Saturday morning, I had a class for all people planning to study in the United States. I had sessions on such things as how to take a test. Most of these people had worked through the French exam system which started from the top and worked to the bottom. Now, in the system we use, there are 10 or 15 questions in a category. If you can't answer the first one, you skip it, you go down until you find one you can and then you back up. As you know, through the passage of test time, sometimes you find answers that you have forgotten. Well they would be more inclined to do question one and then do two and then three, which is a poor way. So we gave them test taking experience. We had sessions on social life and sessions on college life and so on.

The way I would start it, on the first day I was to come in late. These were all government officials at that time. They were already in their seats, white shirts usually with a tie. I'd come in with a pair of old tennis shoes with the strings untied and flopping and a sloppy pair of pants and

a tee shirt hanging down low. I would swagger down the aisle and then stand up on the table right in front of them and start to talk. My message was “when you get to America, don't pay any attention to what the professor looks like. What you want to do is pay attention to what he says and what you can hear.” That was always a startler for them I'll admit because it was unconventional.

The same way with doing business. This again is a social style. You and I are serious because we are sitting down. If we were standing up in the hall, that is not a serious discussion, so if you want to be serious with a person, you have to sit down. Also, you don't sit on a table. Anyway, those are some examples of working with the Vietnamese people.

To finish up, I also was involved in American orientation to the mission. We had an orientation every month. It ran for about two or three mornings. The Mission Director would come over and put in a 15 minute talk. We'd have movies and lectures about different aspects of Vietnamese politics and culture. The mission required it or wanted it. I did it there at the Staff Development Center. Sometimes USIA people would come over. Very seldom did any Embassy people or any other agencies that were out there. Voluntary agency people would send people over. I also did their orientation for new Vietnamese employees about what AID was doing, the problems of the world, the population increase, food, etc. We'd have 20-30 people because of the size of the mission. I used an interpreter.

Q: What was your view of the overall American effort in Vietnam at that time? What were we trying to do given that Vietnam was a controversial subject; could we have accomplished anything in AID terms?

ZIGLER: You remember I recited all the AID performance record. It is my opinion that if North Vietnam would have stayed north of the 17th parallel, that South Vietnam today would be a gem in the history of development partly because of the incredible human resources. You had a nation that had both agriculture as well as tourism potential. There was access to the ocean as well as the interior, which is up about 3000-5000 feet. There were different climatic conditions there, which makes it appealing to tourists. It would have been a real achiever. It would be superior to Korea, I think, not necessarily in heavy industry but in the world of human appeal and achievement. So that is a generalized response.

Q: What about the North Vietnamese's approach or strategy or understanding of the development process? Did you have any perception of that at the time?

ZIGLER: To me the fact that the North Vietnamese were able to engender such continued endeavor on the part of people to go to war is incredible. When you think about the results which took them years to achieve. Of course, then they have this history of success against the oppressor which they don't forget. They resisted the Chinese. They resisted the French. I know Frenchmen at Dien Bien Phu who told me their machine guns were so hot they didn't dare touch the barrels. They just sat there and mowed the attackers down. The Vietnamese kept coming and eventually they over ran. So, you had this incredible purposefulness that was maintained. As you know there were all kinds of tunnels that were dug under Saigon. I talked about this human infiltration.

Now, when it comes to development itself, I don't think they did very much except survive. Now they got some assistance, no question about that, from the outside. I don't know exactly how it got there, but we know about the Russian Chinese association. That enabled them to carry on their military actions. I don't know if they got any food or anything like that. I think they were pretty self-sufficient.

Q: I guess this the point you mentioned earlier, that because of the war some people felt it was a hopeless situation for trying to do development work of any kind. We were really going to lose in the end in terms of development because of the war situation?

ZIGLER: Well, when you think in terms of numbers of people as human resources when 180,000 had association with foreigners and then the 5,000 AID returnees. Then you had USIA people and you also had military people. How many of them were evacuees I really don't know, but certainly their influence and the people still in South Vietnam are influential; some are people that were associated with the American presence in one way or another.

Q: Well, anything else about the Vietnam experience?

ZIGLER: Yes, I'd like to say this about the American team, and I'm talking particularly about the field people. I will contest that it was the best trained, best prepared group of people that the United States has sent anywhere anytime, period. Why? Well, as you remember they started out with a training program here in Washington over in Rosslyn, the Foreign Service Institute area. They studied the Vietnamese, and the cultures and language for months. They achieved a level, I think it was FS-2.

Then it was decided to do training in Hawaii, an interesting idea. Instead of training in Washington, they would move out to Hawaii. From a training point of view, psychologically and physically it had appeal because it was separated from the home base. Trainees could concentrate. Also it was a new culture. It was also easy to bring in people from Southeast Asia to serve as teachers.

Then you had an interesting organizational situation. It was a new program, and it was in the United States. Administrators could go out and check easily. It was USA. It was not foreign travel, so budget wise it was a little easier to arrange travel. So you had a lot of people who talked to trainees, and the people who they talked to were usually the talkative ones and usually the discontented ones. So, the reports for awhile were of discontent and negativism. As a result, Hawaii training was terminated rather than maintained and it came back to Washington.

So anyway we are talking about the time spent in the preparation. I can remember an unusual program when there was lots of AID money available. We took a squad of trainees into Tennessee and a couple of times to West Virginia. They would go out and research and develop in one week a development plan for a county.

Q: This is part of the development studies program?

ZIGLER: No. This was separate from that but it included some of the ideas. They did not have a language problem. But they had all the human factors, they had resources and records available, and they could write it up. You talk about spin-off; a number of those communities used those plans for development purposes. The report was turned over to them; it was reviewed before they left. How many national developmental agencies had the money and the time and the capability to do that? I have never heard of any other country that did it. So there we go on that. That is the one reason I make this argument for the best prepared group of people.

Q: What was the size of the mission roughly?

ZIGLER: I think it was over 1000. Then another interesting thing, we are talking about Saigon. The Texaco company had put on some TV shows in the USA called Texaco Theater of the Air. These were movies and they shipped some of them to Saigon. These were American classics like "Our Town." We had a movie projector, so we would advertise, but this was always with a curfew. We'd show it at 6:00 and be done by 7:30. You sit and watch and wonder how long it takes to go home. It was not the most relaxing.

Q: Did you visit any of the rural areas and the pacification posts where we had people assigned?

ZIGLER: No.

Q: What was the situation there?

ZIGLER: I can't talk to that really. I know men who went out there and I traveled around as a tourist, but I never talked to them. You have other people who could speak more effectively and competently on that than I. No, I think that is the end as far as I am concerned in Vietnam.

RICHARD SACKETT THOMPSON
Provincial Reporting Unit
Saigon (1968-1972)

External Affairs
Saigon (1974-1975)

Richard Sackett Thompson was born in 1933 in Pullman, Washington. His father was a college French professor, who later became a Dean at Washington State University. It was on a trip to France with his mother in 1952 that impressed him so much, he resolved to become a member of the foreign service. He graduated from Washington State University in 1955, after taking his junior year at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris. He was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and obtained his master's degree from Georgetown in 1980. He spent two years in the Army in 1958-1960. He has also served in Antilles, Nigeria, France, Algeria, and Greece. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1994.

Q: Where were you taking Vietnamese?

THOMPSON: Well, it was in the old Foreign Service Institute, which was also where I had the A-100 course when I first came in, which was in a remodeled garage under what is now River Place, then called Arlington Towers, in Rosslyn. I remember that when I first went in I wondered why you had this wide door and sort of sloping ramp down to the registrar and information desk. It was only years later I realized that was because it had been a garage and was for the cars to drive in. So I spent 40-42 weeks studying Vietnamese.

Q: You already had probably a better grounding than most Foreign Service people in French, how did you find coming up against tonal languages?

THOMPSON: Well, I had also done a lot of singing, so maybe that helped. You weren't allowed into the course unless you showed a relatively good aptitude. When you come into the Foreign Service there is or was a test that you took called , "Modern Language Aptitude Test." I think all of us scored fairly high on that. People varied in their diligence and ability to learn, but most of us managed to do it, I think. And it was quite intensive. We had six hours a day with a different teacher each hour for the benefit of either the students or the teachers, or both, so you heard a variety of approaches and accents, but all working on the FSI method which emphasizes repeating phrases and sentences after teachers to get it right. It emphasizes the oral use of the language.

Q: How did you come out of that?

THOMPSON: I felt very uncomfortable. Although I operated in Vietnamese at times for the following five years, I never felt really comfortable in it. I think perhaps because I was a little old, by now I was in my mid-30s, and I never really felt that I mastered the language even though in fact I was a good student and after I had been in Vietnam for a while I tested 4/4. I really felt my 4/4 in French was much more meaningful in actually being able to communicate with people in a nuance complex way than it was in Vietnamese.

Q: Did you get some area studies while you were at FSI?

THOMPSON: There were some lectures. Just after I left I think they improved and strengthened that part of the program. I thought that was pretty lacking. I had language training and not much area studies.

Q: I came through a little bit later in the garage too, but I got two weeks to familiarize myself with the language which was impossible, but I got the area studies program which was rather an intense series of lectures.

THOMPSON: I think we specifically did not get the area studies, only now and then there would be some especially distinguished lecturer and we would go hear that one and be let out of our language lessons to do it. But, otherwise I thought it was very weak on area studies, I didn't really have much of an idea of what was going on in Vietnam or the area's history and background, or anything when I went over there.

Q: You got there in 1968. When in 1968 did you get there?

THOMPSON: Well, I got there a few days before the Tet attack in January. My boss said, "Well, things are very quiet Dick, you will travel around with Peter Collins seeing how we do it and working up your language capability for a few weeks before you strike out on your own."

Q: You were going to be what?

THOMPSON: I was going to be in what was called the Provincial Reporting Unit which was a group of eight officers plus a boss who among them covered the four Corps areas of the country - I Corps, II Corps, III Corps and IV Corps. IV Corps was the Delta. We had relatively few American troops in the Delta so it was rather different from the other areas. Peter Collins, who had been there for several months already, and I shared the Delta, we shared the provinces. He took the important ones and I took the less important ones...that is not quite true because it was partly geographic. In the end, because of the Tet attack, instead of taking it easy, as soon as we could catch a chopper down to the Delta...we both caught the same plane down to Can Tho, the capital of the Delta and then fanned out visiting our provinces riding choppers, scheduled Air America Lines, or taking a vehicle, to see what the situation was in these various provinces after Tet.

Q: Could you describe your experiences after Tet, you had just arrived?

THOMPSON: I was sharing an apartment with another man several blocks from the embassy. I could hear a lot of shooting but I didn't know what was going on except by phone. I was advised by my boss to stay put.

Q: Your boss was whom?

THOMPSON: Tom Cochran. I stayed put in my apartment until close to noon the following day when my apartment mate, who was a military officer also serving in the embassy, came by and gave me a ride down to the embassy. It was a distance I could have walked, but I wasn't about to walk around the streets without having some idea of what was going on. So I got to the embassy about 11:00 the next day. There were still some Viet Cong bodies in the courtyard that had not yet been taken away, and of course the place was all shot up and there was a lot of confusion.

Q: Here you are brand new. What was your feeling about how this thing had happened and its effectiveness?

THOMPSON: I just don't recall having that kind of conversation. Nobody had all that amount of time to talk to me. The only thing I remember was the urge to get Peter Collins and me out to visit our provinces as soon as that could possibly be done so that we could be doing after action reports. I don't really have a feel for the mood in the embassy. I was just accepting whatever happened and not really thinking about the longer term.

Q: There is a certain point when you come in you are not in a very reflective mood, you are just

absorbing this brand new thing. What happened in the Delta during the Tet, Tet was not just a one day thing?

THOMPSON: You are absolutely right. The part I remember very clearly, I would go up to the roof of the apartment house and it was like a fireworks display. All around town you would have choppers shooting tracers down around the suburbs where the fighting went on for some time. And the people on the ground sometimes firing up at the helicopters. Then flares being dropped all around. It was a spectacle that I would watch from my roof. As I recall, I was probably down in the Delta for a while and came back and it was still going on. As you say it lasted for quite some time.

In the towns I visited in the Delta, of course, there had been some very heavy fighting for a while but they were repulsed from all province capitals, and I was visiting basically province capitals. So very typically I would come in on a helicopter and as you would see the town from above you would have some modest masonry structures in the middle of town, which may or may not have been partly damaged by the fighting, and then you would have a large area of burned out huts. It was reed huts that they lived in and they burned easily. So, you would have one quadrant from the center of town out which was where the attack had taken place, been repulsed and there was a lot of burned houses. So you had a burned area as a segment of each province capital. And then, I landed and would talk to the senior Americans; the local politicians, where to be honest I usually used French rather than Vietnamese because that was a much easier way for us to communicate; and the local priests, the Buddhist priests, the Cao Dai sect leaders, if they were there, and the Catholic priests, of course. I would talk to people like this with positions in society to get their views of what had happened at Tet, from all points of view -- military, our development programs, what propaganda by the VC was circulating, etc. For a while there we just threw everything into our reports that we could think of that might be of use to try to analyze what happened.

So, it was a fascinating time. Every place there seemed to be some unusual circumstance that caused the VC plan to go awry. I won't try to recite what they all were, but every place felt that the VC had almost succeeded in taking over but because of some factor that had suddenly intervened that was favorable to the government side they had been pushed back in every case, so they took no province capital in the Delta, nor did they take the capital of the Delta, Can Tho, itself, where there was some very heavy fighting. Of course, they did take Hue in the north and were pushed out after a month of fighting. That was a somewhat different situation.

Q: What was the feeling both of the Vietnamese and the American side about Tet then, that you were getting from the Delta? Was this basically looked upon as a success or was it shock and dismay?

THOMPSON: That was where you had this great dichotomy between how things looked on the ground and how they looked in the United States. On the ground the VC had been pushed back with very heavy losses. They had such heavy losses that they really decimated the VC in the sense of the southern armed forces. The north which, of course, was running the whole thing, Hanoi, had to send northern troops into the Delta after that to provide them a fighting force in the Delta because their southern branch had become so decimated. It was a military defeat for the

Communists, but a political victory because the reaction of the United States was that people felt that they had been misled that things were going better and that the enemy no longer had such a capability.

Q: Were you getting a feeling from the Vietnamese of pride and confidence that they had taken care of this matter?

THOMPSON: Oh, very definitely. In the Delta, with very few exceptions, it was Vietnamese troops who managed to do the job. So they were really very proud of the fact that they had taken the best shot of the VC and taken them out.

Q: So you finished this survey and went back to embassy and made your reports?

THOMPSON: Yes. It wasn't a survey, I did the same thing for 18 months. I tried to hit all my provinces the first couple of weeks to get a view of what happened after Tet and then after that I would be more selective. I did not have to go back to Saigon to deliver my reports because I could turn them in to the CIA operator in Can Tho. So Peter Collins and I usually met and cooperated on the reports. We just typed them out as best we could and gave them to the CIA telegraph operator and he would send them in. Of course the CIA was glad to have them because they could use them to check against their own reports. Sometimes the people in the embassy would mutter that the CIA got our reports before our own bosses did. But, anyway, the information could be transmitted that way. Other times we would travel back to Saigon and stay there a few days and write our reports and then go back out again. There was no set pattern to it really. For each Corps you had two officers. One of the two would live in Saigon and one would live in the region. Peter Collins lived in Can Tho and I in Saigon. The vague idea behind this was that they wanted some people around in Saigon so if they suddenly needed to consult about what was happening there might be somebody there -- except if you were doing your job you wouldn't be there either. This was true except for I Corps in the north which was too far away and both officers lived up there.

Q: You were under the political section?

THOMPSON: Yes, that's right.

Q: What was your impression of the political section and how it operated during this period?

THOMPSON: Well, it was very good. The ablest officers, without calling myself an able officer, generally very capable people were being assigned to Vietnam. It had a priority in the world to get the best people. So, by and large, they were very excellent officers to work with. I think the total officers in the political section was something like 25, because you had 8 on the Provincial Reports; a similar number working on internal politics at the Saigon level, the various parties and organs of government; you had a labor attaché; a political military section. It was a very large political section indeed.

Then, when you got up to the top leadership of the embassy, of course, you got into some interesting and sometimes controversial people.

Q: Could you talk about some of these people?

THOMPSON: Without naming any names at the moment, I think one problem in Vietnam in understanding what was going on was that a lot of the top people had been in Korea. I think there is a very clear difference which these people didn't grasp. In Korea, the Communists had virtually taken over the whole peninsula before we drove them north, so all Koreans hated the Communists. In Vietnam, on the contrary, the Communists had the prestige of having defeated the French. They by and large presented a humane face in the areas where they did control and there was much more ambivalence about the Viet Cong even among the people who presumably were on our side or our supporters. The government that we were supporting, these were the generals who had sided with the French puppets fighting the Viet Minh Communists who embodied the cause of nationalism. There was this concept of Chinh Nghia, leading or main principle, which might be translated "righteous cause. I find it hard to define but you have it or you don't and the Communists tended to have it because the driving force of the society tended to be more in their hands because of these factors I mentioned. So even the people I would deal with that were staunchly anti-communist, nevertheless had real admiration for the people on the other side who suffered privation, did not have luxurious living, lived out in the jungle for years and worked hard. Ho Chi Minh, himself, was known for his ascetic style of living and they would contrast this with the corrupt life-style of the military government in Saigon. So for the Vietnamese their loyalties were often very ambiguous and a person would have a brother fighting on the other side and things like that. I think the Americans who came in with Korean experience where things were black and white, did not realize the ambiguity of the situation in Vietnam and how people were not really staunchly anti-communist in a sense, even though all this fighting and dying was going on. The people had a respect if not sympathy for the other side. I think this was an important difference. I don't want to name too many names, but I think an example of the Korean school would be Sam Berger...

Q: Yes. He had been ambassador to Korea.

THOMPSON: ...who I liked very much. Shortly after I arrived there was a Vietnamese member of the parliament who was calling for a peace settlement involving a coalition government. Well, that was the position of the North, the Communists, in the negotiations, so he was eventually imprisoned. The senior Americans couldn't understand how the Vietnamese could have any sympathy for a man who was advocating the enemy point of view. But, of course, if you have this more ambiguous view of the war and the conflict, why it certainly made sense to the Vietnamese to call for a coalition government which would end the fighting and bring peace and reconciliation to the country.

Q: Martin Hertz was the political counselor most of the time you were there wasn't he?

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: How do you think he saw things? He is one of the intellectuals of the Foreign Service.

THOMPSON: He was an example of that. At the end of his tour he wrote a memo called "Bell Ringers," and I wish I had it somewhere. He described in there several incidents, for example a

conversation with a leading general who said he had a brother who was a general on the other side, etc. which to him brought forth this ambiguity of the war and of feelings toward the war which I am describing to you which I thought most people would get from the New York Times before even going to Vietnam.

Q: Was there sort of a feeling that you have to think positively? We had a great commitment there, obviously, did you have a feeling that maybe we were thinking too positively all the time?

THOMPSON: Well, of course, you have to feel positively. The President says we are going to hold out here and you do your best to carry out the mission. I think the lower down you got in the hierarchy the more pessimistic you were about the long term chances because you could see the continuing strength and respect for the VC out in the countryside and the weaknesses on our side. But the view became progressively more rosy as you went from the village level to the district level to the province level to the Saigon level and then back to D.C.

I was quite startled in the spring of 1969. A high ranking senior embassy officer had visited Washington and came back and assembled the entire political section to discuss the situation. He told us that the war was about over, they can't hold out more than a few more months, you can expect peace this year. That was in 1969. That is sort of an extreme example of how the situation looked different...the realities are hard to define or express in the best of circumstances and you just got farther from reality with the chain I described.

Q: Was this one of these cases which is not unique to Vietnam where you have the more junior officers getting out into the countryside coming back with quite a different picture than those who are of more high rank, and partly because of their position of having to deal with the government, etc.? Did you feel there was kind of a split within the embassy between those who were getting out and reporting one world and those at the top who didn't seem to get the message?

THOMPSON: I think Ambassador Bunker had a pretty realistic view. Generally speaking our reports went into Washington as we wrote them. At one point the head of our unit then, Nick Thorne, would tone down our reports a little bit. When he went on leave and a young tiger took over as acting head, he said he was going to send in all our stuff exactly as we wrote it. So people wrote all these Airgrams telling about how they visited a town and all the Buddhist priests said that Big Minh should be president and Thieu was corrupt and should be out, and so on. All this stuff went into Washington unimpeded for two or three weeks. And, nobody took any notice whatsoever. There was no effect of this presumably franker reporting at all. And, of course, Washington was reading the New York Times and the other news reports coming out so they weren't just relying on the embassy. They realized the embassy probably toned things down a little bit.

You know, the State Department has a system for sending in dissent messages so if an officer has a policy difference he has the right to send that in and it is given high level attention in Washington. So, on one occasion I had written a cable about corruption, I think it was the fact that the general in II Corps was illegally logging cinnamon and selling it which was supposed to be prohibited. He was using army trucks. It was something like that, an everyday occurrence. I had a comment in there that the corruption would probably continue as long as the present

military government was in power. This got toned down in the front office. I said, "Well, why don't I send this as a dissent message just representing my views." Then they went ahead and sent it the way I had written it. That was the only time it ever came up in my case personally. But I think Washington had access to a lot of information besides embassy reporting and I don't think that really made a big difference.

Q: Well, there is a certain amount of inertia, once you start going down a certain course it is pretty hard to change.

THOMPSON: I think the problem in Washington was, as you say, how do you change the policy without creating an even worse situation. A lot of people forget that when we got into Vietnam there were active Communist insurgencies considered dangerous in all the countries of Southeast Asia. We were afraid the Communists were going to take over in the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand. In Indonesia there was an attempted Communist coup in which they came very close to taking over. It is against this background that we were trying to keep the finger in the dike in Vietnam. People looking at the situation later on when we had improved relations with the Soviet Union and China, don't remember that this was a time in which we felt we were competing with the Communist influence all over the world. I mentioned earlier about having an embassy in Niger. We managed to stop them in Korea and we had to do the same thing in Vietnam. So I think people fail to remember that background. But, once we are in, then it is very hard to disengage and you come up against another of the myths that people were saying after we achieved the peace agreement in 1973, that we could have had the same agreement four years earlier and saved a lot of lives. Well, that is not true at all. In 1969, which I think is the year the Paris Talks started, the Communists were demanding a coalition government. Well, that meant we had to overthrow the government we supported in the south, and everybody agreed that would mean an almost automatic Communist takeover, because that would leave them as the only organized force in the country, and it was not until the negotiations in the fall of 1972 that they agreed not to require that as a precondition for some sort of agreement. So the Communists changed their position and it was only then that our government felt that it could honorably get out. We could leave and the government we had put in place there and were supporting would still exist. To overthrow that government ourselves would provide problems of credibility and dishonor, I think our leaders felt rightly, around the world. Only after the Communists made the additional concession did the US government feel that we could honorably withdraw. So, following up on your question, how you get out of it even when the world had changed...for example, after the opening to China in 1972, we no longer felt we were opposing China by remaining firm in Vietnam. In fact, the Chinese and the Vietnamese were staunch enemies. So, as the international situation changed, the original interest of having to oppose communism everywhere became greatly diminished as we improved relations with Russia and China, but it is still very hard to withdraw once you are in that deeply. I think our leaders were right feeling we could not do that until the 1972-73 period.

Q: How long were you doing provincial work?

THOMPSON: For 20 months. I came back in October, 1969.

Q: Let's concentrate on that period. What was your impression on how the American military

was dealing with the situation in the Delta? You were able to go around and sample opinion and probably had a different view than many. How was this system working in the Delta?

THOMPSON: In the Delta area there were American military as advisors, but not regular units, at least in the provinces I was in. It depended so much on the personality and ability of the individual advisor. In some places we had very good people and in some places I felt they weren't so good. But it was still an advisory position and I think the Vietnamese officials, by and large, had a more fatalistic view. In other words: This war was something that had gone on for a long time and was going to go on a lot longer. The result eventually would be settled by arrangements among the great powers -- China and the US and Russia -- so whatever they did wasn't very important. The most important thing for them to do was to survive and perhaps lay up a small fortune for their family and children, because your family is more important to you than anything.

Starting from that basic premise you weren't in a situation where the Vietnamese really wanted to take chances or run risks of getting people killed or even themselves killed or stirring things up too much. So I think you had a pretty passive Vietnamese military and I don't think the American military advisors would make that much difference. Now that's a very broad generalization.

Q: Were we continually uncovering corruption and making noises about it, or were we learning to live with it?

THOMPSON: Well, probably both. I think everybody who had been there for a while realized this was endemic and that a certain percentage of everything you gave would probably be skimmed off one way or another by the local authorities, but there wasn't much you could really do about it and unless it was really blatant you wouldn't complain. There were certain times and places where people did object and probably obtained some improvement if it was exceptionally blatant from a public affairs point of view vis-a-vis the population, beyond the bounds the population would accept, because they would probably accept a certain level as being part of a way of life.

Q: I would guess that the Delta wasn't an area of particular interest to the press who were probably involved elsewhere.

THOMPSON: You are absolutely right. There were relatively few reporters in the Delta, they tended to be more with the American troops or in Saigon.

Q: What was your impression of the media at that time?

THOMPSON: I would not have an impression of the media during that period. As a provincial reporter traveling around the Delta I met reporters rather infrequently. During my next tour, which we haven't talked about yet, I became better acquainted with a number of them. My first tour, ending in October, 1969, I really didn't meet enough to have an impression.

Q: Okay, Dick, why don't we call it off at this point and we will pick up next time with your second tour which was from December, 1969 until February, 1972.

THOMPSON: Fine.

Q: Today is August 12, 1994. Dick, so we are now in December, 1969. What were you doing after you came back after home leave?

THOMPSON: I might mention that on November 8, 1969 I got married in the National Cathedral in Washington to Kathlee Calhoun Crouch, who is the daughter of the late Edward Crouch. He was a well-known Foreign Service officer in his time who ended up being deputy assistant secretary for budget and finance, testifying on the Hill because he got along well with Congressman John Rooney who virtually ruled the State Department at that time. So I came back to Vietnam with a bride.

Q: Did she come with you at that time?

THOMPSON: Normally wives were not allowed except for members of what was called the Mission Council, a sort of large country team they had there. They wanted me to come back because they were trying to get experienced officers to come back for a second tour. So I said that I would come back if I could bring my wife. So they said, "Okay." She was one of a relatively few wives.

Q: When you came back, what were you doing?

THOMPSON: I came back to a slightly different position. During my first tour I was what they called a provincial reporter covering 8 provinces in the Delta out of 16. My second tour I was following Vietnamese internal affairs and had special responsibility for the lower house of the national assembly; certain political parties; a special organ of their government to fight corruption, since that was recognized to be a serious problem; and the supreme court. It was more typical political section work than my first tour.

Q: How did you find contact with the Vietnamese deputies?

THOMPSON: Well, it was very easy. You know, Americans, especially young political officers assigned to Saigon, were really spoiled because the United States represented power to the Vietnamese and whatever faction there might be, and there were a lot of political parties and factions there, they all wanted to have an American connection because that was their way of getting their views to the American embassy. So it was really very easy to do political work, to make contact. In fact, you were being besieged by people really too minor to waste your time on. And the deputies were generally friendly. There were very few who tried to be standoffish towards Americans. They were generally very friendly as were all the Vietnamese in the government because they recognized that they wouldn't exist if it wasn't for American support.

Q: What role did the lower house play?

THOMPSON: That is a good question. They had a national assembly with a lower house and an upper house. I am trying to remember back now, they did pass legislation and often important legislation since they and the government were united in the anti-communist effort. Key pieces

of legislation necessary to the war effort that were passed sometimes were changed by the national assembly. There were what were considered opposition deputies who used the assembly as a platform to be consistently critical of the government. There was a very active press in Saigon and about 50 daily newspapers ...maybe 35 Vietnamese language and a dozen Chinese language and a couple of English...representing a fairly wide spectrum of political opinion. There was a pretty free press there. A lot of them were very critical of the government and of the United States presence there, too. They would publish pictures of what were allegedly fetuses deformed by Agent Orange and things like that. So there was more political life and activity going on than a lot of people might suspect from a distance. You might just think that it was a military government and that was it. But they did have some of the substance of democracy there. They had a constitution and an election in which President Thieu was elected president. Even though behind the scenes the military did retain control through its control of the military apparatus, they permitted quite a significant degree of political activity and freedom.

Q: What about the supreme court? Did they play much of a role?

THOMPSON: My memory is, and I am sure scholars have done a better job on this, is that since their constitution did provide for judicial review, as we do in the United States, now and then an issue would be taken to the supreme court which would have some significance and political importance. I remember a time or two I was in a rather embarrassing position of lobbying the supreme court to make a decision one way or another. In retrospect, this would be unthinkable in the United States for a foreign diplomat to be lobbying the US supreme court. But these were issues relating to what we thought were important political aspects of what was going on there.

Q: I am always interested in nuts and bolts, how do you lobby a supreme court?

THOMPSON: You call on the chief justice or the other justices in their offices and point out the importance of the decision they are about to make, for example, disqualifying a presidential candidate or not disqualifying him, or something. I don't remember the precise issues, but they were things that we felt important to the political health of Vietnam.

Q: You were there from 1969-1972, I was there from 1969-1970. It was at a much lower level at that time. Was there any change that you saw up through 1972?

THOMPSON: From the military point of view, we had obviously driven the opposition's main force units pretty much back toward the borders by the time the Paris Agreement was signed. Certainly there was a political structure in place in many areas and the North was just building up waiting for its chance to attack again. But, as you say, the cities were quite tranquil during that period. There was the Tet attack, of course, in early 1968. In the spring of 1969 there was another lesser nation-wide offensive that was very serious in certain locations. And then things were fairly tranquil until the signing of the Paris Agreement in January, 1973.

Q: How about opposition groups? Were the Buddhists a problem anymore?

THOMPSON: That is interesting. They had been so important before I got there with the immolations, etc., which is the period of our willingness to go along with the overthrow of Diem.

Although we had somebody who is our most fluent Vietnamese speaker...

Q: Who was that?

THOMPSON: Harold Colebaugh, who left the Foreign Service some years ago. His career was relatively brief, but he was a very talented linguist. But when I was there I don't recall that the Buddhist political parties really had a leading political role. Some parties had more Buddhist support than others. But the Buddhists as such, as I recall, were in a somewhat secondary role.

Q: Were you limited in your contact with the Vietnamese military? I am thinking of the embassy. Or did we leave that more to our military?

THOMPSON: Well, we had a couple of Foreign Service officers in the embassy who were supposed to follow political/military affairs. I know they saw generals from time to time, but I would be reluctant to try to describe in detail the extent to which we were in touch with the senior officers. Of course, Ambassador Bunker kept in personal touch with the top military leaders. After a while the prime minister was also a general. I think when I arrived the position was held by a civilian and for some reason that didn't work out and so a general was made prime minister. Ambassador Bunker certainly kept in touch with that top level. He was constantly having people to dinner and doing an excellent job of keeping in touch.

Q: This was probably the largest political section we have had anywhere. How did you find the political section, particularly this latter half of your time there? There were a lot of people running around, lots of contact, but how effective were they?

THOMPSON: Washington wanted to know in detail what was going on in Vietnam and it was a vitally important issue for the United States then. So I think the political section was certainly needed. For example, the provincial reporters, the unit of about eight people who went around the country, plus a chief, that would be nine people all together and that was part of the political section, gave the civilian part of the embassy and, I think, Washington tremendous insights into what was going on around the country. There was the CORDS system which was ultimately considered under military command but with a civilian deputy. You had people out in the country working on reconstruction and helping the local forces fight at the same time. There was reporting going back through their channels also. But it often didn't reach Washington as fully as our reporting, and it tended to be spotty in some provinces. In some locations you would have some bright young fellow with Vietnamese who would really turn in some interesting information, and in other places you didn't. So I think the embassy reporting really pulled it together for Washington. I think I counted 25 or 26 people in our political section at one time. For an important country I didn't think that was too many.

Q: Let's talk about corruption. How did you see corruption? For many looking at this from a distance, it seemed that the Vietnamese government was sort of fatally flawed because of the corruption angle.

THOMPSON: World wide the idea of taking care of your family first and then your village and clan, etc. is rather strong as opposed to our idea of a government. A certain degree of

government taking a rake-off is expected by everyone and accepted, but it was excessive in many cases. This was obviously a great weakness of the Vietnamese government that we were supporting. Some people were considered excessively corrupt and grasping and greedy and that weakened us in competition with the Communists who, of course, although they had their people on the take, by and large were rather honest and ascetic as symbolized by "Uncle Ho" who apparently lived a very simply life. It was almost monastic, as I recall. That was a very serious problem, weakening popular support for the government.

Q: Did you see any serious effort to try to do something about it?

THOMPSON: Not really. There was an organ set up by the constitution to fight corruption, I forget the name of it now, but it just couldn't be effective because the main people being corrupt were the military leaders who really ran things. So there wasn't much that they could do.

Q: Were you ever involved in saying, "I hear general so-and-so of the II Corps is taking a rake off here and there" and reporting it and that sort of thing?

THOMPSON: That was done especially at the provincial level where we had a province senior advisor, who I think would be telling his province chief that he had better curb this or that. I don't recall much being said about this at the national level. It may have been, but I don't recall any such demarches.

Q: When you arrived there the second time...you basically left during the Johnson Administration and came back in the Nixon Administration....did you note any change in demands on the political section such as more candor, less candor, more complete, less complete?

THOMPSON: I am trying to remember. As I recall, Ambassador Bunker was kept on straight through. I didn't really notice any changes from one administration to another. What was sort of interesting was that the Communists were very clearly trying to exploit every presidential election. In 1968 it was the Tet attack and then in 1972 it was more on the negotiations scene that they were trying to use the American presidential election to weaken our political will. They were really combining military strategy with political tactics in a very skillful way.

Q: In the second period, before we move on to the Paris Peace Mission, were there any major developments in Vietnam that you were involved with?

THOMPSON: I might say two things. In the first place, there were a lot of functioning democratic institutions and the people were used to it and politicians got used to it, and I think there was a lot of progress in making democracy a reality among the political elite of the country. In 1971, as I recall, there was a presidential election and that turned out to be a one man election. There were various ways you could be nominated to be president. You had to be nominated by a certain number of deputies and senators or by a certain number of the provincial councilors. President Thieu had been telling Ambassador Bunker that there undoubtedly would be several candidates. Then suddenly, close to the deadline for qualifying people, Bunker discovered that President Thieu had pressured almost all of the provincial councilors to sign up for him. In fact,

there were very few that hadn't signed up for him and would be available to sign up for somebody else. Ambassador Bunker felt that Thieu had really lied to him on this one and was furious about it. As I recall, somehow Nguyen Cao Ky, who was a well-known figure had got enough to be nominated, but I think then he withdrew. Either he didn't get enough or he withdrew, I forget which, so he was suddenly out of the picture and Big Minh, a leading general but a critic of the Thieu government, was the only hope to be an opposition candidate. I think there were enough lower house. He had quite a bit of support among lower house deputies. I think he had enough or would have had enough signatories from deputies to run, but he said it was obvious that it was going to be a fixed election and he wouldn't run. There was a famous meeting when Bunker came back from Washington and called on Big Minh. Big Minh said afterwards that Bunker had offered him one or three million dollars (I can't remember the exact amount) if he would run, the idea being that the US wanted it to be a real election with two candidates, at least in appearance. I went with Bunker to that meeting but at a certain point I was asked to step outside so I don't know exactly what went on between them. I think probably what really happened was that Ambassador Bunker offered financial help to Big Minh's campaign or at least it was in that form and Big Minh turned it down because he said he knew it was clear, even though we were offering money, we still wanted Thieu to win. Thieu was the US candidate but we wanted Big Minh to run to make the election look good and he wasn't going to do that. So, he didn't run and the election in the end was uncontested, which was certainly a setback. But, overall, I think if there hadn't been a Communist threat they might actually have become a democratic society.

Q: You left there in December 1971, is that right?

THOMPSON: Yes, that would have been a two-year tour. I got there in December, 1969 and probably left December, 1971 or January, 1972.

Q: I might just note for the record that you got the Superior Honor Award for your work there. Was this for just sustained work or was it for any particular action?

THOMPSON: I am very grateful to John Sylvester who wrote it up and pushed it through. He wrote it up that I had done excellent reporting, sometimes in physical danger, which was certainly true from time to time.

Q: This goes back to your provincial reporting?

THOMPSON: I guess it would have been the first time, although he was actually my boss during my second tour. I guess he must have gone back into my provincial days when writing this up. On one occasion, for example, I was sitting at the airport in Can Tho, the capital of the Delta region, in a small plane waiting to take off, when mortar rounds started coming in on the airport. The pilot had to sit warming up his engines while the mortar rounds came in and then he took off. Or you would be flying along in a chopper and land at some small town and be told that the VC had fired at the chopper from a nearby tree line. Of course you couldn't hear it while in the chopper because of the noise. I guess there are incidents like this in the life of everyone there. I think it was given for a combination of excellent reporting and some danger.

Q: When you left there in 1972, whither Vietnam in your opinion at that time?

THOMPSON: Well, I think we all felt that Vietnam would be dependent on strong American support in view of the tenacity of the North. The only way the South could survive would be through continuing American support. You could see that such support was gradually slipping away over the years. So, I think our long-term prognosis was pretty poor, even though by 1972-73, there was an appearance of tranquility. There was a major communist offensive in the spring of 1972, but thereafter the enemy's main force units had been pushed back into remote areas around the borders and economic development was proceeding very rapidly. Their exports were going up very quickly. Rice production was booming. There were fish farms. The country had had virtually no exports for a number of years and their imports were covered by US assistance, but their exports were now zooming up. There were signs that they could have a viable economy. But this was all kind of a false picture of prosperity in view of the constant threat of the North renewing the offensive.

Q: What was your next assignment?

THOMPSON: After my second tour in Vietnam I was assigned to the Paris Peace Talks. But before we move on to Paris I should note Kathleen and I had two children born at the U.S. Army Third Field Hospital on the edge of Saigon. John Edward Thompson born August 29, 1970, and Francesca Cloud Thompson born September 1, 1971.

Q: Okay. You were in Paris from 1972-74. When you arrived, what was the status?

THOMPSON: Well, they were a kind of ritual that had been going on for at least a couple of years. There had been all that discussion about the shape of the table, but by the time I got there that had been settled. Of course, those sorts of issues are very important because they are symbolic. One side maintained that they were four-sided talks, and the other side maintained they were two-sided talks. So you had all these seemingly trivial issues like the shape of the table and the arrangements, etc., which really were symbolic of who was actually going to prevail and impose his view on the other side. They went to the heart of how the war would come out.

By the time I got there there were these talks in the Conference Center in the Avenue Kleber. They were very ritualized with the exchanging of statements around a large table, then you had lunch, and then would come back for some rebuttals. There were four delegations for North Vietnam, the United States, The Republic of Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which was the puppet government that Hanoi had set up purporting to represent the South. Of course, the famous Madame Binh was the head of that delegation. You would come into the room and the first few minutes are kind of exciting to be sitting there with the North Vietnamese and Madame Binh. And then the speeches drone on and it becomes less exciting, especially as every speech had to be given in three languages. The procedures were set up that the Vietnamese would speak in Vietnamese, it would be translated into French and then into English. There was simultaneous translating so you could hear all three at the same time, but it still meant that every statement was made three times so everything was really dragged out.

Q: What were you doing?

THOMPSON: I was liaison officer in our delegation. This meant that I was the person authorized to talk to the other delegations to set up meetings, sometimes to exchange documents, and at times visit their headquarters to exchange documents or procedural proposals or something. If you stop and think this makes a lot of sense because you need to have a designated person as a contact point for the delegations. If someone else from the delegation called them they should ignore him or her. You could imagine a delegation with 12 or 15 people if anybody felt he could phone somebody from another delegation and start setting up meetings or passing papers, etc. You needed to have a definite point of contact for that sort of thing.

I did some of the reporting on the meetings and there was always a press conference right afterwards in the same location where the four delegations would take turns speaking to the press. I would do a reporting cable of what was said at the press conference. At the actual meetings, part of the arrangements was a big circular table and a small rectangular table on each side which sort of divided the big table into two sides. That was part of the proceedings. I sat at a small table and opposite me on the other side was the North Vietnamese liaison officer. His English, of course, was much better than my Vietnamese. When somebody started a speech we would exchange the text because they were all written out ahead of time to help your translators know what to say. So, he and I did certain things relating to our duties as liaison officers even during the meetings.

The whole point of these lengthy meetings was to make them last until lunch because the French would give a good lunch. Apparently in the early days, it had been a nice hot lunch, but as the years went on, it started becoming a cold lunch, but it was still very tasty. So, the object was to make sure you could go on long enough to get lunch. And then you would come back for a round of pro forma rebuttals and then go home.

Of course, behind the scenes, as revealed later, Kissinger was carrying on his secret talks. Now and then, in hindsight, there was a faint reflection of those in what went on in these more or less public talks.

Q: Who was leading our delegation?

THOMPSON: When I arrived, it was William Porter, who was a very respected career officer and who thereafter became briefly number three man in the State Department, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and then I forget if he retired or left with the change in administration or what. Anyway he held that job for a relatively short time. A very nice person. Very realistic. One of the relatively few high ranking people I heard that always spoke honestly and made sense. He was in the Phil Habib mold who always spoke directly and frankly and realistically. His assistant was Heyward Isham, another career officer who retired not long thereafter. The next important development was in October, 1972 when Kissinger revealed the secret talks.

Q: What did that do to what you all were doing?

THOMPSON: It meant the suspension of the talks around the round table at Avenue Kleber and a couple of us were then taken from the regular delegation and brought into the Kissinger talks. I was brought in as a second interpreter. He had a very gifted interpreter, David Engel, who really

spoke fluent Vietnamese.

Q: Where did he learn Vietnamese?

THOMPSON: Well, I think in the system. He was at the Foreign Service Institute and just a very gifted person. I was pulled in to the delegation as sort of an additional flunkey to attend meetings. I don't remember exactly what happened, but basically what happened secretly was that the North had started to pull back from positions it had been taking before and that was when Kissinger revealed the secret talks in October. I attended one or two meetings then at houses in Neuilly, a suburb of Paris where we met with the North and they in effect were confirming that they were pulling back from previously agreed positions. There was one last meeting in early December at which Hey Isham was head of our delegation, all the top people having left already. Hey Isham and I went out to a Communist-sponsored meeting place on the outskirts of Paris and just ran down the list of issues and confirmed that they had pulled back on everything. This set the stage for the famous Christmas bombing of Hanoi, after the election.

Q: You say that they pulled back from previously agreed positions, these are ones that both sides had agreed to?

THOMPSON: Yes, in the secret talks.

Q: And then all of a sudden they just stopped?

THOMPSON: I can't remember. I am talking from memory. I am sure Kissinger has written about this.

Q: Were both sides looking over their shoulders at the battlefield at that time?

THOMPSON: No, they were looking over the shoulders of the American presidential election. And I suppose the reason they pulled back was because they saw that Nixon was going to win and they were not succeeding to influence the election by their maneuverings in the secret talks. The last meeting we held with them was after the election, I recall, in December, and they were still recalcitrant so we had the famous Christmas bombing.

There were two military officers attached to our delegation. During most of the time it was a general and a colonel, but towards the end it was a colonel and a lieutenant colonel. They had the best intelligence coming in from around the world to our delegation. During the Christmas bombing the North started shooting down B52s, the first time any were shot down. I can't remember how many were downed but from our intelligence we also knew they were running out of missiles so they would soon be totally helpless in the face of our bombing. Under the influence of this bombing, which I think was intended to be close to Hanoi, somehow stray bombs not only strike the French embassy, but killed the ambassador's mistress, which is very unkind indeed. So, in early January they agreed to resume the talks, the secret talks which by then were not very secret because hordes of newsmen would follow Kissinger wherever he went.

Q: Did you attend these meetings?

THOMPSON: Yes. Some meetings were between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, and I would be there. As they started to make progress, they broke into two levels and Kissinger and Le Duc Tho would be working out the general agreement and Ambassador William Sullivan would be meeting with a deputy foreign minister, Nguyen Co Thach, who later became foreign minister. Bill Sullivan and Thach would be working out the protocols which were the details of application, how you set up inspection teams, etc. in a separate set of meetings. So there were two sets of meetings going on. The principals, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho might be meeting in one place and Sullivan and Thach in another meeting place. So I was the interpreter for the Sullivan/Thach meetings and David Engel would stay with Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. Now and then I would be in one of the principal meetings. Maybe they would have to meet and talk to set some guidance for the secondary meetings and then the secondary meetings would resume.

Q: How did Kissinger and Le Duc Tho conduct their meetings?

THOMPSON: When the meetings first resumed in January, they were very frosty. The media, of course, didn't have much to go on but they set up cameras on raised towers 20 feet high so they could focus down inside the walls and see what happened between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. Kissinger would arrive and knock on the door and somebody would let him in. Then after some days Le Duc Tho would come out and greet him on the doorstep and guide him in, and then he would shake hands on the doorstep and guide him in. So the newsmen judged by this how warm the talks were getting. As they started to make progress, at first you would have lunch separately. Then they started having lunch together making it a social occasion between the two delegations. And then Kissinger and Le Duc Tho would sit together and chat during the lunches. So the atmosphere gradually grew warmer as we made progress toward an agreement. By the time we got to the point where they were sitting together they were chatting together almost like old friends. You could tell that they were both very intelligent men, very dedicated to the interests of their respective countries and that there obviously was continuing reserve and carefulness even as they were seemingly chatting in a social way.

Q: Before going to a meeting, what would you and the support people on the delegation do? Would you sit around and try to figure out what you were trying to get from that particular meeting?

THOMPSON: I was not a substantive factor in this. Kissinger certainly would sit around and talk with Bill Sullivan; George Aldrich, his legal advisor who had been working on the negotiations for years; Bill Stearman, who I think is now on the faculty here at Georgetown and who was there with the NSC, about what they were going to get out of these meetings. I was not involved in that.

Q: You had been in Vietnam for a long time, did you find yourself being asked how such and such played with the Vietnamese, etc.?

THOMPSON: No, Kissinger and his substantive assistants had been dealing with the Vietnamese in these negotiations for several years and there wasn't anything a political officer from Saigon could add. They had been gaging and judging these people at the level they worked for years.

Q: At this point we essentially bypass the South Vietnamese and the Viet Cong?

THOMPSON: That is very true. Of course, the PRG was only a puppet anyway, although Madame Binh tried to pretend she had a more serious role from time to time. We immediately briefed the South Vietnamese after every meeting. Kissinger usually sent Bill Sullivan to do that. Whether he told them everything or not I don't know. You will recall that at one point the issue arose that the negotiators had been working with English language documents and there was also a Vietnamese translation. We gave the South Vietnamese the Vietnamese version of the document and they said, "Well, look, in Vietnamese this says very different things than it says in English." We went back to the North and got some changes in the Vietnamese language to correspond more closely with the English. But they were somewhat shunted aside. I can't remember the exact sequence of the meetings, but I recall at one point when the agreement had been virtually finalized and we were preparing for a very formal international conference because there was sort of a guarantee statement that would be signed by China and the Soviet Union, as well as the four countries involved. There was an international conference with the foreign ministers of all the great powers for the first time in many years after World War II. They all came together in Paris to sign the document guaranteeing and recognizing the agreement on Vietnam. While the preparations were being made for this, suddenly Madame Binh called for a meeting around the old round table again. I remember I was meeting with Ambassador Sullivan and Thach in another room in the conference center to work out some final procedures for the formal signing while she had called this meeting. I can't remember what she was talking about, but anyway, our meeting finished and we came in to the other meeting and Thach was resuming his chair as head of the North Vietnamese delegation. Thach, the deputy foreign minister, walked behind Madame Binh who was talking to the group and stopped and made a choking gesture behind her where she couldn't see him and everybody else in the room laughed and he went on and sat down. This, I think, was pretty symbolic of how the North Vietnamese regarded the Provisional Revolutionary Government. They were nonplused when she called the meeting because this was not following orders.

Q: During this time did you form any relationship with your North Vietnamese counterpart, or were things still chilly at your level?

THOMPSON: Since we met together and chatted during the luncheons, of course, and I had my counterpart close to me at the general talks, so we chatted a bit about our families and other things, I felt there was a certain degree of personal relationship. At the secondary meetings between Sullivan and Thach working out the protocols, again you had the regular meeting at a table, which might be the dining room table in a house in a suburb, but then you would adjourn for tea after a while and Thach spoke pretty good English, although Sullivan and he could talk in French too, and they would sit off to one side and probably work on some of the details. Tea breaks are very important in diplomacy as you know and that was certainly true of these.

Q: Did you stay until the end of the whole process?

THOMPSON: Well, even beyond in a sense. I am trying to remember when the Paris Agreements on Vietnam were signed. It was in late January, 1973. At any rate, once the

agreements were worked out and initialed all the foreign ministers came together and had a big signing and cocktail party in this conference center at which the Foreign Minister of South Vietnam and Madame Binh clinked glasses and toasted peace...I remember at the same party I ran into a Soviet diplomat who had been posted five years in Hanoi and we talked for a half hour in Vietnamese, that was our common language. That was kind of fun.

One of the things that was set up by the Paris Agreements on Vietnam, was a joint economic commission between North Vietnam and the United States because we had undertaken a commitment in the agreement to bind up the wounds of war, which meant to give the whole of Indochina additional help. There was a secret promise, under Johnson, that was originally proposed to North Vietnam that they would get a considerable amount of assistance and this was confirmed in an exchange of correspondence between the prime minister of North Vietnam and Nixon that they would get, as I recall, \$3.25 billion over five years. The Agreements also set up a joint economic commission. So I stayed on in Paris as one of two delegation members who were kept on -- the other one was Bill Marsh, now US Representative to the FAO in Rome -- to staff this new delegation. New people came out from Washington to be substantive members of this delegation headed by Maurice Williams, then deputy administrator of AID, who is a very able man. On our delegation, only Maury Williams and I knew that Nixon had promised \$3.25 billion over a period of five years if the North Vietnamese would be good. This was a secret for several years. It finally became public a few years later.

So these meetings started taking place at two levels. There would be meetings between heads of delegation in which key issues were discussed. Of course, the North wanted us to hand them a check for \$650 million every year and they would know how to spend it. We were saying that they had to have projects and sign agreements for each project and have the full AID detailed treatment of each project. The North was saying that that was ridiculous, etc. So, we worked out a set of principles which would guide the US assistance. In our general meetings with everybody from both delegations present we would be discussing our assistance on the basis of specific needs they had, the commodity import program, a statement of principles to guide the US assistance to North Vietnam (their principle would be hand over a check and ours would be all the usual oversight safeguards of an AID program). But after two or three months it was clear that they weren't abiding by the agreement. They were preparing for future war, so we broke off the talks.

In June, 1973, there was something called the June Communiqué. Things were breaking down so seriously that Kissinger and Le Duc Tho came back to Paris and had some additional talks and came out with a communiqué which to some degree modified the Paris Agreements and described how both sides would implement them. This joint economic commission came back and met again briefly, as I recall, in June and July. But the North was not observing various parts of the agreement from our point of view and we adjourned those talks and never met again. I think the world has not really noticed that that joint economic commission ever existed, ever met, but we were, of course, holding out carrots to the North Vietnamese to observe the Paris Agreements, which would have preserved an independent South Vietnam.

Q: When the Paris Accords were signed in 1973, how did you feel? What did you think?

THOMPSON: We felt that the North would probably take over the South in the near future. We were withdrawing our support from the South. Kissinger observed it, and the rest of us, that the South could not stand up and prevail since US support was gone, and Congress had passed a law forbidding any further bombing of Hanoi. These agreements would give us a chance to pull out our troops and make an honorable retreat. There was a lot of talk that Nixon could have had the same agreement four years earlier, but that is not true because the North had been insisting that we set up a coalition government with the current government, neutralists and communists in Saigon even before they would let us withdraw, which was absolutely intolerable. It was only in the negotiations of 1972 that they started to say, "Okay, you don't have to overthrow this government before you leave." So the South Vietnamese government which was our client stayed in place, we withdrew our troops, got our POWs back and were able to withdraw the American forces in some sort of order from Indochina, and that was about the most we could hope for really. We left with the government we supported still in place and with some perhaps small fighting chance to maintain itself, but we weren't very optimistic. So I think we all felt we had gotten what we could out of it and managed to negotiate a more or less honorable US withdrawal from this commitment to Southeast Asia, which obviously was not supported any longer by the American people.

Q: By the time the Peace Accords were signed were you watching Congressional actions as far as support for the war went?

THOMPSON: Yes, that was very clear. Even the hawks were giving up. Of course, then the fighting was resumed, there was the offensive in 1975 and there was a very key vote, and I can't remember how much the money was, perhaps \$300 million, on assistance to the South. By then even the hawks were saying that there was no sense throwing good money after bad, so even the hawks were not willing to vote money for Vietnam by 1975. You could see that trend developing already.

Q: When did you leave Paris after these economic talks had broken down?

THOMPSON: After these talks adjourned in July, Marsh and I were left there in charge of the delegation.

Q: This was in 1973?

THOMPSON: Yes. These talks had adjourned but in theory they could resume. Our delegation's quarters were very splendid because these quarters were a section of the American embassy in Paris which had been organized to house the US ambassador to NATO and his assistant. So they were very nice offices in Building B, as it was called, adjoining our embassy in Paris. It was just Bill and me in two very impressive large offices with large anterooms and a whole series of smaller rooms for other members of the delegation, etc. So we were kept on there I guess almost indefinitely. Finally after a while I said to the Department of State, "There is nothing happening here, will you reassign me?" But by then my two years were almost up and they said, "Fine, we will do it." Ambassador Graham Martin asked me to come back to Saigon to be head of the external affairs unit in the political section. I left Paris I believe in February, 1974 and I arrived in Saigon in late February or March after some home leave in the States.

Q: We are talking about February 1974, what was the situation then in Vietnam?

THOMPSON: The internal situation, as I recall it, was relatively peaceful. There wasn't fighting, the Republic of Vietnam seemed to have extended its sway over most of the population of the South. The economy was improving, as I was saying before there was some international aid coming in in addition to American assistance and you started to think that maybe this country was going to survive after all. Although you knew that the North was strong and wouldn't give up, at that time they were obviously lying low. I was chief of the external affairs unit in the political section, which was very different from my earlier two tours. Now I was following Vietnam's relations with the world and my main local client was the Foreign Ministry. The main thing I was doing was trying to keep the PRG from being accepted in international organizations. Bureaucratically it was kind of fun. Usually we would get an intelligence report indicating that the PRG was about to open an office in Geneva or something of that sort to represent the PRG in the UN organizations based in Geneva. Then we would send cables all over the world saying that this is an awful thing and recommending approaches be made by Washington to a bunch of countries to stop this. Washington would get out a cable saying "Okay, proceed as recommended by embassy Saigon in para 3 reftel," or something like that. In Washington they were sort of paralyzed, nobody wanted to do anything and take the lead, but Graham Martin's orders were to try to preserve South Vietnam if he could and by God he was going to try to do it. I even got some phone calls from Washington saying that people didn't like these cables from Saigon going all over the world. I said, "Well, we are just doing our job. You guys are paralyzed back there, and this is what we are supposed to do."

Q: Why would they be paralyzed?

THOMPSON: Well, there was no interest in Vietnam anymore and they would rather not think about it. I think it was just harder to get higher-ups who were going on to other problems to worry about keeping the PRG out of international organizations. So we were really taking the lead on that and that was kind of fun.

The other main function my section had was watching Hanoi. I had a State Department officer, David Walker, who had been doing this for years, and he would look at all the intelligence reports we were getting plus looking very carefully at the public broadcasts from Hanoi from the Foreign Broadcast Information Service and doing analysis of what was going on.

Also nominally in my section was Frank Snepp, who later wrote a book, "Decent Interval" on the fall of Saigon, which was interesting reading. Frank Snepp was also involved in analyzing what Hanoi was up to. The external unit had the main function of watching Hanoi and keeping the PRG out of international organizations, dealing mainly with the Foreign Ministry.

There developed another fun function at that time. Congressman Leo Ryan of California, a moderate Democrat, came to Saigon and I was named his escort officer. When he arrived in Saigon he was put in the guest quarters next to the ambassador's house and the ambassador came over [this is Graham Martin at this point] and the Congressman was very grumpy to him. I think he was mad at the State Department about something that didn't have anything to do with Saigon,

as I recall. He also had a cold from the trip and was tired. He was pretty short with poor Ambassador Martin. I accompanied him on a trip around the country and I always enjoyed these trips because you get a lot of chopper rides and small plane rides and get a good look at the countryside and get to talk with a number of interesting people. Congressman Ryan went back to the United States and issued a report supporting continued aid to Vietnam. Well, Ambassador Martin thought that somehow I had something to do with this favorable result so he made me the control officer for all VIP visitors to Saigon. So I spent a lot of my time flying around Vietnam escorting people, which was great fun. One group was especially outstanding, Congressman Pete McCloskey, who is a liberal Republican, and Senator Dewey Bartlett. The two of them came together. Bartlett later died of cancer and McCloskey ran against Nixon in 1972 in the Republican primaries so there would be some alternative to Nixon. McCloskey had been in Vietnam before and had a loose leaf notebook with the notes from his previous trip. Every time he was talking to a Corps commander he would hear what he had to say and then respond, "In 1972 you said the same thing, has nothing changed?" He was really interesting to travel with. So, the third function was escorting VIPs around the country which I enjoyed very much.

Q: How did you find Graham Martin? He became very controversial because of his hanging on until the very end.

THOMPSON: I was in a rather special position with Graham Martin because Eddie Crouch, my wife's father, had been a very good friend of Graham Martin. My mother-in-law, Kitty Crouch, was a very good friend of Dotty, Graham Martin's wife, and still is for that matter to this day. So I was to a certain extent persona grata with him. He brought in a group of personal friends who had served with him at other posts to fill various key positions in Saigon and this group would give parties for each other and I was included because of my wife. We would go over to his house and watch movies with him and his family. Often his daughter, Janet, was there... I don't know if you have read the book, "The Last Ambassador" by the Kalb brothers. It is a novel based on the fall of Saigon which includes the daughter of the U.S. ambassador there at that time and that character was modeled on Janet Martin who spent a considerable amount of time in Saigon. She was one of my wife's best friends, so I had a personal relationship with the Martin family. I respect him a great deal for his personal integrity. I think he did not reach out like Ambassador Bunker did, he would read reports from everywhere but he didn't personally talk to Vietnamese very much except when he had to make a formal demarche, as I recall. He was an insomniac so at 2:00 in the morning he would be writing reports and cables on yellow legal pads on new ways that we might outflank the North and win after all. I can't add a great deal to the picture. But he is definitely a man who had his own quirks and his own blind spots, even though he was also a very able man and had been ambassador to at least Italy and Thailand before that and been very highly regarded. He did his best to preserve South Vietnam and that was really something impossible to do.

Q: What was the prevailing feeling in the political section -- that there would be an eventual Northern attack which would prevail?

THOMPSON: Yes. But that was somewhat in the back of your mind because superficially things seemed to be going very well. Then suddenly, I think it was February, 1975, there was an attack on Ban Me Thuot, the capital of one of the highland provinces not all that far north of Saigon. As

I recall, there were elements of three divisions involved in this attack and we hadn't known they were there. Previously by listening to radio communications we had had pretty good intelligence on where the major North Vietnamese units were. They had figured out we knew where they were from their radios, so they had run tremendous long land lines or used couriers, etc. and managed to move in the jungle without our knowing where they were. So suddenly we had an attack not very far from Saigon by elements of three divisions. At that point most people thought this was the beginning of the end. The estimates by various agencies of how long Saigon would last varied from something like six weeks to six months. But once the North renewed the attack people started getting pretty pessimistic. It was not long thereafter that there was an attack in the north. The South had to keep divisions throughout the country making it easier for the North to roll up the country by concentrating its forces in one area at a time, moving southward. There was a plan to try to defend the Delta region at some point, but by then the Southern troops were crumbling and they couldn't form a defensive line anywhere. So once the end began it came rather quickly. More quickly than the North expected too. Usually they planned everything for months and worked everything out on sand tables, but they did not expect to win that quickly. They did not have plans in place to govern Saigon and the South, for example, but they made the decision once they saw how weak the South was to go ahead and win that year. Of course, that was my calculation too, when I agreed to go back to Saigon. I bought a house in 1974 when I was in Washington on home leave. I thought that I could probably finish a two-year tour in Vietnam before the North would win. We received extra pay for serving in Vietnam which would enable me to repay my parents for the down payment on the house. In the end it was only one year to the surprise of both the North Vietnamese and myself.

Q: You left when?

THOMPSON: I left -- I am confused whether it was April 29 or April 30, because it was one date in the US and another date in Saigon -- but the day of the fall of Saigon, I left by chopper from the embassy roof, about 9:00 PM. There was a very dramatic period leading up to that.

Q: Please talk about it. I think it is very important to get a feel for the embassy and the political section and how you felt. For those of us sitting back in Washington, when you saw Da Nang go down and those dramatic pictures of people being pushed out of planes, etc. you knew it was over. But the embassy kept functioning. What were you all thinking?

THOMPSON: By and large the same thing. It was only a matter of time. There were just differences of opinion as to how quickly the end would come. At a certain point about the beginning of April they started permitting families to be sent out to a safe-haven. I think I sparked that. I should be somewhat modest, but I suggested to the Deputy Ambassador, Wolf Lehmann, that it might be a good idea to start getting families out. My family went to Bangkok, but the Thais said that they did not want all these people so we had to send the rest somewhere else. When I went back to Vietnam with my wife in 1969 families were generally not allowed, but it gradually became easier and easier as the situation improved and a lot of families including children were in Saigon by 1975. I sent my family out about four weeks ahead, around April 1. By this time we had three children: Alexander Sackett Thompson had been born October 21, 1972 at the American Hospital in Neuilly, a suburb of Paris. Kathleen was much more comfortable there than at the military hospital outside of Saigon.

Getting back to the last days of Saigon, there were scary stories, especially the CIA people started saying that if they left for a weekend the local Vietnamese working with them started thinking that this must be the end. I went for a weekend to Thailand to visit my family and came back and my maids were tremendously relieved to find that I had in fact returned. As the fighting got closer and closer politically an interesting situation developed. The Paris Agreement on Vietnam set up an international commission to watch over the withdrawal arrangements and these people were still there. There was a Polish delegation and a Hungarian delegation and Tom Polgar, the CIA chief of station in Saigon was of Hungarian descent, and he felt he was getting good information from the Hungarian delegation indicating that the North was going to stop short of taking over Saigon and force the formation of a coalition government. You could see a lot of reasons the North might do this. It would give them international legitimacy, they would be eligible for international loans and assistance, on the surface they would be abiding by the agreements on Vietnam which called for a coalition to be established, and creating a very stable situation. So you can imagine that there might be reasons for the North Vietnamese to stop short of Saigon. On the other hand, Frank Snepp indicated in his book that he had a good strategic source who was telling him that the North was simply going to take over Saigon.

So this affected me personally in the sense that...there was the night of the 28th when I was awakened at 3:00 in the morning because Tan Son Nhut airport, on the outskirts of Saigon, and three miles from where I lived, was being shelled. When I went in to the embassy that morning I didn't know if I was going in to accompany the ambassador, who still thought there would be negotiations locally on some sort of coalition, so I wore my best summer suit ...if I was going to be evacuated I might as well take it out with me, or I might need it to accompany the ambassador to negotiations. So, either way I wanted to wear my best suit. I also had a very small bag that had just the key things in it you would need if you were going to be evacuated...towel, soap, toilet kit, change of clothing, etc. So I took my evacuation bag into the embassy and learned that evacuation was indeed in the cards.

Now, as far as evacuation was concerned my role was to be in touch with several other embassies. We had drawn down personnel in the American embassy, my secretary had left some time before and I had had several substitute secretaries and then they left. But certain people who had a role in the final evacuation were kept on. My role was to get in touch with certain other embassies and tell them, "We are leaving, if you want to leave with us do this." The last few days all four lines of my telephone had been constantly lit. I couldn't begin to take all the telephone calls I was getting and it was very hard to get a line out. I was afraid that on the final day I would not be able to get in touch with these embassies by phone and I would have to physically go around to them. In the end, however, I got through to them very quickly and my actual duties were done. So I helped other people do things like shredding documents. Some people had not shredded documents, for example the ambassador had not shredded his documents and he had file cabinet after file cabinet that had to be shredded that last day. I had about this much left.

Q: You are showing about six inches.

THOMPSON: Yes. I tossed them in the shredder and was ready to go. I also took my telephone list, containing Vietnamese contacts, etc. and shredded that. I didn't want to leave anything that

would show them who my friends were. So then I helped other people shred and organized various things that last day. At one point my maid telephoned me to say that the guard at the gate had left my house and she was very frightened and didn't know what to do. I said to take the TV and anything else she wanted and to clear out because we were evacuating and I wouldn't see her again. She was crying, I was crying. The Vietnamese language is very hard to speak at best but I found it very hard to speak while crying. Then my faithful chauffeur came around. I had inherited him from my predecessor. I gave him several months salary for him and all the others in several envelopes in Vietnamese currency, which I hope he was at least able to get to the one at the house. I was able to pass the envelopes through a locked gate. Somebody told me that a few months later they had seen my car, which was very distinctive, a yellow Volkswagen squareback with a shiny silver knob on the shift lever being driven around Saigon. So, some Vietnamese Communist official presumably got that.

I got to the embassy at the usual time, around 9:00 am and parked the car across the street and never got back to my car again. The embassy was soon surrounded by Vietnamese wanting to get out. There were already several thousand inside the embassy compound, because during the night certain Americans had been bringing their friends in.

I am really getting ahead of the story because for several weeks there had been a degree of evacuation going on of South Vietnamese who might be in difficulty if the North Vietnamese won. There was a lot of controversy at higher levels about evacuation with the military authorities wanting to start evacuation fairly early on and the ambassador resisting this as I understand from the stories at that time. You have the famous story of Lionel Rosenblatt and Craig Johnstone, two Foreign Service officers stationed in Washington, coming back to Saigon to help their friends escape during the final weeks. I was keeping a tally of how many people there were at the embassies we were responsible for that we might have to get out on the final day and other people were keeping a tally of the number of Americans that might have to be evacuated the last day. In the end, no American who wanted to evacuate, as far as we know, was left behind. But the number of Americans actually went up on some days rather than going down. This infuriated the ambassador because he thought it would be coming down. But people were coming back to get their Vietnamese friends or their loved ones out.

We started helping Vietnamese who would be in danger leave the country and at some point the ambassador gave this his blessing, I don't know when. When I came down to breakfast each morning I would find several Vietnamese there who wanted me to help them get out. I would apologize for eating while I talked with them. I would eat breakfast and they would give me pieces of paper, listing their family members, how they could be contacted and stating why they were in danger. Upon arriving at the embassy I would write a cover memo for each of these and put them in the in-box of Shep Lowman, the head of the unit in the political section dealing with Vietnamese internal politics. The members of this unit were going around at night and picking up the Vietnamese, or telephoning and telling them to be at a certain place with their family members and suitcases, and taking them out to the airport. So I put these papers in his in-box and he would decide which ones were worthy to be taken out under our program. He conducted the actual evacuations but I would receive all these petitions from these people and put them into our system. I was very touched when one Vietnamese friend said that if I didn't get out he had a friend who would help me to get out -- he was an importer who had a lot of boats and when the

final day came he would get on his boat and sail away. Later I learned the Vietnamese friend who offered to help me did get out and it turned out that his friend, the businessman, did not get out because he went down to his boat and all the crew members turned out to be VC. He said that the last he knew his friend was working disguised as a cyclo driver, the Vietnamese equivalent of a rickshaw driver, in Saigon and living a very meager life. So, if I had tried that way out I wouldn't have made it. Anyway it was very touching that somebody offered me a way out.

But anyway, there was all this confusion in the final days. All these stories of people throwing babies over the fence at the airport to get them out, etc. which is all true. There was also a heightened sense of sorrow from various things that happened during the last couple of weeks. A few days before the final evacuation a C-5 loaded with orphans went down near the airport and many were killed. Also, a couple of days before the evacuation I got a call from the Australian ambassador saying that he was concerned that his friend, the Australian chargé in Laos, had not shown up at Tan Son Nhut airport when he was supposed to meet him. So I started phoning our embassy in Laos and other sources. It developed that this plane had been shot down in the Highlands by the South Vietnamese for some reason and that his friend had probably been killed. So, after piecing things together I had to call back and tell him that his friend had been killed in this crash. This kind of sorrow for several days was pretty depressing for me.

Q: How about the consular section? I'm a former consul general there.

THOMPSON: They were working very hard. There was a line several people wide and a couple of blocks long in front of the consular section every day. I say this subject a little bit to correction, but people in the United States, of course, were sending in petitions to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for their Vietnamese relatives to get out. So the Americans would be told by the INS that it had approved their petition and sent it to the consular section in Saigon, so tell your relatives to go by the embassy and pick up their visas. Well, you couldn't pick up your visa if you were at the end of a line two blocks long. In the case of Vietnamese relatives of an American that I knew, Edward Height, I helped them bypass all this because I knew they were relatives of an American and they got on a bus at a certain spot and were taken to the airport and evacuated. But there was a mismatch between what was going on frantically in the Consular section in Saigon with the petitions piling up and the routine information being given to the families back in the United States.

Q: Were you privy to how Graham Martin was operating during these last days?

THOMPSON: In a sense, what he thought was happening and what really did happen worked together. For example, he thought that the North Vietnamese would stop short of Saigon and negotiate a coalition government. The embassy would remain in place and keep functioning, working with this coalition government. Once it became clear this scenario was not true and the North...they paused a few hours until we finished our evacuation and then they came on in. They paused just outside Saigon to let us get out. Once it was clear that they were not negotiating and we were going to evacuate, things were really out of his hands. His only goal then was to evacuate as many people as possible because he felt that we owed it to these Vietnamese. The choppers went on and on evacuating people. There were several thousand people, including the famous bar girls from Mimi's, within the compound at that time. He wanted to make sure

everyone possible would get out before we left. When I left there weren't very many people remaining, but they kept going for several more hours. Finally he was ordered by the President to leave because the chopper pilots and crews were far beyond the limits of endurance that they should have been observing in terms of flying. He was ordered to get out and he did get on a chopper. And then the battalion of Marines who were guarding the embassy perimeters withdrew and the looters came in. There was a lot of talk about some people being shot at, etc. as we left the embassy. I certainly never saw any of that or felt in danger. There had been a lot of talk among Vietnamese who worked with Americans who said they were going to take the pin out of a grenade and hold it and stay with you until you are able to get me out, etc. The final day I didn't hear or see anything of that sort. The people around the embassy were peaceful, they were not shooting at us. They wanted to get out if they could, but they were not hostile as far as I can remember and not shooting at the choppers as they took off. So the evacuation went off, as far as I am concerned, in a rather peaceful way. Once you got up in the air there would be tracers coming up at you, but we were told we were above where they could reach.

On the last day the big symbolic act was cutting a certain tree down in the parking lot within the embassy compound to make room for the choppers to land. Of course, when you came to the embassy you were not allowed to park in that lot, there was another lot across the street. The choppers could land both on the parking lot and on the roof to take people off.

I took a chopper from the embassy roof about 9:00 PM for about 45 minutes to a ship out in the South China Sea. There were tremendous flames and tracer bullets you could see out toward Long Binh where we had a large base which was obviously to some extent burning. There was a tremendous light show going on all around.

Q: Where did the ship take you?

THOMPSON: I went to what was called a landing ship dock, I can't remember the name of it although I have it written down somewhere. This is a boat whose purpose is to transfer troops from a troop ship to an aircraft carrier or to shore. Helicopters can land on its deck and the rear end comes down and six smaller boats can go out. So you could shuttle troops from a troop ship on to this ship and then they can get on the small boats and go ashore, for example. The military took more time than people expected to put the ships into position. You can't just put a boat off shore and simply take people off. You have to have a way for people to get on the boat. The helicopters would land on this boat and the Vietnamese would get out and go down to these smaller boats which would take them over to commercial vessels which had nets over the sides and they would climb up them. Then they were taken to Guam, which is ten sailing days away.

Vietnamese refugees had to go on to the commercial freighters, but American evacuees simply stayed on the ship that I was on. It had extra space. I had a bunk and was quite comfortable. The next day we were not far from an aircraft carrier and the South Vietnamese Air Force people loaded up planes and flew out to this aircraft carrier. You have heard the stories, they would land in a helicopter, they would all get off and then the aircraft carrier crew would shove the helicopter into the ocean because they needed space for more helicopters to land. So the equipment couldn't be saved. This went on for several days and it was quite dramatic with various boats and the aircraft coming out from the shore to the fleet here to be rescued. Finally

we were told to steam off to Subic Bay. Have you talked to Francis "Terry" McNamara?

Q: Yes.

THOMPSON: He had quite a dramatic departure from the Delta. Some refugees in the end stayed on our boat, camping out on the deck until we got to the Philippines.

Q: Did you find yourself using Vietnamese to talk with them?

THOMPSON: Yes, to some extent. Once they got settled there wasn't all that much. I would go among them to see if they had any problems now and then. The ship provided them with food and a blanket apiece. They brought some stuff with them. Apparently most of them were Catholic and there was a priest who was their leader. He was the only one you needed to talk with. The Philippine government did not want any Vietnamese brought to the Philippines, but apparently the instructions to the U.S. ships stated that only Americans could be brought to the Philippines. This caused some problems because the chopper I was in included a Japanese diplomat. He had come that morning to the embassy on some liaison mission and then because of the crowds surrounding the embassy decided he couldn't leave. He could have climbed over the fence and probably gotten back to his embassy but I guess he didn't feel he should do that. So, he stayed at the embassy. When he got to the American vessel they would not let him stay on board, they made him go with the Vietnamese, as if he were going to Guam. But eventually he was located and plucked off a freighter after spending a couple of days with Vietnamese refugees. He became famous in the Japanese diplomatic service for the adventure of having been taken out of Saigon in this way. The rest of the Japanese were evacuated in a more orderly fashion. There was a French woman and her daughter, who I knew very slightly, who had gotten to the ship earlier and the executive officer of the ship was insisting that they go with the Vietnamese because the Philippines had said only Americans. So there were these other people from other countries who really would have had no problems in the Philippines. I don't know where the French woman and her adult daughter ended up. So, the evacuation from my point of view was quite orderly and successful.

Q: You went to the Philippines?

THOMPSON: We went to Subic Bay and had some processing there and then were flown to a Naval air station near Manila and then bussed to the embassy where we got hotel rooms. I spent a couple of days there before going back to Thailand as soon as I could to get back together with my family.

Q: And then what happened? Did you all go back to the States?

THOMPSON: Well, some people immediately went into the effort to help Vietnamese refugees. There was a refugee task force that was formed under Julia Taft. I went to Thailand and just felt drained. I stayed there with my family for two or three weeks. By that time my wife had an apartment. I stayed there until the rainy season came and I couldn't sun myself or go to the swimming pool any more, so we decided to go back to the United States. I had compensatory time and I used some of that. When I did go back to the States I was put on the Vietnamese

Refugee Task Force for a month before I took up a regular State Department job.

Q: What were you doing with the task force?

THOMPSON: Well, I was working with Lionel Rosenblatt. He had a small group of inspectors and troubleshooters. I went to various camps around the United States to see how each camp was carrying out its processing and whether the procedures that one had adopted would help another to do its processing faster. That was rather interesting. I did that for one month.

Q: How did you find the process worked to get the Vietnamese to work? It moved rather quickly didn't it?

THOMPSON: Well, you know the impressive thing was De Tocqueville was right about private organizations being so important in our society. There were a number of these refugee organizations, I hate to mention one and leave out others. The Catholic Charities, the Tolstoy, Lutherans, etc. were doing such a tremendous job of helping these refugees. Of course, the Lutherans were mostly from the northern United States, so the refugees would get from the north down to the south as soon as they could for the warmth. But these organizations were tremendously impressive in their capacity to absorb these refugees out of these camps. Again, the camps were usually set up by US military organizations who were just superb. So the camps were all doing well. I visited Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, and Indian Gap, or something, up in Pennsylvania and I felt everybody was doing a very good job in all of these locations to get these people processed and out into American society as soon as they possibly could.

CLARKE MCCURDY BRINTNALL
Major, U.S. Army
Phouc Vinh (1969-1970)

Brigadier General Clarke McCurdy Brintnall was born in Omaha, Nebraska. He attended Wentworth Military Academy and University of Nebraska, but graduated from West Point in 1958. Though his bachelor's degree had an emphasis on engineering, he also studied American history, diplomatic history and Portuguese. He has also served in Brazil and Panama. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 2, 1996.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when?

BRINTNALL: July of 1969 to July of 1970.

Q: Where were you serving?

BRINTNALL: I served with the First Cavalry Division. I was the Intelligence Company Commander for the Division.

Q: Where were they located?

BRINTNALL: At that time the headquarters was in Phouc Vinh, north of Saigon. It was positioned to block the approaches from Cambodia.

Q: When you got to Vietnam in 1969-1970, how did you see the military situation? What was your impression? The Tet Offensive had taken place in 1968 and so here you were in this particular period.

BRINTNALL: I was a little bit puzzled. I knew what our Division was trying to do, but I didn't really understand the overall objective, exactly what we were doing there. However, I was a new Major and I thought that maybe I wasn't supposed to understand. At any rate, I was too busy to spend much time in introspection. Half way through the tour I decided to resign from the Army, effective at the end of my tour in Vietnam. Later I withdrew the request, but I was still troubled.

Q: What type of work were you doing?

BRINTNALL: We provided the tactical intelligence for the First Cavalry Division and its three brigades. The Division had 345 helicopters and was a formidable fighting force, a superb unit. I had detachments stationed with the Division's three brigades. We provided tactical order of battle, imagery interpretation, counter intelligence and prisoner of war interrogation.

Q: What was your impression at that time of the enemy presence in Vietnam, of both regular line troops and the Viet Cong? How were we seeing the forces arrayed against you.?

BRINTNALL: Obviously, they were very tough and they were very good. We had respect for the units. Particularly the regular army units.

Q: Were you seeing at that time that the Viet Cong had pretty much shot its bolt?

BRINTNALL: No. I didn't see that it had shot its bolt. I saw it as a very active enemy that was continuing its efforts to defeat the South Vietnamese and American forces.

Q: How about the ARVN? The Army of the Republic of Vietnam? What were you getting both from your own views and also from the commanders who were dealing with the ARVAN?

BRINTNALL: I was a little disappointed. I had expected that after all those years of fighting they would be better than they were.

Q: This is a time when we were beginning to draw back as far as our participation...

BRINTNALL: The emphasis was on the "Vietnamization" of the war, something we probably should be doing since the beginning. This was President Nixon's plan to get us out of the war and turn it over to our Vietnamese allies.

Q: Did you find a change in the tempo of what the First Cavalry was doing?

BRINTNALL: Yes. I was told that it did not enjoy the high tempo of operations that it had when it was in the North, but it was still very active. At this time there was much greater emphasis on working with and training the South Vietnamese counterparts, but the patrolling, the fighting and the casualties continued.

Q: How about the American Troops? Were you beginning to see the problems that developed later on of moral and discipline?

BRINTNALL: There were problems, yes. For us, they were not overwhelming problems. The First Calvary Division was an absolutely first-rate unit and did not have some of the problems that affected other units. But were there morale and disciplinary problems? Yes.

Q: Were you there during the bombing incursions into Cambodia at that time? Did you get involved in that?

BRINTNALL: I was there but was not involved, either directly or indirectly.

Q: You were fairly close to it weren't you?

BRINTNALL: Fairly close, yes, but I really was not aware of it.

Q: It wasn't discussed at the briefings?

BRINTNALL: No. I don't recall our actions in Cambodia ever being covered in the regular briefings.

Q: It, after Tet, it was another of those defining moments. I know. I was Consul General in Saigon at the time and I thought well, goodnight. I thought this might do something to break up North Vietnamese's bases of supply. But obviously it was too complex for us to go in and out in such a hurry. Well, you left Vietnam when in 1970?

BRINTNALL: July of 1970.

Q: We left the same time. What did you think about whither Vietnam when you left?

BRINTNALL: I was uneasy. I didn't know whither Vietnam. I knew that things weren't going right militarily, politically or economically. I didn't know what to do about it but I had left Vietnam and began to think about other things.

CHARLES STUART KENNEDY
Consul General
Saigon (1969-1970)

Charles Stuart Kennedy was born in Illinois in 1928. He entered the Foreign Service in 1955, serving in Germany, Saudi Arabia, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Greece, South Korea, Italy, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed in 1986 by Victor Wolf.

Q: I see that from the Department, you went in 1969 and '70 to Saigon as consul general. This, of course, was at the height of our involvement there, but at the same time, shortly after it became obvious that we were going to be reducing our military presence there and hopefully eliminating it as quickly as possible. Do you think you could tell us something about the consular work in Saigon, movement of peoples who were in Saigon during that period of '69 and '70?

KENNEDY: The interesting thing, really, is that there wasn't a great press for visas. The war wasn't going too badly. I arrived in February 1969, and I left in July 1970. Those 18 months, American troops were beginning to disengage, the war had gone rather well, the Viet Cong had exhausted itself in the Tet Offensive the year before I arrived, and the situation was, you might say, upbeat. Another thing that one has to remember is that the Vietnamese themselves really loved their families, loved their homes. You might think, "Gee, everybody wants to get out of here." There wasn't much of this. Some professionals had left, but if they were going anywhere, they would probably try to go to France rather than the United States. So our main emigration was wives of G.I.'s, and even those might get their visas, but then they would go to the United States, take a look around, and say, "To hell with this," and many of them came back and kept their green cards [alien registration cards]. But our problem was often trying to tell the American husbands that their wife, who had gone home to see the family, she really wasn't being trapped back in Vietnam; she just didn't want to come back at that point.

Prostitutes were always a problem for consular officers where ever American soldiers are stationed, and we had about half a million G.I.s in Vietnam at one point. The consular problem was that prostitutes were not eligible for visas under the law and the only way around the problem was if a special act of Congress was passed for each exception. Congressmen were not happy about having to introduce special legislation for constituents who had married prostitutes, consuls were unhappy about the paperwork and investigations that had to be done on each case, and the men marrying these girls were not only unhappy, but angry at the consuls for impeding their brides from coming back to their homes. During the Vietnam war Congress changed the law to make it easier, and we consuls breathed a sigh of relief.

Some of the girls that the soldiers would become involved with were pretty unattractive and I wonder how they made out when brought home. They looked pretty good after being out in the jungle, but I suspect that most of these marriages did not last and the girls were thrown on their own resources, generally back to prostitution at massage parlors, within a short time. I remember we would get letters from time to time from a ex-soldier asking us to locate "Jenny (or Mary, Susie) etc. who lived in the third "hooch" [hut] in the prostitute section of Vung Tau, the local R & R [Rest and Rehabilitation] area near Saigon and ask her to marry him." We would try to help and sometimes could locate the young ladies and put them in touch with their loved ones in America. The problem was that the ladies of Vung Tau were "rent-a-girls" who would take care of a soldier for the week of his leave and then move on to another and often have no remembrance of the man who had rented her some months before.

Q: You're saying there was, in a certain sense, a misconception or a poor communication or poor understanding. The Americans assumed that these women were in terrible difficulty and desperately trying to get out, whereas in actual fact, many of the Vietnamese spouses were not that terribly concerned about not returning to the United States, at least at that point.

KENNEDY: Absolutely. It was quite a contrast between Korea, where there was not a war, when I served some years later. So immigration from Vietnam was not as major a problem as were other problems of Americans in trouble, but that's another story.

One problem that I did have was with Vietnamese orphans whom Americans wanted to adopt. The situation was urgent. Because of the war there were many orphans, often just infants being kept under appalling conditions in hospitals. Americans respond to this sort of crisis and were trying to adopt these children. The problem was that the Vietnamese had a French-based law on adoption. It was a typical European approach to adoption for the time. You had to be of the same race, religion and over 50 in order to adopt a particular child. Of course this ruled out almost all Americans. The only way to get the adoption approved and a visa issued was to get the law waived. The only person who could waive the law was the President of Vietnam, who had other more pressing problems. President Thieu would not delegate this task and so there was quite a bottleneck. From time to time I would send word to the ambassador that we would like some movement on the orphan approval business and reluctantly he would raise the issue.

Q: Of course, from 1975 on, we began to have large numbers of people leaving. Were there any precursors? Were there any signs that such a thing might happen?

KENNEDY: No. As I say, the war was going well, and it was only when things started to collapse that everybody tried to get the hell out. There was a general feeling that if the country was to collapse, if the Vietnamese Government would collapse and the North would take over, yes, there would be a tremendous desire to get out. But that just wasn't happening when I was there.

The following is an excerpt from the unpublished memoirs of C.S. Kennedy regarding his time in Saigon.

The staff of the consular section consisted of about eight Americans and twenty Vietnamese, mostly ladies. A major problem besetting all foreign organizations trying to do business in Vietnam was the shortage of English-speaking staff and the consular section was no exception. Most of the Vietnamese had only been working for us a few months and there just was not that depth of expertise that consular officers had come to expect in most of our posts; we consular officers were in fact spoiled and in Vietnam all of us had to go back to our instruction manuals to relearn the basics of visa work and then to teach the willing but novice young ladies in their tasks. It was difficult since these young ladies (I use the term deliberately, since most were young and of good families and were in fact ladies) were not fluent in English and had been acculturated by their society to say "yes" when asked if they understood something even if they did not. Once trained, however, they were quite efficient and developed a rather commanding presence in dealing with our clientele, who were mostly the wives of U. S. servicemen who came

from a lower strata of society; a good number were actually hardcore prostitutes and difficult to deal with.

I had a fairly segmented group of consular officers, my two senior officers were of the old breed, no real interest in what was going on beyond their immediate concerns. My deputy was quite competent in his field of consular expertise but had a drinking problem, which meant he was not always on hand. The other senior consul was close to retirement age, a confirmed bachelor with a host of lady friends from the older American ranks who took more of a sisterly interest in him than otherwise, or so I believe. He had connections all over the city and could be invaluable in getting odd bits of consular business done, but he was temperamental and I found I was having to continually massage his ego and tell him that he was important. He was always feeling he was being insulted by other people or ignored and so a good part of my time was spent as resident consular psychiatrist, not only with him, but also with some of the younger officers. They were having problems of conscience, being in Vietnam when many of their contemporaries in civilian life were out protesting American involvement in the war. Also we had a lot of work and kept at it five and a half days a week, plus other duties so there was pressure. There were several female officers in their first or second tour as FSOs who were having problems because of all the American military officers who were attracted to them but with whom they had little in common. I could understand their dilemmas and the pressures of their social lives, but it could also play hell on their tempers. I had a couch in my office and from time to time one of my officers, male as well as female, would come in, stretch out and explain why they could not stand such and such any more. I did my best to be whatever was called for, listening or making suggestions based on whatever advice columns I had read in the newspapers or got out of my previous courses in psychiatry or on sheer gut instinct. I also spent a good deal of time going over the litany "why are we here?" which I more or less believed in, and still do, but never was as convincing as I should have been since I was not really sure what we really wanted and was more and more dubious about how we went about things.

Several officers stick out in my mind. There was one whom I can't help feeling was an experiment, and a stupid one at that, on the part of our selection and recruiting people back in Washington. He was in his early twenties, wore his hair long and stuck out in a great mop, which in that era was not done in the business/government world. I have never been a great conformist, especially in matters of hair, but this sort of "Afro style" especially in a young white man, was considered the sign of a radical and radicals were the kids who were protesting against the war. Now I was trying to man a quiet little office that was serving young men who were over in Vietnam in uniform and who were, willingly or not, putting their lives at risk in a debatable cause and many of them felt the State Department had considerable responsibility for their presence in Vietnam. Needless to say, seeing that character, and he was not a strong personality who could have overcome the initial impression, dealing with passports caused all sorts of scenes with some of our more vocal military and civilian clientele. He was a poor officer, haircut or no, so I had to keep him in the least demanding job, passports, while I worked frantically to get him out of my section. No one wanted him, but eventually he was transferred elsewhere in the embassy. Before he left there were even a few letters to the editor of the local English language paper complaining about long-haired State Department radicals in the embassy consular section.

I had long talks with the lad, but could not order him to get a haircut as we were not that sort of

organization and it went against the grain. I did point out, however, how it was hurting his effectiveness but he really did not understand. While we worked in shirt sleeves, we did wear ties and when this young vice consul started coming to work in a crumpled shirt and no tie I called him in and explained that we wore ties as sort of a badge of office in an informal world, that for an odd reason it did convey a bit of authority and I would appreciate if he would wear one, which he did thereafter. After my little spiel when he left my office I suddenly realized that this was practically the same speech given me by Consul General Schwinn back in Dhahran ten years before when I had experimented with an open shirt policy. I suppose that we consuls general have a tie fetish.

Not to dwell on my young non-conformist vice consul, but he started another little practice that I had to squelch quickly. He used to post anti-Nixon cartoons on his office wall. Now President Nixon was not one of my favorite people and I had no problem with some of the sentiments portrayed in the cartoons, but it was a government office, one dealing with the public and my jerk of a vice consul just did not see what was wrong with his practice. I am sure he felt I was a conservative fuddy-duddy, and perhaps I was, but the cartoons came down as a result of a direct order. I might add that it has been general practice throughout our history to have the picture of the reigning president in the offices of the chiefs of the consular sections as well as in ambassadors' offices. In Belgrade I displayed Kennedy and then Johnson on the wall behind me, keeping Kennedy on since it was sort of an icon for the Yugoslavs. On the wall facing me though I found some old engravings of presidents and had the two Roosevelts, Teddy and F.D.R., and Truman hung as they were the leaders that I especially admired. In my office in Saigon and later in Athens I kept Nixon's picture on the part of the wall where it would be partially obscured when I had my door open, and I followed an open door policy.

There was another officer, on his second tour who gave me an even greater headache than did the hairy one. This was my Protection and Welfare (P & W) officer. He seemed quite competent and went about his job of visiting American prisoners and taking care of legal matters in an effective way, or so I thought. Part of my responsibility was overseeing our consular post in Da Nang and when there was a shortage of personnel there we would help out. I sent my P & W officer up to Da Nang to fill in while the regular vice consul was on leave and I took over his work for a couple of weeks. The first thing I did was to go through the officer's in-basket filled with letters and memos that needed action. Now we all had cases that are of sort of left to percolate or waiting for additional data so I was not too concerned that the in-basket seemed pretty damned full, but the farther down I got the more annoyed I became. It seemed that this young man had been quite lazy in taking care of matters. As I went farther down into his work basket I found matters that were seriously overdue. I finally cleared up that mess after some long days and nights of work and was ready to give the man unshirted hell when he got back. Out of curiosity and suspicious concern I went to his file cabinets to check out how he had handled past cases and found out that by and large he had done nothing.

There were all sorts of legal problems that required extended action over a long period of time, especially matters dealing with the deaths of Americans overseas and if the officer is not conscientious about following through the families in the United States might not be aware that some details have been left undone until years later, if then. By the time I discovered this mess the Viet Cong Tet offensive had been over more than eighteen months. A number of American

civilians had been killed and their estates were the responsibility of the consular section. I found wedding rings, bank books and other items that should have been sent on to the next of kin, but which had been filed and forgotten. I was horrified and steaming mad as I worked on the problem. The letters I had to write to the next of kin to pass on the things I had found squirreled away were difficult, but I did clear things up eventually.

When my vice consul returned from Da Nang I had a long discussion with him. I am sure that his problem was more serious than being just a matter of laziness or carelessness. He was apparently a person who had a real problem in making decisions and filed things away without action if he could not bring himself to take some stand. For the rest of the time he was working with me I had him bring his daily work to my office and discussed what action he had to take and checked on this. I spared no details in my efficiency report on his performance as I was convinced that he just was not able to be an effective FSO despite an impressive academic background. I recommended he be selected out of the service, and that until that happened he be kept away from positions in which he would have unsupervised responsibility. Naturally his next assignment was to a small post in Thailand where he was the sole administrative officer. I heard he fucked up (that is the appropriate word in this case) again. He was transferred to another small post on an island in the Pacific where he again was the only administrative officer! He did the same there and after about two years after he left me he was selected out. The wheels of Personnel grind exceedingly slowly in cases of incompetence.

There were no country team meetings such as we had in Belgrade with all the section chiefs attending and reporting to the ambassador. Instead there were several mini-country team meetings consisting of different mixes of section chiefs presided over by Sam Berger. I used to meet once a week with the chief of the huge administrative section and Berger. Much of our discussions were over what to do about the black-market activities of Americans working either for our government or for one of the many large American construction firms doing business in Vietnam. One sour point was the so-called Embassy Club in downtown Saigon. It had been established under the auspices of the embassy in the mid-1960s during the period of major growth of our military and civilian presence in Vietnam. There had been a lot of trouble with American civilian sailors and construction workers, with far too much money, raising hell and at the same time being the prey of all the slimy characters who collect around places where there are transit workers with big bucks. The club was envisaged to be sort of a civilian USO with good, inexpensive food, a place to relax and few souvenir shops. There was a board of governors with the embassy represented by its administrative officer. Unfortunately because of lax supervision, or lack of interest, the club eventually got out of hand. The little souvenir shops soon were selling gold, furs and jewels. Embassy people more or less avoided the place, I only went there once or twice. It was pretty well taken over by the big American operators whom we suspected, with ample evidence, of being heavily into the black-market. They brought their fancy women there in droves which gave the place a certain atmosphere. The gold, furs and jewelry were convenient articles to get illegal funds out of the country. If you wanted to make a quick deal, probably illegal, the best place to make a contact was at the Embassy Club. This was not a savory situation for the embassy to be in, but because of contracts and concern about publicity, it was difficult to turn the situation around. I was involved because I had responsibilities in dealing with black-marketing problems. We debated the matter of the damned club in many mini-country team meetings. Finally the solution was more or less handed to us. During a yearly inspection it

was found that the roof of the club needed major repairs, so we shut the club down and put the jewel, fur and gold merchants out on the street (the deputy ambassador cleaning the temple!) and then announced that the club would reopen at an unspecified date and just did not authorize any money to repair the roof.

The consular section performed the full range of work with visas and passports being our main production. Despite the fact that there was a nasty war raging all over the country there was no great pressure for visas to the United States from the Vietnamese. We issued a lot of non-immigrant visas to Vietnamese going for business or training in the United States, and our immigrant visa unit had its hands full with the Vietnamese wives of GIs, but there was not the large-scale attempt to use tourist visas as a way to get to America and stay, or much of the fake marriage racket to get an immigrant visa as I later encountered in Korea. The Vietnamese were much like the French, they loved their country and wanted to stay there if possible. We had, in fact, some trouble with this love of the homeland. Americans would marry Vietnamese girls and bring them home where they would find themselves isolated (there were not yet the large Vietnamese colonies that developed after the fall of South Vietnam in 1975), and the women would then pester their husbands to allow them to go back and visit their families "for Tet". Often once back these wives would dig in their heels to stay, writing their husbands that they could not get back because the Vietnamese Government or the American Embassy would not let them. We would get a hot telegram from a congressman or senator asking what in the hell were we doing separating a fine and loving couple. We would check and sure enough the lady in question would be happy in the bosom of her family; and frankly I could not blame her for not returning. The family was all important in Vietnamese culture. One telegram came from Senator Mansfield of Montana asking about such a wife who apparently arrived in Great Falls, Montana in the dead of winter, took one look and decided that she had to return to Vietnam to take care of a sick relative. I doubt if she ever returned until, perhaps, the final days of the collapse. The good American congressmen were sure that any woman would prefer to be in the United States in their congressional district than in the middle of a war in Vietnam and suspected we had tried to hinder their return to their loving constituent's arms.

We would get odd requests from time to time and would try to help the GIs since they were usually out of their depth once they tried to do something not in the normal military routine. For example there was Rosie of Vung Tau. I received a letter from a young lad back in the United States asking me if the embassy could help him locate a girl; her name was Rosie and she lived in the third "hootch" [i.e. hut] on the left from a certain bar. Could we find out if Rosie was all right and have her write him as he wanted to marry her. Now Vung Tau was a town on the ocean near Saigon; it used to be called Cape St. Jacques, a resort area and some GIs went there instead of on a R & R out of the country. The place was full of young Vietnamese girls who followed the GI trade and obviously Rosie was one of those. As I got into the subject I found there was almost a rent-a-girl service for the GI in Vung Tau. He would appear for his week's R & R go to a bar meet a girl and after a bit of dickering over the fee would have the girl, a hootch, the surf, the sun and God knows what, for a week. He would leave at the end of the week and the girl would go back to the bar for the next transaction. The whole thing seemed like a sensible arrangement to me.

I called a young FSO who was working as a political advisor to a military unit in Vung Tau. We

both agreed that the chances of finding Rosie in the third hooch were dim, and even if found she would have been acquainted with perhaps fifty-two young Americans in the past year and her chances of remembering the one we were matchmaking were also remote. The Vung Tau FSO, however, liked the challenge and set off to find Rosie and did. Rosie remembered the ex-GI well and was quite happy he wanted to marry her. We put the two in touch by letter and we may well have been responsible for another American dynasty.

While the major preoccupation of our embassy was to help the South Vietnamese government defeat the attack on it by the North Vietnamese, I spent a great deal of my time concerned about Americans in trouble with the South Vietnamese. Besides the half a million American troops in the country at the time I arrived in 1969 there must have been close to 50,000 American civilians of various persuasions, U.S. government people in a multitude of programs, the place swarmed with reporters of all types from the resident correspondents of the major media organizations to free-lancers, most of whom were young, no real responsibility or experience and have a fine time enjoying a war, and at the same time criticizing it from no base of expertise. There were American contractor personnel who were rapidly turning Vietnam into a giant construction site, and then various American entrepreneurs and businessmen, some legitimate and some not. My major concern was with those who were not.

At any time in the past century or so there have been boom towns which attract the flotsam and jetsam of the world. San Francisco was one at the time of the gold rush in 1849, Alaska had it during its gold rush, Oklahoma was another in the 1920s during the oil rush, and wars created their own rush, London in 1940, then Paris in 1945 after its liberation; Seoul had its little boom time during my war and Saigon, along with Bangkok, Hong Kong and Singapore were the magnets for all those who were after a fast buck in the 1960s until the collapse in 1975.

There were plenty of legitimate business people in Saigon but there were also men who gravitated to where money was being spent to get the jobs done and to hell with the cost. There was a thriving black-market in the country consisting mainly of items brought into the country duty free to the large American military PXs we maintained there. The GIs would buy items at the PX walk out the gate and would be met by swarms of Vietnamese who would buy certain items at double or more of their cost. The military police were running all over the place arresting GIs and Vietnamese, there were ration cards and restrictions but the trade was just too lucrative to stop. Although we were all supposed to be fighting a lean and tough war the PXs were loaded with stereo radios, phonographs, TV sets, fancy liquors and what have you. There were two major decisions behind stocking PXs with such inappropriate items for a country at war. One was that our soldiers should be kept as happy as possible and a major attraction to military service was the ability to buy expensive items at low cost. Many soldiers did not sell on the black-market but brought a stereo set home as their souvenir of Vietnam. I still have mine, which is a bit crackly, but useable.

There was also the theory that if there were not PXs with luxury items the GIs would take their not inconsiderable wages and spend them on the local economy and bring inflation and impoverish the local populace, hence the PXs were used as sort of sponge to soak up the military pay. Another use of the PX was as a tool in international affairs. President Johnson and his advisors wanted to give the war in Vietnam at least the patina of a multinational effort by the

forces of democracy, i.e. the good guys, fighting against the spread of communism, i.e. the bad guys. Therefore there were small contingents from New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines and a sizeable force of South Koreans and a moderate contribution from the Thais. In order to keep the Philippine, Thai and Korean troops happy they were given access to our PXs and they used this opportunity to a fare-thee-well. I recall watching with annoyance and a bit of secret admiration, a Thai officer taking about a platoon of his troops through the main PX in Cholon, marching them from counter to counter, see that each purchased exactly the rationed limit of items such as cold cream, ladies shampoo, certain popular snack items, radio cassette tapes, towels and the like and then marching his now heavily laden troops off the compound while our military police provost marshal (police chief) for Saigon watched, getting redder and redder in the face. I understand that Korean troops did not mess around with that sort of nonsense. Wholesale lots of requested items were just delivered all packed to go home since the market was better there. If I recall correctly each soldier was allowed a cubic ton of goods to bring back with him, officers got more.

It was in this milieu that every American confidence man and sharp trader who could get a ticket and visa to South Vietnam operated. Some of them had worked out deals with the military and civilian employees of the PX and were doing especially well. Others had to operate on the fringes of the black-market, making little deals with individual GIs and the shrewd Vietnamese and Chinese who were involved in the business.

The consular section came into the picture when American civilians were caught by the Vietnamese in illegal transactions and either had not taken the precaution to bribe some official or was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. We always had a population of about twenty or thirty Americans in jail, mostly in Chi Hoa Prison in Saigon. It was not a nice prison, but in many ways life was better there than in many American prisons since foreigners were kept together, had no real work to do and could get certain foods and other items if they had the money. We used to visit them every few weeks and bring in some cases of combat rations to supplement their diets, listen to complaints and report on the progress of their trials or appeals.

There were some American prisoners who were in for crimes other than black-marketing, often for homicide. There were two items that were readily available in the American community, guns and liquor, and an atmosphere that put quite a premium on displaying toughness. Mix these together and people get killed and those that do the killing usually end up in jail. One case I remember was a man who worked for one of our construction companies out in the boondocks. He and his buddies had been drinking heavily sitting on the veranda at sunset. They thought the Viet Cong were sneaking up on them and one man took out his trusty automatic rifle and let loose at what he thought was a Viet Cong infiltrator, killing a laundry man delivering his clean underwear. The American ended up in jail. The South Vietnamese did not want to flood its jails with a bunch of Americans who required special care and feeding. A sort of tacit agreement developed, never spoken about or even alluded to, whereby Americans in jail gradually left the country in a completely unofficial manner. What would happen was after an American had been in jail for several months or longer he would be released and told he would be called back at some unspecified time, but he was not to leave the country. The prison authorities would keep his passport as surety. The ex-prisoner (or prisoner *interruptus*) would appear at my office, we would supply him with a new passport, and then my unit which dealt with seamen would find

him a berth on an American ship leaving Vietnam so he would not have to go through passport control. I would explain with a straight face that we were getting him a job on a ship to allow him to earn some living expenses until he was called back for a review of his case by the Vietnamese and to be sure to report back. Off he would go, never to be heard of again, and the Vietnamese authorities never questioned about the missing Americans. It was all very sloppy and I could not promise our people in jail they would get out or even hint that they would. All I could say was to keep cool (not easy in a tropical jail) and things would work out. I often wonder how the alumni of Kennedy's underground railway (or better undersea steamship line) are doing.

Two cases that stick in my memory concern a black-marketeer named Harms, or Arms and a murderer whose name I forget. Mr. Harms was in trouble with the Vietnamese over a long period of time, in and out of jail, but had several things going in the black-market and did not want to leave the country. At one point when he was out of jail there had been a big political issue by the media about the South Vietnamese using open roofed "tiger cells" for political prisoners and how they had been mistreated. One of the top correspondents for either CBS or NBC television came to see me to say that they had interviewed an American named Harms who said he had been kept in a tiger cell and had been mistreated while the embassy had done nothing to help him. I explained that I could not state categorically that Mr. Harms had not been in a tiger cell, but that we had seen him regularly while he was in prison and he had never mentioned ill-treatment. I also pulled out a fat file that had been given me by the Provost Marshal's office and read excerpts from it dating back to 1944 in Paris where Mr. Harms had been involved in black marketeering, then later in the 1950s he had done something in the Philippines and Korea, as well as in West Germany. The correspondent said that they would not take Mr. Harms' word on anything but he would love to do a story on the gentleman's career.

My murderer case was an interesting one. It seems that we had hired an American firm to bring in one of its big dredges into the Mekong River to keep the channel open. While doing its work in the middle of the river the first mate and the captain of the vessel got into a quarrel. The captain at one point went into his cabin, took his pistol, came back and killed the mate. Both were Americans. A U. S. military lawyer came up with the bright idea that this was a crime on the equivalent of the high seas since it took place on an American registered vessel in the middle of an international waterway; the Mekong is navigable into Cambodia. Acting on this theory our military police took the captain into custody and there he sat while the matter was referred to Washington for the top legal people to mull over the legal niceties. In due time, months in fact, the answer came back that this was not a high seas crime (which any layman could have told them) and to turn the man over to the Vietnamese authorities as it was their problem. When our police tried to do so, however, the South Vietnamese lawyers said, "oh, no, we agree that it indeed it was a crime on the high seas on a U.S. vessel and so South Vietnam has no jurisdiction". (I like to think that there was a twinkle in the eye of the South Vietnamese official who gave this decision). So this particular hot potato was right back in our laps. I told the Provost Marshal, "ok fellows, I have no option but to give him a passport and wish him godspeed." The U.S. military people then got mad at me, they had to be mad at someone, for not doing something, that something was not spelled out. All this time the captain kept quiet, did not protest his incarceration as a civilian in an American military jail, and in due time was reluctantly released, came to my office, picked up his passport and went back to the States.

Everything we did in Vietnam was a bit bigger than life; I for example, found myself in my capacity of consul general presiding over what were in effect the courts martial of American civilians. Because of the problem of black marketeering and other forms of corruption that spring up like toadstools wherever there is a massive, hurried spending situation, as in a war. The ambassador and the head of our military establishment, General Creighton Abrams, wanted to get some control over non-Vietnamese civilians who were involved in cheating either the U. S. government or that of South Vietnam. A joint embassy-military review panel was formed with the precious name of Irregular Practices Board and as the ranking civilian I chaired it. There was a civilian representative from A.I.D. (the U.S. government's Agency for International Development) and three officers from the Army's Judge Advocate's office. Cases would be presented to us by the Provost Marshal's office, i.e. the military police, with that officer acting more or less as the prosecutor. What we were doing was to review the cases of Americans, Koreans, Filipino and other non-Vietnamese who had been caught or suspected of dealing in the black-market or other "irregular practices" that could make them *persona non grata* (my diplomatic background keeps showing through) to the U. S. military. We were really looking only at the small fry; the big black-marketeer either would face criminal prosecution by the U.S. or Vietnamese would get off by some means or other. Our punishment would seem like a minor one, but was quite severe to those involved, the loss of U. S. military privileges. A person who lost his PX card and other privileges, could not deal with the U.S. military as a contractor and could not get on military bases. For someone absolutely dependent on access to the military for their livelihood, such as people who ran entertainment agencies for the troops, worked for an American contractor building new military facilities, or reporters who relied on military transport and the ability to get on and off bases, the loss of privilege was for all intents and purposes an end to their work in Vietnam. It was even more than that since they were sort of on the blacklist of our military so that later they could not pursue their trade in other countries where we had troops. Many of the people who came before us were dependent on their contact with our military for their livelihood, and we did not take our responsibilities lightly.

The actual responsibility of the Irregular Practices Board was to act as an appeals panel with our recommendation to be presented to the commanding general in Vietnam (Abrams). As far as I know our recommendations were always accepted. If a civilian was caught by the police, American or Vietnamese, in a black marketeering type operation or other such activity they could just have their military access papers taken away and they would slink off into the sunset. If, however, they felt they were getting a bum rap they could ask for a hearing by our board, and could be represented by a lawyer.

I did not relish the idea of presiding over the board when I first heard about it, especially when I found I was the only member who was not a lawyer by training, and that the sessions were open to the public. Like it or not I gritted my teeth and went to my first of many monthly meetings. It was not as bad as I thought it would be since the matters brought before it were rather simple. The most common case was of a civilian going to what we kiddingly called The Bank of India in Saigon. There were small shops, usually a tailor's, run by Indians in Saigon. Our culprits would have gone to one of these stores and given them a check with the payee left blank. The Indian tailor would give the check writer Vietnamese piasters at the black-market rate, about three times the official rate, and then smuggle the check to Hong Kong to be cashed for dollars. Then those dollars would be used to buy piasters in Hong Kong at perhaps four times the official rate and the

piasters would be smuggled back to Saigon and so it went. There were all sorts of restrictions on the export of currency and the rules were well known. These checks would be seized from time to time by raids on merchants believed to be in the black-market. Since writing a check without the payee's name on it was an unusual procedure and was pretty much a give-away we listened with considerable skepticism of the explanations of how Indian tailors had these checks from the men who wrote them, but none were convincing. We would ask questions and try to get a handle on the person involved, was he an old hand in Vietnam, or a brand-new arrival who just might have stumbled on evil ways. I found that I played a role in these hearings of trying to give a little perspective to our findings and to make some allowance for naivety. The military members tended to be harsh in their judgement, unfairly I thought. For one thing the people we saw were civilians and there was a certain contempt for their work by the men in uniform; the civilians were often considered parasites. The punishment of taking away all military access privileges was much stricter than that meted out to a soldier caught in a minor black-market caper. The soldier might lose a stripe and be fined, but did not get a dishonorable discharge, which in fact we were handing out to civilians. Another factor overlooked by the military members of the board was that soldiers never really needed Vietnamese piasters. All purchases on their bases at the PX and snack bars were in U.S. script, special dollars printed for use in Vietnam. The civilian, however, had considerable expenses in piasters, such as food, rent and gas and with the black-market rate of three times the official rate the temptation was far greater than for someone in the cocoon of the U.S. military. Prices in Vietnam were, of course, pegged to the black-market rate, not the official rate. My Judge Advocate colleagues did not take as compassionate a view of the weakness of man, but I was able to get some of the first time minor offenders off with a short suspension of their privileges and strong admonition to sin no more.

My second monthly meeting was one which I would have loved to avoid. I still felt unsure of my role and was not exactly delighted to learn that we were being handed a hot potato. A TV cameraman for one of the major networks had been caught with a check in the hands of the Bank of India. Since the news media people were giving the U.S. military and the South Vietnamese a difficult time, being extremely critical of every action; so there was no love lost between the two groups. I started getting some calls from news people complaining that our military was picking on the cameraman to punish his network for its reporting and the First Amendment was brought up, Freedom of the Press etc. Naturally I could not prejudge and said we would look at the case with open eyes. I guess news was slow but my little board room was packed with media types ready to see their colleague was not railroaded by the hostile government people. There even had been a request for TV coverage, which I ruled against, enough was enough.

The cameraman had a young American attorney, Sesto Vecchi, who later became an acquaintance of mine, but he did not endear me by asking all sorts of questions as to the legal basis of the board, which as a brand new chairman I had problems answering, but my fellow members helped me out. He then launched into how this was a matter of abridging the freedom of the press. Here I was able to make the point that we were only looking at a possible black-market violation, and that the press was not immune from the consequences of the law and regulations. Finally when all the rhetoric was exhausted and the bare bones of the case were examined it was clear that the gentleman had indeed been using the Bank of India. Also I asked if he were being paid an expense allowance that took into account the high cost of living if someone were to pay the official rate and not the black-market rate for piasters. He allowed he was. By this time the other

news people realized that there indeed had been hanky-panky and their man had been caught fair and square. Since the amount was a large one we recommended that his privileges be suspended and he be deported from the country. While the media did not press the issue, I will not forget, however, the presence of that crowd of initially hostile news people in the audience and how intimidating it could be. It helped me to be more sympathetic when I would observe from afar it turning on various people in the government or in private life.

While I had been in the Air Force I had always kept a wary eye on the justice side of that organization and my suspicions were confirmed by my close contact with the workings of the military in Vietnam. The term military justice has been called an oxymoron and that definition had some merit. A typical case involved an American who obviously was living on the fringes of the black-market. He had a Vietnamese girlfriend who was deep into the black-market and her place was raided. The police found practically a warehouse full of PX items. Because the American was sleeping with the woman at the time he was accused by the U.S. military police of being in the black-market. He well may have been, but there was nothing to show he had purchased any of the items found in her place. Although I argued long and hard and wrote a dissenting opinion the rest of the Board voted for suspension of his privileges. Even more disturbing was the case of a Filipino who was accused of black-marketing activities because of the usual checks found with black-marketeer. The accused man proved to us quickly and conclusively that these were not his checks or on his bank. The name was the same, the Filipino equivalent of John Smith, but the handwriting and bank accounts were quite different and the man was out of the country when it happened. We never should have had the matter referred to us since any good cop would have thrown the matter out immediately. Our Provost Marshal lieutenant still kept arguing against the man on the presumption that he obviously had been up to no good anyway and this was a good chance to take care of the matter. It was frightening to see this attitude displayed out in the open by a person in responsibility, and his military colleagues did not seem at all upset. We did at least dismiss the case.

There were some moments of relief. One referred for our august deliberations concerned some young American civilians working for a U. S. construction firm who got a little drunk and talked their way onto a base, claiming they were the bodyguards of the wife of the South Vietnamese president, Ky. They commandeered a jeep, drove around the base, took a rifle from a soldier who was asleep while on guard duty and played a few other relatively harmless tricks before the MPs got wise to them. We on the Board had a hard time keeping straight faces while our righteous young lieutenant laid out the charges in this matter while the crestfallen "ex-bodyguards" were lined up in front of us. We gave them a short suspension and had a good laugh after the room was cleared.

Several years later while I was in Athens I heard I, along with the entire Army chain of command, had been named in a suit by a man whose privileges had been taken away. It was the case I mentioned before of the man sleeping with the madam of the warehouse. The suit was filed by a famous lawyer named Melvin Belli and was for \$1,000,000. I wondered what would happen, but nothing apparently came of it so I took my million dollars that I had set aside and spent it.

Not only was I chairman of the Irregular Practices Board but also of the TCN Board. When I first

was told I would be the head of the TCN Board I was sure I was going to have to deal with an exotic oriental disease, a new secret weapon, or some political movement. It turned out that TCN referred to Third Country Nationals, or someone who was not a national of either South Vietnam or the United States. Really we were concerned with Filipinos and Koreans, for the most part, who were working for the various American contractors who were doing most of the construction and maintenance in Vietnam. A word is due here about these contractors. They were in organizations that not only built highways, airfields and harbors; they also maintained helicopters, tanks and aircraft, repaired them after combat etc. They ran the harbors, electric generating plants, food supply outlets, worked on civic improvements for the cities and villages. Often the American civilian contractors were right out in the combat areas keeping them running. This was a capable, hard working, hard drinking, bunch of guys. Much of the American contractors' work was being done by Koreans, Filipinos and a smattering of other nationalities only vaguely supervised by Americans. These TCNs had been trained in our military installations in Korea and the Philippines and were familiar with American equipment and the American way of doing things. They were willing to put in long hours, were excellent at the jobs, and were cheaper and less trouble than Americans to supervise. Most of the best manpower in Vietnam was in the armed forces and those that were not tended to be the less efficient and not as amenable to the discipline and working conditions of our hard-charging contractors. Besides in Vietnam dealing with the Vietnamese, our contractors had to meet all the rules and regulations of the government's Department of Labor and deal with local unions. The TCNs, on the other hand, were paid well, did their jobs and went home at the end of a contract with a nice nest egg. There were no unions or other aggravations (I'm speaking from the contractors' point of view) to worry about. It is no wonder that the American contractors were unanimous seeing that the TCNs did most of their work.

The Government of Vietnam (GVN) was not too happy with the TCN situation. Money and jobs that could be earned or done by Vietnamese were going to people from other countries. There was also a matter of pride or face. By bringing in all these Koreans and Filipinos the Vietnamese were being told in effect that they could not manage their own country. There were other hidden factors including the fact that the local Vietnamese military commanders often got a "bite" from the pay of local workers on American projects, but could not get as good a payoff from TCNs. The GVN also was concerned that once the war was over (on the premise that the South would win) they would be stuck with a lot of Korean and Filipino entrepreneurs well-inserted into the local economy, something which was already happening.

Because of the desire of the Vietnamese to keep a firm lid on the number of TCNs in their country and voracious appetite of the American contractors for more, the situation became what could be termed turbulent. The GVN had control over the TCN population through the use of the labor permits, and the policy of issuing these permits was erratic, to say the least. A basic problem was that some of the contractors were paying hefty bribes to get labor permits, while others who tried to play it straight, as the embassy insisted, were having problems keeping their operations afloat through the lack of skilled technicians. There was a great deal of hard feelings among the contractors and all sorts of accusations of illegal and unfair dealings with the Vietnamese government. Shortly before I arrived the matter had caused considerable concern at quite high levels at our embassy. With the usual response to this sort of thing, the ambassador established a committee with all the major contractors represented, the head of the U.S. civilian

personnel for our military and a few others. As a disinterested party the consul general was made the head of the committee. When I appeared on the scene not too much had yet been done by the committee except to air all the gripes, which I suppose was something. I felt a little like Daniel tossed into a den of ravening American construction people. These men were specially selected for their hard-driving, no nonsense approach to getting things done immediately without regard to cost or difficulties. They did not look kindly upon a soft-spoken FSO who was obviously brand new to the Vietnamese scene. After a few meetings the soft-spoken was no longer so soft-spoken as I heard the same litany over and over again from some of my irascible members about "God damn it, we're here to fight their war and why won't these so and so Vietnamese let us get on with the job!" I tried to explain the Vietnamese point of view, but these men were not interested in points of view. We finally hammered out a solution which I think was pretty much my creation. I took charge of all dealings between the GVN Ministry of Labor and the contractors over TCN labor permits. I set up a little unit with some clerical help from the contractors, put a consul over it and soon we had a smooth running operation. This procedure also cut out most of the opportunity for bribery and I felt rather pleased with myself that it all worked out so well.

My negotiations were not solely with the difficult contractors; I also had to sell the Vietnamese on the idea and had quite a few meetings with the Minister of Labor and got him to be more forthcoming on TCN matters, but we established overall limits on the number of TCNs allowed in the country, which gave the Vietnamese what they wanted. I recall one meeting late in the day in which I was the only American at a large table with about twenty Vietnamese. I was tired and at one point started to say, "but what does the Government of Yugoslavia want?" but before the fatal words came out I looked at all the oriental faces and somehow Yugoslavia seemed to be wrong. At one point we almost got into a cat and dog fight between the Ministry of Labor people and the contractors over forms. The Vietnamese representative mentioned that the contractors would supply the forms used by the TCNs to get their labor permits. The American contractor representative started to have a tantrum "these damn people not only won't let us get on with the job, they won't even supply the blank-blank forms!" etc. I realized that here we had a cultural difference. In the United States all agencies give out forms free, but in Europe you often have to buy a form at a kiosk. Either system makes sense, but Americans are not used to paying a penny or two for a form. I was able to smooth over this *contretemps* over and the system was established and worked.

EUGENE KOPP
Deputy Director, USIA
Washington, DC (1969-1970)

Eugene Kopp, a lawyer by background, joined USIA under the Nixon Administration and eventually became the Deputy Director of that agency. He was interviewed in 1988 by Hans Tuch.

Q: Tell me about the Keogh Administration, the four years when Jim Keogh between early '73 and the election of Jimmy Carter when he was the Director of USIA. What do you think were his

main accomplishments or his main problems while he was Director of the Agency? He was there during Watergate.

KOPP: Exactly right. I'll mention three serious outside problems the Agency had during that period. One related to Congress and the other two related to issues. One was Watergate. How do you explain to foreign audiences what was going on with Watergate? How much coverage did the Agency give to Watergate when, in its early stages, it was a lot of innuendo and unnamed sources and a lot of speculation and very little in the way of facts? And beyond that, how do you explain to foreign audiences what on earth was going on in this process whereby a chief executive, a President who was viewed as a very strong leader by foreign audiences, was from their point of view being savaged for reasons that they had great difficulty understanding?

Then the second major outside problem we had, of course, was Vietnam. The wind down in Vietnam and then the ultimate collapse of the ARVN and how we played that story as we were trying to get Americans who were still on the ground out of there. So I would say those two matters were the most prominent outside problems we had.

As far as relations with Congress, we had for the most part during Keogh's tenure very excellent relationships with the appropriating and authorizing committees of the Congress, with the exception of one monumental problem involving the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee that controlled authorizations for USIA and State. And, of course, I'm referring to Congressman Wayne Hayes. Very early in 1973, Congressman Hayes served notice on us. And since I don't know who's going to be listening to this tape I will not tell you the exact language used since it may be a family audience. But he had a friend, in this case not a female, who had been a Congressman from New York who had been defeated. And he called the Agency and demanded that we give this former Congressman a job.

As we looked into the matter, it became quite clear that, given the positions that this former Congressman had taken on issues when he served in the Congress, that he was exactly the wrong kind of person to be a senior officer in the Nixon Administration. And we decided we had no choice but to resist the appointment. And that brought down the full weight of Wayne Hayes' wrath upon Keogh and me and the Agency.

What always frustrated me was that we could never get much protection or support from our friends on the Hill for what was clearly an outrageous case of a Chairman's excessiveness. But we couldn't. And that was a major problem for us until Wayne Hayes got into his own problems with Elizabeth Ray. And that was the end of Wayne Hayes. Not a tear was shed as he left in disgrace.

We would try to emphasize the need for that kind of sensitivity at the Voice, and this mainly involved the coverage of what was "news," we would always meet with resistance and sometimes heavy criticism. A lot of the outside criticism Tom I'm frank to tell you was generated by people at the Voice. We know that. A lot of the charges of censorship that we got from the Hill we're pretty sure were generated by people who didn't like the management and the policies that we wanted followed.

If we've got another few seconds, let me just give you some specific examples of what I'm talking about. We've already talked about the policy of how we were going to cover the news with relationship to Watergate. Let's forget Watergate and let me give you several examples of what I'm talking about.

You may remember the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. The officer who commanded that platoon was Lieutenant Calley. And, of course, that whole matter was fully reported at the time the awful thing happened in Vietnam.

But you may also recall that months and years later, Calley had been convicted, but his conviction went up on appeal. And I remember very clearly this had to be six months to a year after his original conviction. There was some stage in the appeal when the conviction was either reversed or modified. What happened is unimportant. The fact is some appellate court did something in connection with Lieutenant Calley's conviction that became a news item in the United States, absolutely valid news item, the facts to be reported.

What did the Voice do? The first question was were any foreign audiences going to recognize what Lieutenant Calley's conviction had been and were they going to be interested in it? But assuming you got over that hurdle, the Voice instead of simply reporting that Lieutenant Calley who had been convicted X months ago, the court ruled today and simply give the facts, we found the Voice in its reporting going back over almost in shot by shot detail the entire My Lai massacre. And its reporting was indistinguishable from what you were hearing on CBS and NBC and ABC every night. And we felt that it was not necessary for the Voice to go as far as the commercial media went with the negatives. It was a matter of editorial judgment, not censorship.

LANGE SCHERMERHORN
Consular Officer
Saigon (1969-1970)

Ambassador Schermerhorn was born and raised in New Jersey and educated at Mt. Holyoke College. Entering the Foreign Service in 1966, she had several assignments in the State Department in Washington dealing with a variety of administrative and political matters. Her overseas posts include Colombo, Saigon, Teheran, London, and Brussels, where she served twice. In 1992 she was named US Ambassador to Djibouti, where she served until 2000. Ambassador Schermerhorn was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: For the record, I was your boss. I was the consulate general there during this time. In the first place, what was your perception of how things were going after you got there and were looking around? You were kind of the new girl on the block. What were sort of your initial impressions?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I was amazed at the American presence. Just the vast numbers of people and the kinds of things that people were doing, it was quite incredible. The American presence, I mean not only official, but the business, the contractors because, up to that time the biggest construction consortium that had ever been put together was operating there. It was

PA&E, Pacific Architects and Engineers, Brown & Root, and J.R. Jones.

I had been taken to the PX (military store) to get some things to start and looking around and being absolutely flabbergasted to see whole counters full of diamond jewelry and fur coats and all of these things in the PX. I had never been in a military store so I didn't know what PXs had anyway, but to see all this stuff. I'm saying, "fur coats in Vietnam?" Well, as it turned out this was one of the aid economist's possessive ideas of how – we had all these troops, we paid them and they had a lot of money, so rather than have them flood the market, we were going to sop up this exchange by having goods to buy. But of course what they forgot was it just meant instead of having a black market in money, which you had anyway, we had a black market in goods too. So the whole thing was insane.

Q: Your generation of Foreign Service officers was also the generation of people who were demonstrating in the streets all over the country against the war. What were you picking up at the junior officer level?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I think there were a lot of people there who were not that enthusiastic about it but were enthusiastic about starting their careers and felt that if this was what they had to do, that's what they would do. Again, I remember the first day or second day I was there, there were so many young people and they were very hospitable. They said, "You've got to go over to the political compound." Well the political counselor and something, there was a compound with a number of embassy houses on it. There were young men who were in the political section, young men who were in CORDS, young men who were something which was a little different called the Provincial Reporting Unit, which was part of the political section but supposedly they went out in pairs in the countryside and talked to people, and they'd all studied Vietnamese. This was the thing, we'd had I don't know how many Foreign Service officers – I think it was over 1,200 who actually had had the forty-four weeks of Vietnamese. It was quite a significant proportion.

There were a lot of them, especially the ones who were working in CORDS with Vietnamese counterparts. The Americans realized that they were pretty weak reeds to rely on some of these Vietnamese counterparts. Either, they didn't have the level of competence for the kinds of things we thought we were trying to do with these programs, or simply because they had a different agenda than what we had and they weren't going to give too much to this. So I think that was where a number of them began to question whether we could succeed in what we were trying to do, if it was indeed clear. It wasn't entirely clear, maybe, what we were trying to do. The catch phrase was "build the hearts and minds." And there were a number of people who worked at the MACV, the military headquarters, that had a briefing unit there that was composed of some young FSOs that were in CORDS, but were assigned to this, and some military people. One of the military people was Chuck Meissner. He was a captain and had a Ph.D. in economics.

Q: His wife Doris was director of the Immigration and Naturalization Agency.

SCHERMERHORN: I think there was quite a bit of cynicism among people, but it was kind of as if we'd been caught up in this great maw of doing all this stuff here, ordering our lives around. I think the thing that people thought was maybe we can make a difference. There were people

who thought that. I used to think that after I was in Vietnam; that the people there who went through that and went back to the Department had a different view and were somewhat skeptical of the way the bureaucracy had worked there and sort of that things would change. Of course things have changed, but not because of those people; because of the social pressures otherwise. It's pretty hard to change the bureaucracy.

Q: It is. Did you get any feel for how the war was going while you were there?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, you know, I had a very interesting perspective on things. In some ways I knew more about it, in a very broad brush thing, than some of my colleagues who were working in specific provinces because in the consular section I was the visa officer and what that meant was visas for war brides and adoption cases. With the Vietnamese government, you couldn't travel on a Vietnamese travel document unless you obtained an exit visa, and the government didn't give exit visas because they didn't want people to leave unless you had some specific reason like you were married. And the other category that got visas were the military who were going to training programs, pilot training and whatnot, but those were handled not by personal interview; those were handled in bulk. So, most of my clients were Vietnamese young women who were the girlfriends of GIs or a civilian who was there.

It was interesting that this was designated as a French language job, which might've once made sense, but most of the Vietnamese girls who came in were not from the milieu of Vietnam where they spoke French, so they spoke only Vietnamese – but we had consular assistants who could do all of the translating. The GIs usually came in with them so I had a big map of Vietnam with the four regions listed on it and the provinces and stuff and they'd come in and I'd chat a little and ask them where they were and they'd say, "Oh, I'm in Buon Me Thuot," or "I'm in Can Tho," or "I'm up in Pleiku," or whatever, so I quickly learned all the places and what they were doing and so forth. They'd talk about it. "Well, it was pretty bad," or "I'm getting out now. Thank god."

But of course the whole business of the marriage of these people was a problem because the military had a system; before you could get married, you had to go through an approval process in the military. And what they did was they made them go through everything that you had to do to get an exit visa from the Vietnamese government, and to get the entry visa from us. But they strung it out so that these certificates and so forth usually had a time limit, so they would string it out so that if they actually got through all of this great obstacle course and then were ready to get married, by the time they actually came back to get the exit visas, they'd have to go through this all again and a lot of them were only on a year's rotation. The military was hoping that they'd never get through this process. Though, some of them were extremely diligent about it and against all odds managed to do all this.

You heard a lot of bad stories and one of the things you rapidly realized there, what they called the tooth to tail ratio, and people used to say that in World War I it was five soldiers to one or something, and in World War II it was one to three, and in Korea it was one soldier to five, and there it was like one to ten; so there were a lot of people who weren't actually out there on the front line, but were hanging around. Those are the people who had more time on their hands to meet the girls. I mean here they were in – they used to call it the land of the great PX. So we had

a lot of cases and some of the stories were very sad and some of them were things you'd look at it and you'd say to yourself, "Well, now if I were a social worker, I'd be doing my utmost to try to discourage this young man from doing this." Of course, that was not your role, nor your function. However, the military certainly didn't mind exercising that role. But then there were also civilians who met Vietnamese girls.

Q: Well also there were GIs who got discharged and returned to get their girlfriends too, weren't they?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: In fact they were part of a real problem.

SCHERMERHORN: Well actually one of the things that I feel good about there, and because of my wonderful boss, we did have a problem with...if you weren't actually married according to the Vietnamese law that was recognized by the U.S., you couldn't get the immigration visa because you weren't an immediate relative, and there was no provision for someone going as a fiancé to get married there because the definition of visitor is someone who is going to leave. If you say you're a fiancé and you're marrying an American who's living there, then you're not a visitor. So it was a catch-22. The only way you could go if you weren't married was to get a non-preference immigrant visa. The visa categories had six grades of preferences and all the visa numbers, the allotment – which was a limited amount – would go to those categories. Only if they weren't filled would there be some other ones left. Basically it was a catch-22 again; as a fiancé you really couldn't meet the qualifications, even if there was a number available. So we had some very unhappy people who didn't want to come all the way back to Vietnam, but wanted Miss Susie to go.

Q: Also on the other hand, we didn't want these young guys coming back to a war zone.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. And most of them, if they didn't get the marriage completed, a lot of them did give up. But some of them didn't and I can remember there was one young man and he wanted to marry this girl. When I saw her, this was one of the times when I wanted to be a social worker. He had a letter from his senator, Senator Stennis, saying we had to see that this all happened, and he was still in-country. So we actually found this guy and called him in and said, "This is what you have to do. If you want to get it done, you're going to have to start now," and we went over and over and "Do you understand?" and he went off and he claimed, "Yes." He came back – this is a several step process and so forth – and we said, "Okay, the last step is you have to go down with her family book," this is like the French registration system; you must be registered in the district you live in and have a document, but you're not married until you actually get these stickers and stamps and whatnot on it. So we don't see the guy again and he leaves, I guess, for the United States and she comes in and she doesn't have this stuff so we can't do it. So we come back and we said, "You didn't do what we told you to do." Everybody else who got to that stage, who was told, got it right. So this guy was really not with it.

Then I get this call from the head of the visa office in Washington and he says, "I know, but we want you to issue a visitor's visa." I can't remember his name now – George something – but

anyway he was a civil servant; he'd been in that job for a million years. He asked for the vice consul; he asked for me and he gets me on the phone and he says, "Well in this case I want you to give a visitor's visa to this girl because it's a congressional interest," and all that. I don't know where I thought I was coming from, but I said, "Okay, and I will take this as your permission to give visitor visas to the seventy-five other fiancés who are in the same situation that we can't help," and he said, "No, no. I didn't say that," and I said, "I'm not going to do it for one if I can't do it for all. That's not fair." It wasn't fair because there were a lot of other people in this situation. And he said, "Well, get your boss on the phone," or something, and you were there and you took his call and I don't know what transpired – I couldn't hear that part of it – but at the end of it you said, no, the guy will have to come back and get married here. We did a good thing, Stu, because that was when they started saying, okay, this is a problem. We have to have a way to fix this catch-22 business. Then, that's when they put the legislation for what's called the K visa.

Q: Yes, we were pushing very hard and of course we were the biggest problem, but it was also true in other places.

SCHERMERHORN: In Korea and in [inaudible].

Q: But we had a war on, so we were saying, you know, we've got a real problem here. We got something done.

SCHERMERHORN: I just think, you know, we're a society that's based on fairness and equity and that wouldn't have been right.

Q: No, it wouldn't have been right.

In the first place, could you give a little bit of the ambiance of the consular section?

SCHERMERHORN: I remember your predecessor was still there when I arrived; there was an overlap.

Q: You got involved with the adoption business, too, didn't you?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: Do you want to talk a little about that, because that was different?

SCHERMERHORN: There had been an interest but I think it began to get very big. There were people coming from the United States to adopt. They would come and the scope for fraud and misunderstanding in this was quite high. In this society that had been torn by war for so long, there were a lot of children that were placed in what were called orphanages, but they weren't really orphans; perhaps the father was off with the military, the mother had died and sister couldn't take care of them. They meant to come and take them back; it was not meant to be a permanent thing. So there were a lot of children who actually were maybe not orphans who ended up in some of these places, and then there were people who just wanted to get their own children out of there and if they had six or seven maybe they'd put one in hoping it would be

adopted. So there was a lot of scope for problems and there was a lot of document fraud. You had this French system of registration of family, but all you had to do was go in and have two people swear that this was the child of so-and-so to the authorities in the district – and who knew whether it was true or not.

There were also some nuns wanting things there and there was one Australian woman, Rosemary – I can't remember her last name...

Q: Oh yes.

SCHERMERHORN: But she was working with a couple of recognized, established orphanages which were legitimate.

Q: She was really a remarkable person, really remarkable.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, and she was the one who helped facilitate a lot of this. I mean toward the end of my time there when she was talking about...I know that some of them maybe she helped facilitate the documents which weren't, you know. But their view was we can't have this system constipated; there are people who want these children and there are children who need these families. She was quite extraordinary. There was quite a bit of that. But again, it was this same business; you had to get all of the documentation that the U.S. government required for an immigration visa and you had to get the exit visa which they wouldn't give until you could show that you had an immigration visa. As my time there went on, there began to be more and more cases of that, and also more cases of these people coming out of the woodwork and saying, "Well, I re-upped," as the GIs used to say, "I've been here for five years," because some of them did actually keep extending and extending. You know, "I had this girlfriend, but now it looks like I'm going to have to go. What can I do?" and so on.

I left before that famous thing where the plane with all the babies on it crashed.

Q: That happened in a C-5; that was just awful.

If I recall, and please correct me, but wasn't there something in the Vietnamese law which was based on the French law which almost said that if you went to adopt a child you had to be over the age of childbirth and it was very restrictive. The only way you could get around it was to get the president of the republic to waive it. And I'd sort of send notes up to the ambassador, "Could you please get the president to move on this?" because he had a little pile of them on his hands anyway, being a war.

SCHERMERHORN: I think what's so fascinating when people are looking at a war from afar is that they don't appreciate all the ancillary activities that the war generates the social impact.

Q: Yes.

SCHERMERHORN: And you know, when you think that in Vietnam – I mean we even had a few people there in the '50s – but say from 1966 to 1975, we probably had three million

Americans, at least, go through that country and a population of eighteen million or so. That's a tremendous social impact.

Q: One of the things that I've noticed in other countries where I've served, such as Greece and Korea, particularly Korea we had GIs, and even in Germany when I was there during the occupation or just after, that you could be assured we had people leaving on regular immigration to the United States who you were reasonably sure they would make a success out of it. In Vietnam we had no feeling. Of course they have made a tremendous success out of it, but there's no particular feeling for that because there wasn't any of this mom and dad going off to...

SCHERMERHORN: No, but that was totally excluded at that point. It was only with the fall of Saigon. Only we had people marrying, and as I said, from a social work point of view you could look at some of the pairings and say, "I don't know if that's going to work."

Q: I recall a case – maybe you got involved with it – of a woman who married a GI and he took her to Great Falls, Montana and she spent one winter in Montana and headed home for Tet and he tried to get her to come home and she was saying, well, the embassy won't let us get... And Senator Mansfield, again, said, "Why won't you let her go?" She was not going to go back to Great Falls, Montana.

SCHERMERHORN: That's right. She had never come in. She was just using that as an excuse. I do remember that one. There were so many stories like that.

Q: Did you ever get out and sort of do some of the orphanages?

SCHERMERHORN: I went to one with Rosemary and it was a pretty awful place – overcrowded and not enough people to look after them.

Q: Did you get around much? What sort of things were you picking up, both from what you were seeing and from your friends? I was at mid-level there, but you were at the junior level which is always the more interesting one because these are the people who get out and get around.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, we were busy, as you know. We worked from eight until six and then you did a lot of the paperwork.

Q: There were no women in CORDS, or at least...

SCHERMERHORN: There weren't when I got there, but it was interesting. When I arrived my friend Lionel met me and he said – everybody shared apartments there, at least at the junior level – "I share an apartment with someone in this building and the apartment just below us is vacant right now," but he said, "You have to have somebody to go with you. It's not for a single person," and he said, "There's another female vice consul here," this woman Sandy Keith. She was a vice consul then but she was going to move – I think she moved to the political section.

Q: I think she did.

SCHERMERHORN: “And if you don’t mind, you and she should put in a bid for this thing.” So right away we met and we agreed and we did. So we got this apartment. And there were always lots of people coming to visit in this building and so on. So I went off to Nha Trang with a group; I went to Vung Tau, which is the little resort on the sea coast that we drove to; and we went to Can Tho. We had a consulate in Da Nang and I remember talking to the vice consul about some case up there.

Q: Don Westmore.

SCHERMERHORN: I remember speaking to him, it was very close to the fourth of July and I said, “If I can get up there, may I come to the Fourth of July reception?” No, he had said on the phone, “Oh, and the consul general,” whose name was Terry McNamara, “is going to Hue.” Hue was the former capital city and the place that had been hit during the Tet Offensive the year before. But again, I didn’t have any reason to go there unless I was with...I said, “If I get up to Da Nang, could I go with him?” and there was this long pause and he said, “I’ll ask,” and he came back and he said, “Yes, okay, but if you can get here.” You were kind enough to let me go off and I went to the Fourth of July reception and then I went around Da Nang and saw it and it was fascinating. It was fascinating because they had the former dynasty culture, the pre-Indo-Chinese culture, that had a little museum with Cham statuary there; but it was open air because the statues were kind of big. You could walk through it, but you saw Vietnamese Army people were bivouacked in this museum. It was strange. So the next morning, here we are in Da Nang, and I present myself at the appointed time and Terry is there with his 4x4 and he’s in his blue jeans, cowboy boots with

Q: Oh, yes, and probably several M-16 type guns.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. Well, I’m in my little dress and sandals and he says, “Okay, I’m going to sit in front with the driver and you sit back there,” and I looked over my shoulder at the back and it was loaded with machine guns. So he outlined the program. He said, “I have to go and call on four or five people. We’re going to be there about five hours and I’m going to drop you off and you do whatever you want to do and don’t worry about it.” So that’s what happened. I walked around and I saw the old imperial palace and I did all this stuff. And it was a very charming place. I actually have a chard of blue and white pottery that I picked up from the terrace of the imperial palace.

Quite soon after I got there, Sandy Keith and I...some Army major came in and he wanted some kind of consular thing up in Pleiku and Can Tho and said we’ll take a little expedition. So the two of us went up there and went to both places. I remember in Pleiku they had a ceremony with the head man, because these are the Montagnards, not the ethnic Chinese, Indo-Chinese people, and Vietnamese. They looked like bushmen, or people from the Kalahari or something. They had a ceremony and they had this big platform and these big vats with something in it, and the reeds coming out of the vats, and these drums that are kind of like the Indonesian gamelan or something. So we go up on the platform and there was a lot of chit-chat and stuff and then they look at the major who is the head of our delegation, if you will, and they want him to sip through this straw – what they said was rice wine – and he refused to do this. I said, “Well that’s

protocol. We have to do it.” So does that, and it was vile, vile stuff. I don’t know what it was. But anyway we go through all this stuff and I don’t pass out.

Major –Sandy knew him and she said, “Todd, you have to play the game,” and he said, “Not me. Better you than me.” But we went off and because I did this they gave me the seven bracelets that you put on that are supposed to ward off the evil spirits or something.

Q: You left there in '71 or '70?

SCHERMERHORN: I left there in October '70, but I have a few other little anecdotes.

Q: Oh, absolutely, I want to grab these.

SCHERMERHORN: One thing you have to realize about Vietnam is in that period I think they had the best food of anything in the world because you had three or four styles of Chinese food; you had Vietnamese, which is similar but more delicate probably than any one of the regional Chinese cuisines; you had the dim sum, you had the barbequed type of thing which they do – pork and chicken, and it’s sort of like we know. Remember there was a restaurant that had only the barbequed chicken. And then there were probably half a dozen excellent French restaurants: the Provincial, the Normandy – nobody could figure out where Madame, who was the patron, got her eggs and butter and cream, but she had those wonderful dishes – and of course the seafood was wonderful. I used to go and eat the raw clams and people used to say, “Don’t do that,” and I’d say, “I haven’t gotten sick yet,” – and I never did get sick there. Then there were Senegalese that was sort of a history of a little vestige of French colonialism; there were some Senegalese troops and you had a restaurant that had Senegalese gumbo. The first time I ever had couscous was in Saigon. Behind my apartment building there was a place that a retired French soldier was there with his Vietnamese wife – he had been in Algiers – and he had couscous. It was really terrific food.

But the best meal I think I ever had in Vietnam was a couple of these...well, it turned out that one of my high school classmates had joined the Foreign Service after he’d been in the Navy, and in fact, when I was in San Francisco and had just passed the exam, his ship came in and we got together. He said, “What are you doing?” and I said, “I’m going to go in the Foreign Service,” and he had been accepted at law school and he was going to go, but then he took the exam and passed it and so by the time I had finished my time in Colombo, he had finished law school. He was on his first tour there. Anyway, half a dozen of us went out to Nab Dai, which was sort of the port area along the estuary there, the river. But we went out beyond that and we parked this fleet of vehicles. I said, “Where are we going? There’s nothing here.” Well, he said, “Over there,” and across the marsh – it looked like you’d have to walk on water to get there – it was this tiny little hut and you walked for what seemed like miles across there and you went in. It was just a thatched roof, all open at the sides, with floorboards with wide spaces between them, and what they gave you were crabs that were cracked open, sautéed in the shell but cracked with peppers – that wonderful Vietnamese pepper – and some lemon juice, and you ate it and then you dropped all the shells and everything right down to the floorboards and you could see things swimming. It was wonderful food.

There's one story, too, that I think might illustrate the family issues in Vietnam about immigration and adoption and whatnot. There was a very nice Vietnamese woman, a very respectable looking woman, probably in her late thirties, and an older American who was not in the military – he was in AID or something. They came in and were going through all the business to get married and she had two daughters, like five- and seven-years-old, and the birth certificates said everything. We're ready to do this and we're very happy because they're really a nice little family and everything, and we're waiting for them to come in so we can sign it and do the formal thing, and then one of the consular assistants comes in and says, "Miss Schermerhorn, you have to look at this," and she points out to me on the medical exam of the woman and down there the doctor had written, "Patient had total hysterectomy" and I'm doing the math and I'm saying, "No, no, this doesn't compute." So I called the husband in, and I mean this is delicate, right? What do you say? And I said, "You know, we have a little problem here. This is what the medical exam says, but of course you have the little girls," and he said right away, "No, that's right, they're not." He said, "They're her nieces but their mother has died and their father is in the military and we haven't seen him. We don't know whether he's dead or alive." And she went and got these birth certificates.

We got her immigration and the immigration inspector says, "Who is this darn vice consul? I can't figure out that because, in those days the form was right on top of the thing where they had all this...but, by some miracle – I had mentioned non-preference visas – we had just gotten some sort of end of the month, extra, special thing; we had just gotten two non-preference visas and because we always told people we never had any, we didn't have a queue anymore. That was the one time in my whole twenty months there that I could actually do that legitimately and we did so they could go as they planned. But that's a very good illustration; here she said, "I am responsible. I am going to take care of these children," and never mind these legalisms about this is my extended family.

Q: When you left there, what of Vietnam in your impression?

SCHERMERHORN: I don't know. By the time I left, having arrived the day of our maximum presence, we were down I think 200,000; we were down to about 350,000 at that time and it seemed like half of them had walked into the consular section. The public face of it was we were winning their hearts and minds. This thing was successful.

Q: I felt that way when I left. I thought, well, you know, it's not the greatest democracy, but compared to a lot of other places it seemed to be going and the Viet Cong was no longer much of a problem. It was the mainline North Vietnamese.

SCHERMERHORN: Oh, you had asked where I'd been. Barbara Watson, who was then the assistant secretary for consular affairs, came. Remember that? We planned a trip for her and one of the things to do was to go to Tay Ninh, which was the parrot's beak in Cambodia, but by helicopter, and to see the Cao Dai temple there. I remember that. We showed her everything and we talked about these issues of social problems and whatnot, and the kind of clientele we had, but I had the impression that it didn't make a lot of impression on her. Here, in this country, we were doing with fewer people as much, on a prorated basis, activity as they were doing in Germany and those other places with a big military presence.

But I did go to Cambodia and this was something that was very interesting. I went in the first week of May 1970 and we hadn't been able to go there. From the time I was in Colombo I wanted to take my little two week trip that you could take and go there but they said if you have a diplomatic passport you shouldn't do that. When I got to Vietnam it wasn't open, but then there was a window starting in about October or November of '69 when they said it was okay. And a lot of these various young men who I worked with were going off and they said, "Hey Lange, you better come with us if you want to see it."

Q: Lange, 1970, you were where?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I left Vietnam and we could still take American ships if there were any to be found, and we had the American President liners, which were basically cargo ships but had some passenger [compartments]. So I flew to Saigon to Hong Kong, and then from Hong Kong, Manila, Yokohama, I took an American President liner, then I flew because it would've been too long. I knew it would be the last chance to do that and so I did it.

JAMES W. CHAMBERLIN
Artilleryman, US Army
Vietnam (1969-1970)

James W. Chamberlin was born in Miami, Florida in 1945. He received a BA from Principia College and an JD from the University of Alabama in 1972. He served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970 and entered the Foreign Service in 1973. His postings abroad include Sao Paulo, Bangkok, Brasilia, Warsaw, and Rome. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Mr. Chamberlin in 1997.

Q: Can you talk a bit about your experiences in Vietnam? When were you there? What type of work did you do?

CHAMBERLIN: I was there in '69 and '70, in an artillery battery. We were in Northern I Corps which is near the DMZ on the border with North Vietnam. I was very fortunate in that before and after my tour, there was quite a bit of action in this region, but while I was there it was relatively quiet.

We had several people in my unit who were killed, but mainly because of accidents, rather than hostile fire, although in one incident we were firing at the enemy when one of our 175 mm guns blew up, killing or wounding the entire gun crew. Nevertheless, it was an interesting experience to be on a mountain top near Khe Sanh shooting at the Ho Chi Minh trail, or on the DMZ firing along the DMZ itself. When we were on the DMZ, Air Force forward air controllers would fly up and down the border. When they would spot footprints in the sand next to the river, we would start shooting at the footprints and usually the guy, some poor NVA soldier trying to infiltrate into South Vietnam who was hiding in a tunnel or something, would start running as we started

zeroing in on his location. It would be a race to see whether he could cross the river back into North Vietnam, because we couldn't shoot across the river. He knew that; so, he would try to run and swim across the river. For me, it was a war of small incidents, not big set piece battles like they had in earlier wars.

Q: Were you up there around Quang Tri and Rock Pile and all that sort of good stuff?

CHAMBERLIN: Yes. The first place that I was stationed, Camp Sally, was just outside of Quang Tri, where we shot for the 101st division. Before I left, we were near Dong Ha which was further north. Those were the two main towns that I was in. In between, we were in the field on small firebases that had been used earlier by other Army or Marine artillery units.

Q: While you were there were you feeling the hot breath of the anti-war movement? While you were there or did that come later? How did that work?

CHAMBERLIN: Well, when you were there, you weren't too aware of it. We were out in the field most of the time. So, about the only news we got was from AFVN radio. The AFVN didn't cover that kind of stuff much, and so you didn't hear too much about it.

I think you really got it when you came back. In fact, that is the main reason I ended up going into the Foreign Service when I got back. Even at the University of Alabama, which was not a hot bed of liberalism, it was clear that the only thing that was interesting about the Vietnam War was the opposition to it. There were quite a few veterans that came back to the University when I did, and the way they got attention, if they wanted it, was to talk about atrocities -- seeing babies killed and things like that -- which of course I didn't do. I spent my whole time there in an artillery battery trying to make sure that we never fired into a civilian area, never fired without political permission from the South Vietnamese, didn't make any mistakes in the data that we sent to the guns, and so on. As far as I know, I was never involved in any kind of atrocity, and never shot at any civilians, but that was all that people wanted to hear about.

LACY A. WRIGHT
Political Reporter
Saigon (1969-1970)

Mr. Wright joined the Foreign Service in 1968 after earning degrees at Mendelien College and Loyola University. His foreign service took him to Vietnam both during and after the War. Other assignments took him to Milan, London and Bangkok as well as to the State Department in Washington, where he worked with International Organizations in matters concerning refugees, and UNESCO affairs. Mr. Wright was born and raised in Springfield, Illinois. Mr. Wright was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: You've always enjoyed languages. How did you fit with Vietnamese?

WRIGHT: I did all right. I think I had a 3/3 at the end, although when I got there I did not learn to speak Vietnamese as well as a lot of the people I had gone to school with, because they were sent out to the field to live in provinces or districts, whereas I went to the embassy political section as a so-called provincial reporter, so I had less opportunity to practice than they did. But anyway, I got to the point where I could do my job with my language, but a number of these people who really lived night and day with the Vietnamese became superb at it.

Q: *Well, now, you were in Vietnam this time from late '68?*

WRIGHT: Spring of '69. I went there in March of '69.

Q: *And you were there until when?*

WRIGHT: I was there until September of '70, the first time.

Q: *Let's concentrate on this first part first. When you got out in the first part of '69, what were your jobs?*

WRIGHT: I was attached to the political section of the embassy, and in that very large section, there was a sub-unit called the provincial reporting unit, and it was headed by a Foreign Service officer by the name of Nick Ford, who was later succeeded by Cal Maylert, and it was divided up according to the different corps in Vietnam. There were four corps. And there were two provincial reporting officers for each corps. I was assigned to Fourth Corps, which is the Mekong Delta, a fellow by the name of Dick Harrington and I. We were the two provincial reporters. We spent about half our time in Saigon and about half our time down in the Delta. We were both living in Can Tho, which was the Fourth Corps headquarters, the unofficial capital of the Delta, and our job was to go around the Delta, to its 16 provinces, and report on what we saw happening. We had a very vague mandate. We were sometimes given specific assignments by the head of our unit in Saigon, but often we weren't. Often we went to a place, and we looked around and tried to divine what was going on that would be of interest to the embassy and report it. We were quite free in what we were able to do. It was a marvelous job, marvelous.

Q: *What was the situation in the '69-70 period in the Delta?*

WRIGHT: At that time, the last American troops were leaving the Delta, that is, the last American ground troops, in the Ninth Division. The Ninth Division, which was based in My Tho, was packing up and leaving. And from that point forward, which is something that a lot of people don't realize, that is, from 1969, so for the last five and a half or so years of the war, there were no American ground troops in Fourth Corps. There was American air support, but by and large, the Vietnamese were fighting in the Delta in large part on their own.

Q: *What was your impression of the Vietnamese leadership in the Delta at this time?*

WRIGHT: I'm trying to think who the corps commander was then. I don't remember who was there then; however, the head of the Vietnamese Ninth Division then was a general by the name of General Di. I'll think of his full name in a second. He was regarded as a very good man—

honest, hardworking. I can remember that during this period his picture appeared on the cover of the New York Times Magazine, a big cover story about him, but he was, I thought, and still do think, an example of a good officer, competent at what he was doing, with a sense of dedication, hard work and under terribly difficult conditions. General Di, by the way, now lives in Orlando, Florida. I spoke to him about a year ago on the telephone. He had just gotten out of Vietnam not very long before. He told me that he was among the last five or so South Vietnamese officers who were released by the Communists from prison. He spent something like 18 years in prison after the end.

But let me go back to your question. I think there were a number of officers, like General Di, who were extremely good men, operating under very adverse conditions, who were admirable. There were also, of course, a lot of the other kind; and there was a system of cronyism, and worse, in which all of these people had to operate. And I think it has to be said that, although there are many reasons why we lost the war, some of them our fault, had there been a greater level of dedication on the part of people in command in Vietnam, including a number of military officers, things also might have turned out differently.

Q: What was your impression of the lower level, of the province level, of the Vietnamese leadership there, and also the village level?

WRIGHT: It was mixed. You had examples of good, competent province chiefs with leadership qualities, and you had examples of the other kind, I'm afraid. And the fortunes of a province were determined in very large measure by the kind of leadership that it had. So I don't think it's saying anything very profound. It goes without saying that when you have good leadership in a province or in a military unit you have good results.

Q: What about our various efforts in the region for both aid and advisors and all this? I mean the American side.

WRIGHT: It seems to me a number of our programs were successful. The Rural Development Banks, for example, introducing new strains of rice, road building—these were efforts which really introduced, even during the war, a new level of prosperity into the Delta. And in fact, don't forget that, I would say, from 1969 to 1973, things in the Delta, and I think in the rest of the country as well—although I'm less acquainted with that—were going awfully well. The theory is that in 1968 in the Delta we were regarded as extremely dangerous. We're not so regarded during this '69-'73 period. A great deal was done to lift standards of living, and a great deal was done to clean areas of Viet Cong elements and to make life a lot more livable for people. It was not until, say, the spring of 1974, maybe a bit earlier, that things really started to deteriorate and move, kind of, inexorably toward the end, the fall of Saigon.

Q: During this '69-'70 period, was there much hostile action taking place in the Delta?

WRIGHT: Oh, yes, quite a bit. I can remember going to the military briefings every morning for different periods at IV Corps headquarters. These were in the form of a briefing to the commanding general, and I would say that on the big map, on an average morning, there would have been recorded maybe a hundred incidents. In some of them maybe no one would have been

killed, or one person killed, and in the bigger ones maybe a hundred or two hundred people would have been killed. So there was a great deal of military activity going on, but these were not dramatic pitched battles, like you saw farther north in Khe Sanh and elsewhere. These were skirmishes between units or parts of units, but they were occurring every day of the year, just about.

Q: *Were these North Vietnamese troops, or were they mostly Viet Cong?*

WRIGHT: Mostly Viet Cong, although increasingly North Vietnamese troops as the end approached.

Q: *We're still sticking to the '69-'70 period. In the late spring of 1970, there was the incursion into Cambodia. Did that have an effect in the Delta?*

WRIGHT: I haven't thought about that particular question for a long time. I remember one effect it had was that there was a lot of looting done in Cambodia, and units were returning to South Vietnam loaded with stuff. I haven't thought about this for a long time, but I remember it was of such proportions that I can remember John Paul Vann being very unhappy about what was going on and speaking to the commanding general about it.

Q: *Can we try to get a feel for the spirit within the political section in Saigon? In the first place, you've got this huge political section, now reporting more on local events than we probably have in any other country in the world ever. Was there a division between the young officers seeing it one way and older officers seeing it another, or any conflicts?*

WRIGHT: Oh, sure. Yes, on the subject of corruption, which is usually what divides people in these kinds of situations, it certainly did then. There was great tendency on the part of older officers to take what they regarded as the longer, more culturally sensitive view, and to regard corruption as a perhaps unfortunate fact but nothing we should get overly worked up about, as opposed to the view of most of the younger people, including me, which was that corruption was something that got in the way of the war effort and that we ought to be more active in trying to suppress.

Q: *Did you have a feeling that your reports that were coming in were being suppressed, doctored or what-have-you, as far as how it went up the chain of command and to Washington?*

WRIGHT: It's a little bit hard to compare the two periods because in that first period we did not have consulates out in the field, so they were not doing any of the kind of reporting that they did later. But during the '69-'70 period—Ambassador Bunker was there—I would say that in both periods that I was there, '69-'70 and then '73 until the end, there was pretty heavy massaging of the reports that came out of the younger officers. I don't necessarily find total fault with that. I think in such a sensitive and complicated situation, it behooved the embassy to look carefully at what went out and not simply say, "Every man for himself. You can all report whatever it is you think you see happening." That, especially when you state it that way, would be an absurd position for an ambassador to take. But I think that in the doing of this, the bias of the older officers was in the direction which I have described, so some of what was being sent out of the

embassy reflected this and was probably—when things like corruption were being discussed—not etched as finely as they might have been otherwise. At the same time, I would certainly not think that this, in itself, had any particular effect on the way Washington saw the war or the actions that we took. In fact, I think that the more you read about the history of the war, the more it's clear that the President and others high up in the succeeding Administrations had a very good idea of what was going on in Vietnam, warts and all. When they took particular decisions which might seem to ignore those facts, they took them for very different reasons. And so the more I read, the more it's clear to me that there was no dearth of knowledge about what was going on in Vietnam in the top echelons of our government.

Q: Did you see a difference—here we're talking about the '69-'70 period—between what the American military was reporting and what the provincial reporters and others were reporting?

WRIGHT: Well, we reported in vastly different ways. First of all, most military reports are incomprehensible to the rest of us. They are often reports which fit into a format, so it's the format itself which determines what's going to come through in the report. There is little prose reporting, I think it's fair to say, and usually the prose is so horrendous that it can't be read anyway. I don't mean to be overly critical of military reporting, but I think that military reporting generally would not be set up to catch the kinds of things that we are talking about. It's not set up to report on corruption, and so on. Now again, that doesn't mean that military commanders sitting back in the Pentagon were ignorant of what was going on in Vietnam. I think there was so much that went on by word of mouth and in other ways that I doubt that most of the people sitting back here were ill informed—although I must say that when you read about people like General Westmoreland, I think that probably there were some misconceptions, maybe some big ones, about the way the war was going.

You know, Bill Colby had, I thought, a very good article in the Washington Post some months before his death, in which he said, among other things, that most of the histories written of the Vietnam War pretty much stopped at Tet '68, ignoring what went on later. His view was that, yes, we made terrible mistakes up until that point, but after it we corrected a number of them. And so that kind of reporting is like reporting the Second World War but stopping in 1943 or so. And so his view was that we had corrected a lot of the things that were wrong and that we, in our lives, were doing extremely well during much of that latter period, until we petered out and greatly slowed down our assistance.

Q: Did you find there was much reliance on what the CIA was doing, or was the CIA sort of doing its thing and the political section was doing its thing and the two didn't meet particularly?

WRIGHT: My sense is that we were both doing our thing. I guess they met up in the Ambassador's office, because he read both of them. There was so much reporting coming out of both sides. One of the features of the CIA reporting in those days was that the CIA station chief did periodically, maybe every month or six weeks or two months, his own assessment of the situation. And these were extremely well written, not always accurate, but extremely well written pieces which were fairly comprehensive in their picture of the situation, and there are things that I have not seen since written by the CIA station. And I suspect that when these well written pieces, seemingly comprehensive pieces, went back to Washington, they were regarded with

some seriousness.

Q: You know, something I've heard a lot about are young officers like yourself, trained in Vietnamese, getting out in the provinces. Did the CIA have the same system of training people in Vietnamese, or were they more reliant on other sources?

WRIGHT: They trained some people in Vietnamese, but by and large, their people who were out in the provinces did not speak Vietnamese. These often tended to be people who were, say, former police officers—people who were brought in from outside to fill those positions. And they were not necessarily people who knew much about Vietnam, although some of them eventually stayed there a long time and could have been said to have a lot of experience in Vietnam. But I would say that, over all, their people did not tend to speak Vietnamese.

Q: I would assume in that situation it would have been a real detriment. I mean they would have been more dependent on—

WRIGHT: Yes, it tied them very closely to the Vietnamese who worked for them. They tended to have one of the things that the CIA did there, I think in pretty much every province during the height of their involvement, their own separate quarters, their own house, their own everything. It pretty much made a shambles of any attempt to pretend they were integrated into the rest of the establishment. And to make matters worse, they habitually referred to their quarters as the embassy. And this was standard—all over the Delta, certainly, and I'm sure all over the country—that if a stranger, Vietnamese or otherwise, came around looking for the embassy house, he would be pointed to the CIA house, which was unfortunate. But there was either little care, or perhaps it was inadvertence or incompetence, but little was done to create a situation where the CIA would be hard to find or would be integrated into the rest of the group.

Q: I noticed when I was in Saigon, at the same time you were in this period, '69-'70, that the CIA had their own guards, Nung guards, who looked different from others. So as soon as you'd go outside and you'd see a house, and here would be a Nung, a fairly big guy who doesn't look Vietnamese at all but Oriental, and you say, "Well, it has to be a CIA house."

WRIGHT: Exactly.

Q: So they didn't fly a flag, but they might as well have.

WRIGHT: I can remember when I was acting consul general, after 1973, in the Delta, at a certain point, the CIA told us it was sending someone down and that this person was to be unknown as a CIA operative but was to be integrated into the political section. And so I did my best to keep up my part of the bargain, and we prepared as best we could. We prepared an office for the person and everything, and it turned out when he arrived that the CIA station chief, first of all, decided he would go out personally to meet the man at the airport, which was a bit of a give-away. Many of the CIA people lived in a certain part, in front of the CORDs Club, and they all drove distinctive types of cars and they all had their names on their parking places in front of these little town houses that they occupied. I came to find out after the guy had arrived that they had painted his name right into one of these parking spots, right in front of where all of the CIA

people lived. With that kind of attention to detail, going in the wrong direction, it's an example of what I think, by the way, is a fairly common phenomenon around the world, but which was really accentuated there. The agency often takes extremely inadequate steps to hide the identity of its people.

FREDERICK (TED) G. MASON, JR.
JUSPAO Affairs Officer
Saigon (1969-1970)

CORDS
Saigon (1970-1971)

Frederick Mason was born in Connecticut in 1926 and graduated from Yale. His career included posts in Saigon, Paris, Casablanca, Antananarivo and Rome. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

MASON: At the end of two years in June of 1969 I was brought back to Washington and to the Vietnam Training Center at Arlington Towers, where I attended lectures that lasted two or three months. We had top flight speakers like Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute, and experts like Chester Bain, who wrote a book on Vietnam. These were some of the people who helped us to flesh the subject out very thoroughly. So I can't say that I wasn't prepared to go to Vietnam and I appreciated that. I asked to be in the press office because of my French, thinking I could deal with the French press better than some of the others. But no, I was assigned as Reports Officer of JUSPAO (Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office). JUSPAO was in the Rex building downtown. I arrived the first of October of 1969 in Saigon.

Q: How would you describe the situation in South Vietnam, at the time that you got there in October of 1969?

MASON: We considered, in spite of what the press was saying, that we had won the Tet Offensive, so what was going on was not an immediate danger to Saigon. I remember that people would climb onto the roofs of their buildings to watch what looked like heat lightning way off in the distance but was in fact artillery fire. I remember that there was one that landed on a tennis court at the Sporting Club.

Q: ...The tennis court. I was a member of the Cercle Sportif.

MASON: I can't stand that kind of heat, lying in the sun and even swimming is no pleasure to me but that was it.

Q: So now what was your job?

MASON: I was reports officer.

Q: Which meant what?

MASON: It was a miserable, frustrating job. On my first day, I showed up for work and was told without explanation to get out the weekly report. I guess it was a Friday or Saturday. I was supposed to work the entire weekend to get this report out. Well, it came back to me a few days later with the comment, "This report requires considerable rewriting" and so on. Of course, I hadn't had any experience in writing reports to Washington, or instruction in how to do so. I took the individual reports, which came from all over South Vietnam, and put them together by subject, I guess, or by military region. And my great complaint was what I imagine took place everywhere in Vietnam, that with an unpopular war and an unpopular President who was trying to justify the war, no President would want to hear bad news. So any bad news just wasn't reported as far as I could see from the final reports that went forward.

The only classified item in it was the number of leaflets dropped on the trail that week. And what the North Vietnamese did with those leaflets, I can only imagine. Another thing that I noticed was the posters put out by JUSPAO, beautifully done artistic posters showing happy peasants protecting their villages. One had a village silhouette in the background with a soldier from the South Vietnamese army in the foreground protecting the village. But on its tallest building in the distance there was a cross, just two tiny lines making a cross. I said, "Since the South Vietnamese are divided between Buddhists and Christians and the Buddhists greatly resent the Christians, who were converted by the French and whom they consider to be pro-French, pro-American and not good Vietnamese, why do we have to have a cross on this?" I was told to shut up because these were approved by a committee that went over these things very carefully. Well, to me this was a waste of time and money, because without the cross, it could have been a good message, but with the cross, it alienated the Buddhists and reinforced their feeling that the Christians were lackeys of the Americans.

Those are little things, but you could multiply them by as many cases as you could think of.

Then there were delays in getting the reports approved. Since there were three bosses in the front office: Chief - JUSPAO, his deputy, and a third man, I don't have to mention their names, it doesn't matter. They all went over this report before it went out, and it was delayed and delayed. They were swamped with work. They had much, much too much to do, so that by the time the report went out, much of it was obsolete, or if they heard something in the meantime in the field, they'd send it back to me to be checked out. Then I would go back to the person in the field and he would say, "My God! I gave you this report three weeks ago and it hasn't gone out yet? Naturally, things have changed. Why couldn't it have gone out? I'd sent you a new report. Now I have to go over this same report that I wrote before." So there was frustration all up and down the line and we were swamped in paperwork, in Saigon and in the field. I found this a thankless job. I was trained to be a public affairs officer and I am doing nothing but paperwork, sitting in that icebox of a JUSPAO office, and sick with a cold every other day from the air-conditioning. So I asked my boss if I could have a different job for my second year there and do something else and not go back to the States after two years in Vietnam with nothing to show for it but having written reports which were re-written before going out.

They did move me and I am sure they held it against me, but I didn't mind because I was made a

PSYOPS - psychological operations - advisor in CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support) Advisory Team 44 in Gia Dinh Province (the suburbs of Saigon). Now CORDS under Bill Colby was a real working outfit. Every province had a team, a Province Senior Advisor and specialists from the military and the civilian side. JUSPAO was also military and civilian, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office. But at CORDS, I was the man in charge of public affairs, reporting what I thought was the truth about the rural development program. My boss was one of the finest men I ever met in the Foreign Service, Dave McKillop. He would call me and his Filipino assistant, Ed Navarro, after our daily staff meeting, which was, I guess, 7:00 A.M. or 7:30, and Dave would sit in a chair between us and we would have a cup of coffee and talk things over. This, to me, was supervision the way it should be. Not the way they do things in my agency, and it increased my respect for the State Department. Of course, I would have preferred to be in the political section of the embassy, but there were no openings, since everyone wanted to be in the political cone.

There I was with Dave McKillop, and he wrote the finest rating I have ever been given. It was just outstanding. I would have gone into combat with him. He was there for my first year. Actually I guess I spent 14 months, so he wasn't there for a full year. He was replaced by Bob Walkinshaw, who was a labor officer, since retired and I enjoyed working with him also. It was one of the best jobs I have had anywhere in my career. I'm happy to have had it because it gave me the possibility of going back to America, having mingled with the people and seen what actually went on in the suburbs of Saigon, down to Can Gio on the South China Sea, all the way down the Saigon River. There were five or six districts. We had district advisors, young officers and we had the Province Senior Advisor nearby and we were in daily contact with him. I saw mistakes being made. I remember once, when they were about to have an election, the supervisor gave a party and invited the various contending Vietnamese parties over to the house for drinks. Naturally, only one or two showed up. We were interfering in their election, and this was the kiss of death. So I learned a lesson there too: what not to do when there are elections about to take place.

I got great satisfaction in Saigon. My wife was able to get a job there since according to the rules at that time, a woman who was able to get a job on her own was welcome to come and live with her husband and they would make it a two year tour instead of an 18 month tour with safe havening in say, Baguio, or Bangkok or Hong Kong or wherever it might be. So, I had my wife with me the whole time and we took short, week-long vacations every three or four months and saw a great deal of Southeast Asia and that made it very tolerable. She was very happy there. She sang with the Saigon Choral Society. They sang *Carmina Burana* and *The Messiah*. She even taught typing to the Air Force. So she was occupied and it was the perfect situation for the two of us, except for the war.

Now you asked me about the feelings and the attitudes and the atmosphere when I arrived in October. I described what it was in October, but then, of course, we had the Cambodian incursion, which cleaned out the whole Third Corps Area. Saigon was in the middle of the Third Corps Area, or third Military Region, and the Vietcong there was defeated I was told the kickoff for the Tet Offensive had taken place in the Hoc Mon district. The surrounding countryside had been saturated with Vietcong, but not after the Cambodian incursion. I don't actually know what damage we did in Cambodia. I have asked people, and I don't know if I have the truth. I have the

strong impression that we only bombed the Trail. We didn't bomb cities or towns as such. I hope I'm right. But whatever else it did, it opened the area.

I had a Ford Bronco and a Vietnamese assistant (whom I helped to bring his family to the Los Angeles area after 1975 and with whom I'm still in contact). We could drive all over the area. I drove with my wife one Sunday up to Tay Ninh on the Cambodian border to see the Cao Dai Temple, and down to Vung Tau (Cap St Jacques) once. By day the roads were open, which made a big difference, and gave us a greater sense of security. I no longer heard the artillery at night that I had heard when I first arrived there, so that when I left, I stopped in Paris in the fall of 1971 to see General Walters who was still there as the Defense Attaché and took a great interest in the war, and reported to him. I told him I felt that unless some outside force came in, at least locally we know that the people are with us and that we will be able to hang on, that Vietnamization will succeed. Well, I was wrong, because Congress didn't vote the funds to keep the South Vietnamese Army properly armed and their morale suffered and it went in a matter of weeks, but long after American forces had left.

Q: Yes, you're talking about 1975.

MASON: Yes, 1975. I don't want to get into criticism there, since I had left in 1971. For about \$35 more, we came back through Asia and stopped in as many places as possible and made it a great trip. We had a few days in Kashmir on the Dal Lake and in Beirut, and in Lisbon and across Puerto Rico and Florida, where my mother was living. Then I was assigned to the staff and faculty at the Vietnam Training Center. I was proud of that. It was a good job. I spoke to groups who were going out to Vietnam following us, because they were expected to go out with no let-up in the CORDS program or the other programs within the provinces. We did this until the spring of 1972 when the whole thing - the Vietnam Training Center - just closed down. I remember we had General Haig as a speaker and at just about the time he was there, it was announced that we were closing. So I had to look for another job. At USIA no offer was forthcoming. I was willing to take anything, because I wanted to know how the Agency functioned. By that time I had spent four years, from 1967 to 1971 (four and a half years really), without an assignment at the Agency. But I also tried the State Department and lo and behold, I found a job in Media Services, part of the Public Affairs section of the State Department, under Paul Auerswald, where I worked with a retired Naval commander named Ed Roeder, who had done a lot of television work for the Pentagon.

We started a program of sending out to the local stations around the country little scripts which outlined American policy with slides. We would take photographs which we would send with a text. If we happened to mention Secretary Kissinger, we would send a slide of Kissinger, so that his face would appear behind the speaker's face at the local station. This was good work because I was able to follow policy - it could have been the Law of the Sea or any number of subjects which local stations out in the Dakotas could use as they please. There were a few that sent them back saying, "We don't want this propaganda, we don't want handouts," but that was their loss because we weren't forcing it down their throats. We were merely saying, "This is American policy." That is the way it was for my two years spent at the Vietnam Training Center and in Public Affairs at the State Department.

Then I discovered to my dismay that the Agency did not consider this mainline work. It was not an assignment with USIA. Well, I had a great deal of trouble getting a statement of need-in other words that they needed me at the Agency-because I was not doing Agency work. I was working at the State Department. I had a strong feeling that when there is a war-time situation and when that war is a land war, the navy still has to get involved. Every service has to have its share. I felt that USIA was playing this game too. That's why they had JUSPAO, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, which added layers and layers of people there. I can tell you one thing that caused me to be looked at askance. Our Deputy Director came to town and sat in on one of our staff meetings. He told us that every USIA officer coming up for a new assignment would be sent to Vietnam, if he hadn't already been there, and he would break the assignment of anybody who had an assignment somewhere else and had not been to Vietnam. Well, a high ranking individual came from Washington, USIA whom I'd met before, and he called me in and asked what we'd been told. I told him, and he stared at me and said not another word. That was the end of the interview. So I shouldn't have mentioned something the Agency was doing for us to raise our morale!

J. RICHARD BOCK
Refugee Officer
Bien Hoa (1969-1970)

Special Assistant to Ambassador
Saigon (1970-1971)

J. Richard Bock was born in Philadelphia in 1942 and educated at the University of Washington and Princeton. He entered the Foreign Service in 1965. His career included posts in Bremen, Bien Hoa, Saigon, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Beijing, Berlin and Melbourne. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Today is May 30, 2002. Rick, off to Vietnam. First, you were in Vietnam from when to when?

BOCK: I arrived in April of '69 and I left just a little over two years later, spring of '71.

Q: Okay. How would you describe the situation in Vietnam in '69?

BOCK: Well, it was, of course, a little over a year after the Tet Offensive and the South had recovered reasonably well militarily from that, although psychologically there were scars. There was what was called the Mini Tet Offensive - that was the Tet of '69, which would have been February, I believe - which was also a fairly broadly based attack on government and American strongpoints around the country, but not nearly as serious as the '68 one. But that was in the immediate background when I arrived. We're talking about drawing various conclusions, one that "This isn't nearly as bad as the previous year" or alternatively "They're still in the position of being able to do these things."

Q: How were you processed in and where did you go?

BOCK: Well, we went over there pretty much as a group, arrived in Saigon, spent a week in Saigon basically doing paperwork, in- processing, getting some briefings. We were at that point assigned to a region. I think I'm right in saying that we did not know what region we would be in before we arrived. Then I was assigned to Region III, which is the area surrounding Saigon and headquartered in Bien Hoa. I went up to Bien Hoa. I don't remember all the specifics, but what I specifically remember about my regional in- processing is that they sent me out on a weeklong tour of the area by chopper and Air America plane. So I spent a day and a night in each of five or six provinces. That particularly sticks in my memory because one of those provinces – actually, I was sent to a district in Tayninh Province which was a continual battleground. I mean, the district advisory chief lived in a bunker. There was artillery going all night. When you tried to sleep there was always radio communication going on. You really felt you were in a war zone. So when I finally reached my own assignment, it seemed very peaceful by comparison. I suppose that was good.

Q: Yes, there were areas within that Saigon region that were a continuous battleground.

BOCK: Yes. Well, Hau Nghia Province was maybe the worst of the provinces. It was just south of Tayninh between Saigon and the Cambodian border. The province I was assigned to was Binh Duong (“Bin Zoong”) Province or “Bin Yoong” Province using the southern dialect, which is just up the Saigon River from Saigon. It was probably a 45 minute or an hour drive, not that far in distance but fairly far in terms of the difference between the city and the province. Although the province capital where I was assigned was reasonably peaceful, the districts surrounding it were battlegrounds to a considerable extent. The province included what was called “War Zone D.” It included War Zone C. It included the Iron Triangle, which had been the site of several big battles. It included the Michelin rubber plantation, which was still a hotbed of Viet Cong activity. The area was just crawling with American troops. Although we had no American forces stationed near the province capital, we had elements of the 25th Division, the 81st Airborne, the 1st Air Cavalry, and perhaps one other division when I arrived. That gradually became less as time went on.

Q: How was the province governed and what was our role in the government?

BOCK: Well, the provincial governor was a military man, which was if not universal then at least typical. I think all the districts – there were six districts – were all governed by military men. There were civilian administrators under him. The governor was both commander of his own regional forces and civilian administrator. So he had kind of a two sided hierarchy there over - the military and the civilians. Our advisory team was set up to kind of parallel this structure. In our case, we had a military provincial senior advisor, a Lt. Col., who had a military advisory team under him as well as a civilian advisory team. The deputy provincial senior advisor was a civilian. This was standard: if you had a military man at the top, you had a civilian next; otherwise it was vice versa. Many provinces had civilian provincial senior advisors. And we were structured so as to be counterparts to the various provincial agencies that we were dealing with.

Q: What was your impression of the governor?

BOCK: He was in some ways sort of a typical military man given to issuing orders right and left. There was always the question with everybody in Vietnam as to what extent corruption was taking place. I don't think we ever quite got a handle on it, but at least there were rumors that he might have been involved in some activity, but not in an obvious way. He didn't have difficulty in dealing with Americans and with all the advice he was getting, but he was clearly his own man and you could not be certain that any advice he was given would be taken, but he was always open to it.

Q: How about your bosses?

BOCK: I went through two sets. The provincial senior advisor when I arrived was a full colonel by then, Angus Mundy, who was extremely personable and had a very good reputation. He left within months after I arrived. And he was replaced by Lt. Col. McLean Raymond Fleigh, who I thought was very good. He was both a capable military man and also very sensitive to the situation we were in. I found him very easy to deal with and I'm very pleased that I had him as boss. Then there was the top civilian, the deputy PSA. When I arrived, there was a shuffle and a fairly junior officer who had been assigned in a lower level position was put into that position for 10 months, or so, a fellow named Gardiner Brown, whom I found very good to deal with. He was then eventually succeeded by Merle White, "Woody" White, who was a more experienced Foreign Service officer. Again, I have nothing but good words to say about him. He was very good to work with.

Q: What were you doing?

BOCK: It's interesting. When I was assigned, I was assigned as a refugee officer. There were a lot of refugees in the province because of all the military activities that had been going on. When I arrived, though, I was confronted with a situation where Gardiner Brown had just been moved up and his position was vacant. So, I was asked in very short order to look after what was called the New Life Development Office. I was the NLD officer. I find that a little difficult to describe. It basically covered the range of aid programs, community development programs. It was in concept broader than that. It had certainly a political element to it in trying to use community development to encourage and develop support for the central government. But in practice it was really mostly monitoring, if not overseeing, what the Vietnamese were doing with all the assistance we were giving them. So, that was what I was doing there for about 10 months, I think. I had a staff of several Americans and several Vietnamese working under me.

Q: Then what would you do?

BOCK: Well, one of the things I would do would be to go out with one of the Vietnamese provincial government counterparts to monitor projects that were being funded out in the villages, to talk with local level officials about what sort of projects they wanted, any problems they had with projects that were under development. I would also do that on my own. I had still the refugee responsibility, which meant helping out with and overseeing refugee relief. There was a great deal of concern all over the country that these kind of relief funds might be misused, so a good part of it was just to make sure that whatever we were providing for these purposes

was being used the way we wanted. Increasingly, I also got involved in trying to implement the now infamous hamlet evaluation system, which was something set up by Bob Komer, if I'm not mistaken, to try to have a broad based database on how well we were doing in the pacification program. It included a range of measures, both development issues, Viet Cong infiltration issues, and so on. These were supposed to be done by each of the district advisory teams. Well, many of the district advisory teams, being four levels away from the people who had devised this system, didn't have a clue. I sort of fell into the job of going around and helping all the people in our districts figure out how to make this thing work, which was an uphill struggle.

Q: My understanding is that it was hard to get what amounted to a really objective evaluation because when push came to shove, the members of the team, particularly the leader, had to show both progress and that things were good when if you wanted to have a real evaluation, you might be in a place where things were bad and probably were going to stay bad.

BOCK: Yes. One of the things that became evident over time was that every time you got a new district advisor, the hamlet evaluation system ratings went way down the month he arrived and then gradually went up for his year and then went down again as soon as the next one came in. Everybody had to show progress. Some of it was gaining the system. Some of it was just psychological. They knew that their own ratings depended on showing progress and they wanted to see progress where they could.

Q: Looking back on this and looking not only at your work but you were going around and traveling around, here were Americans put into a culture that a couple of years ago none of the people there had a clue about and doing work that we weren't trained to do, except for a quick course. How did you find this working? It always struck me as being something that was fine on paper, but when you got right down to it, there were so many obstacles to making it...

BOCK: There were. What we were ultimately trying to do was, in that immortal phrase, "win the hearts and minds of people." Some of what we did to accomplish that objective was useful. There were a lot of schools that were built. There were a lot of medical stations out in the provinces. This was good. But in terms of really accomplishing our objectives, it took something well beyond that. It's hard even now to think of what could have worked better than what we were doing. If we'd ever gotten to the point where the Vietnamese people at large felt that the South's government was on a steady winning streak, then a lot of this would have fallen into place. But the people were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. They had, particularly in our area, a lot of North Vietnamese soldiers with whom they didn't necessarily identify. But on the other side, they had a fairly corrupt and in some cases brutal system, which is perhaps inevitable in war. You had 18-20 year old Vietnamese who were drafted up and sent out there and they were scared to death of anything that moved, just like our soldiers in some cases. They would not have the local people's welfare at the top of their list of priorities. So it never really gelled.

Q: As you went around, when you got below the province level, how did you find some of the district... Was it province and then district?

BOCK: Province was the higher level, and then district.

Q: And at the village level, how did you find the Vietnamese government worked?

BOCK: There was a big difference between district and village. The village leaders were local. They were locally elected, although the elections weren't necessarily always democratic, but they were local people. The district, on the other hand, was an arm of the central government, so there you had people assigned and the district chief was also a military man. So, the district functioned very much as a province did, although much less elaborately. But you had these lower level military officers and civil servants who were there in many cases, particularly in the less secure areas, you had a lot of your district administration not living there, not staying there overnight. They would come in in the daytime and then hightail it out. This was even true in some cases with the school staff. They just wouldn't stay there overnight. So, one question of effectiveness of the district government was how well these people had managed to integrate into the local population from outside. At the village level, you had a different equation. These were people who by and large lived there, although there were some exceptions to that. They were local people. There, the question tended to be were they playing both sides of the war. In some cases, they were.

Q: How did you find going down, did we have junior officers out at the district level and all?

BOCK: We had, of course, district advisor teams in every district. They were largely military. They tended to be about six people headed by a captain. Of the six districts in Binh Duong, three of them had most of the time a civilian assigned to the district team. One of those civilians was a Foreign Service officer like myself. The other two were young AID employees. I should say that the whole thing I was involved in was CORDS. All the Foreign Service officers in CORDS were detailed to AID, so we were all under AID administration.

Q: You knew who was Foreign Service and you knew who was coming in for the... Sort of career Foreign Service person.

BOCK: Oh, yes, because we all knew each other's backgrounds. Some of the AID people were career and some were direct hire because they needed more people than they had. And when you had a civilian, then you had somebody whose focus was on the civilian programs. In the three districts, where we didn't have that, then a district advisor would designate one of his military people to do it, but they were not trained at all for this.

Q: What was your impression of how our military worked in this? Again, it was a very unfamiliar milieu.

BOCK: I tended in our province to see a considerable difference between the military assigned to the advisory teams and the military assigned to the regular units. And there was a certain amount of tension between the two. The folks assigned to the advisory teams were there to work with Vietnamese counterparts and they did. I don't know how much training they had. In many cases, I think very little for this. But they were fairly well inculcated as to what their job was. So they were sensitive to what the Vietnamese government was trying to do and all the surrounding issues. The main force units were a much greater struggle because they were there to fight a war.

Inevitably, they had difficulty in distinguishing between the good Vietnamese and the bad Vietnamese. There was always a latent tendency to suspect any Vietnamese, including the gal who came into the hooch in the morning to pick up the wash. And with some reason. So, our provincial senior advisor often found himself kind of in the middle of these things and trying to persuade the various units in the province to be more cognizant of the impact they were having on civilians. That said, we didn't have any My Lais or anything like that.

Q: Was My Lai in your area?

BOCK: It was in the region, but it was pretty far removed from Binh Duong.

Q: It was just coming to light about that time, too, wasn't it?

BOCK: I think it was. We had minor incidents, reports of some people in a convoy throwing grenades off their truck at civilians along the road, not all the time, but now and then.

Q: How about your Vietnamese?

BOCK: I found it extremely useful. This assignment out in the province is, I'm ashamed to say, the only time in my career when I consistently spoke the local language to the office staff. I started that from the outset and I found it very useful because then I was speaking Vietnamese all the time. I don't know what my fluency was, but it was certainly adequate to go out to local villages and talk to people.

Q: Do you feel you were able to get a reasonable line on what was happening when you went out and talked to the local people?

BOCK: There were limitations. We were the foreigners from the West. Depending on the circumstance in the local village, people might or might not want to tell us what was really going on. I never felt that I really knew. You would pick up what you could. The more you went back, the more you'd find out, but...

You had asked me earlier about what sort of things I did. Another part of my job description was political reporting. I did some of that. We functioned in that regard as kind of an extension of the embassy. The embassy had in its political section an internal unit with one person assigned, I believe, per region. That person would come out occasionally to do interviews.

Q: Do you recall who came out?

BOCK: Let me finish the thought. The region also had someone who kind of did the same thing. For most of the time I was there, Lars Hyde was at the region and doing political reporting and Mike Skol was the person in Saigon. But in addition to these two full-time reporting officers, we were encouraged to write up reports and pass them through those channels on all sorts of things, including political party activity, or if there were any things to do with security interests which would be of interest outside the standard CORDS structure. I did a bit of that.

Q: Did you feel that you were under pressure to show the rosier side of things?

BOCK: No, I didn't. I think that was probably a distinction between the military and the civilian side of the advisory setup. We were under the supervision of the Deputy for CORDS at the region. When I was there, that was Charlie Whitehouse. He was of course very interested in and committed to the whole pacification program, but I never sensed that that translated into an insistence that we had to show progress regardless of circumstances. So, no, I did not.

Q: Did you get any feel for the government sitting in Saigon? Was there any almost connection between that and loyalty towards that or was that just another government far away?

BOCK: Well, it was more the latter. There were efforts - my memory is not very clear on this - I think about that time efforts by the president to set up his own political party and try to establish it around the provinces. I believe that was happening to a considerable extent in our own province, but it tended to be kind of an artificial exercise, as that sort of thing often is. So, to a large extent, Saigon seemed to be rather far away and sort of an "us versus them" kind of situation.

Q: Did you get that feeling at all between you out in the province and our embassy back in Saigon?

BOCK: Yes, to some extent, although this system I described a few minutes ago about the roving political reporters gave us kind of a window into the embassy and diminished that to some extent.

Q: During the time you were there, were there any major developments in your province?

BOCK: The time I was there coincided with a general quieting of the insurgency. I mentioned the 1969 mini Tet. That was the highpoint for a while. So, there were successes in the sense of less Viet Cong and North Vietnamese activity for most of the period I was there. In the spring of 1970, and by this time I was no longer in the province, was the big Cambodia incursion. That was a major development from the perspective of our province and that region because it was directed at North Vietnamese military units who were ensconced on the border and using that base to put pressure on the provinces between the border and Saigon and that was us. So, from a purely parochial perspective, that incursion seemed like a good idea. And it wasn't until you started thinking about what might be the effects in Cambodia itself that you ran into the other side of the picture.

Q: I was in Saigon at the time and I thought, "Gee, good idea. What the hell?"

BOCK: I was amazed at the reaction in the United States.

Q: This is something, too... While you were there, did you get any feel for what was going on in the United States?

BOCK: We kept up with the news, but, no, I wouldn't say I had a real feel for it. Certainly I did

not have enough of a feel for it to prepare me for the reaction to the Cambodia incursion.

Q: Were you married?

BOCK: No.

Q: So you were getting post reports... My wife was picking up another degree at the University of Maryland and I was getting the campus feedback and wow.

BOCK: No. I suppose I was in correspondence regularly only with my parents and they did not fill me with political news.

Q: How about getting around? Was this dangerous?

BOCK: There is no easy answer to that. I got around a lot. I drove to all the districts. The one district I couldn't drive directly to was the one up in the Michelin plantation because the road went through the Iron Triangle and that was bombed out. You had to make a rather circuitous route to do it and often we would fly, but I did drive on a couple of occasions. You would only do it in the daytime. You couldn't even drive to Saigon at night. There were checkpoints set up and so on. There were some people who were very cautious about driving. I think that tended to be the case more with the military than with civilians. That was their training. But I drove not only around the province but around the region. I drove to most of the provinces in the region at one time or another. I drove up to Dalat at one point and later down through the Mekong Delta. The roads were open. There didn't seem to be a problem from my perspective.

Q: Did you carry weapons?

BOCK: I was issued an M16 on arrival. I never carried it. I would have been a danger to myself and anybody around me if I had ever had to use it, although I was given rudimentary training in how to use it. I didn't want to carry a weapon.

Q: I have to say, as consul general there at the same time, our concern was, there were too many damn guns around that construction workers, Americans or something, would have too much beer and kill themselves when the Viet Cong turned out to be the laundry boy or something like that.

BOCK: I don't think we had that problem out in the province. My feeling was, that wasn't my job. If it was going to be a situation where I was going to be under the gun, so to speak, then I shouldn't be there. That wasn't what I was there to do.

Q: In some of these places that were under fairly frequent attack, were there Foreign Service officers there? Were they turning into military in a way?

BOCK: I had a very limited sample to go by. Only one of our three district civilians was in such an area. He was up at Ben Cat and Ben Cat did come under attack from time to time. I would have to say no in that case, but that's not representative. To the extent I knew about other

provinces, I didn't see it.

Q: Did you ever find yourself having to use your diplomatic skills of getting between the American civilians and the American military?

BOCK: Not directly. Because we had this rather large and elaborate military advisory structure in the province, if I became aware of a situation which required that kind of mediation, I would take it immediately to my military bosses. They were enough on the same wavelength that I was that they would be the ones to tackle that. There was no real negotiating. I was dealing with people who were coming from where I was coming from.

Q: Yes, and who had the clout, too, to take care-

BOCK: Well, who may or may not have had the clout, but who had more clout than I did.

Q: Something that I'm sure you got familiar with was the difference between an American Foreign Service briefing and a military briefing. So many of the briefings that I would get from the military were so terribly canned and I really didn't feel I got much out of them whereas the Foreign Service ones seemed to be a little more at least instructive or something. You'd be talking about the real situation rather than too many flip charts and all that. Did you find this?

BOCK: Yes, not so much during this time in the province because the military people out there did not have the capability to do this kind of elaborate briefing. However, and maybe this is jumping ahead, I spent about two months following my provincial assignment at regional headquarters in Bien Hoa. One of my jobs there, at least for part of the time, was to do civilian briefing for the commanding general. So, I was there in tandem with military briefers. This was a major military command now, so you had exactly the kind of thing you're describing with all this rapid fire flip chart kind of stuff and I was up there just trying to talk and it was quite a contrast.

Q: I know. Shortly after I arrived, somebody had set it up for me and my deputy, just the two of us, Paul McCarthy. We went up to Bien Hoa and I think a major came out and did this. There was a big table and it was just the two of us. It was like he was addressing an audience of 500 or something. It was sort of eerie. It wasn't us guys sitting around and telling what it was. This is how they did it. I realize it has its purpose, but the wavelengths weren't right on that.

BOCK: Well, I have a vague memory of the commanding general coming out to our province and getting a briefing and the military team being all uptight about it. But even in that situation, we just didn't have the capability to do the real military briefing.

Q: You had a two month time in Bien Hoa? What were you doing there?

BOCK: One of the things I was doing, and I guess the one that was the most time consuming, there was a provincial survey team made up of Vietnamese who would do public opinion surveys. I was very familiar with their work because they would come around to provinces and would be tasked by provincial advisory teams – because they worked for us, not for the

Vietnamese government – but they were headquartered in Bien Hoa and were often tasked out of Bien Hoa... So, when I moved into Bien Hoa, I was running them and editing their reports and either devising things for them to pursue or soliciting questions to be asked from the various provincial advisory teams. I was also working at the regional end on the hamlet evaluation system. I was doing the military briefings. There may have been some other things, too.

Q: Did you then go back?

BOCK: No. There was a personnel situation which had left me unhappy. I mentioned that I had been doing this acting NLD advisor job. Well, that was very satisfactory to the provincial advisory team and to the region, but the central system still kept that position on their books as vacant. Lo and behold, they assigned somebody to it, a guy with no background, who came out. There was an effort on the part of the provincial team to block his assignment and it didn't succeed. So, I was back in a subordinate position to somebody that didn't know anywhere near as much as I did. I hope I wasn't too obvious about it. I began to look for a way out, with support from the provincial senior advisor. So that was the genesis of my move to Bien Hoa. It was also the genesis of my next move. In Saigon, the embassy had three special assistant positions that it recruited CORDS Foreign Service officers to fill: the special assistant to the ambassador, the special assistant to the deputy ambassador, and the special assistant to the head of the CORDS program. I had become aware of this through my contact with these embassy rovers and so when I heard that there was about to be a vacancy, I put my name in the hat and went in for an interview and was accepted.

Q: Which one?

BOCK: This was special assistant to Ambassador Bunker.

Q: We used to laugh about this. One, it was obviously an honor and was a very good thing to do. But it was called, I think, the Charm School or the Charm Competition because this was a competitive thing. The people who got it were usually damned good Foreign Service officers, but they'd been out in the field. It was a little bit like the competition to be specially picked to go to the Ops Center or something like that.

BOCK: I guess it was, yes, within the Vietnam context.

Q: So you did this from when to when?

BOCK: It must have been about June of '70. Although I was originally on a year and a half tour, this was done with the knowledge that it entailed an extension. So I served there about a year.

Q: Okay. So this would be June of '70 to...

BOCK: April or May of '71.

Q: What was your impression of the operation of the embassy?

BOCK: Well, the embassy was absolutely monstrous. From the perspective of the ambassador's office, there was a lot of stuff that just never came to his attention at all. The deputy ambassador was a DCM. The reason to call him the deputy ambassador-

Q: Was it Sam Berger at that time?

BOCK: Yes. That probably had more to do with relations to the military than anything else.

Q: I know, for example, I hardly ever saw the ambassador. I reported to Sam Berger.

BOCK: Yes. That was true for so much of the embassy. So, on the one hand, I was aware of the vastness of the embassy community, but on the other hand, I wasn't that engaged with a lot of it because I was there directly in the ambassador's office and was interested in only those things that he was interested in.

Q: How did Ambassador Bunker use you?

BOCK: Well, what I was there to do was, first of all, to manage the paper flow, try to determine what he needed to see and what he didn't. Secondly, to handle his contacts with the Vietnamese government to the extent it wasn't being handled by the political counselor or someone similar. To help out when he went out on visits or entertained. So, it was very much the personal staff assistant type of job, certainly not a policy position.

Q: Who had been your predecessor?

BOCK: Al Adams. He moved then into the political section, so he was still there. At the outset, that was a real advantage because he was there to bend his ear, you know.

Q: From your perspective, how did Ambassador Bunker operate?

BOCK: I'm not sure I know how to reply to that. He had a number of trusted people that he dealt with constantly, starting with Sam Berger, including in particular the mission coordinator, who at that time was Hawk Mills, Ambassador Colby, head of the CORDS program, and the commanding general, General Abrams. So, he tended to rely on a fairly small circle. I should include the political counselor as well, although I didn't sense that he was as close.

Q: Who was that?

BOCK: Hitchcock, I guess. Bill Hitchcock.

Q: Was this a team that seemed to work together?

BOCK: I think it worked together reasonably well. On the economic side, that required Berger because that was an area that Bunker really didn't get into very much. But Berger was there and he was good. As far as the military relationship is concerned, yes, I didn't see the kind of tension you might expect between the civilian embassy and the military command. They were all, I

think, working from the same script. I can remember, without having been involved in them, the endless consultations regarding the Laos incursion, which took place during the time I was there. I can't remember the name of the operation. It was not successful.

Q: Operation Lan Som.

BOCK: Yes. It was a Vietnamese operation supported by the U.S., but the troops on the ground were by and large Vietnamese. There was a period when Bunker spent a great deal of his time working on that, constantly talking with Abrams.

Q: Did you get any feel for Bunker's dealings with Washington? Nixon was in. Henry Kissinger was the National Security Advisor.

BOCK: I did not get a very good feel. One of the restrictions of my position was that all of the highly restricted traffic did not go through me. That went through Eva Kim, his secretary. The other person I should mention that was constantly in consultation with Bunker was Ted Shackley, who was chief of station. So, you know, a lot of those messages, particularly from Kissinger, went through CIA channels, so Shackley would be bringing these things in. One would become aware of things from time to time, but I didn't have a great overview.

Q: Sometimes it happens – I can't imagine Bunker, being the gentleman he was to get into one of these screaming matches over the telephone – that you get with relationships sometimes. I've just been reading a book about Phil Habib dealing with Washington. He was not one to keep his voice down.

BOCK: Yes. No, I don't remember anything like that. He would go back on consultations, of course. I don't know what happened then. But even then I wouldn't have expected him to get in a shouting match.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of Bunker rolling his eyes, getting instructions or requests from Washington or something like that?

BOCK: No, not that I remember.

Q: As a personality, I find it difficult to think that...

BOCK: Yes, he was a very self-contained individual. He was already into his 70s. He had been through a lot. He didn't have to be there. But he had this real sense of service and that carried over into the way he dealt with people.

Q: I imagine that you were terribly busy most of the time.

BOCK: Yes.

Q: Did you get any feel for Bunker, but also the embassy dealing with the Vietnamese government? This was the Thieu government. How did they function?

BOCK: I didn't have a direct view of it, but during the time I was there, certainly Bunker talked to Thieu quite a bit. He would also talk to a couple of the people around Thieu.

Q: Did Ky ever come into the thing?

BOCK: I don't think Ky had any particular contacts with the embassy, at least not with the Ambassador.

Q: He was Vice President.

BOCK: He was Vice President. He was kind of doing his own thing. All of the Embassy dealings that I'm aware of went through Thieu or, depending on the issue, through some of the cabinet ministers. But with Bunker, Bunker dealt with Thieu. I have vague recollections of some tensions there, but not enough that I could give you any real details. Again, Bunker, with his personality and sort of stoic approach to things.

Q: As a young officer, there was sort of a young officers' mafia in Saigon, which included people like yourself, many of whom had served in the field and came in. It was a very lively social group. Can you characterize what you were picking up from them and you were adding about what was happening?

BOCK: There was a certain amount of general cynicism both about the capability of the Thieu government and whether the pacification strategy was really working. But this was not a crisis period. So, this was kind of background noise. I can't remember any real tensions in that regard. It was more sort of people just chatting. I do remember the corruption issue was a major one. It was one that Sam Berger got in the middle of. He was at some point designated as the person who was going to have to deal with this. There were considerable pressures put on him - some of them were raised by more junior officers - about what was going on. Since it was Berger's deal, it was something that I wasn't getting involved in at all, but I certainly was aware of it.

Q: Well, I got involved in some things, for example, there had been an organization called the Embassy Club in Saigon. You probably didn't run across it. At one point, they had to repair the roof or something. It was going to take a while.

BOCK: This was the one in back of the main embassy, right?

Q: It was downtown somewhere. Later, they had a regular club with a swimming pool, but this was really a place where you could go get drinks. But they had little gift shops which were selling fur coats and diamonds. You can imagine, it was a hotbed of everything that you didn't want. They said, "Well, you really have got to repair the roof," so Berger took that to shut it down and said, "We're not repairing the roof." I ran something equivalent to a civilian court martial system. It's called the Irregular Practices Committee. American civilians who got caught in black market activities, we could take away essentially their PX privileges, which killed them. They couldn't operate anymore, including newsmen.

BOCK: The whole question of irregular practices on the part of Americans was something I was aware of from the time I was in Vietnam. Everybody knew that virtually any military unit's paymaster had ready access to Vietnamese girlfriends. I don't think I ever saw a paymaster who didn't have some sweet young thing on his arm. Such were the temptations. The ability to siphon off commissary goods and PX goods and so on was legendary. I don't remember this coming up very strongly during the time I was at the embassy, but I may just not be remembering it.

Q: I remember watching Thai soldiers being marched to the PX in Cho Lon and each getting a certain amount of whatever they got. It would eventually end up on the black market.

BOCK: If I'm not mistaken, what Berger was charged with dealing with was not that kind of thing at all, but major diversion by Vietnamese of U.S. aid commodities. But I don't have the details on that.

Q: Were you able to get out and talk to Vietnamese in Saigon?

BOCK: Not very much. I did get up back to my old province on occasion. Sometimes I'd go up there on a Sunday if I knew that I wasn't going to have to work, and talk to the Vietnamese staff that I had gotten to know up there. Not to any significant extent in Saigon.

Q: Particular the time you were with Bunker, this was the time of Vietnamization. We were beginning to draw down our troops. This was the Nixon Doctrine.

BOCK: Yes, and negotiations were going on in Paris, too.

Q: Yes. Was there any disquiet about our getting out of there, moving our troops out?

BOCK: I would say from the embassy perspective, very little. I think to the extent there was disquiet it was with what was going on in Paris in terms of cease-fire negotiations and what restrictions would come out of that. As you will remember, there was eventually a real standoff between Nixon and Thieu. Actually, in the early negotiations, between Johnson and Thieu, but later on with Nixon as well. The embassy was clearly reflecting to some extent Thieu's concerns about some of those issues such as how fast we would have to withdraw. But in terms of the ongoing withdrawal which had been put in place in '69 or '70, I didn't sense any particular qualms about that. Of course, these cross-border operations, both Cambodia and Laos, were designed to set the stage for that, too, and to the extent they were successful, as Cambodia initially was, that helped. If they weren't successful, as Laos was not really, then that raised alarm bells.

Q: As a Foreign Service officer put in this sort of unique situation, what were you looking at towards whither Rick Bock? Were promises made?

BOCK: No promises. People always talked a good game. "This will be good for your career." In those days, there was a pretty standard pattern for junior Foreign Service officers, which was, of your first three assignments, two would be abroad and one would be in Washington. Vietnam was my second overseas assignment. I had not yet been assigned to Washington. So there was a

general understanding, which I don't think I ever questioned, that I would be assigned to Washington. And I was. So, then it was just a question of what office in the Department.

Q: When you left there in April-ish 1971, whither South Vietnam?

BOCK: I think the focus tended to be on how would these cease-fire negotiations pan out? Could there be something put in place which would really remove the North Vietnamese regular units from the South? If that was the case, then I think the general consensus in Saigon was that at least then the Thieu government had a decent shot at surviving, no guarantees certainly. So the focus tended to be on what was going on in Paris.

Q: Was there any concern that the Nixon people were in to get us the hell out of there no matter what and what might be equivalent to a sellout?

BOCK: I don't remember that specifically. There may have been.

WILLIAM K. HITCHCOCK
Director, Refugees and War Victims
Saigon (1969-1970)

Political Counselor
Saigon (1970-1972)

William Hitchcock was born in Colorado in 1919 and educated at the University of Colorado at Boulder and American University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1953. His career included posts in London, Paris, Madrid, Calcutta and Saigon. He was interviewed by Stephen Low in 1998.

Q: Jim Grant lives two houses away from us.

HITCHCOCK: Jim Grant was responsible for Vietnam affairs in AID, a job of major importance since AID served as the administrative umbrella for all American civilians in Vietnam engaged in the direct prosecution of the war (as well as those doing regular AID functions). In his usual, effective manner, Jim explained how refugees and other types of war victims - between 2.5 and 3 million of them - had become a major problem both because of the human suffering they represented and the way they were being exploited by anti-war activists. After a few telephone calls, I agreed to take on the job, subject to my first reviewing the situation in the field. I went out in January of '69 and spent most of the month there, came back to DC for most of February and hit the job full time the first of March, 1969.

The Director of CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) at that time was Bill Colby (later in charge of the CIA). (I lived with him my first month in Saigon while looking for a place to live.) The Directorate of Refugees and War Victims was one of the four Directorates of CORDS, the acronym for the civilian side of the war effort, also known as the

Pacification program. Nineteen sixty-nine was an interesting, challenging year to acquire the responsibility for intensifying our refugee assistance efforts. The war was still active but the general security situation had become more stable than it had been in 1968 after major enemy assaults during Tet the previous February. In these improved circumstances many South Vietnamese displaced by the war could be returned home or otherwise helped to rebuild their lives. A substantial proportion of them were given help either by our programs directly or indirectly through about 30 voluntary agencies (VOLAGS), the largest of which, I think, was Catholic Relief Services. About a hundred million dollars were spent a year on our refugee assistance efforts in addition to the contributions from the VOLAGS. We had refugee advisors in all the provinces of South Vietnam, some 18 in all, and the VOLAGS, too, had personnel sprinkled liberally throughout the country. It was an intensive effort.

Q: The objective was what, to ease the plight of the refugees?

HITCHCOCK: Yes. There were two and half million displaced people. Technically they were not refugees (i.e., people driven out of their countries); in Vietnam, they had been driven out of their homes and most couldn't return to them. We called them refugees. There were also several refugee camps usually located in areas where the war made their return-home impossible. They were mostly located in the northern part of the country. We also dealt with another category of war casualties we called war victims. These were people whose homes were destroyed as a result of some war related action. We gave them material for rebuilding their homes, food during the rebuilding period, and other help as required.

I spent a year in charge of our refugee efforts. It involved a lot of work, much of it done while moving around the provinces of SVN (South Vietnam) by helicopter. I usually traveled with the Minister of Social Welfare of the Vietnamese government.

Q: Your French was good enough?

HITCHCOCK: Not really; nor was my Vietnamese. My work was almost all done in English. We also had translators as required, usually for dealing with village or provincial officials.. There were a lot of inspiring, committed people involved in the U.S. refugee effort, as one might expect. Quite a few were FSOs, usually on their first assignments. Others came from NGOs (non-governmental organizations) or other similar activities. One junior FSO was George Moose who later became Assistant Secretary for African Affairs.

Q: Do you think the program was effective?

HITCHCOCK: I think it or something like it was crucial. These people had to have the kind of help that was given including the food. They also needed assistance in preparing their land for planting. And, yes, I think it was very successful, especially during 1969 when the intensity of the war had subsided a bit.

Toward the end of January or February 1970, Senator Fulbright opened special hearings on the Vietnam war before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of which he was the Chairman. Very near the start of the hearings he heard the CORDS side of things. To make our presentation,

I returned to Washington with Bill Colby and John Paul Vann. The hearings were not as hostile as we expected. The Senator had decided that CORDS was not where he was going to focus his fire. It must be said that our presentations went well in part because we could report progress made possible by the improved security situation that existed during that period of time.

Ambassador Bunker, about the turn of '71-'72, asked me to move to the Embassy to replace Martin Herz whose tour as Minister Counselor was coming to an end. I, of course, agreed to do so and made the transfer after returning to Saigon from the Senate hearings about the beginning of March as I recall.

Q: Of 1970?

HITCHCOCK: Yes. My new job was called Minister Counselor for Political Affairs, but it also had several other responsibilities beyond the range of the political section. We also had a Political Counselor for whom I was directly responsible. The Embassy structure included an ambassador and a deputy ambassador - Ambassador Bunker and Ambassador Sam Berger. Sam gave his attention to special problems such as corruption within SVN, and he served as principal adviser to the Ambassador. I provided special assistance to the Ambassador, going with him occasionally to meetings, drafting messages, undertaking special studies, etc. I also was our action officer on the Peace talks, then going on in Paris. Galen Stone was the Political Counselor when I arrived and rotated out shortly after. Lauren Askew was the Political Counselor during my tour and supervised the daily work of what I believe was the largest political section the Foreign Service had. But I, too, had a very active role and was in frequent consultation with the political section, including, of course, Askew.

I was Minister Counselor for a little over two years - until the spring of 1972. I had been in the Refugee job about 15 months. So my total time in Vietnam was a bit under 3 and ½ years.

Q: You were much more involved in the policy issues in that position than you had been as the Refugee Coordinator?

HITCHCOCK: Of course, but our refugee assistance efforts were also important not only for the refugees as such, but also as a limited antidote to the anti-war movement in the States. As you will recall the war was a significant event in almost every American's life; many opposed it and their opposition increased in effectiveness as the war continued. In the Embassy we were well aware of the opposition, but our main concern continued to be the war and our role in pursuing it. Many of us, for example, had to remain sharply focused on the fact that there was a 12 or 13 hour difference between Washington and Saigon - every day. We had to get messages out at the end of the day in order to receive instructions at the beginning of the morning. These messages, in contrast to a lot of messages at other Foreign Service posts, frequently went directly to the President. We did not then have, as you will recall, a strong Secretary of State, but we had a strong National Security Advisor (who soon became the Secretary of State). This was just after the end of the Johnson presidency, early in the beginning of that of Nixon.

Q: I have heard from a number of the junior officers that they were aware of the deteriorating situation, but that they felt they couldn't report that.

HITCHCOCK: I have to ask when?

Q: Did you have personal contact with the junior officers in the field or were you able to get from them a flow of information that was satisfactory?

HITCHCOCK: Not always, but generally yes. We got what we needed - from the field, from our own officers in the Political Section (many of whom were Vietnamese speaking), and other contributors. We had information from many sources. The greater challenge was in evaluating and using it effectively. Knowledge of developments in and about the North was a weakness among our analytical tools.

Q: Were we deluding ourselves?

HITCHCOCK: Maybe in retrospect, but at the time, there wasn't much doubt about there being a feeling of general optimism in the immediate wake of Tet '68. You never approach a military situation as a military person with the conviction you are going to lose. And, indeed, you tend to see what happens as a reaffirmation of that positiveness. The indicators were generally much more positive in Vietnam at that time than they were in the States. But I would add that during that period in the States everything was really going to hell in terms of support for the Vietnam War. I can't remember the date of Kent State, but it was probably around '72. I'm not going to get into the U.S. side of the war except to say there were lots of people who came to Vietnam of varying degrees of importance - national importance in U.S. - who were strong opponents of the Vietnam War. Among them was George McGovern, as he was beginning his presidential campaign effort. I was the control officer for his visit. There was a tendency to put as positive a face on the state of the war as possible - or as negative as possible if you were an opponent. It was difficult to marry these two opposing points of view and reach useful conclusions in terms of our national interest.

From Vietnam it seemed to many Americans that a number of promising approaches to the pursuit of the war were avoided because of self-imposed constraints. For example, in Vietnam there was widespread support for a greater effort to interdict movements of the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which was predominantly located in Laos. There was even a constraint against bombing access to the Ho Chi Minh Trail in North Vietnam where the trail enters Laos, although we did some bombing of the Trail in Laos and there was some bombing of the Trail in northeastern-most Cambodia. The point was, we never undertook a major effort to stop the North Vietnamese from bringing war materiel into SVN over the Trail, and we could have. The effect on the ability of the North to pursue the war in the South would have been major, possibly decisive - or so many advocates believed. I don't know why it wasn't done, but I presume that, as in other cases, it was a concern about the possibility of escalating the conflict. I cite this not to reflect any disappointment on my part, but to identify the kind of dissatisfaction about the prosecution of the war one occasionally encountered in Saigon. But there were many Americans in SVN whose principle concern was with the obviously rapid decline in U.S. support for our continued participation in the war, not to mention our continuing support to our ally, the South Vietnamese. This latter concern was given a substantial boost by the introduction of the Vietnamization of the war effort by President Nixon and many of the

actions that followed that decision.

Walt Cutler, in charge of external relations in our political section, and I work together on possible Peace possibilities, including negotiating proposals for presentation in Paris. The thoughts we developed, I thought, were sometimes rather inventive, never necessarily breakthrough stuff, but inventive. Even though we never knew whether anything ever happened to our efforts after we submitted them, I know we both enjoyed the work.

I also coordinated with the Vietnamese (the Deputy Foreign Minister) once a week, I think on Thursdays, the position the U.S. Delegation proposed to present at the peace talks in Paris that week. These coordination talks continued even after the highly secret negotiations involving Secretary Kissinger and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam had commenced. Allowing us to continue our meetings in ignorance obviously was part of the effort to protect the secrecy of the Kissinger talks.

Q: It sounds to me as though you were more operational than analytical and that you were really putting out fires and didn't have the opportunity to stand back and see where we were going. People didn't develop strong positions pro or con on the war at this point. You were too busy doing it.

HITCHCOCK: I think you may be right. The pressure on us to do what we did was substantial - 90 hour or so work weeks. So it could be argued that we hardly had time to do what you suggest. It was also true that much of the criticism of the war coming out of the United States was criticism without much knowledge of what was happening on the ground. Of course, that may not have been important to the critics whose greater concern was probably what they feared the war was doing to the United States.

I became known, I think, as a kind of skeptic within the inner circle. I will tell a story that may not be flattering to me. One of the real warriors was Ted Shackley. Shackley had been the head of the CIA operation in Laos, for five years or more before he came to Saigon as the station chief. He was really committed. Whenever these issues or instructions from Washington that we had to pursue, or comment on, arrived, I was always skeptical or would say "let's look at this." He came up once with the sharp rebuke, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." Well, look. You go through four years in India in which one of their greatest doubts about American foreign policy was Vietnam, you become cautious.

Q: Had you had any content with people like Paul Kattenburg when you were in INR?

HITCHCOCK: Lou Sarris was the INR Vietnam specialist. I knew him when I was in INR in the early '60s. I also knew Kattenburg at that time, though not well.

Q: And, he had the reputation of being very pessimistic about Vietnam.

HITCHCOCK: Yes, and it was a view warmly shared by Tom Hughes who was the Director of INR at the time. I think sometimes that they were more skeptical than the events supported. But, I must admit, some of their skepticism turned out in retrospect to be almost prescient.

There is a piece on the war that has been pulled together under the auspices, I think, of the LBJ Library. Have you seen that? It is a brainstorming on Vietnam by a selected number of top-level policy people like Mac Bundy, Bill Bundy, Tom Hughes, Doug Cater, that level of person. It is a very interesting insight into some of the policy making during the war. I would say that even at that level, they didn't have time for a lot of quiet reflection on things. I'm not sure you always do in situations like that. Imagine a similar session on World War II.

The pace of events was stunning. Within a matter of days of my arrival, the Cambodian invasion occurred. I had no involvement in that, in the sense that I didn't about it. I was just getting my feet on the ground. A succession of things quickly happened. I was a member of the limited country team which consisted basically, in this case of: Bunker, Berger, General Abrams, Shackley who was CIA, and myself. And, they added to that as the agenda required. Bunker had his embassy country team meeting and then he would have this limited meeting, usually at his home. There were certain issues that would get discussed that didn't get discussed at the earlier meeting.

We had activities going on around the clock. Some of these became quite memorable. Bunker would get special instructions, usually from the President, to see Thieu (President of South Vietnam). He'd sometime see him at three o'clock in the morning. By the time I came to work, which was about 7:00-7:30 am, he would have drafted his report and no one knew about it. It was very secretive. Usually it was Thieu because most of the contact had to go at that level from Bunker and particularly if the message was a presidential instruction.

The thing about the Vietnam War that I think you and some of the rest of us might try to understand is how basic decisions grow out of circumstances which soon get lost in the background or are just forgotten. How much did Vietnam emerge from some of the circumstances that existed in Southeast Asia in relationship to other things like the development of the Cold War, the statements the Soviets and Chinese were making at the time which were quite frightening? How much our involvement in Vietnam emerge from our early support for the French in Vietnam partly in order to get them to agree to lines of communication and logistics through France for NATO may be one such example. If you are able to take yourself back to such NATO prompted decisions you might end up with an attitude toward Vietnam which is much more understanding, even if you didn't necessarily agree with it.

Q: Precipitated into opposition to Vietnam?

HITCHCOCK: The war in Vietnam was an easy target for criticism by younger generation (i.e., draftable) Americans because they were interested in other things, and fighting a war, anywhere, was not one of those things.

I never became an advocate of the Vietnam War. I did become an advocate of our getting out of it as honorably as we could and with minimum adverse political consequences. I'm afraid we missed both these objectives. It's shaking a little more into shape with the passage of time, but it will never be seen as one of our major moments of honor.

BRUCE W. CLARK
Deputy District Advisor
Tuy Hoa (1969-1970)

Office of Inspector General for Foreign Assistance
Washington, DC (1970-1971)

Vietnam Working Group
Washington, DC (1971-1972)

Bruce W. Clark was born in Los Angeles, California in 1941. He attended Claremont Men's College from 1958 to 1959 before transferring to Stanford University, where he received his BA in 1962. He also served in the U.S. Army Reserve before joining the Foreign Service in 1966. His career has included positions in countries such as Germany, Vietnam, Belgium, and Saudi Arabia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 4, 2002.

Q: So where did they send you next?

CLARK: To Vietnam after several training courses. At that time, almost all single officers, and I think officers without children, were sent to Vietnam with a few exceptions. I was assigned to CORDS - Civil Operations and Rural Development. That was the USAID organization that ran the pacification program.

Q: When did you get there with the Foreign Service?

CLARK: In 1969.

Q: Was there any sort of dissension in the ranks? Did you just salute and go or did you feel you had any choice in the matter?

CLARK: I didn't have any choice as I understood it, but I had two friends who resigned rather than go there. One not so much because he disagreed with the policies but because he was an Italian speaker who had been assigned originally to Italy but sent instead to Mogadishu with a promise that he'd be assigned for his second tour. Nonetheless, after a really unpleasant time in Mogadishu, they assigned him to Vietnam, so he said goodbye, joined the UN and just retired a couple years ago. But others didn't go because they thought the policy was wrong. By the time I got to Vietnam I was very suspicious because I'd done a lot of reading on Vietnam at FSI and was beginning to have a lot of doubts, especially after Tet, whether or not this was the way to do it.

Q: Did you take Vietnamese?

CLARK: I took the short course and didn't do very well because of the tones. I could reproduce

them but I couldn't hear the difference when someone was speaking.

Q: Like learning the Morse code. I never could tell the difference between a dot and a dash. It went by too fast, which makes it a little difficult. It's almost the same, up against the same frustration. When in 1969 did you go out to Vietnam?

CLARK: I think I got there about April.

Q: And you stayed 'till when?

CLARK: Eighteen months. So something like October...

Q: Of '71?

CLARK: Of '70.

Q: '70.

CLARK: Is that right?

Q: Yes. That would be right. Where did they assign you?

CLARK: Well, I arrived in Saigon and I was told there were several posts around the country that were available. So I called a friend of mine for advice....

Q: Who was this?

CLARK: David Passage.

Q: I've tried to get and interview him.

CLARK: Well he's hard to get in touch with. Anyway, he was working at MAC V Headquarters in Saigon. I guess he had just had an argument or something with one of his bosses and was really down on working at MAC V. He recommended going anyplace outside Saigon. So I said okay, I'll go out in the country somewhere. Since I was raised in California and liked the ocean, I tried to choose a place near the ocean. And preferably a place where I didn't have to take those awful malaria tablets which made me ill every time I took them. So I went to Tuy Hoa in II Corps in Central Vietnam.

Q: Well, when you got there in the spring of '69, what was the situation in South Vietnam?

CLARK: As the country goes, it was still recovering I suppose from the after-effects of the previous year's Tet. I didn't have any special feel for the situation, but FSI had done such a good job in indoctrinating me about the need to be extremely careful about my security that I was amazed how freely people moved about. When I arrived in Saigon, they put me in USAID I - one of those hotels for USAID officers. I was almost afraid to leave the room. When they said to go

across the street about a block to eat, I said 'Is that safe?' After awhile I got used to the fact that the situation was by no means as dire as they had said in Washington, then on the way up-country they took me first to II Corps headquarters in Nha Trang. When I arrived there and got off the plane, they took to a little hotel in the middle of Nha Trang with no visible security. I looked at this and said 'There's no way I'm staying here; anyone could walk in here.' So I guess the reality was that the security situation was a lot better than I thought it was, but nonetheless I stayed instead with a fellow I had just met a couple months before in Washington. Actually I personally never had any security problems, but friends of mine certainly did. I lived downtown in the little town of Tuy Hoa in a house I shared with another USAID officer. We had a couple of guards that slept through the night instead of guarding, I think, but never had any problems even though VC had made it into the center of the town during Tet.

Q: Tuy Hoa. What was the situation there? Was that a district?

CLARK: Tuy Hoa was a district in the province of Phu Yen, on the coast north of Nha Trang. Since Tuy Hoa was the main town in the district and also the provincial "capital," so to speak, the town was pretty secure. It was separated from the much less secure valley by a highway, railroad tracks and a river. The town was pretty secure, but how secure the valley was at night was anybody's guess. And if you went far from the town into the woods or the jungle during the day you could be asking for trouble.

Q: What were you doing?

CLARK: I was the deputy district advisor. The district advisor was always an Army major.

Q: A district was the smallest unit?

CLARK: Yes. Corps were divided into provinces and provinces into districts.

Q: You'd had military experience, albeit in the reserves. Was that helpful where you were?

CLARK: Well, a little bit, but where I was the U.S. military didn't play a combat role. The district team lived right outside the center of town and spent most of their time advising and training the Vietnamese. There was not a lot of military action in Tuy Hoa district, probably because the province headquarters were there and a lot of Vietnamese military. However, in Tuy An, the district to the north, the district team's compound was overrun by the VC one night. My counterpart there, whose name I've forgotten, had to fight for his life with his machine gun and grenades. I went up the next morning and saw a stack of about forty VC bodies. I mean they really had a tough time.

Q: Well, what were you doing?

CLARK: Basically seeing where our aid was going and how it was being used. Going out to the villages, and seeing that the villages or hamlets got what they needed.

Q: What was your impression of how was it being used?

CLARK: About 10% effective if judged by our intentions. The aid would arrive on a truck in a square inside the district government compound downtown. When it was unloaded, the merchants would come and buy it, which they weren't supposed to do, of course, since this was all being donated by the United States. Basically all of the stuff moved smartly into the market. The powdered milk went to feed pigs (not children), and the oil went into the marketplace to be sold.

Q: Had we learned to accept this?

CLARK: I guess. I mean, I reported it and I think everyone just sort of assumed that 10% effective was okay. It was extremely wasteful. And, of course, corruption was rife. The province chief was in on it.

Q: Did this turn you off to the South Vietnamese cause? How did you feel?

CLARK: I liked and respected the Vietnamese I worked with. The district chief was a Army captain and concerned with military matters. He had two deputies - one civilian and one a lieutenant - who spoke English, and I went around all day with them, visiting villages and hamlets outside the town of Tuy Hoa. I think they were trying to do the best they could under the system. I felt very sorry for the Vietnamese. But I didn't think the war was really of winnable, because I thought that for the people who had influence and contacts the war was, in a way, a golden opportunity to make a lot of money. These people didn't suffer so much. They could buy their sons out of the military, and there were many ways to make money off the war and the Americans. Stuff that we threw away could be converted by Vietnamese into dollars. For example, the garbage from the U.S. airbase across the river south of Tuy Hoa was a gold mine. People fought to get the contract to haul the garbage away. The same went for the contract for doing the laundry for the airbase. A lot of American money and aid flowed into the economy but I think most of it benefitted people who were basically already rich.

Q: Was this stirring up any dissent within the AID ranks, officers like yourself? Were you sat on from an upper level so to say, and told to cool it?

CLARK: No. I don't know what happened when reports got to Saigon or to headquarters in Nha Trang. Our province senior advisor, who was a very honest, hardworking Foreign Service Officer, was very sympathetic.

Q: Who was that?

CLARK: James Engel. I'm not sure about this, but I think he was transferred because he had a falling out with the Province Chief over corruption. They had several real hot arguments, and I think his bosses figured out that that situation wasn't helping anything. He was, I think, transferred to II Corps headquarters in Nha Trang and replaced with someone who they hoped could work with the province chief. But he, too, got really angry at all the corruption.

Q: How about with your colleagues, fellow Foreign Service Officers? Did you sort of sit around

in the evenings and talk about the problems that you saw?

CLARK: Yes. But there wasn't much we could do about it but report. I don't think any of us were big supporters any longer of our involvement in Vietnam. I think we all sort of favored the idea of declaring victory and leaving.

Q: Well, you were there when they were just beginning to draw down, weren't you?

CLARK: Right.

Q: Did that have much effect when you were there?

CLARK: Tuy Hoa had really been in the middle of the fighting in Tet '68. But afterwards, for some reason, the Vietcong did make a big effort there, so the absence of American and Vietnamese troops was not much of a problem. Also, Tuy Hoa and the whole province was basically defended by Koreans. What I call Korean-occupied. The Koreans were tough. No one messed with the Koreans. I think the Vietcong decided to let the Koreans own the highways and so forth and avoided tangling with them. I think the VC concentrated on other areas, although it was clear that small units of VC were around and entered the villages and hamlets at night.

Q: Well, this is one of the interesting things. When the Koreans came in they didn't get involved in a great many fights, but they scared the bejesus out of both the Vietcong and the South Vietnamese.

CLARK: Well, they were really pretty ruthless. They'd drive up and down the highways shooting not only at water buffalo but at almost anyone that moved in an area that wasn't considered secure on the general premise they must be Vietcong. They were really fierce.

Q: Did you have any dealings with them?

CLARK: No. Not really. I met them once in awhile but that was all.

Q: Did you get any insight from speaking to Vietnamese? I mean were you able to get any feel for how they felt about things, how things were going and all?

CLARK: Well, the Vietnamese I worked with obviously did not want the Communists to succeed for political or family reasons. Naturally they feared imprisonment or worse if the VC won and that their families and all would suffer. But I don't think they had a lot of hope that things were going to get better for the government.

Q: You didn't get much of a feel, then, that the South Vietnamese government was making a big effort to win the hearts and minds in your area? President Thieu wasn't coming around inspiring the troops and that sort of thing?

CLARK: No one like that ever came to Tuy Hoa or Phu Yen province while I was there except for William Colby, who was head of our pacification program.

Q: Did you get any feel for the operations of the CIA there?

CLARK: No, not really in Phu Yen. I know that one officer who served in the district south of mine was reportedly a young CIA officer, but I thought he was a Foreign Service officer. So I know they were around. I had no idea what they were doing or that they had different contacts or anything.

Q: There were these young men working out of the political section in the American Embassy in Saigon, called provincial reporting officers. Did they come around?

CLARK: Yes, they came. There were several. I thought that they went to Saigon but actually lived and worked at corps headquarters like Nha Trang. and traveled around all the time. I remember one in particular, a very nice fellow who spoke Vietnamese.

Q: Who was this?

CLARK: I think it was Fred Shoup. I always wondered how he related to the military. He had a soft, cultured manner that was quite a contrast to the military officers who had come in from the field in camouflage uniforms with grenade belts and weapons in hand.

Q: Well, after eighteen months you were sort of counting your days in your job, weren't you.?

CLARK: Oh, yes. I was eager to leave. I enjoyed seeing parts of Asia on leave which I never would have seen otherwise, and the policy of sending all single officers and unmarried officers without children there produced, I think, the biggest gathering of bright, interesting people I've ever met in one place. Saigon was just filled with people of my own age, many of whom had served elsewhere. It was a fabulous sort of group.

Q: I was there at the same time, and it really was exciting. I was an older officer but it was very exciting.

CLARK: My best friends even today are almost all from that era. They lived in Saigon or elsewhere and I met them while I was over there.

Q: Did the Director General John Burns come around? I know he visited Vietnam when I was there to ask FSOs where they wanted to go and what they wanted to do afterwards. Did you meet him?

CLARK: I never met Burns, but he may have sent over a team that visited Phu Yen to talk to the FSOs. I'm not sure about their names. Phillips and Henderson, maybe? They came and visited almost every Foreign Service officer in place. I guess they took notes on how officers were doing and what they wanted next. They seemed to me to be very impressed by what they heard in Saigon which, I thought, was not too representative of the experience out in the provinces. I personally thought people in the provinces should get some extra points, because life in the provinces, even if you weren't in a bunker, was a lot harder than it was in Saigon.

Q: Oh, yes, I spent eighteen months in Saigon and it was very comfortable life. I didn't mind being separated from my family. And then I would go out and look at some of the young officers, you know, in a sandbagged dugout.

CLARK: Exactly. It seemed to me when it came to assignment time that the guy that spent eighteen months living in a dugout should get preferential treatment.

Q: So what did they do with you?

CLARK: I was sent back to Washington and assigned to the long-since-abolished office of the Inspector General for Foreign Assistance. And my main job was to lead more experienced inspection teams back to Vietnam, which I did. I went back to Vietnam a couple of times, and once to Central America.

Q: How did you find looking at Vietnam from the headquarters perspective of AID when you went back there?

CLARK: I had the impression that the Inspector General of Foreign Assistance very carefully targeted the areas to inspect in line with Congressional interests. They didn't want their inspection reports to be ammunition for critics. So the inspectors were very careful about what they looked into. For example, if you said, "Yes, we're here to look at what happens to powdered milk and oil, but look at what's happening over here," the inspectors might reply, "Yes, yes, but we're not here to look into that." So I don't think they were very effective.

Q: Of course, there was the great problem that if you tried to do this, any critical report would be immediately fed to the enemies of AID in general and get played up. Then, rather than helping to correct the problem, it just becomes ammunition to destroy the program.

CLARK: That's right. So there's a reason for it.

Q: And this is one of the problems of reporting on corruption, I think. If you're in a country and you keep reporting on corruption, critics of AID or what have you will zero in on the corruption and not on other developments.

CLARK: During one of my trips, I think that I had a tiny part in uncovering some serious problems in the USAID effort there. By that I mean there were a lot of officers that were supposed to be assigned out in the countryside who weren't actually living - at least full time - where they were assigned and were maintaining an apartment in Saigon that USAID was paying for. I mean it was a total breakdown. Some would have a car out in the country and a car assigned to them in Saigon. You know that type of waste. And I think the Inspector General did finally get USAID to make sure that people were actually living where they said they were living, and if they had one car that they didn't have another. Very sloppy administration and misuse of funds.

Q: Particularly by this time, I think you found people who were turning this whole effort into a

career program of leading the high life, you know, with a Vietnamese girlfriend, black market activities, and so forth. I think the real true believers by this time had probably mostly left, leaving the field to the sort of careerists who were trying to stretch it out as long as they could and make as comfortable a life as they could.

CLARK: I think there were a lot of fellows who found Vietnam a very profitable way to make some money, have some girlfriends on the side, and spend every weekend in Thailand or whatever.

Q: You also had a significant number of people, I think, who were estranged from their wives back in the States. The atmosphere, I think, was much better in the beginning when people were really making an effort.

CLARK: Well I think it couldn't help but get worse the way they recruited people for Vietnam. They were going out to, say, Fresno and signing up policemen who had no experience abroad.. And then suddenly these guys were abroad without their families and double or triple their old pay in a rather loosely administered situation. That sort of thing leads to abuse.

Q: Were you concerned that you were getting too in with AID as such and away from sort of the regular Foreign Service?

CLARK: Yes, I wanted out of that job, since I didn't find it what I wanted to do. So I was switched from there to the Vietnam Working Group, which is probably the job I liked least in the entire Foreign Service.

Q: Well, you were doing the Vietnam Working Group from when to when?

CLARK: Well I think I was with the Inspector General for maybe eight months or...

Q: This would put you in the middle of '71.

CLARK: I think I was maybe a little less than a year with Inspector General. Then I moved over to the Vietnam Working Group which was headed by James Engel who had been my boss in Vietnam. Except by the time I arrived he had left to be an ambassador to some country in Africa. Dahomey, I think.

Q: Yes.

CLARK: Got in a lot of trouble there, too. Anyway, my new boss while I was there was Josiah Bennett. He was from New England and fit all the ideas you'd have about a close-mouthed New Englander. (Laughter) Never said anything. Information is power and he wasn't going to share it with anyone.

Q: Well, you were there from sometime in '71 until when?

CLARK: I was in the Vietnam Working Group until about March '72.

Q: What were you doing? What piece of the action did you have?

CLARK: Basically our job was to defend our war effort to critics, Congressmen and military people who would ask why we were allowing this or that to go on. We had to write responses that fudged the truth or were simple unresponsive. This was very painful for me because a lot of the criticisms were right on. But we always had to come up with some answer that either avoided answering the question or gave a response that we didn't believe in.

Q: Were you picking up on the anti-Vietnam movement and all?

CLARK: Well, I think most of the people in there were well aware of the criticism and sort of sympathetic to it. We weren't participating in it, certainly, but I think our belief and support for the war withered.

Q: What about the other officers? Were they having the same problem you were having?

CLARK: Well, one officer was Steve Johnson, who was the son of U. Alexis Johnson, then the Undersecretary of State. I don't think he had as much problem, but he probably knew what his father was dealing with and had a much better understanding of all the pros and cons that someone at that level had to deal with. And another officer was Theresa Tull. I think she was supported the effort and thought that it all could come out well if everyone would do the best they could.

Q: She was later Ambassador to Laos, I think.

CLARK: That's right. But the atmosphere in that office was pretty grim for me.

Q: Well, you must have been ready to get the hell away from the whole Vietnam thing, weren't you?

CLARK: Yes, I really was. In fact for years afterwards it seemed to me those who had served in Vietnam would talk about nothing but Vietnam. It just got so tiring. I was glad when the topic finally faded away.

ERNESTINE S. HECK
Political Officer
Saigon (1969-1971)

Ernestine S. Heck was born in Oregon in 1940. She received her bachelor's degree from Oregon State in 1962. Her career has included positions in Bombay, Saigon, Teheran, Niamey, Katmandu, New Delhi, Colombo, and Madras. Mrs. Heck was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in December 1997.

Q: You arrived in Vietnam and you were there from when to when?

HECK: I was in Vietnam from July of 1969 until the end of May/beginning of June 1971, so I had about 22 months.

Q: What was your job?

HECK: I was one of the political section officers. We had, of course, a very big embassy, and there were a number of people from other agencies who were under cover as political officers, but the real State Department political officers when I got there were 23 in the embassy proper and that's not counting the ones who were out in various CORDS jobs reporting political things. When I left, there were 17, and in both instances I was the junior officer of the lot, but the people who were coming in behind me were more junior than I. So I was the odds and ends person. You can imagine, when you try to divide a pie, which really represents only Saigon city and the national government, Foreign Ministry, the courts that were located in the city but didn't include a lot of the reporting from the field - you really get into things in great depth when you have 23 people running around covering these things. We had an internal section and external section of Political, Military, and Labor - there's one more - but in any case, there were five sections in the Political Section. Each section had a section chief, and we had a political counselor, a political military counselor, a deputy ambassador who was himself an ambassador, and an ambassador. So the hierarchy that breathed down our necks about what we reported was big. The first thing that one ran into when one got to Saigon as a political officer in 1969 was that what the front office believed and reported and what junior officers believed and tried to report and were thwarted in reporting were two entirely different versions of what was happening. There was tremendous bitterness among many of the officers, great cynicism among many of the officers, because they couldn't get their thoughts across, they couldn't tell it as they saw it. They kept getting overridden by the powers that be. I don't think that the people who were in those senior positions were being hypocritical or dishonest; I think they actually saw it that way. They were insulated. They were doing so many things which didn't get them down among the people, that when somebody whom they respected, like a general, told them something, they believed it, and the general in turn believed it because somebody told him that. So the stuff that got to the ambassador and the deputy ambassador was a far cry from what the more junior officers were seeing and reporting. So there was a real chasm in the embassy between the people who led it and the rest of us, not that we didn't in many cases greatly respect these senior officers or political appointees but we just saw a completely different war, and I think that permeated the entire mission. Correct me if I'm...

Q: Just for the record, during most of this period I was consul general sitting in an office to one side, and I was just doing consul general work. Ernie, let's talk about the two sides you mentioned, the junior officers. How did work and reports come to you, and what were you getting, and what was your particular area?

HECK: As I said, I was the absolute junior-most of this lot, so I didn't get a heck of a lot of real reporting. My responsibilities were the Supreme Court and the hierarchy that supported it, the court system in the capital city, who were not part necessarily of the political mainstream, and Saigon City itself, something called the SCAG, the Saigon Civil Action Group, the military and

civilian organization which ran the city of Saigon, which then had about 3,000,000 people as I remember. I also did the real scut work, the weekly report. There was a weekly cable that went out every, I think, Tuesday evening with all of the things that were not important enough to send separate messages on but had to be reported, and that was mine; and finally, biographical reporting and with it all the things that go along, making lists of future leaders and various committees, dealing with USIS to identify perhaps the journalists who were going to become something or the cultural people who were going to become something in the hierarchy. So it really was not an exciting political job where I got to do a lot of my own reporting, but a lot of people with whom I worked did, and they would come back absolutely frustrated, particularly the guys who worked across the hall from me who did provincial reporting. They were responsible for various provinces of the country, divided by corps, by the four military corps, and they did go to their corps a lot and they did do reporting on what was happening in the field. They came back telling one story, and they could never get it past the political minister-counselor, or maybe it could get that far and it would never get out of the front office. They were, to a man, very frustrated. I should mention that they were all men. In this group of 23, there were two women when I came; and when I left, I was the only woman. We didn't have a lot of women in Saigon anywhere. There were a few women in the Consular Section, a few women in the Economic Section, almost none in the Political Section. From that comes a story of how those of us who were women were resented. Specifically those of us who were in political or economic work were resented. The old embassy had been down on the Saigon River when Henry Cabot Lodge was ambassador. There had been, as there often was, a bomb attempt. A bomb had been thrown at the old embassy, and some people were injured. I believe several were killed. This would have been in the mid-'60s. Apparently there had been some snafus at that point about how it was reported and what happened. Ambassador Lodge said to somebody in the embassy, "From now on I only want men who are political and economic officers to be the duty officer, because Mr. X loused it up somehow." That word was apparently chiseled into stone. Of course, Henry Cabot Lodge had no women in the political or economic sections, so when he said "men in the political or economic section," he just meant people, we thought. For the period that I was there, no woman could be a duty officer. Well, being a duty officer in Saigon was unlike being a duty officer in most places. You lived at the embassy, you slept next to the communications unit, you were on the front lines for a week. It wasn't that you took your little radio home to answer phone calls in the middle of the night. You were there and you were the operations center for the embassy. By having maybe three or four women in the embassy at that point, it meant that everybody's turn came up four weeks earlier if they were men in either of those two sections. These men with whom we worked didn't like it, and, of course, they had every right not to like it. It was unfair to them, and we thought, we women, it was unfair to us. We wanted to actually be the duty officer. If we were going to be the officer, let us do it. Our front office in that period, '69 to '71, would not change the regulation. They didn't want any women in harm's way, I suppose. So we were not allowed to do it, and it was a constant thorn in the side. When anybody got a little annoyed about something, it was always something to be thrown at any of the four women.

Q: When you say there was a split, what was coming in from the provinces that wasn't going out?

HECK: Well, first of all, that our troops weren't doing as well as perhaps they were being reported to be doing. There was the infamous body county, about which, I'm sure, others have

reported, but the military and USIA - we had a press czar, as it were, a USIA senior officer - ran something called the Four O'clock Follies, or the Five O'clock Follies. In any case, it was a daily press briefing, and there were always these very neat little statistics, that we had killed X number in this little skirmish here or there, or this many were killed on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in such and such a province, or whatever, but there were always statistics which were dubious at best and didn't necessarily mean that anyone had actually seen a body. A lot of it was sort of by guess and by gosh and extrapolation and inference and so on. Our men would come back from provincial reporting and say, "This place where we were supposed to have killed 18, it didn't happen, man, it didn't happen that way." Or they would come back and say that the district chief, who would be a mid-ranking military officer in the Vietnamese army, was very corrupt and that he was doing X and Y and selling X and Y in terms of weapons and shaking people down and so on. Some of them were excellent officers. Others of them were corrupt, but the story we were putting out in those days was that they were all excellent officers, they were all terribly patriotic men who were fighting for democracy and the American way in Vietnam. The awful truth of it was that by 1969 there had been fighting in Vietnam for almost 30 years, first against the Japanese and then the French and then the war that started after 1954's settlement of the division of the country temporarily. I think what most of us finally saw is that Vietnam was a very complicated place and that there were a lot of people in Vietnam whose loyalty truly was only to his extended family. After that many years of fighting, any of us, I think, would be very cynical about what we were doing, and our major interest in life would be protecting those we love and care about. Some of this other twaddle that we were putting out was very simplistic and just didn't hit the mark at all. So this is the sort of stuff that our younger officers would come back with, and of course it wasn't right, because we had this story which was still one of optimism and we were always just about to break the back of the enemy and we were just about to have another breakthrough and so on and so on and so on. It got very nasty, and basically there was a great deal of telling junior officers to shut up. There was no real dissent channel of the kind we had later on. You couldn't do too much other than complain, and I think that many of the seniors felt that some of these junior people were then spewing it all forth to American press, who were more than happy to pick up some of these stories and play it back to the United States. So it was an unhappy sort of a place in terms of trust and camaraderie amongst different parts of the same mission.

Q: Was there any effort within the political and upper reaches of the embassy to get together from time to time with provincial reporting officers or others, to talk to the ambassador, to the deputy ambassador or to the chief of the Political Section?

HECK: Well, certainly in the Political Section we had staff meetings and things like that, so, yes, there was an opportunity to do that. I do not remember any efforts made to do that with the front office. It may have been there. I just didn't know about it.

Q: Front office means the ambassador?

HECK: The ambassador and the so-called deputy ambassador, who at that point was Ambassador Samuel Berger, who had been ambassador to Korea, a very important job. The reason for having what we would normally call the deputy chief of mission as an ambassador, and using his title with abandon was that it had been determined, I suppose in Washington,

although maybe in Saigon, that the U.S. military wouldn't listen to anybody who didn't have the title of ambassador. So, it was decided that our embassy would be headed by two ambassadors, both of them using the title, so that they could have more weight with the military leadership. That had been General Westmoreland and then it became General Abrams just after I got there.

Q: Did you find that in a way the spirit of the military - I'm talking about the American military - was permeating the embassy? There's usually more of a free flow in an embassy, but it sounds as though it was mostly the junior officers or mid-career officers. You don't talk up and all. Would you say we had absorbed a military structure within the embassy?

HECK: I think we had to a certain extent, certainly after Tet. One of the more stupid, if I may say so, decisions about how to man the embassy came into play in terms of absorbing the military culture. In the Tet offensive in March of 1968, in the aftermath of that, the military - I believe it was General Westmoreland - determined that it was unfair that the boys in the foxholes, the men out in the field, the guys in the fire bases, had no regular working hours. They just had to be out there for a certain period of time, and they had to do whatever had to be done, whereas the men in military headquarters had fixed hours. So a decision was made at that point to expand the fixed hours and to cut out any days off. The military then after Tet went on to the seven-day-a-week, 52-weeks-a-year routine and, I believe, had very long hours. Certainly then the State Department picked up on this, or at least the civilians, so by the time I got there the official embassy hours were seven a.m. to seven p.m. or seven-thirty a.m. to seven-thirty p.m., whatever it was. A 12-hour day was our official day. We, of course, had a curfew, so it didn't leave a heck of a lot of time at the end of the day for anything. The first year I was there, we had no days off. We worked seven days a week, we worked Thanksgiving, we worked Christmas, we worked New Years, we worked the Fourth of July, we just went to work seven days a week. This was offset, of course, by frequent trips out of country, either rest and rehabilitation provided by the State Department or trips on military R&R flights where they would give a few seats to the civilians too so that we did get some respite from all this, but officially we were working 365 days a year. The second year I was there, we were allowed Christmas and Thanksgiving off, I believe. Of course, you don't get your best out of people who are having to do work with their brains on that sort of a schedule. It's just one more of the things that seemed sort of senseless, because certainly we had the personnel to cover the place seven days a week. We could have allowed people to have a day off occasionally, but it just didn't happen that way. There was obviously, although I was certainly not privy to it, a great deal of tugging between the civilian leadership and the military leadership in Vietnam. Now that is, of course, a problem that sometimes comes up no matter where an ambassador may be posted, if he has, in fact, combat troops in his area or if in fact he has a significant military establishment, American military establishment, in that area. Relations between the civilian and the military are not necessarily a bed of roses in those situations.

I do remember, for instance - and this is just something I thought about a minute ago that I wanted to mention - the idea of whether or not our front office understood what was going on amongst the people. They had, of course, very important problems to deal with, and I am not trying to second guess them, but just one story that illustrates this. The major military PX was located in the Chinese area called Cho Lon some distance from the embassy. We at the embassy would occasionally go out there to buy our food and other items that we needed. It was also, by

the way, open to allies, so you would see at this place soldiers from some of our allied countries in Asia going first to the area to buy the suitcase and then going to the cosmetic counters to buy a suitcase full of cosmetics to ship back to their native places.

Q: They would be marched in. I saw Thai soldiers. I'm told the Koreans didn't do this, because that was all arranged for them. They were given packs when they left.

HECK: Well, the Thais certainly did it, and they would pick up their suitcase first and then go to the cosmetics or to the electronics, whatever we had, and buy it out. In any case, on that long drive, we would normally pass the central food market which was near the old opera house that had become the parliament. Then there would be this half-hour drive out to the place, particularly around the central food market, where our people would go to get vegetables and fresh meat and things like that. There was a long line of grandmotherly women squatting on the pavement usually with a little box in front of them. On that box would be something like a Sears catalog. Very often it was the Sears catalog. Anybody could stop there and they could pick out what they wanted to order, and those women would deliver it to them. They had a fixed time, like three weeks, and within three weeks that item from the American Sears catalog would be delivered to whichever Vietnamese wanted it. I remember telling this to my so-called deputy ambassador, Ambassador Berger, and he refused to believe it, as he never had to drive by the food market. He never saw the catalogs and he didn't realize the amount of American goods which were coming in surreptitiously into the country. He wasn't thinking about things like that. Of course, that's part of the corruption that weakened the society and became a bone of contention in the United States later. So it's all intermingled. Obviously there were Americans involved in forwarding those orders through some sort of APO, and I'm sure that great money was made. I know of people who lost their jobs for having dealt in diamonds as government officials, civilian officials. Shortly before I left - well, first of all, I should say that the major drink of choice among many men in Vietnam was cognac or brandy, and that it was drunk in large amounts. Particularly, I think, among the Chinese Vietnamese but also throughout Saigon it was a major drink. The river port that our things came into was a place called Newport on the Saigon River not far from Saigon City, and shortly before I left, an entire truck of Hennessy was diverted from a convoy moving from Newport to Cho Lon to the commissary. Now, this convoy had MPs on every truck, and it had an MP leading the herd, and a truck disappeared. Well, obviously the MPs, some MP at least, was involved in this, and a truckload of Hennessy would be worth a great amount of money. It wasn't just a civilian American who was involved in this; there had to be military also involved in it. There was a great deal of that, and our front office wouldn't see it. I also remember, by the way, gift wrapping a leg of lamb once for President Mun Van Tie from my ambassador, who had ordered from the commissary a frozen leg of lamb to give the President of Vietnam. I remember gift wrapping it, which seemed to me a strange thing for me to be doing as a political officer, but then there you are.

Q: What was your impression, albeit from a distance, of Ambassador Bunker?

HECK: A man of great integrity, great dignity. I adored him. He didn't want to be there, but he was just too patriotic a man to not be there. I'm sorry that that was his last appointment with the U.S. government, because I think he deserved better. I think that the snakepit that was Vietnam at that time tended to tarnish all of the people who were there, certainly all of the seniors who

were there. But I had great respect for him, as I did, for that matter, for the deputy ambassador, Sam Berger. Personally I found them both very impressive men, and I kept in touch with Ambassador Bunker afterwards, particularly because I had worked for his wife, Ambassador Carol Laise, and she was a friend. The last time I saw him was I was his control officer in New Delhi in '85 just a few months before he died. I thought very highly of him, but I'm not sure that he's the person who should have been there. For one thing, he was not mean enough and tough enough perhaps in the sense of what we perhaps needed in order to make the civilian side of the equation more a part of the play on the ground in Vietnam. I don't know. I think I was in too low a position to actually make a judgment on that.

Q: You had at least two officers of the Political Section - what would they be, political counselors? - Martin Hertz and then Galen Stone?

HECK: No, Martin Hertz was the minister counselor. Galen Stone and Lauren Askew were the two counselors whom I had at the time. Both Galen Stone and Lauren Askew were very senior men at the top of the pecking order of the Foreign Service, and there they were reporting to three people above them. It was an extraordinary experience.

Q: Did you have any feeling about how they were dealing with things, because at a certain level if you've got all these young junior officers reporting up and then they in turn are reporting up? It sounds like it was sort of an incestuous operation.

HECK: The hierarchy was ridiculously complicated, and also most of the men in the senior positions had no Asian experience as far as I know. The Asianists, such as they were, were at the next level down as heads of the section. My head of the political internal unit, which is where I fit into this thing - I had two heads of the political internal unit, and they were both Asianists and had a better feel for the complications of the society and the personalities involved perhaps than people further up the line. But I have a feeling that form got in the way so much that substance was secondary all the time. When you have to think of jobs that really matter, for instance, for 23 political officers, you're really down there into the form rather than substance category.

Q: Isn't there a problem when you get too many people that almost too much information is out there and you have people who are too busy with almost the administration of the thing?

HECK: Absolutely. I'm sure that nothing that I did was ever looked at by anyone in Washington other than the very junior-most of people, and I suspect that's probably true up the line. The fifth section in the Political Section, which I did not mention, was the Labor Division. I don't know that anyone in Washington really cared about labor in Vietnam. It was just tertiary to the problem. And political military - what does that mean in a country where every male over the age of 15 seems to be in a uniform, and so on and so on. I'm sure we could have slashed the whole section by 50 percent and things would have been better.

Q: Did you have any feel with the reporting? Granted, this was a place that sometimes the junior reporting officers were able to get their feelings out, their experiences out to the world, but did you also have a feeling about the press, about what was driving them? Was it an adversarial situation by this time or not?

HECK: The press was full of very bright young men who went on to greater things later. I'm thinking, for instance, of Bob Kaiser from the *Washington Post*, men like that. I think, without having asked anybody about this, I think they saw themselves as the protectors of American honesty, that somehow they had to let people know back in the United States what was really happening. In many ways they didn't know any more than any of the rest of us, but they certainly did see an awful lot of very awful things in their travels around Vietnam which were not a part of the Five O'clock Follies, and they made sure that that got out, and I think for that they did something that was probably very important. The whole issue of the Vietnam War, I guess, was sort of a loss of innocence for a lot of us. Suddenly we weren't the good guys. We had been the good guys in World War II, and we most definitely saw ourselves as being the good guys in the Korean War against those awful North Koreans and so on, and the Chinese Communist threat rolling over with real Chinese coming down off of the Yaloo River. But it wasn't so easily understood, it wasn't so black and white in Vietnam. Yes, there was a lot of corruption on our side. There were rights and wrongs on both sides. I don't think we were used at that point to dealing with the fact that maybe we weren't always the white hats in situations like this or that we might be thrown into something where we would be forced to do something against perhaps our own heritage. Then, of course, there was this added fillip of the problems in the military itself. I mean, this was the time when enlisted men were so-called fragging their superiors by throwing grenades into closed areas where a superior might be. There was a great deal of social ferment in the military as well as in the civilian world - what did we say - back in the world, back in the United States. So it was an ugly time. I think for me personally, a lot of what I came out of Vietnam with is personal and not having to do with job, but it was a very strange thing to be a young, single woman in Vietnam, an American woman I mean, when there weren't many young, single, American women in Vietnam. Of course, there were nurses and so on, but there surely weren't very many in total, and we were in a very strange situation. I have a lot of sort of almost half-guess remembrances about the strangeness of life there that will stick with me till the end of my days. It was a place which was unhappy, aside from the war, just the civilian life there in Saigon was a very, very weird situation.

Q: Did you find that there was sort of a junior officer mafia that would sit around and...

HECK: Oh, absolutely. And, of course, we had been told collectively, perhaps not each of us singly, but it was a widely used line in Washington that our careers would jump forth from here on because we had served our country by going to Vietnam. Well, of course, this didn't happen, as we all know now, but this was a line that Personnel tended to be feeding us, that you'd get the next assignment that you wanted, you'd get promotions faster than others, you were all going to be ambassadors. Anyway, there was a great deal of sitting around with junior officers at parties and even in the office and griping, and it was very much an us-versus-them, us the junior officers versus the rest of the contingent out there. It tended to make us join in groups against the sort of vague senior enemy out in the hierarchy there.

Q: Looking back on it, did you feel that this gap between the senior officers and the junior officers might have also had something that I think I noticed? When you get to being older and all, you've sort of seen it all and you realize that the world isn't a very perfect place. There is, you might say, more tolerance for corruption, for things not working as well and all. One of my

problems as a supervisor has always been to get young officers to accept the fact they're going to be lied to and not to take it too personally.

HECK: I think what you're saying is right, and I think a lot of what we had in Vietnam was just a reflection of what was happening in our society, which was in ferment back in the United States, and it didn't all have to do with the Vietnam War.

Q: This was really the '60s hitting it.

HECK: That's right. This was the time of pavement stones being thrown in the streets in Paris and so on. All over the Western world there was ferment among social groups, the young people against the rest sort of thing, and Vietnam was only one part of that. That's very true. It was an unhappy time, I think, in general for us as a country.

Q: At that time - because we're trying to go to the time and not how we saw it later on - did you see South Vietnam as being a viable place, and maybe with your other people, and what was sort of the prediction of...

HECK: My prediction, for what it's worth: One of the things that got on my plate was sort of once a month lecturing to newly arrived people in Saigon, which meant largely people working for USAID and military officers, middle grade and below, who were going to be working in headquarters, at Totsena, Binmore, places like that, but doing jobs which were not going to be in the field. So once a month or so I would go out and I would give the political briefing to this group which usually was 20 to 40 people, almost all men. I do know that the line that I was using in that period, '70 and '71 - I didn't start this until the end '69 - was basically that what we had done for Vietnam was to give them some time, but they were going to have to do it on their own. My personal opinion was that it wouldn't last five years, and in fact it didn't last five years. We pulled out. We basically were out of there by '72, and, of course, Vietnam fell in April of '75. I didn't want to be right, but I was right, and it didn't last very long after large numbers of American fighting troops left the area.

Q: What was your impression of the American military officers you would be seeing? I assume they would be around the captain/major level and all. I mean on a social scene or in business and all, what were you getting from them, your impression of them?

HECK: I think perhaps the group that I dealt with most closely came out of Tan Son Nhut from the intelligence side of things, and we - we meaning a number of my friends and I working in the Political Section - spent a lot of time with these. They were basically captains, a few lieutenants. They were very cynical themselves. The best of them were very cynical. They were great fun, but they were cynical. So even in the military there were divisions and fissures. One of them went on to become a political appointee in the State Department during the Republican years. That was Chuck Misener, who then died with Ron Brown in Dubrovnik, near Dubrovnik in the former Yugoslavia in the mid-'90s/early '90s, as an official, high-ranking official, of the Department of Commerce. I remember that he particularly was - he and his buddy who was a relative of a Foreign Service officer with whom I had worked - they were very, very cynical, every bit as much as our provincial reporters who were telling it like it was. I'm sure that

permeated the military in headquarters offices.

Q: Just looking back, did those who had served in Vietnam, in your experience later in the Foreign Service, did that create a bond or something that was different than maybe other postings or not, or do you have any feel for that?

HECK: I think a lot of people who were in Vietnam remained close to each other, at least more close than most. You had been through a great deal when you had been through Vietnam together. Aside from the fighting, I mean just the weird world that we lived in as government officials, civilian government officials, was enough to keep us bonded through the next 30 years, and, yes, we see each other even today, some of us. Of course, people's careers have gone their own ways, but it's something that we will always look back upon and can share. A number of us, I think, do not talk a great deal about Vietnam except among people who have been there, and obviously this is a pool of people who had been there and know what you mean when you say a certain thing or refer to a certain incident. It was a very strange place, you will have to agree.

Q: We both share that experience. What was the feeling towards President Nixon?

HECK: Well, I don't think he was particularly trusted by those of us who were over there - as a group, I mean. There was a good deal of resentment about his various orders to bomb inside of Cambodia, which brought the Cambodians into the war full time, the various machinations around stopping bombing on certain holidays in the North and then starting it up again, but that may have reflected the society as a whole. I don't think that President Nixon's strength lay among people under the age of 40, even back in, as we called it, the world, and certainly out in Vietnam there was a good deal of cynicism, but more so about his minions, because they were the ones who then had to make the various policy announcements. I would say that this was also true of how people felt about Johnson when he was the President and about his people. You remember the way that poor Robert MacNamara was looked at by certainly people of my level in the State Department. No, it was a time when one didn't trust necessarily one's own government in large part, and we, like all the others in the country, I guess, we were being buffeted about by the same winds. It's an experience that I was not unhappy to leave. In Vietnam we would say, "So many days and a wake-up," and I think the civilians counted that as much as anybody else. You're going to leave in two months, so it's sixty days and a wake-up, and on that wake-up morning you're out of there, and the civilians were every bit as eager to get that way as, I think, the average grunt or the average headquarters officer.

Q: What was your impression, and maybe of your colleagues in the Political Section, of the work of the CIA?

HECK: Well, it was a pretty shadowy organization in Vietnam in that I didn't have a lot of interaction, other than social with some of the junior officers amongst them, but the head of the CIA was something of a pro-consul, and that was kind of frightening. I had one run-in with one of the heads of the CIA - because I think there were two during my time. First of all, the Political Section had asked me to become friendly with a leftist woman lawyer in Saigon who was suspected of being a conduit to the Viet Min and by extension to North Vietnam. I did this, and I saw quite a bit of her for six months or so, and then I was told to drop it, that I was to not see her

again. So, being a good soldier and so on, I dropped it and I did not see her again. Well, one Saturday afternoon quite late in the day, I was called up to the sixth floor and into the lair of the gentleman who was the chief of station and the pro-consul.

Q: The sixth floor was the CIA floor?

HECK: The sixth floor was the CIA floor, and this particular gentleman in effect accused me of not following orders and seeing this woman, and reported to me that I had been seen - and more importantly, my car, which was quite unusual, it was a Chevrolet whatever they were called, a jazzy little sports car...

Q: Camaro or something?

HECK: Chevrolet Camaro, and there weren't a lot of them in Saigon. My car and I had been seen at a funeral at Binwon north of Saigon in the company of this lady, and he really raked me over the coals. Well, first of all, I had never seen the woman again. I hadn't spent my Saturday at a funeral, but more to the point, I didn't work for this man, I didn't report to this man, and he had no right shaking me down like that. In effect, it was sort of an interrogation, and it went on for what seemed to me to be a very long time. I'm sure it wasn't, but it really shattered me. Now, what I should have told him to do was go take a big jump off of a pier somewhere and to leave me alone, and I should have reported it to my own hierarchy, and I didn't. I just crept home and was afraid of this man and his organization, which was a stupid thing to do because, of course, he had no right to deal with me that way. But there was a good deal of that sort of thing, of the CIA being an organization unto itself in Vietnam. Now whether they did a good job or not in the field, I don't know. I have visited friends who were CIA and in charge of their organization for certain parts of Vietnam. A man I had worked with in Bombay was down in the far part of the South, and I had spent some time visiting him once. So I look at it in something of a patchwork, but I think that it was just one more of the problems that we had in Vietnam of the dichotomy of the divisions between the civilian leadership and the separate little fiefdoms which ran on their own, and I certainly put the CIA in one of those as a very important fiefdom.

Q: Oh, boy! You were there - we were both there - during a time when somebody really kicked over the milk bucket in the United States, and that was in May of '70 when the United States went into Cambodia for a bit. What was the reaction, your personal reaction and maybe the younger people around you at that time?

HECK: I think there was a great groundswell of feeling that this was a stupid move on our part, that it wasn't going to destroy the fact that the enemy, the Vietnamese, whether it be the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese troops per se, could still get refuge in that part of the world inside the borders of Cambodia. The sad part of it was that the government of Cambodia couldn't control the movement of the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese troops through its own region. It didn't make any difference in the long term, therefore. It didn't stop anything. If these was indeed a Viet Cong headquarters in the Perinspeke or elsewhere inside of Cambodia, we never found it. All the talk about the caches of arms and so on was that, just talk, efforts to make it look like we had actually gone in and succeeded in stopping something when we didn't. What I saw, and I think what a lot of people saw, was that we really ruined the country, because we dragged

into the war Cambodia, which had, no matter how tenuously, been able to stay out of the war until that point. Prince Sihanouk was and is and remains a very slippery, crafty, Machiavellian politician, and we had a lot of reasons for not liking what he was doing, but he did in fact keep his country out of this. In the aftermath of our going in, we dragged the country in. He departed. Lon Nol came in. I remember being over in Phnom Penh shortly after this happened and after our attacks in 1970 - I think it was in April of '70, but whatever, when we went in - and watching what looked like college boys in trucks going to the front. This is, of course, not the first time in the world that this has happened, but here are these kids with no real idea what they were getting into "going to the front in the back of an open-bedded truck" with no particular preparation. The things that happened to Cambodia in the years that followed up to '79 all go back to that day ten years earlier, and I think that we bear a great responsibility for what ultimately became the killing fields and then became the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, which actually brought some calm to the area, and we are, therefore, somewhat responsible for the rather tenuous position that the country finds itself in today. So I think we have a little bit on our shoulders there to bear.

WILLIAM A. ROOT
Transportation/Communications Officer
Saigon (1969-1971)

William Root was born in Massachusetts in 1923 and educated at Colorado College and Columbia University. His career included posts in Bonn, Copenhagen, Saigon and West Berlin. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Well then in '69 you left for the first time. Where did you go?

ROOT: At that time I went to Vietnam.

Q: What were you doing?

ROOT: I was with a joint State-AID outfit in Saigon dealing with transportation and communications infrastructure, most of which was developed by the U.S. military.

Q: You were there from '69 to when?

ROOT: '71.

Q: '71. We overlapped a bit then. I was consul general in the embassy '69 to '70. How did you find the AID structure and all? What was your impression of it in Vietnam?

ROOT: Well it was very artificial structure. We were pretending we were really in control, and it turned out we weren't. The usual political machinations showed up in things like rice. We wanted to sell them rice, although they had their own production capability. I wasn't concerned

with that. I was, as I say, in the transportation and communication side. There it was a reasonably constructive role we were expected to play. The objective was to help the Vietnamese understand what they could reasonably maintain after we left. It would have taken their entire national budget just to maintain some of the roads we built. Roads and communications equipment were not easy to maintain. In that sense I think we made considerable progress, although it turned out, of course, that we were talking to the wrong people.

Q: What was your impression of the people you dealt with in Vietnam?

ROOT: Well, Vietnamese officials were more competent in their fields than I had expected. Naturally, they had their own interests to look out for, including at times some disturbing personal interests.

Q: We are talking about say corruption?

ROOT: Yes. Selling telephones.

Q: At the time you were there, how were you looking upon the war in Vietnam?

ROOT: Well it disturbed me. There were all kinds of protests going on back here, including those in which my own children participated. That was not so unusual. I discovered that virtually everybody I dealt with on the U.S. side in Vietnam was as disturbed as I was. We didn't seem to quite know what we were doing or what was feasible and what wasn't. Finally the incursion into Cambodia took place.

Q: This was in the spring of '70.

ROOT: Yes. I was so disturbed that the next morning when we had our usual staff meeting, and we were still talking about rice and balance or payments, I piped up and said, "I don't know about the rest of you, but it seems that maybe we ought to have some discussion about what happened yesterday." One of my colleagues said, "There goes Root with his Nuremberg defense," which wasn't exactly my idea. Eventually I did write a dissent about what we were up to in Vietnam, and I was amazed when I got back to Washington to learn that I was the only one in Vietnam who wrote such a memo. I was amazed because the vast majority of people I talked with every day felt the same way I did.

Q: In essence what was your dissent based on?

ROOT: Well of course it couldn't be based on a thorough knowledge of everything going on, because I didn't have that knowledge. But I did feel that I knew enough to at least indicate my concern. It was quite a fascinating experience. There were two options. One could either send it directly to Washington without stopping anywhere in between, or you could go through channels. I opted to go through channels, because I didn't particularly want to keep it secret. I wanted to see how it would play. There was one chap in the political section who told me that I just didn't know what was going on. Well I didn't pretend to know everything that was going on, but I didn't think they knew either.

Q: Did you get out in the field?

ROOT: Most of my work had to do with interacting with the central government people in these technical areas and with the U.S. military.

Q: You were part of the AID organization?

ROOT: It was a joint State-AID economic office.

Q: Did you have a feeling we were throwing money at a problem?

ROOT: Yes. One of the aspects that really disturbed me was a proposal to build a new airport for civil aviation use. It struck me that there were already so many airports for military use that it boggled the mind to think that the Vietnamese would need even more after we left. But the engineers could, of course, make an engineering case that it would be nice to get this or that. I kept making negative comments. This was not entirely appreciated. When it came time for my efficiency rating to be prepared, the boss said that I was stubborn. I said, "Would you mind changing that to persistent?" He said, "I'll change it to persistent, but you are stubborn." I thought that I should be stubborn on something like that.

Q: Oh, absolutely. When you left in '71, what was your personal prognosis of where things were going?

ROOT: It was pretty clear by then we were not going to prevail. It was just a matter of time.

INTS M. SILINS
Vietnamese Language Training
Washington, DC (1969-1970)

District Senior Advisor
Duc Thanh District, Mekong Delta (1970)

Aide to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker
Saigon (1970-1973)

Ambassador Silins was born in Latvia and raised in Latvia and Maryland. He was educated at Princeton and Harvard Universities. He entered the Foreign Service in 1969 and served abroad in Saigon, Duc Thanh (Vietnam), Bucharest, Stockholm, Port au Prince, Leningrad and Strasbourg. In 1990 he was appointed United States Representative to the Baltic States, resident in Riga, Latvia, and from 1992 to 1995, he served as United States Ambassador to Latvia. He also had several tours of duty at the Department of State in Washington, D.C. Ambassador Silins was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: So, from sort of '69- '70, you were taking Vietnamese, is that it?

SILINS: Right. Taking Vietnamese and being trained to be a district advisor in the so-called pacification program.

Q: Can you talk a bit about the training of people there and the outlook at that point towards Vietnam?

SILINS: Well, I've called this the most painful period of my life, painful not in a profound sense but in the sense that it was boring and restrictive. The way that Vietnamese was taught there was boring to me because of the narrow range of the vocabulary and the expressions they focused on. It was designed primarily for military people – most of the men doing the job I was headed for were young captains and majors – so it had a lot of military lingo, you know, not the kind of things that I was interested in saying, actually.

My own views on Vietnam were very mixed at the time. I felt that we had made a big mistake in getting in. At the same time I felt that in some sense we were on the right side, which I still feel today, but of course not that we should have killed so many people trying to support that side. I agreed to go in part because by then it was already clear that we were pulling out. I mean, we'd started to withdraw well before '69. So I was torn. I was willing to go because it was something that my country, the U.S., was doing and I was willing to do my part in it, but I didn't feel it was a good thing to have gotten into. At the same time I wasn't all that impressed with the anti-war movement. So it was a very uncomfortable period. A boring training program, these mixed, divided feelings, mixed emotions and waiting and waiting until the training would end and I could finally leave for Vietnam. It was a difficult time.

Q: Well, this was a relatively quiet period, I guess, wasn't it?

SILINS: Depends on where you were. It wasn't all that quiet. Just before I left Washington, the night I was driving my airfreight to Andrews Air Force base, the radio started broadcasting news about U.S. bombing of Cambodia. That was an expansion of the military conflict and made my mother, who had lost my father in another war, very nervous.

Like everyone else, the first thing I remember after landing at Saigon's Tan Son Nhat Airport was a blast of tropical heat and the shriek of jet engines. I have fragmented memories of my first disoriented days in Saigon. Being knocked off my feet, unhurt, by a car while walking along a sidewalk, the Vietnamese occupants jumping out, smiling and laughing, not out of amusement but acute embarrassment and apology. A Vietnamese woman invading my room in the middle of the night in a fleabag hotel, just looking, it turned out, for a place to sleep until morning. Another fleabag hotel where I awoke with large cockroaches nibbling on my eyebrows. And so forth. Welcome to Vietnam. The fleabag hotels, by the way, were not places of my own choosing but where I was assigned to stay by my employer, the CORDS program.

Q: Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support.

SILINS: Right. Our Saigon processing-in included a pep talk from the famous John Paul Vann, then the golden boy of the pacification program. He was later dissected in Neil Sheehan's [A Bright Shining Lie](#). CORDS then sent us off on an orientation trip to various districts and provinces in different parts of South Vietnam. In one of them we came under mortar attack, a reminder, if we needed one, there was still a war on. And I was issued a Colt 45, which I carried for a few months. But then, I have to say luckily, I was assigned to a very peaceful model district, where I replaced Ken Quinn as District Senior Advisor. And there I formed at first a rather distorted view of the war and its prospects. It was in Sa Dec Province in the Mekong Delta, flat as a board, between the Bassac and Mekong Rivers, not more than a few meters above water level at any time, a good deal of it underwater in the rainy season.

The district was called Duc Thanh District. It was controlled by the Hoa Hao, a Buddhist sect that was very anti-Viet Cong, so they kept most of the war at bay. It was prosperous, with rich soil, rice agriculture and some other crops, animal husbandry, handicrafts and light manufacturing. What I was doing there was basically AID and Peace Corps-type work. I was the head of a small team reporting to the province senior advisor, Bob Traister. His deputy, who wrote my efficiency report, was an Army lieutenant colonel. I had a Filipino agricultural advisor who was spreading the green revolution. You remember IR8, one of the new rice varieties that were supposed to revolutionize the world's food supply? My villagers were skeptical and didn't care all that much for the taste. And we were building roads and bridges and schools and little dispensaries, medical treatment centers, and so forth.

Much of our travel was by boat, a Boston Whaler with a temperamental motor. I also had an International Scout, the SUV of the time, which I eventually traded for a real Army jeep. With my counterpart, the Vietnamese District Chief, I made regular visits to the villages and hamlets to inquire into their problems, needs and wishes. All too often an inescapable part of such official visits was heavy drinking, usually warm brandy and soda in very large glasses, and occasionally exotic foods such as seven-day-old duck eggs and field mice. We had a fairly comfortable compound with a generator but showered in canal water from a rooftop tank settled out with alum. I also had a small military training team consisting of a lieutenant named Al Heckman, a sergeant, and about four enlisted men whose job was to strengthen the local self-defense forces as part of the Vietnamization policy. Except for a little nibbling around the edges of the district, there was no Viet Cong activity, no war. We had neither U.S. nor Vietnamese regular forces operating in our territory. That was fortunate for all concerned but it encouraged an overly rosy picture of what was really happening in Vietnam.

The most violent military activity in my district, I regret to say, came when a U.S. helicopter, its crew having blown an emotional fuse as a result of combat trauma, flew over Duc Thanh and sprayed some villages at random with machine gun fire. Luckily, they hit only houses, not people. An Army team came to investigate and offer compensation. They brought along a beautiful Vietnamese girl, Phuong, as an interpreter. She was wearing a flowing snow-white *ao dai* and delicate shoes, so I carried her over the muddy stretches and narrow bamboo bridges as we went from hamlet to hamlet. She was light as a cloud.

Another close call with friendly fire came when Secretary of the Army Stan Resor came on a visit to our model district. Luckily I was monitoring the military radio as our motorcade

approached the village where Resor was to meet with a unit of the local forces we had been training. One of the helicopter gunships escorting him reported “suspected hostiles wearing black pajamas” near the meeting point and requested permission to fire on them. I broke in and stopped them. The guys in black were the self-defense forces the Secretary had come to see.

Q: Oh yes, yes - the aide, which is a very good job, but it was done with a certain amount of propriety and all that. Walt Cutler was one, and others had gone through that.

SILINS: It was a wonderful opportunity for me. So I got to see the war from the rice shoots level and also from the top.

But to continue with your previous question, my impression of the Vietnamese government.... When Ambassador Bunker went on one of his consultation trips to the U.S. and expected to be away for some time, this was after I'd been working for him for about a year, with his permission and authority I took my own little research trip in Vietnam. I visited parts of the country that I hadn't seen before, especially farther north, in Military Regions I and II. I talked to district advisors in depth, saw what the situation was like and got their candid assessments of how representatives of the Vietnamese government were performing. Having been one, I knew what to ask them. I wrote a short report for the ambassador concluding that our policy just wasn't going to work, that the political structure we were trying to build simply would not hold together unless the Vietnamese government made some basic changes. It was clear to me that aside from oases of security like Duc Thanh, things were not going well at all, as we now know.

Q: What was the problem?

SILINS: Well, there were several. Corruption, insufficient motivation. Lack of trust in the Thieu regime and its representatives. Resentment of the foreign military presence. A growing conviction that U.S. forces would be worn down as the French had been before them. A basic problem was that Vietnamese government officials were seen as, and perceived themselves as being, puppets of a foreign power, which was a fatal problem in Vietnam over the long run. We could not impose a solution from the outside, because the attempt to do that, for people as intensely patriotic, really, and xenophobic to some extent, as the Vietnamese are, would cause the government agents that worked for us to be seen as puppets of a foreign power. That was a fatal flaw, such a program could not win lasting popular support.

As I recall, my report sat on Ambassador Bunker's desk for the space of a week or so, then he returned it to me. I don't recall that he made any comment on it. It was not, of course, the only negative assessment of U.S. prospects in Vietnam that he read, as I know very well since I selected much of his daily reading and put the papers on his desk every day.

Q: What was your impression of Ambassador Bunker?

SILINS: He had the most impressive presence of any diplomat that I have worked with. Of course, he was the first one of world class that I worked with closely when I was still in my impressionable youth, but he was exceptional. He had great power of recall. He could recognize Marines that had served for him when he was ambassador to India when they came through

Vietnam and wound up on his security guard. So, a superb memory. When I started working for him he was already 75, 76, something like that, but with plenty of energy. He worked six-and-a-half days a week without fail, long hours.

The most impressive thing about Bunker was something that to this day I can't really explain, and that was an ability to get people to do things without overtly asking or telling them what he wanted them to do. That is the true genius of leadership, when you can get people to imagine for themselves what it is you want them to do and do it accurately... that's just something extraordinary, I don't know how he did that. He did it with me as his aide, but he could also do it with the very senior Americans that formed the Mission Council. I saw him in action because I had the privilege of sitting in on Mission Council meetings for almost two years, but to this day I am not sure how he was able to lead in that indirect way.

Perhaps I should mention here the "honeymoon flights." These were the shuttle flights between Saigon and Katmandu that were a unique feature of Bunker's tenure in Saigon. They came about because Bunker's second wife, Carol Laise, was the U.S. ambassador to Nepal. They married in Katmandu in early 1967. President Johnson, when he pressured Bunker into taking on the Vietnam job not long after the wedding, promised that a government plane would be provided for regular, shall we say, conjugal visits. The flights continued into the Nixon administration. So every few months Bunker would fly to Nepal or Carol Laise would come to Saigon. There were always quite a lot of extra seats, so members of both U.S. missions alternated on R & R trips. I went on one of the longer ones, with the additional duty of escorting Bunker's lithe and spirited granddaughter from Brazil. I almost got her killed. I think her name was Patsy.

Q: What happened?

SILINS: I was staying with the Peace Corps doctor in Katmandu, who organized a motorcycle outing. We were coming back from the Tibet border, with the young lady riding on the back of my bike. The road, like almost all roads in Nepal, as you can imagine, was narrow with a vertical wall on one side and a steep drop on the other. A water buffalo was moving along the road ahead of us, placidly trudging along in the same direction as us, hugging the safe side. As we were about to pass, suddenly it lurched into the middle of the road, almost knocking us over the edge. I guess it was startled by the motorcycle's engine noise. With miraculous luck neither of us suffered more than minor scrapes.

I still remember those ten days or so in Nepal very vividly. It's sad to think how much Nepal must have changed by now.

Q: What about the relationship during the '70-'73 period, particularly during your time between Bunker and the media, American media in particular?

SILINS: Yes. I used to talk to the media, newspaper and wire service reporters mostly, quite a lot. I can't say that I told them much they didn't know. I took almost too seriously my responsibility not to leak anything from the ambassador's office. But I liked them because I'd been in a humble way one of them way back when I worked for the Washington Star. They were interesting folks, they're smart and they know what's going on. So I would see reporters like Fox

Butterfield of The New York Times or George McArthur of the AP often, but I probably wasn't much professional help to them, I'm afraid. Bunker met regularly with the press, including informal get-togethers, but neither side made much of a dent in the other. Bunker was restrained in expressing negative opinions of the press but I believe now, judging by statements in his own oral history interview, that he regarded a free uncensored press as a serious, potentially fatal, impediment to a democratic society's successful prosecution of a war.

JAMES D. PHILLIPS
Vietnam Inspection Team
Da Nang (1970)

Ambassador Phillips was born in Illinois in 1933. He received his Bachelor's degree from the University of Wichita in 1957 and his Master's in 1958. After serving in the US Army from 1953 to 1955, he entered the Foreign Service in 1961. Postings throughout his career include Paris, Elizabethville, Luxembourg, The Gambia, Copenhagen and Casablanca. Mr. Phillips then became the ambassador to Burundi and Congo. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 5, 1998.

PHILLIPS: Well, before I left I had an interesting experience. The Director General of the Foreign Service was a man named John Burns. He was a friend of a friend of mine from Paris named Perry Culley who was in the inspection corps. Burns told Culley he saw a problem in putting together an inspection team for Vietnam. At that time, through a program called CORDS, a number of young Foreign Service officers were stationed in remote areas of Vietnam where they worked with the military to try to win "the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people. They would be part of a five or six person team, usually consisting of one FSO and the rest military. These young officers had to be inspected like any other Foreign Service officer in Vietnam. Burns believed they were involved in work so different from traditional Foreign Service jobs that they would not relate well to traditional inspectors, normally older officers at the end of their careers. So the idea was to add two younger officers to the team. I was an FSO 4 at the time. So Burns through Culley got my name and the name of Charlie Higginson, another FSO 4, and they asked us if we would be part of the inspection team. It was a three month assignment. Our responsibility was to inspect all the officers below the grade of FSO 4. We were assured we would have the same authority as any other team member.

Of course I accepted. The assignment lasted from mid-June of 1970 until the beginning of September. The inspection team leader assigned me the Delta and the Da Nang area in the north and Charlie got the central part of the country. We both inspected young officers at the Embassy in Saigon. I interviewed over 50 officers, saw a great deal of the country and met with people like the famous or infamous, depending on ones point of view, heretical ex-military leader John Paul Vann. I met with Ellsworth Bunker several times. It was a remarkable experience.

Q: I was Consul General in Saigon from 1969 to July of 1970 so we may have bumped into each other. I had some junior officers.

PHILLIPS: I remember Lange Schmermerhorn.

Q: *I remember Lang. She is now an ambassador to Djibouti.*

PHILLIPS: I have kind of followed her career.

Q: *Let's talk about you going out into the field. What were you getting from the officers in the Delta?*

PHILLIPS: It was varied, as you can imagine. It would depend on the officer, on what he was doing and how he related to the military. I remember one of them named Lacy Wright.

Q: *I am interviewing Lacy now.*

PHILLIPS: He was performing very well. He was doing things he would never have had a chance to do in a normal assignment. He had enormous responsibility, worked closely with John Paul Vann and was enjoying the job. Like most of these young officers, however, he was concerned about the dark side of Vietnam. He was keenly aware of South Vietnamese corruption and he sensed the futility of U.S. involvement. In other places I inspected, there was bad blood between the Foreign Service officer and his military colleagues. Teams that couldn't get along were worse than useless.

Q: *This was about a year and a half after the Tet Offensive and it was as we were beginning a pullback of American troops. What was the picture you were getting at that time about what we were doing in Vietnam?*

PHILLIPS: I had access to a lot of places that most non-military people rarely saw. I went by helicopter from Hue to Da Nang, flying low over a good part of the northern sector. Terry McNamara was Consul in Da Nang.

Q: *Was Dick Moose there, too?*

PHILLIPS: No. Moose wasn't there. I saw a lot of Vietnam even some newspaper reporters wouldn't have seen. I came to believe that the huge U.S. military presence was not effective. And there were social problems. Drug use and prostitution was endemic in Saigon. On the other hand, before I went to Vietnam I had been opposed to U.S. involvement, but when I got there I saw the war in terms of a sort of North Vietnam Sparta against a South Vietnam Athens. The southerners were corrupt and they didn't have the best management skills, but they didn't want to be dominated by the militaristic north. There should have been some way to reconcile the differences short of total domination by the north. I felt sympathy for the southerners. If you remember Saigon you remember the schoolgirls sort of flowing down the streets in their colorful school uniforms. It was somehow beautiful and touching. Saigon functioned fairly well despite the corruption. But it was clear that the Vietnamese would have to work out a solution for themselves. A continuing, massive U.S. presence was simply not viable a option.

Q: Did you see in later years a sort of Vietnam Veterans cadre developing within the Foreign Service?

PHILLIPS: I think a lot of officers had a very hard time after Vietnam adjusting to everyday working conditions. I followed Lacy Wright's career for a while. He went to London and it didn't work. To go from practically running civilian operations in the Delta to a normal embassy job was difficult. I kept in touch with some of the officers I inspected. But I don't think the Vietnam old boys network had much staying power. A larger, more influential network today consists of former Peace Corps volunteers.

PARKER W. BORG
Policy Programs and Plans, CORDS
Saigon (1970)

Ambassador Borg was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Cornell University. In 1965, after a tour with the Peace Corps in the Philippines, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his career he served in Vietnam and Zaire, and in the State Department in senior positions concerning Vietnam, West Africa and Counter Terrorism. He served as US Ambassador to Mali (1981-1984) and to Iceland from 1993 to 1996. Ambassador Borg was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: So in 1970 whither?

BORG: In 1970 I was, in about October, getting ready to leave my district because we had 18-month tours. I was really interested in seeing the war from the perspective in Saigon, and so I began going down and talking with people about finding a job in Saigon. I was talking with the people in the office of Program Plans and Policy, which was run by Clay McManaway.

Q: Yes, I know Clay.

BORG: I was thinking very seriously about this. Having spent 18 months in the field, I was really interested in seeing what the war looked like from the Saigon perspective. I got a cable that came out telling me that I was going back to Washington in January and I had been selected to be on the Secretariat staff. I didn't have a clue what the Secretariat staff was, having never served in Washington, and I called a friend of mine, someone who was in Washington who was a staff assistant in the East Asia Bureau, and I said, "What is the Secretariat staff?" and he said, "Ah, that is the most fantastic job. You're the first person from the CORDS program that has ever been selected to this. It's a really terrific opportunity. I would give my eye teeth if I could have a job like that." I thought, "Hmmm, what's going on?" but I decided ultimately that I really wanted to see the war from Saigon, and so I told them, no, I didn't want to do this, that I would spend six months in Saigon and then I would come back. A couple months later I got a notice that there was another opening that had come up in July or August and that maybe I would take

that one. But even before that I had been notified that I was going to go work in INR on Southeast Asia because I had a lot of friends doing INR Southeast Asia, so that's what I thought I was going to be doing, but then I decided I wanted to stay and see Saigon. So I signed up instead to stay in Saigon for six months.

Q: What were you doing? You were in Saigon in the first half of '71?

BORG: No, it was the first half of '70, December through July 1970. I worked in the planning office of the Policy Programs and Plans, Directorate of CORDS, which was under Bill Colby at the time. Our office wrote the pacification plans. Our big initiative at the time that I was there was to extend the political development, which we had already witnessed in the hamlets and the villages through the elections, to the provincial level and to transfer the ministries' budget authorities from Saigon to the provinces so that the provinces decided where the schools were going to be built and what money would be used for health rather than some bureaucrat in Saigon. I thought this was a worthy goal, and I worked on writing the various papers. This was a completely American initiative. We wrote the papers in our office. I did a lot of the drafting. Then we sold these programs to the Vietnamese, who we felt at first may not have understood exactly what the political implications were of transferring so much authority to the provinces, by having a provincial council and then the provincial council would have a budgetary authority. I don't think they had any taxing authority, but each province would be responsible for its own developments. Since I had very strong views that the Saigon government seemed to be irrelevant, it seemed that the most useful thing we could be doing was to strengthen the feeling of province, and then after that one might work for the national level.

Q: How did you find the people in Saigon, Americans? Were they a different breed of cat?

BORG: Yes, a totally different breed, because few of them had any experience in the countryside. Most of the civilians that I worked with had taken an assignment in Saigon as soon as they got there and maybe gone out as far as the resort village...

Q: Vung Tau.

BORG: ...Vung Tau or had gone out to Tra Vinh and that was the extent of their provincial experiences, or maybe they went up to Buon Ma Thuot for a weekend or something like that. So I found them consistently out of it. The person who turned out to be my best colleague in the office was a guy who had been in Special Operations Command, a military major who had been out working on the Cambodian border killing people. But he at least knew what the countryside was like, and everybody else was writing in a vacuum.

Q: How did this work? Did you find yourself sort of trying to be subversive or...?

BORG: No. There was enough work that gravitated to me to keep me totally occupied, and working with this military major there was nobody who changed the things that we had written, so the things we had written were then translated into Vietnamese and were sent on. My boss was quite pleased with what I was doing.

Q: Where was your office located?

BORG: It was out at MACV headquarters. That's where Colby had his office and various associated directorates. I had almost no contact with anybody in the embassy. I don't know if I ever met anybody in the political section. A CORDS friend of mine eventually ended up there, but he hadn't gone there at the time.

Q: You had this hamlet evaluation, provincial reporters and all this, and you had these programs. You would think there would be some sort of cross-fertilization or something.

BORG: I think it was too large an operation for anybody to cross-fertilize. There was an office, one of the directorates under Colby, that looked at all of the hamlet evaluations and tried to assemble them into a coherent whole. I knew some of the people who worked there, and I thought that was a hopeless bureaucratic exercise to sort through all of this garbage.

Q: To show how big this was, you and I overlapped. I was consul general in Saigon...

BORG: And we never met.

Q: Different worlds.

BORG: That's right. I met a couple of people who worked at the embassy in the consular section, and I knew one person...

Q: Lange Schermerhorn.

BORG: ...Lange Schermerhorn, who worked at the embassy. I knew a girl who worked with Lange's roommate...

Q: Sandy...

BORG: No, it was Kay Stocker. Kay Stocker worked in AID, but other than writing reports back to Washington, I have no idea what she did.

Q: It was a funny world.

BORG: That's right. I don't think I went into the embassy more than once or twice the whole time I was there. That first time I came down I was under consideration to be special assistant to one of the ambassadors, and I came down there for an interview, but I was not selected.

Q: It used to be called a beauty contest. Young officers would come in and they would be selected, whoever was the most personable or something like that.

BORG: I was not particularly interested in the job nor was I particularly disappointed that I was not selected for it. You know: "Come down. You're a candidate for this. Please show up," so "Okay." I left in the summer of '70.

Q: Did you get a different view? You wanted to look at things from Saigon, but it sounds like you were somewhat limited.

BORG: I was totally wrapped up in what I was doing, and I thought that what I was doing was a positive contribution to decentralizing the war.

Q: Also, militarily the situation was not too bad because the Viet Cong had been really knocked out by the Tet Offensive.

BORG: Things were going swimmingly, and there was much less violence all over the country than there had been at the time I arrived. So as far as I was concerned, I had had my Vietnam experience, and it was a positive experience in that I thought I made a positive contribution to what was going on in my particular communities. One of the things that we did in the villages was that, if any Naval or Air Force units wanted to participate in any activities in our community, they had to secure our concurrence, and we'd regularly get some battleship offshore that would say, "We have intelligence that there's a Viet Cong unit operating in such and such an area, and we want to use our big guns to smash them," and we'd say, "No way. There are settled communities in here. There's no way we're going to let you." Likewise, with the Air Force: If they wanted to do a bombing mission or an Arc light mission in the area, it had to be approved by us. So we were able to control the American side of the war also within our communities. Another thing I found great fun was that, whenever there was a Vietnamese soldier who was wounded in battle, we had helicopter units that would come and pick them up and take them to the hospital, but they would only go into questionable areas if somebody from the unit, from the unit on the ground, the headquarters, would go with them, and I was always willing to fly at night in these helicopters and go out to the villages. I felt I knew my way around and I was sufficiently young and naive about things that I never had any particular qualms about doing something like that. But I felt that my participation in the field had been positive and my experience in Saigon had been a positive one.

DAVID LAZAR
Director CORDS, Region I
Da Nang (1970-1971)

David Lazar was born in Chicago and educated at Depaul University. His career with USAID took him to Vietnam, Peru, Bolivia and Panama. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.

LAZAR: The inevitable, Vietnam, in 1970.

Q: What was your position there?

LAZAR: I was the Director of CORDS Military Region I, which was the northern five provinces.

Q: What did that involve?

LAZAR: Everything. CORDS was a structure that we put together in Vietnam to bring all civilian operations under one centralized authority. Among other things that included the training of regional and territorial forces, paramilitary groups, which the army didn't want to have anything to do with.

Q: What were the conditions in the area that you were responsible for?

LAZAR: Well, there was a war going on. This has nothing to do with anything, but I must tell you this story. One of the first guys that wanted to see me when I got to Vietnam was the head of the public safety program who was in charge of self-defense measures at our compound in Da Nang. The compound in Da Nang was called the Alamo. There were a couple of things I considered a little more important at the moment, as we were not under actual threat, than getting people to cooperate in this endeavor, so I put him off for a while. But, he was really insistent, so I finally had a meeting with him. His gripe was that he couldn't get people to participate in self-defense compound drills with assigned people to positions and assign weapons to them. Could I think of some way to accomplish this? Couldn't I just tell people that they had to do this? I said, "The first thing we have to do is change the name of the compound. You are not going to get many people interested in defending the Alamo." Jokes are wasted on public safety officials. It seemed pretty obvious to me.

Another funny experience I had happened the first morning I was there. I had flown across the United States and the Pacific non-stop, except for a one hour layover in Tokyo, down to Saigon, getting in about 9:00 o'clock in the morning local time, right into a series of all day briefings and then up to Da Nang where I met some members of my staff, etc. I went to bed and got up the next morning early because the day started with a briefing with the commanding general. I was still pretty blurred from that whole trip and wasn't quite sure where I was. I walked over and opened the heavy grenade curtains we kept across the windows and looked out and saw all these people in black pajamas. I wasn't quite sure where I was and finally focused on the one thing I recognized which was a Panamanian flag. Da Nang was a port and there was a ship in port. It took me about 30 seconds to get all that in focus and realize where I was and why the Panamanian flag was there. That Panamanian flag nearly saved my life. It was the one piece of reality I could get a grip on while I figured out what the hell else was going on around me.

Q: What kind of activities were you having to work on?

LAZAR: Everything. Despite the briefings in Washington, I wasn't really aware of what the hell the job involved. I sort of found out the first morning at the commanding general's briefing. Some of our military had been involved in an accident and there were some civilian injuries. The commanding general turned to me and said, "Are your people up there?" I said, "I don't know, should they be?" My deputy, said, "Yes, Sir, we have some public safety people up there." The job was gauleiter in a word. We paralleled the civilian, Vietnamese government from the district level up to the provincial level and all the way up to Saigon.

Q: How many people were under your direction?

LAZAR: When I first got there 1,100, in five provinces.

Q: What kind of people were they?

LAZAR: Four of the five provincial representatives, my next echelon down, and the majority of the district representatives, were military. Their counterparts were all military. The government was run by the military. We told them what to do, if they weren't already doing it.

Q: What kinds of things were you telling them to do?

LAZAR: Check and see that their village headmen slept in the village at night, for example. Many of them didn't because it was insecure. They were responsible for running the various programs that we were pushing.

Q: What kind of development programs?

LAZAR: Public health, agriculture and some public administration. I had a public administration guy on my staff. We really couldn't do much of anything because there was too much disruption. We wanted to give the Vietnamese people the notion that the region was pacified and that life was going to go on as it had always gone on, peace was here and the enemy was being kept away. Well, that was bullshit and they knew it was bullshit. Besides they thought they were smarter than we were and they were probably right. They certainly knew the situation on the ground better than we ever did. One of the most famous sayings to come out Vietnam was from John Paul Vann, who had been a colonel in the army and gotten into trouble, went back to Vietnam as a civilian, and had the equivalent of my job down in IV CORPS, in the south of the country, which had serious military problems. Our military problems at the time were not that bad, there were incursions, but mostly we had a pretty secure perimeter. Anyway, at a once a month Commanding General's staff meeting in Saigon, General Creighton Abrams made the statement that we really ought to be able to do things better having been here for 20 years. John Paul Vann jumped up out of the audience and said, "Excuse me, General, but no we haven't, we have been here one year twenty times." And that was about right. We never seemed to learn and the Vietnamese knew that.

Q: We never understood the situation; what was going on?

LAZAR: No. Some people did. John Paul Vann may have better than most people. But, most of our people never did. They wanted to do their 18 months and get out of there and I don't much blame them for that, particularly the AID people who were going through the motions. They would have loved it had they been able to have some serious impact.

Q: Do you think anything resulted from our development work?

LAZAR: I can't really say. I haven't been back. I didn't see anything going on when I was there that I thought would have any positive impact.

Q: We were just holding the ground and there to provide services?

LAZAR: Trying to relate to the Vietnamese in a positive way. Some of it may have rubbed off.

Q: You thought of it as a pretty bad experience?

LAZAR: Yes, it was my only bad experience in AID. The rest of it I loved.

Q: What was the core of your unhappiness?

LAZAR: The futility and the killing. As you may have gathered, in Peru, Bolivia and Panama, I had a lot of friends among the people I worked with. I related very closely to them. I understood them and they understood me. I spoke the language, after all, and, if I may say so, I spoke it well. I knew it enough to pick up nuances, not just literal meanings. It was really a collaborative effort, working with people and sharing common goals with them. Even though it was their country, I wanted to see those programs work, to see things happen. So you had this sense of really working together. In Vietnam we were there simply to make sure people did what they were told. By and large they did, because if a District Chief didn't do what his American advisor "suggested" that he do, the American advisor would get on the phone to the Provincial Rep who would talk to the Provincial Chief and the Provincial Chief would send a message back down to the District Chief to do what he is told. Or it came up to me. Or to Saigon, if necessary. But sooner or later, that District Chief was told what to do.

Q: Do you remember what they were being told to do by and large?

LAZAR: Well, for example, we had this HESS rating system. Have you ever run into that?

Q: No.

LAZAR: It was a list of ninety four items that we were to report on every week or month. How many village headmen sleep in their village? Has production of rice increased? It was an attempt to measure pacification, to reduce pacification to a set of numbers. Every month the information would come up through the villages to the districts to the provinces to me and I would send them on to Saigon and Saigon would use them to tell the President and the press the numbers were up and pacification was working. Pure bullshit.

Q: Did they tend to inflate the numbers?

LAZAR: No, it just didn't mean anything. I suppose there was a certain amount of lying, but that wasn't the point. The point was the Vietnamese became masters of what I came to call substantial non-substantive compliance. They would check off all those items and still find ways to run things the way they wanted to run them. I expressed myself a couple of times, but nobody wanted to hear that. Those numbers looked good. It was something like dealing with economists, only worse. You have all those numbers and they must mean something!

DELL PENDERGRAST
Psychological Operations Advisor
Saigon (1970-1971)

Mr. Pendergrast was born in Illinois in 1941. He received his BA from Northwestern University and his MS from Boston University. His positions abroad included Belgrade, Zagreb, Saigon, Warsaw, Brussels and Ottawa. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed him on June 24, 1999.

PENDERGRAST: During my ten months of language training, I had extensive area and country studies, which gave me a lot of badly needed education about the region. And, I think my views started to evolve and shift even while still in Washington. It was partly my exposure to the intense antiwar feeling taking place in the United States, which I had not experienced while in Yugoslavia. I had not fully appreciated the depth of opposition that existed in the United States, and that inevitably did have some impact on me. I remember in the fall of 1969 the Moratorium, a major event in the antiwar movement that turned violent in Washington. Even some of my Vietnamese language classmates, who were going to Vietnam, participated in the Moratorium, which was a little bit beyond my reach at that point. I think there was another thing that helped to shape my attitudes towards Vietnam, and that was a deepening concern about a blind, stubborn faith in American technology and power to win the war. I began to question the widely held belief that American military and political power alone could make the difference in the war, a self-deception which afflicted many in the government and the military. My reaction was partly developed by exposure to the swaggering Vietnam hands, civilian and military, who came back and forth through the Vietnam training center at the time. They had a rather patronizing attitude toward the Vietnamese, which I found disturbing and offensive. Such people seemed to think it was our war and we were going to win it regardless of the Vietnamese, another form of the myopic cultural arrogance which I mentioned earlier. I was by no means a dove or opponent of the war. Its basic strategic goals were sound, but before I even arrived there, I had become nervous about the way and the people implementing our strategy.

Q: How was Vietnamese as a language, as a tonal language? How did you find it?

PENDERGRAST: I had never experienced anything like it, because my language background was entirely in the Slavic family, but actually I seemed to adapt pretty well to it. I never became really fluent, but I managed at the professional level. I never needed an interpreter and was able to travel unescorted around the countryside. The tonal language is major, unfamiliar challenge for any American, but once you master the tones, you really are in control, because the grammar, the structure, tends to be simple, certainly compared to a Slavic language. So as I look back over the languages that I've studied over the many years, Vietnamese was possibly the easiest. But that's maybe because I was still young and able to adapt to languages much better than I could later.

Q: I can't remember, were you married?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, I was. I was married, and my wife initially decided that she would go to Bangkok and spend the time there because, of course, they were not allowing families into Vietnam during that period. In the end, she became pregnant with our first child and decided to stay with her mother in Chicago. In retrospect, it was a good decision, because the home environment was better for her in the pregnancy and then for the birth of our son. And it worked out, I think, pretty well. I'm glad that later she was able to come and visit me in Vietnam for a couple of weeks to get a taste of my experience there.

Q: Did you have any problem with your wife? This is a question I ask of people because often the wives were subjected more... I mean, you had your work to do, you knew what you were going to do and you were a government officer and all, but the wives were out kind of in... I'm talking about in the American public, and they were getting an awful lot more pressure. I know my wife did.

PENDERGRAST: You mean during the Vietnam period.

Q: Yes, during the Vietnam thing. My wife was at a university while I was in Vietnam, and I came back and I found it wasn't very easy.

PENDERGRAST: No, she had no problem being identified with someone working in Vietnam. She lived in a conservative North Shore suburb of Chicago. I don't think there was any strong anti-war feeling there. In fact, her main complaint, I recall, was the paucity of information about Vietnam and the lack of interest among the people she knew in that area. She read the *Chicago Tribune* and other local papers, but, remarkably, in the middle of the war, the information was spotty. She was getting letters from me almost daily from Vietnam and her curiosity was stimulated, but she could not get much satisfaction in the local media.

Q: I remember on my way out trying to find something on what was happening in Vietnam, and I was in Houston, and there was, you know, a paragraph. The papers, when you get beyond sort of The Washington Post, The New York Times, maybe The Los Angeles Times, you're in another world.

PENDERGRAST: You're absolutely right, and she really did feel being in a sort of information vacuum, but she was distracted by her first pregnancy, and when my son was born while I was in Vietnam, and she was quite fully occupied.

Q: Well, you then got to Vietnam in 1970, is that right? When?

PENDERGRAST: In January of 1970, and I was assigned by USIA in Saigon to be an advisor, what they called a psychological operations advisor to the Vietnamese government, in a province northwest of Saigon called Tay Ninh, approximately 60 to 70 miles northwest of the capital city. It had been in the '60s a very prominent battleground between the communists and the South Vietnamese government, the site of the infamous War Zone C, which was a vast stretch of largely uninhabited jungle that had become a major base for the communist forces. I was based in the province capital with the province advisory team and worked with the Vietnamese information service located in Tay Ninh.

Q: You were in Tay Ninh from January of '70 to when?

PENDERGRAST: January 1970 until I left Vietnam in the fall of 1971.

Q: Could you talk about your job and maybe some of the incidents and your experiences?

PENDERGRAST: I was the advisor to the Vietnamese information service assisting them in the propaganda effort supporting the war. The situation in Tay Ninh was complicated because that province is the center of the Cao Dai religion, the largest indigenous Vietnamese religion. It is - at least at the time - a religion that numbered, I guess, three to four million people, primarily in Tay Ninh and along the central coast of Vietnam. It's an extraordinary, quintessentially Vietnamese religion which is eclectic and the elements of different faiths, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, and animism. And it also tends to be very hierarchical and authoritarian, organized along the lines of the Roman Catholic Church, with a pope, cardinals and bishops, and at that time they had a very powerful hold over Tay Ninh. The province government and military structure was essentially a Cao Dai structure. And so what we were working with was not just the Vietnamese government representative, but indeed with the Cao Dai, which rippled the whole fabric of the provincial system. In many ways, of course, that was a great advantage, because the Cao Dai were fiercely anticommunist. Their loyalty to Saigon over the years had been mixed, but at that time in the early >70s they pretty well accommodated to the national government, which allowed them a fair degree of autonomy in Tay Ninh.

What my job entailed was working with my counterpart, the head of the Vietnamese information service, who was of course a well-connected Cao Dai figure, in a variety of information and cultural activities ranging from publications and cultural events and entertainment staged in villages to promote government themes as well as small village libraries and information centers across the province. Increasingly, I began to feel it was rather patronizing to believe that somehow we Americans could tell the Vietnamese how to communicate with their own people. I was a little uncomfortable with that, but my main value, I suppose, was helping in contacts with regional and national headquarters to get needed resources for the Information Service. But at times I did begin to feel a little like a third wheel in that environment, even though I spoke Vietnamese and, indeed, was the only civilian Vietnamese speaker in the province - and got along very well with the Vietnamese - but I was still the outsider.

Q: Well, sometimes these jobs, the Vietnamese experience talking to other people is that often they'd say Uh-huh, but use you as a source equivalent to a supply officer.

PENDERGRAST: There was an element of that and was able to help, I think, in some way to support the Vietnamese Information Service chief, an educated, soft-spoken, pleasant gentleman. We got along well together and he was most gracious in his hospitality to my wife when she visited over the Christmas/New Years period in 1970. But I always had this sense that he had been fighting this propaganda war for 20 years, and who am I, a relatively young Foreign Service officer coming to tell him how to do it?

Q: Was there a difference between the... Did you run across a difference between the Cao Dai

and the government of South Vietnam's approach to information they were putting out?

PENDERGRAST: No, at that time, as I mentioned, there was relative harmony between the Cao Dai and the government of Vietnam. They shared parallel interests in resisting the communists, their common enemy, and they enjoyed considerable autonomy from Saigon in terms of running the provincial administration. It was in essence a Cao Dai government, although few would openly say it, but from the province chief on down, they were all Cao Dai. It's interesting, even the regional military force of Tay Ninh, of course a separate military unit, not in the ARVN (Armée de la République du Viêt-Nam (Army of the Republic of Vietnam - i.e., South Vietnamese Army), had uniforms that carried the Cao Dai colors.

The Cao Dai historically have been inconsistent in their loyalties. At one time they had been very anti-government, and back in the '50s were one of the sects actively and even violently opposed to President Diem. Later on, in the '60s, they began to adapt and work with the government in Saigon, which had enough problems with the Viet Cong and did not want to face the Cao Dai as well.

Q: Did you find yourself in any problem with your Saigon JUSPAO, I guess it was, headquarters, in that here you were dealing in a province where the game was somewhat different. I mean, this was not straight GVN, Government of Vietnam, work. I mean you were working more with a church. Did you have trouble sort of getting that across?

PENDERGRAST: No, I didn't. The people from Saigon were very interested in the Cao Dai. We'd get periodic visits from the Saigon warriors, as they were called, and they always wanted to visit the Cao Dai temple, which was, and remains today, in fact, one of the great tourist Meccas of Vietnam. The Cao Dai temple is an elaborate structure, which looks like something that Disney might have created with its bewildering display of dragons. The camera-toting tourists from Saigon loved it. A large part of my job as my tour evolved really shifted more and more away from the JUSPAO information activities into a mostly political reporting function. My province senior advisor for most of the tour was a senior career FSO, Parker Wyman, and he did not speak Vietnamese. He relied on me to maintain contact with Cao Dai political activists and to develop reporting to the embassy in Saigon. So a great deal of my assignment in Tay Ninh turned out to be essentially a political reporting role, which I found both interesting and challenging, particularly because the so-called propaganda advisory role, I believed, had its limits.

Q: Was there any Catholic or Buddhist influence, and how did the Cao Dai interact with these?

PENDERGRAST: There was a very small population of Catholic and Buddhist residents in Tay Ninh. They usually were confined to one or two villages which had their own form of autonomy within this largely autonomous province. They were pretty much ignored by the Cao Dai, a relationship of mutual tolerance and indifference for those most part.

Q: What about the other side. I mean how effective was this Cao Dai government? I mean you had War Zone Z in the middle of the jungle and all this. I mean, what was the other side doing?

PENDERGRAST: Well, in the spring of 1970 shortly after I arrived in Tay Ninh, we had what

was euphemistically called the Cambodian "incursion," the major military operation by South Vietnamese and American forces moving into the so-called base areas in Cambodia. Tay Ninh was the principal launching pad for that operation. It was fascinating to witness this huge avalanche of American tanks and other vehicles as they went across Tay Ninh into Cambodia, at the time the largest military operation since the Korean War. I did, in fact, briefly accompany some U.S. Army public affairs people just across the border into Cambodia, but most of the time I was there watching this enormous military operation and helping with the flood of hapless Cambodian refugees created by the offensive.

Although failing in its objective to find the Viet Cong headquarters, the Cambodian operation, however, did have success in pushing back the communists, dispersing them, undermining their capability to penetrate the populated areas in Tay Ninh, where they had actually been able to operate in preceding years. As a result of this Cambodian invasion, most of my tour was a period of relative peace and security in Tay Ninh. The communists were for the most part disorganized, weakened, in many cases simply absent. I could by myself, during daytime hours, travel unescorted virtually anywhere in the populated part of Tay Ninh. At night I wouldn't do it, but in the daytime it was not a problem. War Zone C, the uninhabited area in the northern part of the province, was still out of bounds. But I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel freely and get to know people in rural villages and hamlets where Americans would not have gone without military escort two or three years earlier.

Q: How did you find the American military there? I imagine you would find yourself more or less in a role between the military, speaking Vietnamese and all, and maybe keeping relations and things in better form than they might be. Did you find yourself in that?

PENDERGRAST: I had contact both with the military advisory team with which I worked on a day-to-day basis, but also with the regular military units that were still in Tay Ninh when I arrived, the First Cavalry and 25th Divisions, but they left the province during my tour. I think, in general, that the advisory people who worked closely with the Vietnamese were much more sensitive, more aware of the fact that this was not just a World War II-type conflict, but in fact a complicated political war. The regular combat units, I believe, were afflicted more with the fixation that this was another conventional World War II operation and we would just overwhelm the enemy with our technology and power. This was, in my judgment, the great mistake of Vietnam; we were just re-fighting the last war, trying to do what we did in Europe and in Korea, and never really understood that this was a very different environment and a very [different] type of war. In many ways, the tragedy was compounded by turning the South Vietnamese army itself into an American-style, World War II-type organization, heavily dependent on logistics and supporting firepower- all of which made both ourselves and the South Vietnamese less capable of dealing with the principally political challenge that we faced.

Q: Were there any major developments, incidents, or something during the period you were there until you left in '71?

PENDERGRAST: Well, the major event, of course, was the Cambodian invasion that not only resulted in, at least, the temporary easing of the security threat, a brief respite that we enjoyed, but also generated an enormous flow of refugees from Cambodia into the province that we had to

deal with as well. While I was there, the process of Vietnamization was the main reality in a war-torn part of Vietnam, where Americans had been fighting in great numbers for five years, and suddenly they were gone. But remarkably for a time, at least, there was no sudden decline in the security, mainly because the Cambodian invasion had severely damaged the Vietnamese communist infrastructure and their support from across the border.

Q: How were the Cambodians treated by the Cao Dai and-

PENDERGRAST: Generally, the Cambodians were not viewed with great respect or dignity by the Vietnamese, in fact, looked down upon by the Vietnamese, whether Cao Dai or others. Particularly when dealing with the refugees, it was not the Vietnamese government but the American government that really was most committed to helping these people. The Vietnamese authorities were at best indifferent. A vast cultural and social chasm separated the Vietnamese and the Cambodians.

Q: Were there Montagnards in the area?

PENDERGRAST: No, there were no major minorities at all because it was so heavily Cao Dai in the province.

Q: What was your impression of going back to Saigon and seeing the folks at the top and all that?

PENDERGRAST: It was in many ways a surrealistic experience to visit Saigon, as I did occasionally, because there the American military and civilian presence remained pervasive despite the rapidly dropping levels of U.S. combat troops. Vietnamization certainly didn't take hold there. And, frankly, I was somewhat troubled to see the Americans, many had been there for years, living in the lap of luxury as a result of this war. Saigon was always (and remains today) a dynamic, entrepreneurial city. I left Vietnam with enormous respect for the Vietnamese as a people. They are intelligent, industrious people. They make the best of what they can. But at that time they were simply taking advantage of the fact that you had a lot of Americans throwing around a lot of money. The problem was that in the process they lost track of their own fate and their own destiny. I remember specifically several times Vietnamese telling me in unguarded moments over a few beers at night, that they really believed it was *our* war, the American war, and they were just sort of bystanders or minor players in these events. I think that problem persisted right up to April of 1975, the belief among the Vietnamese that the Americans never really would walk away from their war. It was certainly true in 1970 and probably the same in those last days in 1975.

Q: Well, getting this experience under your belt, whither - 1971, what were you thinking about, what did you want to do, and what did you do?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I didn't have any real strong preference or expectation about any particular assignment or job. My tour in Vietnam was shortened abruptly by a few months. I was back in Chicago visiting my wife and expecting to go back to Vietnam for my last months. Literally on the day before I was to get on the plane in Chicago, I received a call from

Washington telling me that as part of the draw-down in the American presence in Vietnam, my position was eliminated and I was not to return. Maybe they were just trying to save travel funds since I already was back in the States. As a result, my colleagues had to pack me up there and return my belongings, and I went back to Washington. In a sense, it was a somewhat anticlimactic way to end a tour and particularly disappointing not to say goodbye to my Vietnamese colleagues and friends. I knew a large number of people in Tay Ninh and was disappointed it would happen that way, but I had a new son and my wife, and it was good to be reunited with them. But it still was not a good way to come to closure with such an experience. Maybe it finally did come to closure just last year when my son, who had been born while I was in Vietnam, went to Vietnam himself as part of a graduate business school project and spent three weeks in Vietnam, mostly in Saigon and Hanoi. He took one day to visit Tay Ninh because he knew I had been there. He saw the Cao Dai temple and the city of Tay Ninh, tried to look for some landmarks I had told him about - never found them - but, I guess everything comes full circle and I'm glad that he could help to bring some closure for me. I'd like to visit Tay Ninh myself someday.

MAURICE E. LEE
Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
Saigon (1970-1971)

Maurice E. Lee was born in Pennsylvania in 1925. He joined USIA in 1949 and served in Germany, Japan, Turkey, Vietnam, the Philippines, Korea, and Israel. He was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1989.

LEE: Following my year at the War College I was sent to Vietnam. About two-thirds of the military in my class also went to Vietnam. Needless to say anything that I wanted from the military while I was in Vietnam I got because of my previous association with my military classmates.

Speaking of Vietnam -- another interesting thing that happened while I was Program Coordinator, Mr. Shakespeare was Director at that particular time. He felt very strongly about the threat of communism and anybody who'd ever worked for him knew this all too well. And I recall one time when he was presiding over a meeting he announced he wanted every USIA foreign service officer to serve a tour in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. We tried to tell Mr. Shakespeare that this was not possible. Because there just were not enough positions in those countries to fill. And I remember my telling him, why can't you give people with Vietnam experience credit as having been close to communism? He said, "I want to tell you something Mauri, looking at a communist through the sight of a gun and looking at one eyeball to eyeball are two different things." So he set up an orientation program where groups of senior officers went to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to visit these countries and meet some communists. I went on one such trip which was very interesting

As I stated earlier, following the National War College experience I was sent to Vietnam where I was number three and later became Deputy Director of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office

(JUSPAO). I carried the dual title of Deputy Director of that Office and Counselor of the Embassy for Public Affairs. We had a dual role there principally to --

Q: Pardon me. But at that time had Barry [Zorthian] left?

LEE: Yes, Barry had left and Ed Nickel who had replaced him arrived a little before me. He came in right after Tet. Tet was the horrendous North Vietnamese Army Assault coordinated all over South Vietnam. It came close to defeating the U.S. and South Vietnamese military forces. It was ultimately repulsed with great losses to the North, but it sparked a psychological downturn in the U.S. and proved a major factor in our ultimate withdrawal.

I came in later in 1969. It was a huge program made up of USIS officers, State Department people, CIA and the military. As a matter of fact, one of my deputies was an Army colonel. JUSPAO had several missions. One was the pacification program. It was our job to get out and convince the people through various programs to support their government which was in many ways a controversial program. We also were responsible for keeping the American press there briefed. We did have a small cultural program going. We were spread out all over the provinces of South Vietnam. In fact, the JUSPAO program was huge. To give you an example, one of my direct responsibilities was the rebuilding of the country's radio and TV stations. During Tet the Viet Cong had badly damaged the four TV stations and four main radio stations. So we brought over an NBC team of engineers who were in the process of rebuilding those stations. And I gather after I left they finally finished that job. So we had some nice modernized stations to give back to the North Vietnamese.

We had an old constellation that we sent up every night it could fly to broadcast into North Vietnam. We also dropped leaflets up there. We had such a fine printing operation, the RSC Manila, that we printed what was taken for counterfeit, bogus North Vietnamese money in the form of leaflets with a message and dropped them over North Vietnam. North Vietnam charged that we were trying to bankrupt the country because they were so good that people could cut the message off and use them as money. An interesting anecdote to that was a later director of the East Asia area had some of those as a souvenir in his safe in Washington. The Secret Service found out about it and were going to come over and take them away from him. We had a tough time explaining to them that they were really leaflets and not counterfeit money.

Q: Yes, I understand that your people who were up in the countryside were almost never or perhaps never the heads of the offices that were up there. Were these people, the heads of the office, State Department personnel? Or were they military personnel?

LEE: As you know, there were four zones. And we did have a senior USIS officer who was head of the Public Affairs Program per se in each of those zones.

Q: Do you have any other Americans?

LEE: He had other Americans under him. They could be military. They could be State. And then there was the province chief. And that could be a State Department man or military man. While he worked for that man, he also had a responsibility to us.

Q: Well, to what extent was he able to or did he try to get any of his own ideas on public affairs work over? And to what extent was he almost completely under the thumb of the Province Director?

LEE: This is always the problem when a guy's working for two different bosses. If there was a problem our man would come to us and we'd try to straighten it out at the Saigon level. I don't recall any serious problems. We didn't have that many people. I think there were around 200 Americans in JUSPAO. You're bound to run into personality conflicts. And everybody has his own idea of how to run the war. Some of the men that were really out in the boonies probably were doing some things that you wouldn't put under a "Public Affairs Program." But we tried to keep our programs within a certain periphery. And if we heard of anything that was out of that periphery we would try to correct it.

Q: Well, now did the people in the provinces involve themselves in anything directly that you would call PsyWar as opposed to more of the standard operations of public affairs? And if they did, what kinds of things did they do?

LEE: Well, you have to realize that we were in PSYOPS in essence. We're no longer in PSYOPS. Later on we were taken out of it. But that's a broad term. It depends on how certain people define it. If I heard that one of my people were out on night raids (and I know of several that did go out on them) or riding around the countryside in black pajamas like the Viet Cong trying to woo the people, I'd get word out to cool it.

One of the big programs we had, one of the reasons we were trying to get the TV stations back on the air, was that each village no matter how small was given a TV set. They put it in the middle of the village square where everyone could watch programs. Now, these programs obviously had a certain PSYOPS aspect, of propaganda, because we were trying to help the Vietnamese government win the Vietnamese people over to their side and away from the Viet Cong.

Q: The programs that went over this telecasting system were originated where? In Saigon? Or did they go out to feeder stations?

LEE: Well, they originally went out to feeder stations as I recall.

Q: I mean, were they on tape? Or were they original programs?

LEE: Well, in the beginning we had tape. We had tape fed into the machines.

Q: But these were done essentially in Saigon not in Washington.

LEE: As far as I know they were done in Saigon.

Q: And were there transmitter stations?

LEE: Yes.

Q: There had to be transmitter stations up in the --

LEE: Yes, but as I say in the beginning they were out. And we had both the radio and TV, not all the radio but most of them, the big ones.

JOHN M. REID
Political Officer, JUSPO
Saigon (1970-1971)

Mr. Reid, a Virginian, was educated at Virginia Tech, Columbia and Harvard Universities. A specialist in East Asian and Pacific Affairs, he served in Saigon, Vientiane, Bangkok and Seoul, primarily as Public Affairs Officer. In his Washington assignments, Mr. Reid also dealt with affairs of that region. He was also assigned as Public Affairs Officer at Beirut during the Lebanon Civil War, and was a casualty in the bombing of the US Embassy in Beirut. Mr. Reid was interviewed by Charles R. Beecham in 2002.

Q: Now let's talk about your assignment to Saigon in 1970.

REID: I had studied Chinese in graduate school, and, throughout my career, I hoped to get assigned to a Chinese-language post. Bob Clarke, who had been deputy in Bangkok, had gone to Taipei as PAO, and, in 1970, as the end of my first Thailand tour was approaching, Bob said he could find a job for me. It was decided in Washington, however, that, since I had been distribution officer in Bangkok, I should go to Saigon and try to repeat my success there.

Howard Biggerstaff had returned to Washington by this time and was working as a post management assistance officer, and Lynn Noah was in Saigon as research officer. In March 1970, after my assignment was announced, I went over to Saigon to discuss the job with Bigg, who was in Saigon on TDY, and with Lynn. We agreed that, with Vietnamization, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) would eventually get out of the massive publication airdrops in Vietnam and that the priority should be development of capability for regular direct mailing of printed material to a list of appropriate Vietnamese.

Lynn said that, to get JUSPAO to commit itself to this, I would have to develop a program proposal and budget and get it approved. Before I went on home leave, I went over to Saigon for three months and worked on this—a proposal encompassing scope, objectives, budget, staffing and equipment. At the same time, Lynn introduced me to a Vietnamese research contractor who was able to begin developing lists of key Vietnamese, names and mailing addresses, in specified occupational categories. It was very much like the distribution and record systems which all USIS posts maintained in later years. Within the three months, I completed the proposal, presented it, got it approved and went on home leave. While I was away, the research contractor continued working on the lists.

When I returned from home leave, I moved myself out of JUSPAO headquarters in the Rex Hotel building and, at the invitation of Frank Phillips, JUSPAO Logistics Officer and a good friend, across the river into the JUSPAO warehouse in Khanh Hoi. This is where the publications were actually handled. At first, getting the project going was quite challenging and required a lot of supervision. We had to organize the information from the research contractor and use special equipment to engrave it onto lead plates, used for printing the addresses in those pre-computer days. Once we got that going, continuing with the project was a fairly mechanical thing. As we completed the work, group by group, we did commence the mailing. I think it was a surprise to everyone that the South Vietnamese postal system worked quite well.

About the time when the distribution project was becoming routine, Frank Scotton visited the JUSPAO warehouse to see a Vietnamese employee he knew. I had met Frank in 1970 when we were both sent to Kuala Lumpur to work on the visit of Vice President Agnew. Frank was back in Vietnam, I think as a special advisor to Ambassador Bunker. Frank saw me hard at work and asked me what I was doing. When I explained it to him, and he looked at our information, he expressed some surprise and astonishment that anyone was doing a project like that in Vietnam. Frank later told me that he conveyed some of this back to the leadership at JUSPAO. In any case, a few days later, Brian Battey, one of the JUSPAO deputy directors, summoned me and asked how I'd like to work for a while in the embassy political section.

I accepted the offer and was sent over to the embassy for what was supposed to be a three-month detail. I worked for Steve Winship, political-military officer in the embassy, and Steve put me in charge of POW issues. The NSC had tasked the embassy with doing a paper on repatriation issues—what would be the legal, political and practical issues if there were ever an agreement to repatriate Viet Cong and North Vietnamese prisoners held in South Vietnam in exchange for the release of American POWs. At that time, as I recall, there were about 23,000 Viet Cong prisoners and about 10,000 North Vietnamese regulars held in camps in South Vietnam. I was able to travel around and look at most of the camps including the largest, on Phu Quoc Island, off the south coast of Vietnam.

I worked very hard on this study, and I think Steve liked what I did. I liked and got along well with the people in the political section. The study got sent to the NSC, there were some questions, and we answered them. The study never surfaced again, as far as I know, and the way the war ended made the prisoners a non-issue.

I was supposed to have gone back to JUSPAO after three months, but I liked what I was doing, and no one said anything, so I didn't either. After spending an hour a day with my Vietnamese tutor, I was getting fairly proficient with the language, and, at some point, someone waved the BPAOship in Hue in front of me, but the offer never surfaced again. Since the distribution job had become a routine mechanical thing, I didn't want to go back to JUSPAO. At the same time, my friend, Frank Albert, who was in Laos, began encouraging me to take the job of binational center director in Vientiane. I made my bid, and it happened.

MICHAEL W. COTTER

CORDS
Mekong Delta (1970-1971)

Staff Aide
Saigon (1971)

Ambassador Michael W. Cotter was born in Wisconsin in 1943. He graduated from Georgetown University in 1965 and received a JD from the University of Michigan in 1968. Postings throughout his career have included Saigon, La Paz, Can Tho, Quito, Ankara, Kinshasa, Santiago, and an ambassadorship to Turkmenistan. Ambassador Cotter was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: You arrived in Vietnam. Tell me how you were received, where you went, and what it was like.

COTTER: Okay. Actually, I was going to mention before I got to that, the trip there was interesting, for a number of reasons. I mentioned I arrived there on Christmas Eve. One of the things that happened on the way there, something that has stayed with me, is that while I was traveling to Vietnam, one of my close friends, and the only one, I must say, of my close friends, who was killed in Vietnam, was a rear seat in a Navy fighter. Anyhow, they sent most of us, who were going to be in CORDs, to Taiwan. On route to Taiwan, I stopped in Japan. I took a train from Tokyo to Hiroshima, and spent a day seeing the town. I had reservations for a night train back to Tokyo. I had a long wait in the Hiroshima station. I was sitting in the train station, reading a book. All of a sudden, I felt this hand on my shoulder, and someone talking to me in Japanese. He obviously had been drinking. I studiously ignored him and read my book. Everybody else in the room studiously ignoring the whole thing. The next thing I knew, I smelled something burning. The guy next to me brushed my head. It turned out that this young kid, who was obviously inebriated, had put a cigarette to my hair, and the person next to me put it out.. I continued sitting there reading my book, trying to ignore what was going on. The next thing I know, a couple of policemen approached. They discovered I couldn't speak any Japanese, so they went away and returned with an English-speaking colleague. They expressed their regret about this incident, and so forth. I gave them my passport, which, of course, was a diplomatic passport. There was much discussion, after which I was taken off to a VIP room and put there until the train left. About a year later, I was down in the Mekong Delta, in Vietnam, when I got a cable from the Embassy in Saigon passing along a query from Embassy Tokyo as to whether I was the Michael Cotter who on such and such date was in Hiroshima Airport and had been attacked by someone. It turns out that the individual's father had gone to Embassy Tokyo with money for compensation. I had Saigon send a cable back, saying, "Yes, I indeed was that Michael Cotter, and I appreciated the thoughtfulness, and would they accept the money and give it to a charity on my behalf?" I thought it was an interesting anecdote. I can imagine how perturbed that Japanese father was when this incident occurred, and how it upset the Japanese police when they discovered that it was an American diplomat.

Anyhow, we went to Taiwan and looked at cooperatives, down by Tai Chung, a very interesting trip. It was an exposure to how imaginatively the Taiwanese, even then, were raising a whole

variety of products, and an interesting visit to Taiwan, itself.

So, I got to Saigon on Christmas Eve. I had requested to be assigned to the Mekong Delta. I had felt that having invested 10 months in Vietnamese language training, I didn't really want to go somewhere where there were lots of American troops, and whatever development work we were doing in Central Vietnam was going to be clearly secondary to the war effort. I don't recall now whether it was in Saigon or when I got down to Can Tho, which was the principal town in the Fourth Region and the Delta, that I discovered I was assigned to Kien Hoa Province. We had a week's orientation in Saigon. I arrived in Can Tho on New Year's Eve, 1969. There is something that passes for a BOQ there. I don't know what it was before, some kind of a hotel. Right next to it was a cess pool. Every evening there was a movie on the roof of the BOQ. My first night in Can Tho, I was sitting on the roof of the BOQ, watching of all things *Night of The Living Dead*, watching tracers, and hearing the 105mm howitzers in the distance. You feel very alone in a situation like that. It is your first tour, and none of the colleagues I had studied Vietnamese with ended up in the Delta. I don't think this was like showing up for a first tour in the normal Embassy, where you sort of walk into an extended family, but to end up in Comte, South Vietnam in the middle of a war. Anyhow, I went onto Ben Tre in Kien Hoa Province. Now, Kien Hoa is a province that is between two of the major outlets of the Mekong River. The river has three major outlets to the South China Sea. Kien Hoa is between the two northernmost. It is bordered on the north by Dinh Thuong Province, the capital of which is the major city in the northern Delta. Kien Hoa has been called birthplace of the Viet Cong, and Madam Binh, who was the Viet Cong Foreign Minister in those days and later an official in the northern government, came from Kien Hoa province. The capital Ban Tre had been made famous in the Tet Offensive of 1968, when it was described as the town we had to destroy in order to save. I was assigned to be the Civic Affairs advisor on one of the district advisory teams. District advisory teams in the CORDs and the MAC-V program, consisted usually of just military personnel, because there really weren't enough civilians for all of those districts. Where we could, we had civilian officers from the State Department or AID in some cases. The Ben Tre district team was located in a compound. South Vietnam is divided into provinces which are further subdivided into districts and into villages. Normally, the district advisory team would sit in the principal village of the district, but in the case of Ben Tre, since that was the province capital, the district headquarters were set in a compound, about three kilometers outside the capital. It was simply a beamed compound about 50 meters square with a number of buildings. Our quarters were sort of built into the side of the berm.

Q: *Berm being a ?*

COTTER: A dirt wall, with a ditch, like a moat, outside of it, where you dug the dirt. I think the thing was probably 10 feet high. That was surrounded by open rice fields. Beyond that, about 1 km away were dense coconut groves. Kien Hoa did, and probably still does, grow a lot of coconuts. I also had some great seafood while I was there, particularly shrimp. The other interesting thing about that district was that there was a famous individual, at least famous at that time, popularly called the Coconut Monk. This fellow was a Buddhist monk who lived on a boat in the branch of Mekong, between Kien Hoa and Dinh Thuong. His boat was tied up to an island, where he had a temple and a village. He was quite well known because there were a lot of young men whom he accepted as adherents; young men who were trying to get away from both the Viet

Cong and the government's draft. Every once in a while, the government would make an effort to do a conscription raid on the island. It always produced an enormous protest. But, by the time I arrived, they pretty much left the Coconut Monk alone. He was nominally under government control, but in fact, he pretty much ran his own village.

Q: Was he the man who leaned against the big jar? He never slept lying down, or something like that?

COTTER: I wouldn't know that. I went over a couple times and called on him. He was an eccentric fellow, but quite successful in what he did.

Q: I don't remember. I met him once.

COTTER: You got to Kien Hoa, by the way, by taking Highway 4, down from Saigon to My Tho; then you had to take a ferryboat. There was no bridge that went into Kien Hoa, itself, and indeed, to get to a number of the districts, you had to take ferryboats because there weren't bridges. If there had been bridges across some of the large canals, they had been destroyed over the course of time. The interesting things about Vietnam was how much - and I've seen this since in the Foreign Service, not so much in our service as in other services - comment there is about the tail-to-tooth ratio, i.e. the size of the support system that we have overseas compared to other embassies. The fact is the size of that support mechanism allows us to work a significant part of the working day. In places like Zaire, with some of the other, smaller embassies, the diplomats often had to fend for themselves, spending 50% of their time simply getting things done, and staying alive, and thus only able to work about half the time. Well, in Vietnam, in the boonies, this was true in spades. We spent an enormous amount of time simply managing housekeeping things. For example, radio watch. We monitored the radio 24 hours a day. One or two nights a week - there were seven of us on the team, so probably one night a week - you had radio watch all night. Then, there was a daily trip, up to the province capital to get mail and supplies. That would take one or two people, and generally consume half a day. There were a number of other regular housekeeping chores as well.

Essentially, my responsibilities were to distribute AID commodities. We distributed corrugated roofing, soy enhanced dry milk, and managed a number of other AID projects. One of the interesting things projects, the results of which I would like to go back to Vietnam to see, was an effort to completely change the pig population. Pork is a very important food in Vietnam. The Vietnamese pigs were these potbellied, black pigs that had a lot more fat than meat. AID introduced a western, much meatier pig. Over the time I was in Vietnam, you actually saw a significant change in the quality of the pig stock. It would be interesting to back 25 years later to see what kind of pigs are there now.

The other main responsibility I had was doing the HES, the infamous Hamlet Evaluation Survey, which got a lot of bad publicity in the U.S. press, which suggested that it was a way to encapsulate the war in statistics that really bore no relation to reality. We did a monthly HES. We had a questionnaire for each village in our district. Then, there was a much more detailed, quarterly HES. The questions were, for example, who controls the area, whether the government had control at all times, daytime or never. You filled in the appropriate box. Actually, like most

of these statistical things, it was quite good if used properly. It wasn't very good when all that got published were the statistics that said, "Eighty percent was under government control," without any explanation. Filling out the HES could be difficult, because it always put you in conflict with the Vietnamese District Chief. Obviously, his reputation and promotion possibilities weren't enhanced by the fact that some of his villages were under Viet Cong control. The worse he showed up on the HES, the unhappier he was. This always produced a certain amount of conflict. In the first district I was in, Ben Tre, we could visit about half of the villages in 1970. The other half of the villages, we couldn't get to; they were Viet Cong controlled all the time. I recall one group of villages that we visited once a week. The villages themselves were quite secure, but the road to them was very dangerous. It was a dirt road on which the Viet Cong regularly placed mines at night. Several times a week the motorcycle-pulled little rickshaws that were used for transportation would arrive at the compound with dead bodies in them. The district senior advisor made it a practice for a team of us to go down there once a week. There was a South Vietnamese "Popular Forces" unit, like a local militia located about half-way down the road, whose job it was, in theory, to keep the road clear. However, they much preferred staying in their compound at night to going out and patrolling to keep the VC from laying mines. So, we traveled down the road once a week on the theory that if the American advisors went down the road regularly, the "Popular Forces" had more incentive to check the road. We would drive down this in a jeep with a layer of sandbags on the floorboards and under the seats covered by a layer of flak vests. We would ride on top of this. My successor, who was an Army captain, was killed on that road when that jeep hit a mine. He was thrown out of it, and landed on his neck. There was a certain amount of danger involved. I spent about five months in that district, and then I went down to...

Q: Well, in the first place, just to get this, you were in Vietnam in 1969...

COTTER: Let's say, from the beginning of 1970, until the summer of 1971.

Q: How did you find you were received, working with the military?

COTTER: Quite well. The military, at both the district and the province level, were happy to have someone do things like the HES, and the other civilian things we did, plus I was the only Vietnamese speaker on the team. I was received quite well. The province senior advisor, Buck Kotzebue, was a retired Army Colonel, who was working for AID as the province senior advisor. He and his team were quite good. I had mentioned that I wanted to go to the Delta because there weren't any American troops there. The U.S. Ninth Division had been located at Tan An, a town between My Tho and Saigon. When I arrived at the beginning of 1970, the Ninth Division had, in essence, pulled out. The base at Tan An still had a few people disposing of things. It worked quite well for us because we could send up foraging teams from the district to pick up all sorts of things. But, the military were quite accepting. I enjoyed that relationship. You had to learn how the military did things: radio protocols, how to bring in helicopters, and many other things. If you weren't able to do that, my guess is that you would have had a much harder time. We clearly were living in a military situation, and we operated by military rules more than State Department rules. The military guys out there sort of admired someone who would go out to the villages and do various things, because most of them were much more reluctant to mix. For instance, we would eat bologna six different ways when there was great food to eat out locally, simply

because these guys weren't prepared to eat out. I remember in Vietnamese training, they went through a long explanation of the fish that lived in the fish pond, and how you could eat them. One of the other innovations we had brought to Vietnam was building latrines over fish ponds, which was much more sanitary than what people had done in most of these areas before. Well, of course, we also introduced fish into the fish ponds. The fish would eat what dropped into the pond. There was a big discussion at FSI about whether you could eat these fish. We were assured that indeed the fish would assimilate whatever they took in and were perfectly healthy to eat. In my case, that was very useful, because when you would go out to villages, particularly in the morning, they would serve you a breakfast, which tended to be a bowl of rice with a fish on top and some of this horrific rice liquor that the Vietnamese drank.

Q: *Nuoc mam*?

COTTER: No, not nuoc mam, which was a fish sauce. This was a rice alcohol that smelled sort of like fuel oil, baside, I think, is what it was called. We would try to go out to villages on a regular basis, either to deliver things or simply to talk to the village officials. I found the Vietnamese very open and accepting. Again, they hadn't had much experience with American troops. Whatever bad experiences people may have had when you get a large number of foreign operations in the area, the Delta Vietnamese didn't have. This was my first exposure to how cultures see each other. As usual, children were the most instructive in this regard. We used to say the Vietnamese would call us "long noses," but what got most of the kids was how hairy we were. You would go around in villages, and kids would come up and touch your arm because they couldn't believe the hair. Vietnamese have very little body hair, so kids would come up and just be fascinated by the hair an American had on his body.

After five months in Ben Tre District, I was transferred down to Ba Tri District, which was a district right down on the South China Sea, at the very mouth of the Mekong. Ba Tri was a pacified district where our team could visit all of the villages. We were a three-man team. I was the district senior advisor, and I had a medic - an Army sergeant - and an Intel Lieutenant. The three of us managed things there. In my first district our seven man team included a couple of weapons specialists, who, on occasion, would go out on patrols. They were primarily there to train and work with the local Vietnamese forces. In Ba Tri, there wasn't much need for that. We did a lot more development work. There were a couple notable things about Ba Tri. While on the land there wasn't much war going on, we did have, very extensive mangroves. Where the land there ended, there were over one kilometer of mangrove and then the South China Sea. The sea was shallow for at least a mile out, mostly because of sediment deposited by the Mekong. On the edge of the Mangrove Swamp was a SEAL [the U.S. Navy's Sea, Air, Land, Special forces] base. The Viet Cong used one mangrove both for cover and transportation routes. The SEALs would generally go out on night patrols to interdict that travel. One gained a lot of admiration for them because it was certainly a high-risk proposition. The most military kind of thing we ended up doing in the Ba Tri district team was very often calling in and supporting Medevac (medical evacuation) helicopters because the SEALs would often end up in firefights on their night patrols. At 3:00 a.m., we were having helicopters coming in to deploy out of our district compound in order to go down and get SEALs out of trouble. The SEAL base had two advantages for us. One was that there was a group of Pinochle players there, and the other was that once a month or so they had a Navy supply ship come down to resupply them, so we could

usually count on them for things like lettuce, frozen steaks, and so on. One of the problems with living in the Delta was that we were at the very end of the U.S. supply line. I remember when I arrived we had, in that compound, no generator. The town power, to the extent it existed, would go out about 9:00 P.M. Actually, we had a generator, but it didn't work. We sent it back to Saigon for repair, and we were told it was an old model the Army no longer issued. We weren't a big enough team to qualify for the size of generator they were then issuing, so it was a Catch-22. Nonetheless, we received our monthly supply of two or three fifty-gallon drums of gasoline, to supply the generator. Well, one day the district chief came to me and said, "Look, I have a deal for you here. My brother runs the ice plant in town, which happens to have a gasoline compressor. How about if I provide you with a diesel generator and a soldier to run it, and you turn over the gasoline to me?" I did that quite happily. So, we finally had a generator. However, it was so small that we could either watch a movie or have the lights on, but not both at the same time.

After 10 months in the Delta, (the tour in Vietnam is 18 months generally) I was transferred to Saigon, to work as staff aide to Deputy Ambassador Sam Berger. He and Ambassador Bunker generally chose staff aides from among the CORDS officers. I was fortunate to be chosen. The move to Saigon was a radical change. I had been, in theory, in the Foreign Service, but in fact, seconded, more or less, to the military. I was supposedly seconded to AID, but when you lived out in that part of the world, you were not very AID-like or certainly not very Foreign Service-like. So the move to Saigon was first real experience of working in an embassy. By this time, I had been in the Foreign Service for about two years. Ellsworth Bunker was the Ambassador. Samuel Berger was called Deputy Ambassador. Berger had been an Ambassador in his own right, to Korea, as well as Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia. There are myriad stories, as you know.

Q: Well, why don't you tell me. I would like to hear what you heard about Sam Burger.

COTTER: No, not about Sam. I was talking about Saigon, in general.

Q: Well, tell me, because this is for the record, not for us.

COTTER: Well, working in the Berger/Bunker front office was an interesting experience. Sam was a fairly gruff person. Both he and Bunker were very focused on the substance of what they were doing. Bunker was a gentleman of the old school, who may not have remembered your name but was unfailingly polite to you. Sam was not that polite. I was young and innocent, and when I left, Sam was too busy to do a performance evaluation on me. It wasn't until my next post, when I was mentioning this to my boss, who said, "you've got to have a performance evaluation." I contacted PER, who confirmed that I should have an evaluation. So, I had to send a cable back to Berger and ask him to do a performance evaluation for me, which he did somewhat haphazardly after the fact. Unfortunately, again, this is what Saigon was like. The Embassy was so big and so busy, there wasn't a lot of cohesiveness, even among the junior officers, as to how the system functioned. It was a strange atmosphere. Sam Berger did have two lovely daughters, one of whom was Sherry. The officer who was Bill Colby's staff aide, Tony Allitto, and I, along with Sherry Berger, took one of the "honeymoon specials" to Nepal. Bunker was married to Carol Laise, who was Ambassador to Nepal. Bunker, in true imperial style, had an executive-

equipped DC7 at his disposal. Once a month or so, either Carol would fly to Saigon or he would fly to Nepal. He would usually take staff along. On one of those trips, I met Skip Gnehm, who at the time was a Vice Consul in Kathmandu.

Bill Colby, who headed the CORDs program at that time, was really outstanding. He would have, about once a month, a dinner for some of the civilian advisors out in the field. As I recall, there were generally 10 to 12 invited. He would have us over to his house for dinner where very free-ranging discussions took place. It was a nice opportunity for most of us to come up to Saigon, have a nice dinner, and engage in some conversation. I think it was very useful for Colby because he would get the kind of insight into what was going on in the field that few senior people in Saigon ever got. Once you got a group like this together, you probably got more sensible information about what was going on than you did any other way. It's worth noting that we did, from the field, very little reporting. We got occasional visits from people from the Embassy, but not that often. Frankly, down in the out-of-the-way parts of the Delta, we got much less in the way of visits than did advisors in other parts of the country, that, for whatever reason, were always considered more important. I was in Saigon during the incursion when we finally went into Cambodia.

Q: That was in May or June of 1970.

COTTER: Was it 1971?

Q: 1970.

COTTER: That was before I would have gotten to Saigon. I got to Saigon after. It was May of 1970?

Q: Around then, because I was in Saigon, I went in July 1970.

COTTER: I still believe that the Cambodia incursion was a military necessity and the right thing to do. I know we were much criticized for it, but those of us who were there were aware that Cambodia had long since ceased to be neutral. The large caches of weapons and other material that were taken certainly justified that incursion.

Q: I've been interviewing Winston Lord, and we have been talking about the great indignation, back in Washington, about this invasion of Cambodia. For those of us who were there, what is the big deal. Where is the moral indignation? It wasn't as though we were going into a neutral country.

COTTER: All we were doing was beginning to level the playing field. I must say that I had come out of the Delta with quite a bit of respect for what our government was trying to do. I like the fact that I went to a place where there were no American troops. To this day, I think the Mekong Delta is the heart of what South Vietnam was. One of the problems, of course, was that South Vietnam was never run by South Vietnamese. It was always run by Central Vietnamese. A lot has been written about how Vietnam works; that it is shaped like a dumbbell, a big north, and a big south, and a narrow belt in the middle; and how for centuries, the central area, which couldn't support itself, has managed to rule breadbaskets in the north and the south. I think Ho

Chi Minh was from the center and Diem was from the center. Southerners were always, even by the Saigon government, looked down upon as country cousins, and not taken very seriously. But, people who lived there were good farmers and the heart of the nation. I think they were much more comfortable living under the Saigon government, and what it would have been, than they were under the communists.

Anyway, at this time, I was staff aide, which was essentially pushing papers and making sure clearances were done. You get some interesting anecdote out of this time. We actually had for a while, four Ambassadors in Vietnam. Bill Colby also had the rank of Ambassador. And while I was in Saigon, there appeared on the scene as head of the third region (around Saigon) Ambassador Richard Funkhouser, who had been Ambassador in an African post. Funkhouser first also used the title. I remember one day the Marines called, and said the German ambassador was arriving in a helicopter on the roof. I didn't understand what the marine was talking about, as the German ambassador didn't have a helicopter and wouldn't have been allowed to park it on our roof in any event. Then I recalled we had gotten a call from his office saying that Ambassador Funkhouser would be arriving, and indeed, Ambassador Funkhouser, who had a helicopter, as the head of CORDs in the third region, arrived on the roof. Finally, at one point, Burger had to call him in and tell him that while he might have been Ambassador at one point, he was creating too much confusion by using the title in Vietnam. He wasn't entitled to use the title in Vietnam, and that we already had a confusing number of Ambassadors. So, Richard Funkhouser reverted to just plain Mr.

Q: While you were in the Delta, what was your impression of the problem with the central government, of corruption, how things were being translated to that center, down?

COTTER: Corruption was endemic. I served most of my career in Third World countries, most of which underpay civil servants and public security officials, with the result that all of those officials tend to live on what I call "user taxes." If you want a service provided, you pay for it. When you are paying civil servants or police officials five dollars a month, it is sort of to be expected that this happens. That kind of corruption was endemic. I know that more senior officers were accused of selling goods and other things. At a district level, you really didn't see this. Your Vietnamese counterpart was usually a Major, living generally with his family. In a military situation, I don't doubt at all that all of those people made more money in various ways than their salaries. But, they certainly didn't live ostentatiously. When you got down that far, you didn't see much impact from the central government. We did not have, in Kien Hoa, regular ARVN, Army of the Republic of Vietnam Troops. The only troops we had were regional forces and popular forces, most of whom were commanded by local people, and most of whom, as a result, had affinity with the local people. How much collaboration went on with the Viet Cong is, of course, a different question. There was always suspicion that a number of the "Popular Force" and regional force people were playing both sides of the street, and particularly in a place like Kien Hoa, where parts of the province, for which regional forces nominally had responsibility were not accessible to those forces or anyone from the government. Because those units undoubtedly had patrolling requirements, I'm sure that a good number of them had things worked out that said, "We won't bother you, if you don't bother us." The other option was they were probably going to get killed.

Q: In Kien Hoa, for example, where you say about half the villages were unreachable. Was there somebody sitting back in the Fourth Corps, or something, saying, "We have to get to those places?" I mean, mounting military operations or was it just let go?

COTTER: It was just sort of let go. They were low level efforts. Again, we and the Vietnamese put quite a bit of effort into the regional forces of, and we put a lot of effort in the CORDS program, into providing commodities and other benefits to villages, to try and convince them to come over to the government. The impact of the Tet Offensive was only beginning to be seen. When I was there, it had a devastating effect on the Viet Cong. Actually, I am getting ahead of myself a little bit. I went back to the Delta in 1973, after the cease fire, and I was one of the first tranche of language officers who went back to monitor the cease fire. That was after two Tet Offensives, one of them the one of 1968, and the other of 1972, which had really devastated the Viet Cong. When I got back to Kien Hoa in 1973, there were North Vietnamese troops there. The province that had provided the Viet Cong with troops as recently as 1970, was forced by 1973 to bring in northern troops in order to sustain a North Vietnamese/Viet Cong effort. By that time, I could visit almost all of the villages in the province. Some of them were difficult to get to because the roads were not very passable, but you could visit them all. In essence, by 1973, we had won the war in Kien Hoa. If they had to depend on North Vietnamese troops there, the Viet Cong had lost the war, because the North Vietnamese were as foreign in accent and behavior, practically, as Americans were, to the South Vietnamese. I think this was true in good parts of the Delta, simply because by their miscalculations in both 1968 and 1972, the Viet Cong exposed significant numbers of their critical political and military cadre who were killed.

Q: The villages that were under Viet Cong rule, how were the people living there?

COTTER: Not very well, by all reports, but it is difficult to tell, because you didn't get in. When we got in later on, by 1973, what you found were villages in very bad shape because they were subject to some patrolling during the day and attack from helicopters. Every night the 105 mm artillery that belonged to the district would fire. In theory, they had ranged in on trails used by the Viet Cong. They would fire randomly on those trails. Some people said the regional forces really didn't bother that. They simply had "X" number of rounds, and would fire them off into the coconut groves. But people who lived in those areas certainly didn't live as well as people who lived in areas controlled by the government.. Again, in the Delta, you didn't have the kinds of things that you had up north, the strategic villages and what not, where we gathered people, and put them into villages. That kind of thing never occurred. Most of these folks were rice farmers. The coconut groves were not well maintained because they were dangerous, either from booby traps or from the presence of Viet Cong. People didn't live very well in the Viet Cong areas simply because the Viet Cong didn't have the resources to improve their lives.

Q: When you were back in Saigon, back in the big city, were you getting anything from the junior officer Mafia? There, more than anywhere else, or any other time in the history of the Foreign Service, we had people, who, like yourself, were coming in, and had been out in the District, and really had been seeing things, from the ground, rather than the perspective of the capital. What were you talking about among yourselves, about how things were going, wither Vietnam, that sort of thing? Was there much of that?

COTTER: I'm sure there was a lot of discussion. I know that there was significant unhappiness because the kind of reporting that went up, if it was at all negative, from a reporting officer's in the field, wasn't particularly appreciated. In other words, there was a goal that we were attempting to reach, and reports that didn't support that goal were not appreciated. I remember at one point I came in for some criticism because I had sent up a report that was positive on the Viet Cong situation in Dinh Tuong. It brought down on me the wrath of the CIA station chief. His name was Tom Polgar. They said that I was being negative. They actually sent someone down to the district to talk to me. This was a guy named Frank Snepp, who later wrote quite a controversial, probably quite accurate, book on Vietnam that was suppressed by the CIA, because he wasn't supposed to write it.

Q: A Decent Interval, I think it is called.

COTTER: Frank did a lot more traveling around than a lot of other people. My guess is he probably had responsibility for the Delta, as opposed to other regions. It is hard for me to say. There was certainly unhappiness with the accuracy of some of the reporting or the fact that Embassy reporting in Saigon didn't necessarily reflect what was going on in the countryside. But, again, so little of any of that was focused on the Delta to begin with. My experience in the Delta would have been much more instructive had I served somewhere in Central Vietnam and could have gauged it much more. As I say, the Delta was simply not ever considered integral to what we were doing. Also, I think as a staff aide, and not working in the Political Section, you weren't quite part of that junior officer Mafia as much as you would have been if you were actually working in the Section.

Q: Did you get any feel for relations with the CIA, for example, in the Embassy?

COTTER: No. In the field, you worked some together. I must say, I don't recall any experience with the Phoenix program, in my district. We had CIA people in the province but not the district. The Intel people were Lieutenants in the Army. I think relations with the CIA were okay, except that the CIA was again like everyone else, interested in, not necessarily what was going on, but what we had determined we wanted to go on. My feeling is that our effort in Vietnam would have been very successful. We lost the war not in Vietnam, but back here in the States. By the time I got back in 1973, this was very obvious. That was two years before we left, but we had already started cutting back significantly on the assistance we were giving the Vietnamese. One of the hardest things I ever had to do in the Foreign Service was one of the things we ended up doing back there during my second stint, was in essence, telling the Vietnamese who were accusing us of abandoning them, "No we aren't. I am here as actual, physical proof that we aren't abandoning you." Of course, we were abandoning them. For instance, in 1971 the Vietnamese fired off 105 millimeter rounds every evening. That didn't happen in 1973. Well, maybe, you say, because the place was pacified, but I think the reason was because there was no longer a steady supply of shells. The Vietnamese had to account much better for expendable items than we did. They weren't going to use up shells that weren't going to be replaced. When the war ended, it wasn't a bunch of rag, tag, cousins in black pajamas that came down the pike, it was the North Vietnamese Army driving Soviet tanks. In fact, the Russians supplied that force. At that time, we had stopped supplying the South Vietnamese, essentially. We lost the war because people in the United States were not willing to see it through. The government hadn't

articulated the reasons for it, or whatever, or the press had misplayed it. Now, again, we are now at a time in history when it is easy to sit with hindsight, after Vietnam and the Cold War, and look back on the inevitability of various things. I'm not certain whether the war itself created as much suffering for the Vietnamese people as what happened to the South after they were taken over by the North. In many ways, not only reeducation of individuals, but simply the reorientation of what, frankly, is very free, economy-oriented people. The Vietnamese, at least the South Vietnamese could not have taken very well to whatever form of collectivization was forced on them. How that turns out, I'm not certain. I think we had good and laudable goals, if we had had the ability to articulate it back here and carry it through, it would have been worthwhile. We would have saved Cambodia imaginable suffering. We would have saved the Laotians significant suffering, and we certainly would have saved the South Vietnamese significant suffering, which was due, to a significant part, to us having lost interest in that adventure.

Q: I take it the media didn't cross your path at all?

COTTER: Very little. Who is the woman who wrote the famous book?

Q: Fitzgerald.

COTTER: Yes, Frances Fitzgerald, she came down once, but very few other media got down that far. You had some media who would visit the Coconut Monk, but you would never see them at a district because we lived beyond the Coconut Monk. They would come down from Saigon, on a day trip. Other than that, you found very few journalists who actually came that far down, which was too bad because they generally got treated very well when they came, simply because we would be starved for any company. District teams were usually happy to put journalists up, but we didn't get very many journalists. You had very few in Kien Hoa and very few from Saigon, in general, because it was hard to get to, and because it had a reputation of being a dangerous place.

Q: You left Saigon in 1971. How did you feel about where things were going, at that point?

COTTER: My feeling was that things were going positively, that we finally had gotten engaged in Cambodia, and had begun seriously to try to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh trail. The war was not going badly in the south. You saw less from there than you would have back in the States, with the impact of the press, I think. In those days, you didn't have CNN. We didn't very often get the *New York Times*. We essentially got *Stars and Stripes* and Armed Forces radio, which were your accesses to the world. But, from what one could see in Saigon and where I had been in the Delta, the war was going quite well. Of course, Johnson had resigned over the war, and Nixon had come in. I guess it was fairly obvious by the time Nixon came in, or at least soon thereafter, that one of his goals was to find a way out. One had hoped for a way out with honor, but I'm not sure we achieved that.

RICHARD A. VIRDEN
Wireless File Correspondent, USIS

Saigon (1970-1971)

Mr. Virden was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at St. John's College in Collegeville, Minnesota. He joined the Foreign Service of the United States Information Service (USIA) IN 1963 and served variously as Information, Press and Public Affairs Officer, attaining the rank of Deputy Chief of Mission in Brasilia. His foreign posts include Bangkok, Phitsanulik and Chiang Mai in Thailand; Saigon, Vietnam; Belo Horizonte, Sao Paulo and Brasilia in Brazil; and Warsaw, Poland, where he served twice. Mr. Virden also had several senior assignments at USIA Headquarters in Washington, DC. Mr. Virden was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2011.

VIRDEN: So that was it. Well, I thought about it for awhile and decided to go ahead. One of the jobs that was open was for a Wireless File correspondent; since I had a background in journalism and continued to be interested in it, that appealed to me more than serving, say, on a provincial advisory team.

So I chose that; USIA agreed and sent me to French language training for a few months, then on to Saigon, where I arrived in July, 1970. I stayed until October of 1971.

Q: So you were in Saigon?

VIRDEN: I was based in Saigon, but I traveled all over the south. I moved around in South Vietnam, reporting what was going on in areas like pacification, refugees. I wrote hard news and feature stories for the USIA wireless file; these pieces would appear in military publications like Stars and Stripes and other commercial newspapers around the world.

I sometimes attended the infamous "Five O'clock Follies," to hear what the U.S. and Vietnamese military and civilian briefers were saying and pick up leads on stories to chase down, in Saigon and in the field. I hitched rides on U.S. military helicopters and fixed wing aircraft, Air America too, to get around.

Early on I had an emotional reunion at a firebase near Chu Lai, off the central coast, with my brother Tom, who was then nearing the end of his one-year tour as an Army grunt; he'd grown up since I'd seen him last, as a fun loving teenager, three and a half years earlier.

Q: What was your impression, you mentioned the "Five O'clock Follies," the press briefing that was held at five o'clock, the nickname for it, what was your impression of the media, the American media, there at that time?

VIRDEN: By this time most reporters were aggressively skeptical and anti-war. Remember what period we're talking about here. This was the summer of 1970, and most Americans had pretty much turned against the war by then.

We still had a huge military presence, of course, about 400,000 troops in the south. That was down from a peak of 543,000. We'd started a process of so-called Vietnamization, so we were

reducing that figure gradually. By the time I left we were under 200,000. But throughout that period, we were a major presence.

You had a whole variety of correspondents. It was a very large press corps, from the U.S., Vietnam and around the world. Many were very good, dedicated reporters. Some had been there for the duration. There were others who never left Saigon and “covered” the war from their desks in the city. But most of them were diligent, courageous, well qualified people. I was impressed with them.

I spent some time with them, including more than a month in a makeshift press camp up in the northern part of the country when the South Vietnamese Army crossed the border into Laos, near Khe Sanh, to try to cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail. That was in January and February of 1971. There was a press camp set up somewhere in Quang Tri province to facilitate coverage of this operation.

And, again, I saw a lot of very dedicated journalists doing their job; some of them died trying to get the story of this particular campaign.

Later in life, when I was teaching at the National War College, I was pleased to bring one of the greatest of the Vietnam correspondents, David Halberstam, to speak there.

Q: Of course he was the author of The Best and the Brightest.

VIRDEN: Yes, he won the Pulitzer Prize for that book, which is a devastating analysis of how America’s elite led us into a quagmire in Vietnam.

Q: Yeah. Did you find that sort of you were considered a government flack or something like that by the media people?

VIRDEN: Well, I don’t know about that, I suppose there may have been some who looked at us that way. Most didn’t spend any time thinking about us one way or another; they had a big war to report. The reporters I knew seemed to regard me and the other two wireless file correspondents as simply colleagues. We showed up at the same places they did and reported what we saw and heard.

I remember one feature I wrote that first summer about the so-called “Street Without Joy.” Bernard Fall wrote a book by that title, about the French experience in that stretch of land. Maybe you know that area?

Q: Oh, yes. I’ve traveled it, from Da Nang up to Quang Tri.

VIRDEN: Yes, exactly. Were you in Vietnam at this same period?

Q: I left in July of 1970. I was consul general there.

VIRDEN: Well, we must have just crossed paths then. You left the month I arrived. And you’d

been there for --

Q: 18 months.

VIRDEN: I'm sorry we didn't meet at that time.

Anyway, I went up to that area in July or August of 1970. I flew to Da Nang on a C-130 and then went by Jeep through that string of villages, which were coming back to life in this period. Pacification was actually having some effect.

People had basically abandoned those villages around the time of the 1968 Tet Offensive, considering them unsafe. Now, two years later, relative security had been restored and people were moving back home. So I wrote a feature describing what had been done to make that progress possible; it got a big spread in Stars and Stripes and was picked up by quite a few other publications.

I remember covering a ceremony for a group of Chieu Hoi, defectors from the Viet Cong who were coming over to the government side. On another occasion I interviewed a North Vietnamese POW. A sampling of other topics included a Vietnamese doctor running a field hospital up in the highlands; American legal experts invited to help re-write some of the country's basic laws; land reform; Vietnamese elections; and press conferences held by visiting politicians of a variety of political persuasions. Vietnam was still a huge international story, and there were few slow days.

Q: My impression was -- I wasn't, obviously, in the media side of things -- but there were a lot of really amateur journalists there.

VIRDEN: Yes, well, there were a lot of very young guys -- and a few women -- who didn't have any training as journalists but just sort of caught on as local stringers or runners for some of the media organizations. Some of them learned fast and did a good job and others were opportunists.

So you got a mixed bag, yes. They were not all of sterling character. Some of them were just adventurers and some of them were shoddy journalists.

My general impression, though, was that most of them were dedicated and really determined to discover the reality and report it accurately. They didn't always succeed. I remember standing on the tarmac at Ton Son Nhut with much of the Saigon press corps when Henry Kissinger, then the National Security Advisor to President Nixon, left Vietnam for Pakistan. No one sniffed out that he would take off from Pakistan for Beijing -- and end more than two decades of our non-recognition of China.

Q: Well, I would think you would have been sometimes in a difficult position, where sort of the free media was reporting one way and we were trying to, particularly the military or the embassy side was trying to report something the other way and there you are in the middle.

VIRDEN: Yes, well, I think as a country we had a major problem with what was called the

“credibility gap.” I saw lots of examples of the divergence between the Washington narrative and the on-the-ground reality. One of the worst was something called the “hamlet evaluation system,” under which you got inflated statistics all the way up through the internal reporting channels. It brought to mind that old saying about “lies, damned lies and statistics.”

You had all these numbers about how great everything was going; that included the body count, which was often invented or exaggerated every step up the line, from the lowest level on up. A recent Vietnam novel, *Matterhorn*, reminded me all over again how that worked and how self-deceiving the numbers were.

Q: Yes, whether officials could sleep in the village at night and that sort of thing. One cooks statistics if you can.

VIRDEN: Well, that’s what gave rise to the phrase in those days, the credibility gap. Or think back to old computer terminology, “garbage in, garbage out.”

That was not the kind of reporting we did. Those of us working for the wireless file and U.S. government publications were just trying to relate facts, some of the untold or under told stories that also merited attention.

So, the body count and other such statistics to measure progress in the war, we were not using that kind of stuff. If you believed the figures in the hamlet evaluation system, we were always on the verge of declaring victory – until we lost. We did not do that kind of reporting.

Q: as we were both there, the media tended to concentrate on horror stories or something. This is true of course in the United States. You don’t report on how nice things are here in Arlington, you report on a disaster somewhere.

VIRDEN: Well, that’s the nature of the beast, perhaps. That’s what commercial media, some of them, believe: that “if it bleeds, it leads,” that kind of reporting. To some extent what we were trying to do was counter that by simply reporting some of the other events or broader developments that were also part of the picture but were not being noted.

Q: Did you ever run across times when they would take your story and not publish it for policy reasons, or that sort of thing?

VIRDEN: Yes, once in a while, there would be pressure to try to make things look better than they were and I would feel that from either an editor in Saigon or back in Washington.

An example is that invasion of Laos in early 1971. That was a real test case. The South Vietnamese Army went across to try to cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail once and for all. Unfortunately, it didn’t work very well; they got their tails handed to them.

The United States provided air support, but we did not go in on the ground with them, so it was kind of an early test case of how the ARVN, the Army of South Vietnam, would do on their own. They did not do very well.

There was pressure on us to report this invasion as a success story from the get-go, but we were able to fend that off by arguing that inflated claims would only undermine U.S. credibility and ultimately blow up in our faces.

Q: What was your impression of the government of South Vietnam, its extension into the field, its officials and all?

VIRDEN: My conclusion was that we were backing the wrong side. The government just was too weak and corrupt; Americans had basically taken over most of the war for the South, trying to win it for them. And in the end that couldn't be done.

I'll put it this way: based on what I saw out there, I came to believe we got ourselves on the wrong side of Vietnamese nationalism. Even though we sent a half million man expeditionary force over there we could not change the stark fact that the government of the South couldn't attract the loyalty of its own people.

It's a simplification, of course, but I think accurate. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese and Ho Chi Minh -- as a representative or symbol of Vietnamese nationalism -- were stronger than our South Vietnamese ally. Try as we might, it was not within our power to change that fundamental reality.

Q: Did this leave you with a template for viewing future American policy, as you went around. You'd been in a place where basically we'd backed the wrong horse.

VIRDEN: That's a very good question. Yes, it did; one fundamental conviction I developed at this time -- and hold to this day -- is that military force is a blunt instrument not well suited to solving political problems. We would be better off relying on other instruments, other tools, instead of resorting so readily and so often to military power.

A related observation is that in crunch time U.S. military commanders prefer to rely on U.S. troops -- who are well trained, well equipped and will follow orders -- rather than depend on local allies -- who might fall short in any or all of those categories. We saw this phenomenon when we took over the war in Vietnam, and we're seeing it again now in our reluctance to turn matters over to our local allies in Iraq and Afghanistan until they receive still more "training." This tendency to turn to our own forces is natural enough, but it does not bode well for our prospects in any future proxy wars. And it should make us wary of trusting military commanders to decide when we can safely hand over the keys.

Q: By this time, how'd you feel about a career with the U.S. Information Service?

VIRDEN: Well, I have to say that I don't regret having gone to Vietnam. It was a central event for my generation. It dominated our national life during that period, and in many ways the fault lines that were either created or exposed by the Vietnam War still define to our political life today.

So I was glad I was there to witness it and learn from it. But wartime Saigon was also a corrupt, raffish, cynical place; I was relieved my tour was over and was ready to move on to other assignments.

Q: You left in '71?

VIRDEN: Yes, late '71. I left Saigon in October and Linda and I were married in late December, in her hometown in Minnesota, during a snow storm. Our first assignment together was Brazil, where we went in the spring of 1972.

Q: Well, how did your wife and your family and friends back in Minnesota and all, how'd they feel about the war?

VIRDEN: Very anti-war, very strong feeling there, as much of the country, against the war. This was also the time when Americans were not treating returning soldiers very well, to our shame.

I think John Kerry said this -- and I liked his way of putting it -- during the 2004 election: "You have to separate the war from the warriors and whatever you may think of the war, don't blame the people that are sent out there to fight it. Blame the politicians for sending them."

We failed to make that distinction during the Vietnam War and maybe we've learned from that. The Iraq War was also highly unpopular, but the soldiers who were sent out there to fight it were not blamed for it.

**NATALE H. BELLOCCHI
CORDS
Da Nang (1970-1971)**

**Commercial Attaché
Saigon (1971-1972)**

Ambassador Natale H. Bellocchi was born in Little Falls, New York in 1926. He received a degree in industrial management from Georgia Tech in 1944 and was soon drafted into the U.S. Army to serve in a rifle platoon during the Korean War. His Foreign Service career included positions in Hong Kong, Laos, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, India, and an ambassadorship to Botswana. Ambassador Bellocchi was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 21, 1995.

Q: So you were in Vietnam from when to when?

BELLOCCHI: '70 to '72, and it was quite a shock.

Q: Where did you go?

BELLOCCHI: I was assigned first in the CORDS program for one year. I went up to Da Nang, and then to a small place called Tam Key, which is sort of a wide place in the Street Without Joy up there, in the northern part of South Vietnam. It was a shock because I had been to Vietnam many times as a courier when the French were still there. And the place that we were sent from once we got to Saigon, was Da Nang. Da Nang had been called Tourane and it was a beautiful little seashore village. Cathay Pacific Airplanes used to have to stop there on their way to Bangkok from Hong Kong. In those days propeller craft had to stop someplace; they couldn't go that far. It had been beautiful. And here I got out, and oh dear. I mean there were American military people all over the place. The first thing that happened, a bunch of kids came around, grabbed my watch and ran off. I thought, oh my gosh, what has happened to this place?

John Gunther Dean was then the sort of district director of CORDS up there in Da Nang. I went in to see him before going down to my place of assignment in Tam Key. The night before he had had a dinner for several Foreign Service people in I Corps. When I left the next morning he said, "The only advice I can give you, is that before you get on that little airplane (there was a little airplane to take me down to Tam Key)take a good shot of cognac." I thought, what in the world is happening.

It turned out it was quite a place. We had defenses all over the housing area to protect ourselves. The area was controlled by the Viet Cong during the night, and we had it during the day. If we wanted to go out to the boondocks, which I did on many occasions, the only question was, are you sure you're going to be able to get back before nightfall. It was quite an experience, I must say.

Q: *Was this north of Da Nang?*

BELLOCCHI: Just south of Da Nang. There had been some problem with the Americal Division whose base was on the coast. They had been pretty badly decimated. Units were still going out to the Triple Canopy jungle, which was not too far away, to set up outposts. Once you got away from the seacoast you got into that business. Having been in the military, I had been in the army in Korea, the state of our military there was appalling.

Q: *This was at its worst, wasn't it?*

BELLOCCHI: They were half-dressed and ill-shaven, dirty and undisciplined. I mean this was just unbelievable. You couldn't help but understand right away, why we had to get out of there or we wouldn't have an army left. There were a lot of things that happened during my time there. Of course, fighting still persisted in our province. I had an occasion where...a little boy had just been orphaned by the fact that some of our troops had been in and shot up the village. The parents had been shot as Viet Cong. And how could they possibly know who was Viet Cong and who wasn't? It was impossible. Some of the Vietnamese had weapons merely to protect themselves. Then somebody came who claimed she was the aunt of the little boy, and I guess everyone finally agreed that it was best that she take the boy. Whether she was the aunt or not, who knows, and what she wanted the boy for. That kind of incident is really sad. It was really clear that we had to get out of there.

Q: We were already withdrawing our forces, weren't we?

BELLOCCHI: Yes. But this was a part of Vietnam where there was still some fighting going on. Down in the south it had been much more pacified, but up in the north it was still risky business to go out in these helicopters and little villages in the hills away from the coast somewhere. Everyone was fine and friendly but you better be sure you get back on that helicopter. They better come and pick you up or you're stuck for the night, and in bad shape.

Q: What were you doing?

BELLOCCHI: Well, CORDS, and I was the deputy, what they called province senior adviser. A military man was the senior adviser. You had AID people there, most of them were giving away wheat and helping start little projects. But by the time I was there, the Vietnamese province governors, or whatever they're called, chiefs, they had been handling groups of American advisers who'd been passing through that place for so long, that they sort of said, why don't you get over there and do your own thing. And that was really what we were doing, except some of our military, always very energetic, wanted to actually get things done. Occasionally they would join in on some clean-up operations out in the hills. On a couple of occasions I would jump on a helicopter and go out there, and actually do a little warring while I was there. I'm not particularly attracted to that kind of thing, but I was curious. It kept us busy, but I was quite anxious to get back to something I knew, and after a year when something opened up in Saigon I was delighted to go down to the embassy .

Q: Before we move down to Saigon, what was the morale like? The military was bad, how about within the Foreign Service people there?

BELLOCCHI: In the Foreign Service or AID, or any of those others, it was there for the money primarily. There really was not much enthusiasm. You didn't see any kind of dedicated people really out there that wanted to improve the livelihood of the people, and that kind of thing, no. They were there to put in their time.

Q: By this time, I guess, everything had been tried that could have been tried, wasn't it?

BELLOCCHI: They were pretty well along. The Americans in their own way had done a pretty good job in many ways. They did have these provinces organized. They had been pacified in some of these areas. But we dealt primarily with provincial militia. We didn't deal with ARVN at all.

Q: ARVN being the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the regular army.

BELLOCCHI: We never saw them in Tam Key. We dealt with the militia, and the militia was there defending their own farm lands. So these guys were far more dependable frankly to work with than the ARVN who was out to see what they could get out of all this.

Q: Did you have any feeling--again, we're talking about when you were in the province--about corruption?

BELLOCCHI: Oh, yes. You'd load up a truck full of bags of wheat, and it starts down from Da Nang, by the time it gets to where it's going you've lost maybe 20% of it. They're paying off all the way down. Oh, yes, it was rampant all over the place. And even at that level I'm sure there was much bigger stuff going on above it.

Q: I take it at this point, even though you were part of the 12 years experience of a one-shot deal for your year there. Had people, I'm talking about the Americans, gotten pretty used to the way things were done in Vietnam, and not fighting the system?

BELLOCCHI: Not trying to change the world. Yes, absolutely. That's why I say there wasn't anybody there that was trying to change the world, not trying to change them. They were there to put in their time, and do their little bit.

Q: The peace talks were going on, but no great progress was made.

BELLOCCHI: Well, there wasn't progress, and it was still at that time the idea that we were leaving, but we were turning over everything to the Vietnamese to do the job. We'd given the ARVN all of the equipment they needed. We'd established a civil authority in the provinces all over the place. The idea was increasingly, let them do it themselves as we leave, hoping that somehow they would be able to manage it. They called it "a decent interval." I think there was a lot of enthusiasm for this idea. An awful lot had been done in that sense. There had been a lot done but it wasn't the time. To try to do that while they're still fighting a war was just, I think, beyond reason.

Q: Then you went down to Saigon. You were in Saigon approximately from when to when?

BELLOCCHI: One year up north and one year in Saigon.

Q: So this means '71 to '72. Who was the ambassador then?

BELLOCCHI: Bunker was still there. Sam Berger was the deputy ambassador.

Q: What was your impression of the embassy when you went there? Here you had been sitting in this little province and all of a sudden you're in...

BELLOCCHI: ...in the big embassy. My office actually was in the old embassy, and not in the new one, but of course we'd go to the new embassy quite often. Well, you're struck by guards all over, soldiers all over protecting you, and protecting the embassy--quite a large bureaucracy. The ambassador and deputy ambassador had sort of a coordinating office. Charlie Hill was one I remember. Hawk Mills was another one. They were fairly high level Foreign Service people. They were acting as coordinators just for the ambassador's office. And then you had the economic section that wrapped up the AID program people all working together. You had a huge station.

Q: Station being the CIA.

BELLOCCHI: It was very large. We'd been there too long. Even our political officers were getting wrapped up a lot with people trying to determine who was who. But also in the corruption and the high living that went on, mostly without their wives.

Q: I was there '69 to '70 for 18 months. It was not a healthy atmosphere.

BELLOCCHI: It was very unhealthy. I was very pleased because when I went down to Saigon, I was the only Chinese language officer in the embassy at that time, and Bunker wanted me to be sort of the liaison with the Chinese community. I was given the title of commercial attaché, but clearly there was no commerce being done there. It was a good title for working with the Chinese community. In that regard, my wife, who was set up in Bangkok, and it was agreed I could have her come down. There were only four or five of us that had our families in Saigon at that time. It was absolutely the right decision because all of our dealings with the Chinese...they're great party-givers, and the girlie restaurants are common in Cho Lon. But because I had my wife we did all of our entertaining and socializing with the Chinese community as families. And they, of course, were very accommodating in bringing their wives for a change to a party. But that made it much easier for me to conduct myself in the way we should conduct ourselves, by having the family there. It made a big difference.

Q: Because so much of what went on was sort of a bachelor existence. Americans aren't very good at this sort of thing. I mean, we either feel uncomfortable, or you go overboard.

BELLOCCHI: And we socialize a lot, so therefore it was a bad situation. Most of the Americans that were there were bachelors, but so many had people they stayed with. It was not a healthy atmosphere, and a lot of them got wrapped up in these things. I was just pleased that I could have the family there.

Q: Again, I want to talk about the '71 to '72 period. How could you characterize the Chinese community, and how did they fit into the scheme of things?

BELLOCCHI: They controlled the economy, of course, just as they do in most southeastern Asian countries. Many of them were very, very helpful to the Vietnamese authorities. Many of the Vietnamese and Chinese had known each other for years. I think many of them made themselves a fortune. But they also cooperated very much, and were very helpful. I remember one of the Viet Cong campaigns out in the countryside outside of Saigon. Several of the Chinese owned a lot of textile factories around the area. They kept their people employed even when they were not able to produce anything because of the Viet Cong interdictions in the roads that prevented any delivery of the goods. They just kept them employed. They were almost like the family, almost like the mafia type of situation where some of these guys are very important, and very rough, but they have a whole group of sub-businessmen that sort of rely on them. And these leading Chinese were very paternalistic in the way they dealt with their subordinates.

I can remember the Economic Minister asking me if I could help in talking to the Chinese community to keep the price of rice from increasing. It was during a Viet Cong campaign when traditionally the price of rice would start jumping up. And they did. And I think in that sense they

were very cooperative. The leading businessmen all took care of themselves, and once Saigon fell most of them wound up in places like Hong Kong. They all had passports that got them out. So common. Many and most of them that went to places like Hong Kong, did not survive very long in the business sense. Their ability to make a lot of money, was in knowing the country, and the officials, and the human relationships. Once they got into another a Chinese area, where they could even speak the language, they didn't know how to operate and they lost their money very quickly.

Q: Did you see, because I think it has some pertinence to almost what is happening in the United States, the Chinese have this renowned ability to go in and sort of set up business, small stores, what have you. And the Vietnamese seem to be less, you might say, business aggressive. When I was there at almost the same time, there was great concern in Vietnam because we had a lot of what they called third country nationals, TCNs, and among them the Koreans were coming in, and the Koreans are great business people, and they were pushing the Vietnamese aside, and also the Filipinos, but particularly Koreans. The Koreans also seem to have this instinct. Did you find this?

BELLOCCHI: The Chinese are entrepreneurial, it's almost part of the culture, and it has been for hundreds and hundreds of years. Yes, they're entrepreneurial, and because their society and culture is based on human relationships so intensely that they're the best networkers in the world. Even here in America if you go around the Chinese-American community, they have hundreds of associations. Chinese Americans join as many of them as they can, and they network around the country. I'm amazed when I go to meetings here, and find, hey, there's so-and-so from Chicago. There's another one from Atlanta. They get together all the time, they're networking all the time. That's their strength. And it's true in southeast Asia as well.

Q: Now you're at the embassy looking at the bigger picture and I guess you were getting some reflection although you were concerned with the Chinese element, what were you getting from your friends at the embassy, or dealing with the sort of mega situation, whither Vietnam? We're talking about '71 to '72.

BELLOCCHI: In that period of time, I think what I would say is the lower levels in the embassy and AID, and all the others, were still complaining about the corruption of Vietnam as if it was unique to Vietnam. Those of us who have traveled around southeast Asia know that it was part of the whole culture in the whole area. There was nothing unusual about the corruption in Vietnam. Number two, I think that by that time I was certainly impressed with the Vietnamese leadership of the ministerial level, for example. There probably was some corruption. I'm sure there was, but by and large I was impressed with how little there was. There were very many dedicated people in that leadership. I took part in the negotiations between the Vietnamese and some of our oil companies when they were starting to negotiate exploring out there in the area. Boy, it was really very straight, open, transparent. They were very, very careful to keep it very open and transparent so there wasn't any corruption. I remember the Economic Minister was trying to keep the price of rice from going up, and he was always very open the way he was doing things. So I think there were a lot of our senior people in the embassy who had gotten to know the senior people in the Vietnamese government and had considerable confidence in these people. They were doing a pretty good job actually. It may have taken 12 years before it got to that stage, but

certainly at that stage there were some pretty good people in the government.

Q: You're pointing out something that I think anybody who is looking at these oral histories, and later things, but it seems to me there's a generational thing. I was basically a consular officer, but had the same thing. After I'd been around for a while, I knew there was a certain amount of lying, and everything else in order to get a visa. But the young officer would come in and coming out of the American culture, horrified; somebody lied to me. Or somebody tried to pay me off. And after you've been around for a while, okay, it's just part of the game.

BELLOCCHI: It's part of the system.

Q: You turn them down, but you don't turn this into...I think the younger people tend to be terribly puritanical, because they're just not ready for this coming out of our society. Today it would be different.

BELLOCCHI: If you don't voice indignation, they take it to be an acceptance. It's not acceptance but you understand what they're thinking.

Q: So I think this is why often one will find many of the protests and the screams coming more from the junior ranks than the more seniors. It's not because the more senior is jaded, or less tolerant, it just understands the situation.

BELLOCCHI: It's just understanding. It's not just a morality problem, but it's an understanding of the problem.

Q: When you got on the plane at Tan San Nyut, you and your wife, what did you think whither Vietnam when you left in '72?

BELLOCCHI: Well, clearly we were leaving, I mean, the U.S. was leaving Vietnam rather quickly. I think there was some optimism that they would be able to hold out. I really do. I think that generally...maybe there was some secret assessments of which I was not a part, where they thought that they couldn't. But I think that by and large people at that time were thinking, we've done a fairly good job and we're giving them the wherewithal. Part of my job as "commercial attaché" was to take part in the local procurement program. Instead of buying things offshore for AID and all the other things that were going on, increasingly we were looking for local suppliers to do that so the Vietnamese could start to generate their own system. I think that there was some optimism that maybe they could hold out.

Q: I felt the same when I left in '70 too.

BELLOCCHI: It may have been unrealistic but it was the case.

Q: It was in many ways a military defeat too, which is always different from just a collapse.

BELLOCCHI: And that's why I think there's some criticism of a recent book of McNamara that he doesn't mention the Vietnamese, there were a lot of Vietnamese that devoted themselves

completely to the cause.

Q: McNamara just came out with sort of a mea culpa book--this is Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense for most of the Vietnam time, and which has gained a lot of attention, but it's all America, and it's all, "We did it wrong." I think it's terribly limited but its gained a lot of notoriety.

BELLOCCHI: Yes, and I think it did not bring in the Vietnamese, and the amount of sacrifice that those people made. You know, wrongly or rightly, they did make an enormous sacrifice.

DAVID WINN
CORDS
Long Khanh (1970-1972)

David M. Winn was born in Texas in 1942. He graduated from Swarthmore College in 1964, received an MA from the University of Texas in 1966 and an MPA from Syracuse University in 1969. He served in the Peace Corps and then joined the Foreign Service in 1969. He has served overseas in Vietnam, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, France and Senegal. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: So, you went to Vietnam, you were there from when to when?

WINN: I went on an 18-month program from the summer of '70, and I extended six months in order to get Arabic, so I was there from the summer of '70 to the summer of '72.

Q: Where did you go?

WINN: To Long Khanh Province, which was about three hours by road northeast of Saigon, Xuan Loc District. We were all assigned to districts, not even a provincial capital. We were assigned to the lowest administrative level, smallest, Xuan Loc District, Long Khanh Province, near a rubber plantation, a beautiful rubber plantation. Long after I left, in 1975 it was the last major town to fall before the North Vietnamese moved into Saigon.

Q: When you got there, how were you received? How did they get you ready?

WINN: When I got to the Vietnam training center?

Q: Well, were you besides French, were you getting good preparation?

WINN: Well, there again, I remember us being bored. We could see even then pretty much the futility of the whole thing. Getting this kind of hodgepodge of various courses in again superficial public administration, a lot of lectures and slides; endless lectures and slides on the various defense forces, the semi-civilian defense forces, local level black pajama, and also how

the paperwork on how to issue sheet metal to build schools. It was an odd combination of development and self-defense and that sort of thing. We also had weapons training by the way. There was a week at Fort Gordon, Georgia, learning how to fire various weapons, but I remember long and tedious lectures. Most of it was language training, but extremely boring stuff, all of which one drew on once you got out there since you had to invent the job on the ground. We never did figure out what we were doing out there. We were out there so Lyndon Johnson could say we also had this civilian program in the field. The military we were working with never really figured out exactly what we were doing either. I figured out what I was doing. We were driving out in these little hamlets keeping an eye on the Vietnamese development programs and again trying to stay alive, you know, not getting killed. But it was kind of a bizarre, very bureaucratic training, endless slides and lectures, endless charts on the Vietnamese.

Q: First of all when the military gets into it, you get into the wiring diagram.

WINN: Well, it was a mostly a military run thing, I mean CORDS, I haven't even used the term yet, C-O-R-D-S, basically AID with a heavy security component.

Q: Did you get involved with the embassy at all?

WINN: Oh absolutely not. No, the Embassy, I don't even recall going into the Embassy. In fact, I know I didn't. We landed in Saigon, but we never went to the Embassy, we went to some outlying building to get some ID cards, but, no the Embassy, no they never came out to visit me and I never went in to visit them.

Q: You never got one of these provincial reporters poking around?

WINN: Never, the only person that came out was Frank Wisner who was doing a survey from Washington through Vietnam on how the FSOs are doing who are assigned to CORDS. I never had once in two years anyone from the embassy visit. Although we were a three-hour drive, but I remember being irritated at that frankly. I mean, it's bad enough to be assigned to the program and then to be utterly ignored. There wasn't even lip service paid. Now, I was at district level. At province level there was a Foreign Service officer as Province Senior Advisor, a fellow who was on his last tour, Park W-O-L-L-A-M, long since dead, and then of course above him at the highest level was another FSO named Funkhouser.

Q: Richard Funkhouser?

WINN: Yes, who later retired. He had been assigned to Vietnam from being ambassador to Gabon. You know the famous story. He was sitting out there as ambassador to Gabon and he got a cable that said, "Give us the reaction in Gabon – a worldwide cable – to Lyndon Johnson's speech of last night." He sent back three words, "Gabon slept on." Then within a few days he was in Vietnam. He was the ultimate boss there. Johnson personally had him punished.

Q: What were you doing?

WINN: I was trying to milk it for all the adventure I could, and all the military lore. I'm not

saying that the tour was not valuable subsequently, although it's not as valuable as some like to make out. I might have had a more useful tour at a real Embassy. I had a Filipino assistant, wonderful guy, and a Vietnamese. The three of us, this weird group, would get in a little civilian four-wheel drive vehicle and we would drive around visiting hamlets and checking on their self-development projects. So, what I did I would accompany this very conscientious, very professional Filipino guy, me just a body trying to learn the ropes and make-work development projects. I would do a tiny bit of political reporting for Park Wollam, never for the embassy. We did have a presidential election. I did some political reporting, but day-to-day I would literally reinvent the wheel. How do I get through the day without sitting in this compound, but without getting killed? One of the young captains in the compound there, he and I would go out and he was a clearly an intelligence type, and I used to find it kind of exotic to go around with him, probably a mistake, branding myself. He later became head of DIA, Pat Hughes, lives right out here in Rosslyn, so we became fast friends these 30 years. But, the poor major that was the head of our district team, he was wondering what was I doing down there, because I was officially his deputy and with an astonishing amount of authority in this team for a first tour Foreign Service officer. So, he was trying to dance around me and figure out what was he doing with this jerk he's got; he just wanted to run his operation. We lived in a Vietnamese compound, so we were the odd men out among the Vietnamese. Later on we had a huge influx of refugees and I actually had a focal point.

Q: Where were they coming from?

WINN: They were coming from the north as things began to fall apart in Long Khanh, a Catholic province. All these Catholics up in the north came to Long Khanh, already, full of refugees that had come down in '54. That gave me a little more of a focal point, working with the Vietnamese. I always felt, though, that I was never really in control. I always felt that the Vietnamese were always pulling one over on me, you know? I said to these guys, "We're outsiders in their country and they're running it." I always vaguely felt I was being taken for a ride and they knew it, but did my best to try to hold up and try to keep an eye on the U.S. budget at least.

Q: Did you run into the French farmers at all?

WINN: Yes, quite a bit. I didn't make a habit of it, but they did have one who was especially hospitable. He had a plantation about half an hour into the middle of the rubber trees, and it was something right out of *Apocalypse Now*. There's this guy out there with his beautiful Vietnamese mistress and he may have had a wife in Saigon. He was a very exotic fellow. I still have a picture of him. I would go out there by the pool and all these French plantation types and French Embassy personnel would be around the pool. One day I came out here and he said, "You just missed the Viet Cong. They came through here and kind of looked around and if you'd been here you would have been dead." That was my last visit to the pool. But it was so funny, this exotic world, beautiful Vietnamese women and mistresses and right out of as I said *Apocalypse Now*. But they pretty much kind of steered clear of the Americans; they didn't want us round.

Q: Essentially, they worked out a modus vivendi.

WINN: Modus vivendi, yes.

Q: They would pay the Viet Cong and the Viet Cong would not bother them.

WINN: That's right, they wouldn't bother them. This guy found me amusing and I found it kind of fun to go out there a few times and I translated some things into English for him. I remember we'd be there poolside and the American helicopters would circle around looking down at the ladies. Modus vivendi. Our problem was the Viet Cong mines. You never knew what road you went down you weren't just going to get blown to hell. The compound was directly assaulted twice during my two years there. That was exciting.

Q: What did you do?

WINN: Well, we were sitting there watching, I'll never forget it, Barbara Streisand in *Funny Girl*. In those days we had the old 16mm films and I was the operator. We were sitting there as we would at night. I heard a pop that I later came to recognize, a hollow thunk out in the rubber trees, and I looked around and the room was empty because my colleagues had recognized the sound of a mortar being fired. Then this huge blast headed toward the edge of the compound. Then this pop, pop, pop, rounds being "walked" closer and closer and I thought, I better turn off this projector. I followed my colleagues. Basically it wasn't a very determined ground assault, but I remember the noise, the sheer amount of noise that you just don't get in a movie, of rounds coming in and firing back. Then they put one of these gun ships that they still use in Afghanistan, it was bizarre. You couldn't see the plane itself, but you could see this line of fire that was emanating out of apparently nothing in the sky. They would just rake the areas around out compound. Anyway, that happened twice. I think we did have some Vietnamese killed that night, but no Americans. Some wounded. I remember a great fear I had for the rest of my tour was not mortars, but sappers. I realized that those Vietnamese could get under anything. They'd get under the wire and once they got into the compound they would begin throwing satchel charges around. So, we had to put a lot more claymore mines out. The occasional dog would come by and get blown up. As I say, as the only civilian, you get very familiar with weapons. I had an old grease gun, which was more of a danger to everyone else, of no use to me, but I figured I would go down shooting. I don't know why I just put it in the floor of the car when I went out. I'll never forget I was having dinner with Pat Hughes the other day and he said, "You know, I was just thinking about all the times we nearly got killed in Vietnam." I said, "What on earth are you talking about?" He said, "All those times we were out driving around and times at the rubber plantations. I later learned you know, that we had just barely missed an ambush there." It was news to me.

Q: What was the talk of you, I mean you were really talking to military colleagues, they were the people you were with?

WINN: Yes and it was all nuts and bolts. It was pretty boring stuff. I was the fly on the wall. I remember making a tape of a typical evening's conversation and I wished to hell I had that tape today, but there's always a radio crackling in the background, constant radio chatter. We were an advisory team, but the conversation was mainly nuts and bolts about this operation or that operation. We had of course U.S. military operating in the province. It was pretty basic stuff. The air of cynicism about the Vietnamese will to fight was pretty hopeless, but we were there to do

the job. I don't recall much indignation about the demonstrations back home. I don't recall it coming up very much.

Q: Did you get involved in military operations yourself?

WINN: Not per se. I went out on a couple of all-day patrols, just to keep my side up, actually put on a uniform took a lot of pictures, just to be able to show these guys that I wasn't going to stay behind. I didn't have to do it, probably not a good idea, but other than that, no. The other unauthorized thing I did was to go around with Pat Hughes and watch him interview Vietnamese agents, which was silly of me. I was compromising myself, I said, "what a hare-brained thing to do," but I found it more interesting than going out and looking at chicken coops. But military operations per se, no. I have a vivid memory of one day when three American guys American guys festooned with war paint and bandoleers of bullets came out of the forest - they were what were called LURPS [Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols]. These guys had been out there for weeks and had just turned into animals. To this day I'm kicking myself for not getting a picture of them. They surpassed anything that Hollywood could have come up with. They lie in wait and kill people from ambush and then move on.

Q: Long range?

WINN: Reconnaissance patrol or something.

Q: They take them out of a helicopter and drop them and then they have to make their way back.

WINN: I remember thinking, how can they ever reintegrate into civilian society, but I guess they melded back in. Another of my many vivid memories – we were all sitting in a jeep. I would go out with my military colleagues all over the place. We'd just ride around and we were sitting in the middle of the compound and one of the Vietnamese had his grenade launcher pointed up and he absentmindedly pulled the trigger. This thing went straight up into the air and was going to come straight down and kill us all. So, we ran like hell and damn if it didn't come down and blow up the jeep. The point of this story I saw so many accidents or would come on the scene after. So many people were killed in Vietnam from accidents. I remember a guy reached in his jeep to pull his gun out and a string had caught on the trigger and he just took a whole burst right in his belly, I was right around the corner.

Q: Well, I know that, I was, 18 months I was consul general in Saigon. This was '69 and '70 and I left when you. We had all these American civilians, but our main problem was accidents on Hondas.

WINN: Yes, I can imagine. Oh, the traffic, well, you know, I hit a little girl on a bicycle, that's quite a story. Sorry to interrupt you, but I'm on a roll. I was driving outside and we could never leave the compound at night, but I remember late one afternoon I was driving back and a little girl on a bicycle rolled up right in front of me and damned if I didn't hit her square. We were always hitting people. You know, these traffic accidents were horrific. She went flying through the air and there was blood all over the windshield and I thought I had killed her. I took her and got her to the American hospital and she had severe scalp lacerations and that was all, thank

God. That was the longest night of my life. I thought I had killed her. It turned out she was fine, she also had a clubbed foot from birth. To make a long story short, I arranged for the U.S. military surgeons to correct her clubbed foot, and I've often wondered how good a job they did, what became of her, where is she now? When visiting her in the hospital I saw so many of these young Americans with their legs blown off. I wonder about this lady. She'd be long since grown of course, with her clubbed foot, whether that operation was a success. I tried to help her, I followed up in the six months remaining in Vietnam; she had this corrective shoe and whatever. But I extended six months. They said, "You know, what do you want to do next?" I said, "I want to learn Arabic." They said, "No, no, no. You can have pretty much any post you want, but you don't want Arabic. Another two years out of it. Do you really want to go and be on ice another two years without an EER to speak of?" I said, "Yes, I want to learn Arabic. I said that from the beginning." Finally they relented, but they said, "We don't have another class. You have to stay in Vietnam another six months." So I did and went off to Beirut and Arabic.

Q: Well, by the time you left, you got out in what '72?

WINN: Well, the summer of '72, yes.

Q: What was your feeling? I mean obviously you were getting the grand overview from what one small district, but what was your feeling about whither Vietnam at that time?

WINN: I still have my letters, and I must say there is a tone in my letters back home that we're on sort of the wrong side. I just saw so much determination on the other side and so much corruption and lack of enthusiasm on our side and so much cynicism on the part of the American advisors that I just couldn't bear it. It looked to me like kind of a lost cause by the time I left.

Q: What about the corruption side? Were you able to get a good view of that?

WINN: Pretty good view. I remember the then CIA chief came through there. A famous guy, brown glasses. I remember him talking to me.

Q: Colby?

WINN: Colby came through, that's right. He came out there and took me aside, more than any Foreign Service officer ever did I might add, and sought my views on corruption. I do recall telling him and he nodded knowingly. He was really up on it. There seemed to be quite a bit of corruption from what I could see. You just never knew, I always felt I was being diddled, the whole two years I was there, trying to stay ahead of the corruption, but never really succeeding. But a few I must say, particularly the Vietnamese colleague I worked closely with, some were extremely dedicated. I often wonder, were they all swept away?

JOHN GUNTHER DEAN
Deputy, CORDS
Da Nang (1970-1972)

John Gunther Dean was born in 1926 in Breslau, Germany and was educated at Harvard and the University of Paris Law School. His career included posts in Vientiane, Togo, Paris and Danang and he was ambassador to Cambodia, Lebanon, Thailand, India and Denmark. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

DEAN: I would not go that far. Students, and for that matter every citizen, have the right to differ. I also have no problem with demonstrations or night vigils. It is violence that I deplore. I did have a slightly different problem, an issue which I still have not resolved in my own mind. It turns around the role of a government servant - civilian or military - and how to react to receiving orders with which he disagrees. Specifically, when the Secretary of State tells me, as a Foreign Service officer, that I have to go to a certain post and I disagree with the policy, what should I do? In my case, I always decided to go. The only alternative is to resign. I went from Harvard in 1970 to Vietnam. I had seen the anti-Vietnam demonstrations at home. I had been involved in the Paris negotiations on Vietnam. I ardently believed in the negotiations. I still believe today, that first and foremost, regardless who is our adversary, let us find a way of sitting down and explore whether we can find a negotiated solution. That is my profession. In my opinion, diplomacy is in part the art of trying to convince others of the mutual advantage of our policies or actions. But above all, as a Foreign Service Officer, I accept to go where the Secretary of State or the President believes I can be of greatest service to the country. Hence, when I received orders to go to Vietnam, I went as Deputy for CORDS in Military Region One. In 1970, we had five U.S. divisions in that military region alone. Before we get into my assignment to Vietnam, I would like to express my gratitude for this year away from the "pressure cooker." I learned a lot at Harvard: how the world was changing and continues to change. Intellectual institutions look at any problem from many different points of view. There is never unanimity on any one point of view. Hence, I was willing to accept some others having a different view from mine or that of our government. Perhaps I also learned something about dissent and how to differ with my superiors. I still believe today that I owe my country the best assessment I can give, even if others disagree with my evaluation. If I differ on a policy, I believe an honest Foreign Service Officer should make it known. Silence is not an option. Personally, I did not make my career by ingratiating myself to my superiors. Many of the things I had seen and heard about in Vietnam shocked me, but I felt that, as a Foreign Service Officer, my duty was to serve the country, Just like a military officer who gets orders to go to war, I felt that if I was assigned to Vietnam to work with our military leaders, I had no choice but go - and I went in the summer of 1970. I was detailed by the Department of State to the 24th Corps in Military Region One, which was the region in the northern part of South Vietnam against the DMZ.

Q: When did you go out to Vietnam, and when did you return?

DEAN: June or July 1970, and I left Vietnam in July or August 1972.

Q: What was the situation in South Vietnam at that time when you got there?

DEAN: The South Vietnamese Government was headed by General Thieu. General Thieu had established a certain amount of political stability since the 1960s when a number of Vietnamese

generals had toppled Ngo Dinh Diem and vied among themselves for power. But North Vietnam was determined to unify the country. During my period in Vietnam, the U.S. withdrew our divisions from Vietnam. We “Vietnamized” the war and left the South Vietnamese to oppose their northern countrymen. The U.S. provided the funds and weapons to the South Vietnamese military forces, as well as advisers to assist the South Vietnamese to withstand the northern drive to bring all of Vietnam under its control. We also assisted in the economic and social development of South Vietnam. It was a privilege to work with Ambassador Bunker on the civilian side, and General Abrams and General Wyant on the military side. Ambassador Bunker's assistant was Charlie Hill. While we may not have had the same politics, we certainly had a good working relationship. The country was governed by a group of Vietnamese dedicated to opposing militarily the expansion of North Vietnamese communism. The South Vietnamese army, navy, and air force were competent but the war had been going on for years without diminishing the will of the North to unite Vietnam under its control. In addition to the regular Vietnamese army, there were provincial forces and regional forces all over South Vietnam. These forces had American advisers. In my military region, I had 1,100 advisers. 100 of them were civilian advisers, and 1,000 were military advisers. The headquarters for Military Region One was in Danang. I moved into the house formerly used by an American admiral which was commonly referred to as the White Elephant.

Our job was to help the Vietnamese regional and provincial authorities in both military and civilian affairs. In short, I was in charge of the American advisory effort for Military Region One. But more important than our advisory effort in 1970 was the presence in our military region of five U.S. divisions. The entire U.S. effort was under the 24th Corps. The first commander of the 24th Corps in my time was a four-star Marine General, an aviator. He was followed briefly by Marine General Robinson. Then, the Army took over the Corps. Lieutenant General Sutherland was followed by Lieutenant General Dolven. My last boss was Major General Kroesen, who became a four-star General and Commander-in-chief of the U.S. Army in Europe. But by the time General Kroesen took over in late 1971, all U.S. divisions had left Vietnam and we had only an advisory function to the Vietnamese. May I add that I got to know General Kroesen very well and I think the world of this excellent soldier. Let me say a word about my work. The position of Deputy for CORDS (Civilian Operations for Reconstruction and Development Service) to the Commander of the 24th Corps was assimilated to the rank of Major General. The person who held that position had a dedicated helicopter at his disposal. Nearly every second day of the week, DEPCORD's duty was to meet with the advisers in the field and see what was going on, and what headquarters could do to support the advisers in the field. One of the military advisers under my command was a full colonel. He was killed. He tried to land on a U.S. ship. It was he who usually briefed me in the morning, at 6:00, at my house, on what happened during the night in the military region. Our region extended from the Demarcation Line (DMZ) to the next four provinces southward, and included the city of Danang. At 7:00 a.m. was the Commanding General's briefing at the headquarters of the 24th Corps. In a U.S. military installation, about 20 minutes by car from my house in the city of Danang. The first day I attended the Commanding General's briefing, I could not answer any questions on what had happened during the night. Thereafter, I asked one of the colonels under my command to give me a “pre-brief.” I said to him: “You brief me one hour before I go to the 7:00 a.m. meeting. I don't ever want to be caught being a dummy.” In the course of the 7:00 a.m. briefing, we might be told that a certain military post was overrun and the American adviser to the Vietnamese military had lost his leg, or an eye. At that point, the

Commanding American General could turn to me and say: “Dean, what are you doing about it?” “Sir, I am flying up there and see whether medical help has been given, and whether I have to repatriate him or replace him. I will give you a report in the afternoon.” Sometimes, it was a different kind of a problem, for example, taking care of refugees who were fleeing from violence. At one point, in 1972, Quang Tri Province, the northernmost province of South Vietnam, was completely overrun by the North Vietnamese. In the process, in April 1972, the North Vietnamese had surrounded the provincial capital where 100 American advisers were huddled together, awaiting rescue, in order to prevent our advisers being taken prisoners. I decided to fly with the helicopter dedicated to my duties to Quang Tri City and take out as many Americans as I could. I was able to take three or four trips from Danang to Quang Tri City, and every time would take seven or eight people out. On my last trip, as I was going up with American Consul Fred Brown (Frederick Z. Brown), we were shot down over Highway One, about 15 kms south of Quang Tri City. Fortunately, the rifle shot by hostile forces hit the oil line of the helicopter and not the gas line. I would not be here to relate the story because the helicopter would have exploded. Our helicopter dropped to the ground like a bag of potatoes and we hit the ground hard. We were shook up. The helicopter could not go any further. There was a may day call, i.e. an American in distress and in need of help. Another helicopter came, under fire, to pick us up and lift us out from the spot where we had been shot down. We were taken to an installation near Hue where I asked the U.S. military whether the Vietnamese could not give us some tanks so that we could try to rescue by land the U.S. advisers for whom I was responsible. I was told that this was no longer feasible. Perhaps 24 hours later, General Hudson of the U.S. Air Force, was flown to Danang and it was from there that he organized the extraction of the remaining 50 Americans from besieged Quang Tri City. The entire operation was carried out while North Vietnamese tanks were firing into the installation. We took out not only Americans but also many South Vietnamese who had been fighting the forces from the North. The extraction by American helicopters from the beleaguered city took place at night. The pilots were so hot that they flew without clothes, except for jockey shorts. The helicopters hovered over the extraction site just long enough for the people to climb into the helicopters. There was no time to land and take off. It was also too dangerous. We got everybody out who was supposed to leave. The Vietnamese Governor of the Province and the key employees of his staff were air-lifted out to Hue.

Q: Did we have anything with which to retake Quang Tri?

DEAN: No, not at this stage. By April 1972, there were no more American military units in Vietnam. We still had aircraft which could bomb the advancing enemy and give the South Vietnamese forces an opportunity to push back the Northerners. After the fall of Quang Tri City, I was told by one of the top people in Saigon that I would not be allowed to go home until the South Vietnamese had taken back Quang Tri Province.

We did take the province back, in June 1972, and I was allowed to go home one month later.

Q: The South Vietnamese had some of their crack divisions...

DEAN: They had some excellent troops and some very good generals. They fought well on the whole. The Governor of Quang Tri was evacuated to Hué. I saw him daily and I urged him to keep his provincial administration intact. In this way, he administered in “exile” the refugees

from Quang Tri Province in Hué. Our advisers helped him by providing food, tents, and wood for cooking. Three months later, the Governor of Quang Tri was back in his province after the South Vietnamese military had retaken the province. One of the advantages I had in the 1970s was that all the Vietnamese senior military officers and civilian officials had been trained by the French and spoke rather good French. This made it easy for me to communicate with them. Most of the senior Vietnamese officers and officials were dedicated and decent. But the war had been going on for so many years that the population had become weary. The destruction was tremendous. People had been fighting since the early 1950s. Before fighting the French, there had been the Japanese occupation. Certainly, the people in the countryside were tired. The Vietnamese military had American advisers and American-supplied weapons, but the war-weariness also permeated the troops. Not every war story relates the heroic behaviour of the valiant fighting forces. In the extraction of the surrounded Vietnamese forces and their American advisers in the Citadel of Quang Tri City, I recall the pusillanimous behaviour of an American adviser which taught me a lesson.

In Quang Tri City, in the compound in which the U.S. advisers were lodged, there remained only one air-conditioner functioning. It was April - beastly hot. That lone air-conditioner was run on a small generator and cooled down the code-room for sending messages. While all the advisers - civilian and military - regardless of rank, had to stand guard all night long, the Lt. Colonel in charge of the Advisory Unit was sleeping in the air-conditioned code-room. After the extraction, the American advisers complained about the bad example set by their leader. Shortly after the story got around, I received a phone call from the American Commander-in-Chief in Saigon. He said: "John, do you have any sons?" I replied: "Yes, I have two sons" "Would you ever want them to be serving under this lieutenant colonel?" I said: "No. This guy does not perform very well." "What are you going to do about it?" "Well, I decided I was going to give him a bad Efficiency Rating." The Commander-in-Chief, a four-star American General, said: "John, you prefer charges against him" and he hung up. That means: have the officer court martialled. On my staff, I had a lawyer and he drew up charges against the Lt. Colonel. The Lt. Colonel had been on the promotion list to full colonel. He was taken off the list. He was a West Pointer. His career was ended and he returned to civilian life. Under fire, the man had failed in his duties as a leader. On the whole, the American advisers were an outstanding group of able, dedicated people. But the behaviour of some of the support troops left something to be desired, especially when it came to black marketing. The advisers in the field were mostly fine soldiers and acquitted themselves with distinction. Vietnam was a war where the American soldiers got little support from the home front. It mattered. When I came home from the Second World War on a troop transport ship, there was a band playing at the wharf in New Jersey and young ladies with donuts and coffee came aboard to welcome the returning heroes. When I came home in 1972 from the Vietnam War, after two years and one month, there was nobody to greet you. Not only were there any festivities but nobody talked about their experiences in the Vietnam War. It was more like people wanted to forget about that chapter in our history. It took time for the folks back home to realize that the Vietnam War, like all wars, had caused hardship, wounds, and bad memories.

Q: I have to say that when I came back from Korea in 1952 or 1953, nobody was interested. You just sort of came back.

DEAN: In Korea, we had done our job and militarily it was a "draw." In Vietnam, we lost. That

word, "lost," is only being used today. It was not used from 1975 until the end of the 1980s. Let me go back to some of the outstanding work done by our American advisers to Military Region One. It also shows what CORDS, the Civil Reconstruction and Development program, was all about. Refugees by the thousands were streaming out of Quang Tri Province. They preferred fleeing to living under the communists. From Quang Tri they walked to Thua Thien Province whose capital is Hue, the imperial city of Annam. But Thua Thien was also under attack, so the refugees walked close to Danang. These refugees had nothing but their clothes on their back, or perhaps a small bundle slung on a stick over the back. The American military forces had left by that time (1972) but the neat white barracks had remained. These barracks, made of wood, were spic and span, with showers, toilets, and screens. They stood empty. So, I telephoned the American Commander-in-Chief in Saigon and said; "Sir, I intend to turn over this former American base to the Vietnamese refugees." He replied: "John, you are in charge" and hung up. I decided that his reply was enough and I did not ask for any other opinions. I turned over the empty barracks to the refugees for lodging. Others gave them food, mostly non-governmental agencies (NGOs) from all over the world, including many American organizations. Yes, the refugees partially destroyed the barracks. As it got colder, the refugees used the wood to keep warm, and they dismantled certain buildings to obtain the wood. But I thought that the war was about people, about trying to make the refugees feel that our side cared more about people and their welfare than the other side. So, I made the decision to turn over a former U.S. military installation to the refugees coming down from Quang Tri Province. Not every military man agreed with that decision. After all, they might have preferred to turn over this facility to the Vietnamese army. I turned over another former small American installation to the refugees because they kept on coming. That installation also was partially destroyed by them. Working with senior army flag officers helped me to learn about decision-taking. If you are the field commander, you rarely have the time to request guidance from headquarters. The decision has to be taken on the spot. The immediate situation requires action. This experience in Vietnam undoubtedly influenced me when I was faced with difficult situations in Cambodia, in Laos, in Lebanon, and in India where the tactical situation on the ground often required immediate action. In all these posts, I had to make quick decisions and my experience in Vietnam made me realize that "Time is of the essence." Take responsibility. Do it. If your superiors don't like it, they can remove you. As I look back on my time in Vietnam during these war years, there was a sight which bothered me then, and still sticks in my mind today. Every day, at 7:00 a.m., I had to be at the briefing of the Commander of the American military presence in MR1. A Vietnamese civilian drove me from my residence in Danang City to the headquarters of the 24th Corps. On the way to the military headquarters, I saw Vietnamese - old and young - male and female, on top of the huge mounds of leftover food from the plates of our military, searching for food, for their own consumption. They used a stick with a sharp point in their search for edible left-overs. Seeing these poor people, in the early hour mist, on top of garbage piles, with the headlights from cars bringing this picture into focus - darkness giving way to the sight of misery - made a deep impression on me. The misery caused by war is a memory I still carry with me today. One of humanity's better qualities is compassion. This experience and sentiment felt in Vietnam played a role later on in Cambodia. I found it difficult to leave the Cambodian people to a fate which I feared could be a genocide. Perhaps this sense of compassion is one of the differences between Dr. Kissinger and myself on the Cambodian tragedy. Perhaps I don't see the entire global picture as those in charge in Washington, but I do see the suffering humanity and I am affected. I am on the spot. Is that one of the differences between a field commander and his superior sitting in an

office far, far away?

Q: Did you have any contact or get any feel for what was going on in Washington?

DEAN: No.

Q: Was it just a different world?

DEAN: I had very little knowledge of what was going on outside of Vietnam, except from reading the Army newspaper. I felt I had a job to do in Vietnam, and people had confidence in me. I tried to do my best. I saw things in war which were despicable. I also saw acts of great bravery, or ordinary people just doing their job - Vietnamese and Americans alike. Let me recite another experience which will underline the importance of good leadership. Back in 1970, when we still had American divisions in Vietnam, I was up in Quang Tri Province when I saw an American tank column coming out of an incursion from Laos. As they came out of Laos, they were surprised in Quang Tri Province by North Vietnamese troops who pursued them. When tanks are in danger of being captured, the soldiers get out of the tanks and run toward friendly lines in the hope of saving their lives. I happened to have been there, standing in back of the American Brigadier General speaking to American troops, when they arrived in a safe area. He said: "Men, you go back and get these tanks. These tanks are going to turn against us. We can't afford to have our tanks in the hands of our enemy. Go and get them!" The answer of the troops was: "General, up yours. Go and get them yourself!" The man was relieved of his command. What he should have done was: "Men, follow me. I am going to lead you. We've got to get our tanks back. We can't let the enemy take over these tanks in good condition and use them against us. Follow me, men!" I have tried to apply this lesson in my role as leader of a team: Lead by setting a good example.

Q: Did you find at this point of the war that the American military, particularly at the troop level, was beginning to not disintegrate, but there were a whole series of things, including...

DEAN: You did have fragging. I was aware of that.

Q: You might explain what fragging is.

DEAN: Fragging is throwing a grenade from the rear, usually against an officer who is disliked by the troops. It's using explosives to eliminate a member of your own team. What I noticed in Military Region One was that most soldiers were counting the days until their tour of duty would come to an end. The average American soldier in a fox-hole was alone with his buddy in an isolated advanced position, and he acquitted himself with valor and a sense of duty. They were in my mind great guys. I also had under my command young Foreign Service Officers on their first tour of duty, assigned to some out of the way district in Thua Thien Province, or in the hills of Quang Nam Province, etc... Many a night, these distant, isolated districts came under attack by the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong. How many of these young men, assigned to help in rural development, education, and hygiene, came under attack at night? Was this the kind of duty they expected when they had entered the U.S. Foreign Service? I have the greatest respect for these young FSOs at the time. They learned about leadership, how to set an example. Some of them are

today ambassadors. They did not sign up for that kind of hazardous duty in Vietnam. Nonetheless, the Foreign Service officers assigned to CORDS in Vietnam carried out duties far removed from what is generally associated with traditional diplomacy. When I had to fly to some distant field hospital and decorate an adviser who had lost an eye or a limb, I understood the meaning of “duty” and “service to your country.” I liked the Vietnamese people and I had a good relationship with their leadership. The South Vietnamese were beginning to worry - “Are we being seen as the stalking horse of the Americans? “Are the North Vietnamese painting us South Vietnamese, as collaborators?” I still wear today, with some pride, cufflinks given to me by General Thieu when I finished my tour of duty in Vietnam. I was asked by Ambassador Bunker to go to the Presidential Palace in Saigon, and I was awarded a number of Vietnamese medals for my service in Vietnam. Another realization I gained during my years with the military in Vietnam was that war hurts mostly civilians. I also gained the impression that most American generals don't engage troops lightly and prefer a negotiated solution to war. Senior military officers know what it means to ask soldiers to risk their lives. Politicians very often don't take sufficiently into account the results of violence and war, both on our soldiers and on the civilians of our enemy. The experiences I gained in Vietnam were very useful for me in the positions which I was about to receive for the next 20 years.

Q: In Vietnam, who was the head military commander while you were there?

DEAN: General Abrams. Years later, I went to his funeral in Washington. He was an excellent chief, indeed. Once a month, the top brass, including the 4 Depcords, assembled in Saigon to be briefed and to exchange views on what was going on in the four military regions. General Abrams presided. On occasion, he could be very outspoken with those who may have made a mistake, even with other top generals under his command. General Abrams was also a very private person. Sometimes, late at night, he would listen to classical music. He was one of the best. He was replaced by Freddy Wyant. His style was different. He was less aloof than Abrams. We got to be friends and stayed in touch for many years. He was in charge when the Quang Tri invasion occurred and we worked together closely during that period. He came often to Military Region One and he was still in charge when South Vietnamese troops retook Quang Tri Province in July 1972. I learned from General Wyant that when you are in charge, that means you must take the decision and you are held responsible for the result. Often, he would say: “Don't come to me for advice. I have confidence in you. Do what is necessary.” That style of leadership helped me to do what I did later in Laos. Not everybody appreciated that kind of leadership. I remember, I was reprimanded in Laos by the Secretary of State for answering the Prime Minister's question when he asked for advice, for not referring the question back to Washington. I assume that Washington was afraid that I might give advice which was not “politically correct.” We will discuss it in our discussion on Laos.

Q: I would like to know a little more how you operated. You are saying the young Foreign Service officers were performing well - the Foreign Service officers assigned to CORDS.

DEAN: Very well.

Q: I assume that you flew by helicopter to the outlying districts where the young FSOs were stationed?

DEAN: Yes. We only had advisers - civilian and military - in regions under South Vietnamese Government control. Certain areas in South Vietnam were written off to the Viet Cong and obviously there were no South Vietnamese Government presence there, nor American advisers.

Q: Basically though, it was really the North Vietnamese who controlled areas in MR1 not under South Vietnamese Government control, wasn't it?

DEAN: Whether you call them North Vietnamese or Viet Cong does not really matter. There was some support in the outlying districts for Hanoi's struggle to unite Vietnam, for nationalism and for ending fighting which had lasted for a couple of decades. Our FSO advisers tried to help the districts to improve the conditions of life of the poor farmers. For example, young officers in a small district or in a small town would say: "I am going to get you some seeds to grow some corn." Or they might say: "I can get you some lumber so that you can repair your house." Or "We will get you some pigs to diversify your farming." They might have a literacy program, I recall that during my tenure in MR1, CORDS helped to keep functioning the University of Hue. After the 1968 debacle in Hue, we helped the Vietnamese rector and professors to reopen the university. Final examinations were being given at Hué University during the fall of Quang Tri Province, in 1972. The graduation of a new group of civilian students was essential to the future of Central Vietnam. Our CORDS advisers helped the university teachers to supervise the exams, provide security, and make the university function. We received an award of gratitude from the University for our assistance.

Q: You spent quite a bit of time flying out and talking with the senior officials of the region.

DEAN: A great deal. I visited regularly the 4 provinces under CORDS control. I also worked closely with the major urban centers. Danang was a relatively important port and the hub of Central Vietnam. During my tenure in Central Vietnam, I received an instruction from Washington to protect the famous Cham Museum. The message said that President Nixon had received a request from Phillip Stern, curator of the Guimet Museum in Paris, asking the U.S. to ascertain that the Cham Museum in Danang would not be destroyed nor damaged, as the museum in Hué was in 1968. With the U.S. advisers to the Mayor of Danang, I went to look at the Cham Museum. I learned that the museum was entirely dedicated to the preservation of Cham art. The Chams were carriers of Hindu influence which is reflected in their sculptures and their temples. Their art is similar to the sculptures at Borobudur in Indonesia. Cham temples can still be seen in Central and South Vietnam. The Danang Cham Museum is an open air structure - the building has a roof, but is open on at least one side. Every item in the museum is locked into a wall with a steel rod. Hence, with metal rods, the art pieces could not be stolen. This museum survived entirely intact. I asked the mayor to send a military detachment to the museum to protect it from greedy traders cutting off heads of the sculptures for resale abroad. A group of soldiers was assigned to guard the Cham Museum in Danang. Today, that museum is one of the great tourist attraction of Vietnam. It is certainly the most outstanding museum of that particular art form in the world. In 1999, the French published a guide book with reproductions of each artifact in the Cham Museum and offered thousands of volumes to the Danang Museum to be sold to tourists. In the foreword, there is specific mention of President Nixon's Instruction to the American authorities to help protect this unique museum.

Q: At the Danang level, how did you find dealing with the Vietnamese Commander? Was General Lon still there? I have heard from other people that General Lon was more a political general and had large warehouses full of his stuff. In other words, a lot of corruption there. Did you find this?

DEAN: I am quite sure that there were abuses. As for the general you mention, I was in Vietnam to help the South Vietnamese to withstand North Vietnamese efforts to topple the Saigon regime. I tried to understand and work with South Vietnamese civilian and military officials. They had mostly been French-trained and spoke fluent French. They came from a rather privileged class of people. Their wives sometimes used the position of their husbands to increase their material well-being. Some generals were less action-oriented than others. Some of the senior military officials also had second thoughts about how they were perceived by their own people so as not to be seen as "puppets of Americans."

We could at times be quite heavy-handed by wanting to run the show by ourselves. This tendency obviously changed after the American military units had left Vietnam. Perhaps the general you referred to was a more cautious person. The general in charge of Thua Thien was a very scrappy general who led his troops himself. Some Vietnamese military in 1972 were also asking themselves if perhaps this war was not going to lead to a victory, would the Americans stand by them in time of difficulty? It's easy to say "He did not fight hard enough," especially if he is sitting in a very comfortable easy chair in Danang or in Saigon. I once received a book which was dedicated to me with the words "We manned the walls of freedom together." Yes, I was in the front lines on the ground, having my windows shot out, some times being physically targeted by the adversary. The man who dedicated this book to me was sitting in a comfortable office back home, thousands of miles away from the military confrontation. I am sure he worried a great deal, but it is not the same when you are in the field facing physical danger. You asked about General Lon and the Vietnamese generals. Some were good generals. Some may have had sticky fingers. But we had our own problems among American soldiers. Let me cite the example of my own orderly. Three out of four of my orderlies were punished for abuse of my commissary privileges. I cannot change others, but I tried to be a worthy representative of the United States. Setting a good example was more important to me than pointing fingers at others.

Q: Were we concerned about the generals - the reputation was there of General Lon, who was spending more time aggrandizing his personal fortune than leading... Was that a concern?

DEAN: Definitely. It was also a concern later on in Cambodia, trying to shore up the military to do the fighting. But as time went on - and that is the difference between being a field commander and being a political observer - you see it differently when you are on the ground than when you are back in Washington looking at the global picture and wonder how it fits into the relationship with the Soviet Union or with China. Colonel Jacobson, who was the Deputy Head of CORDS, was a legend. He was a tough, likeable colonel who thought our mission was to have South Vietnam win. I came to CORDS with a reputation of being a negotiator. If I could have negotiated, I would have negotiated. But I could not. I was merely a small cog in a big wheel. But I always asked myself - and that was going to be a leitmotif in different periods of my life - on whose side is time. I fear that some policy makers misread that terribly. All I can say, I had great

respect for all those who carried out their duty with candor, strength and determination. There were abuses, yes. There were abuses by Vietnamese and perhaps also by some Americans, but that is focusing on the warts.

Q: I am trying to touch various elements, including the overall picture and the warts.

DEAN: The overall picture was that in 1972 you could see a certain battle fatigue setting in both in the United States where the war demonstrators got more vocal, where people in Congress were beginning to criticize our policy as for example Senators Church and Kennedy, and in Vietnam where some elements were beginning to question whether President Thieu could withstand Hanoi's efforts to take over the whole country. Before leaving the subject of Vietnam, I would like to say a word about a great American: Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. He was a fine human being, a great patriot, who saw the picture accurately. He was not afraid to criticize our military on "body count." He was not afraid to send candid messages to Washington in which he set forth his doubts about certain policies. Would we be loyal to our friends and allies to the end? I thought Ambassador Bunker, who came up to Danang quite often, was a loyal supporter of our policy, although he probably saw problems ahead. Ambassador Bunker knew whatever he was doing was for his country and not for his own glory.

Q: How did you work with the Political Section in Saigon? They would send their gallopers out to...

DEAN: I had very little contact; practically none with the Political Section in Saigon. We had a Consulate in Danang and that was its function.

Q: I was going to ask about the Consulate. Who were Consuls when you were there?

DEAN: I knew two. Fred Z. Brown and Terry McNamara. I had a perfectly good relationship, but their role was largely as observers for Embassy Saigon. CORDS officers were supposed to be doers. As I said earlier, Fred Z. Brown was in my helicopter when we both got shot down. Terry McNamara was a brave officer who later went on to become Depcords in Military Region Four where he made a name for himself.

Q: Did you ever run across John Paul Van?

DEAN: I worked with him. I also went to his funeral. I knew his girlfriend very well.

Q: Which one?

DEAN: who was there when he died.

Q: Were you...

DEAN: I saw him regularly once a month at the briefing session in Saigon. He was a strong personality, a military man with strong convictions about our role in Vietnam. He was in Two Corps, which was a particularly difficult region because most of the Hill Tribes lived in that area.

Keeping the Hill Tribes from supporting the North Vietnamese and have them handled in a way that they would support the government in Saigon was a challenging task. John Paul Van was certainly the most recognized personality in the CORDS program by the media for his outstanding service.

Q: Were the Koreans gone by the time you left?

DEAN: No. We had Koreans, but they were not in I-CORPS. We had two Australian advisers who received the Victoria Medal in our region. That was prior to my arrival in Vietnam.

MICHAEL E. TOLLE
Refugee Officer
Saigon (1970-1972)

Michael E. Tolle was born in Kansas in 1947 in Kansas and educated at Georgetown. He went to Vietnam as a Civilian in 1967 and as a member of AID in 1970. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

Q: You went out to Vietnam from when to when?

TOLLE: I left in June, 1970. We took a fairly circuitous route including a week in Taipei in which we were ferried around and shown a number of agricultural projects and things. It was an orientation for the type of work we were expected to try to transplant into Vietnam. I spent some time in Hong Kong and fell in love with that city, of course. I brought my wife out to a safe haven. There is a long story involved in that which we can get to later if you think it is relevant. She was technically not supposed to go. Let me step back here. I graduated in 1969 at which point the woman with whom I was going out and in love with, who was a student at the language institute here, dropped out after her sophomore year. We got married. She then went to a local business school to learn to type and take dictation because her goal was to go to Vietnam with me. This, by the way didn't make my in-laws very happy...their honor student daughter dropping out of school to marry somebody and go half way around the world to a war zone. She accompanied me on the trip out in June, 1970. She stayed with my mother who had been living in Manila since 1966 and I went on to Taipei, Hong Kong and then Saigon. So I would have been there approximately from June, 1970 for a full two year tour.

Originally my tour was to be 18 months as they had thought that my wife would remain in the States. At that time there was a freeze on dependents going to Manila. I managed to circumvent that with great difficulty because there was no additional quarters, my wife moving in with my mother. At this point my tour was extended to a full two years. If you kept your wife in the States it was 18 months, if you brought her to safe haven it became two years. So I spent a full two years in Vietnam.

Q: When you arrived in Saigon did you know what you were going to do?

TOLLE: In a sense, not exactly, because unlike most of the young people who were to be DSAs, the civilians, I was not hired as a CDO, community development officer. I was hired from the beginning as an assistant relief/rehabilitation officer, refugees. From the very start I was in a different category and I was the only refugee officer in CORDS 20. So, I knew I would work with refugees. This was part of the deal in my own mind that allowed me to go there. Of all the people who needed help, clearly the vast number of refugees needed it the most and I felt I could work in this program without any particular problem. So, I knew I would be in refugees, I knew I would be assigned to what was known at the time as the War Victims Directorate in Saigon. However, as to my exact position, no, I did not know prior to my arrival. Immediately upon my arrival, and I emphasize immediately, I was rushed through two days in Saigon and then sent up to the central highlands to Nha Trang, the II CORPS headquarters at the time, specifically to be sent out to Lam Dong province for an anticipated refugee movement that they knew was coming and they needed someone there. Lam Dong is a beautiful place and one of the backwaters of the war. In fact, even in TET of 1968, I think it was one of the few province capitals that wasn't attacked. It was an out of the way place.

At this time we had at least acquiesced in Lon Nol's coup in Cambodia against Sihanouk. In the resulting turmoil, the Cambodians took advantage of the opportunity to expel ethnic Vietnamese who at that time were largely urban dwellers and constituted the petit bourgeois, if you will, and perhaps higher, the middle class, in Phnom Penh. It was these people who became known as the Vietnamese Repatriots from Cambodia who were to be brought to Lam Dong province for resettlement. I was told that we would be getting approximately 5,000, that they would arrive at about 200 a week, that it was going to be a fairly leisurely move. I was to be there for a little while, it wasn't to be that big a thing.

Within a very few days after arriving I was informed that instead of getting 5,000 we would get 10,000 and they would arrive in the space of three or four days. They were just literally going to descend upon us. So, I hit the ground running. There was simply no other choice. Within a week after my arrival the planes started arriving at the airport and the people started getting off. Now, as refugees go, these were a unique group because, as I say, they were not peasants, rural farmers rounded up, they were the urban middle class of Phnom Penh. They came well equipped. It was remarkable what they brought with them. An entire restaurant came with all the tables and chairs, for example. The waitresses came as a group. I remember an individual showing up with a motorcycle that I desperately desired. Rumor had it, although I never personally confirmed it, that a madam and her stable came with them. In other words, it was a truly remarkably well equipped group of refugees although by and large ill suited to rural living. Whether this was oversight, I don't know. I have no idea what happened here. But, the people arrived and it was a time of...it was probably the most fulfilling time, when you have an immediate crisis things...I live well in that environment, I don't have any problems when I am busy.

Q: What was the government structure of the area that you were plugged into?

TOLLE: In Lam Dong province..the province consisted of two districts. On the government side there was the GVN government, the province government, headed by a province chief, an ARVN colonel.

Q: *ARVN being army of Vietnam.*

TOLLE: Yes. His staff, both military and civilians who were representatives of the various ministries in Saigon. There were two districts. They were quite large. Much, much larger than you found in your average Vietnam situation because of the low population density in the highlands. In fact, the population of the province was grouped entirely along the QL20, which was the national route from Saigon to Da Lat. Not too far off that route there wasn't anything at all but various assorted animals and VC, etc. Administratively it was divided into these two districts.

We had on the American side attempted to duplicate the structure of the GVN. In other words, the provincial GVN officials were advised in many cases on a one to one basis by a provincial team. I was assigned to the province team, I was not assigned to a district. I was located in Bao Loc, which is the capital of the province. My assignment was to be counterpart to the director of social welfare for Lam Dong who was an employee of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Saigon, a civilian. So each of us in this team, we were advisory team 38, stationed at Bao Loc. The military lived in a compound outside of town. The civilians, and it varied from three or four of us, lived in the standard USAID compound with all the standard USAID billets and furniture in the middle of town. I very quickly got out of that compound and actually got into a house that USAID owned.

At that time our province senior advisor was a colonel by the name of John Thompson, an outstanding individual. Our deputy province senior advisor was a civilian, a man by the name of John Ford. After that it was all military. When I arrived there were no other civilians in the province with the exception of the police advisor, who was technically a civilian but certainly more warlike than any of the military there. I, in effect, became the third civilian in the team. Because the province was low priority, because it was low population and not central to what was happening, we did not duplicate to the extent that many CORDS teams did. We had our district team. The district senior advisor would be a major, of course, and the advisor to the district chief who was an ARVN officer, usually a captain. We had two of them. Now, keep in mind that one of the districts was located in Bao Loc, so we had three compounds. The American provincial compound military, the American civilian compound and the district compound. So, all of our district level people were military, there were no civilians, nor were there ever any district civilians that I was aware of in Lam Dong.

My work, although consumed with refugees, once the initial rush was over and things began to slow down, I asked for and very gratefully received the opportunity to expand my work into many of the other areas, what was known as the New Life Development officer at the time. We had not had one. All of the many other development projects were either not being monitored or being monitored by military individuals as much as they could. But, the team itself was your standard mixture. Some of the military were truly committed, sensitive people and some of them were stereotypical, quite frankly. We had a MILPHAP team which is a military public health advisory program. The MILPHAP team had their own little compound set up in there. Truly the navy lives well regardless where it goes, by the way. They really lived well.

So, the structure and advisory relationships varied on an individual basis. If you were the type of

individual who could get along with the Vietnamese or who made an attempt to, then you tended to do so. However, if you came in with the attitude, then, of course, you didn't. One could find any number of examples of both of these.

My ace in the hole was the Vietnamese language, of course. No one else on the American team had anything more than what you might call a smattering of market Vietnamese. Now, this was not initially as much of a benefit as I thought it was going to be because my training at VTC had been by Vietnamese women, almost all of them from the Delta/Saigon area. So, I was trained to speak southern Vietnamese. I ended up in the central highlands where the dialect is different. But this particular community was dominated by northern refugees and northern Vietnamese is very different. It has very harsh tones in it. I recall being considerably shocked to show up at a meeting and not understand what they were saying. I had not expected that. Had I been sent down to the Delta, I would have, I think, fit in more quickly in terms of language capability. I actually had to bring an interpreter along in many of my discussions, which I did not anticipate doing. This was particularly a problem because Vietnamese interpreters were in short supply and I frequently had to use a Montagnard interpreter who would interpret from Vietnamese to English, and both were learned languages for him. So, that clearly didn't work. After a few tries I tended to use them as assistants and bodyguards, guides, etc. I, then, regardless of communication problems, attempted to do it myself.

Q: What were you doing when you were resettling this initial group of refugees?

TOLLE: Just about anything that needed doing. In other words I was an expeditor. The function really of the advisory effort was to plug into the various levels of the GVN and to have your own chain of command. Now, the Vietnamese government was characterized by a number of things, not the least of which was the influence of the French system upon which it was patterned, which we would joke was simply designed to do nothing. Let's say the social welfare ministry chief, my counterpart, would not go to the province chief. He wouldn't go to any of the other service chiefs. There was simply no communication. He would communicate up to his boss in Saigon and he would receive his directions. In other words, vertical communications in the GVN worked quite well, although somewhat one sided with everything coming down and very little going up, but at least it functioned. Lateral communications, let's say at the province level, which was my personal experience, was essentially non-existent. But the situation with the refugees was one that required enormous lateral communication. Each of the service chiefs, agriculture, etc., all had a part to play in this and initially in the reception of the refugees, they played an excellent part. However, if the province chief was interested the job got done, if he wasn't interested it stopped getting done. He was interested particularly because these were Vietnamese and weren't just refugees from the VC area. These were people that they expected to meld into the society and become supportive.

Q: It must have helped some that they had a bourgeois background, too.

TOLLE: To an extent I think that it did. I wasn't able to determine really the extent of this because being largely bourgeois the camp emptied fairly quickly and went to Saigon. They weren't interested in becoming farmers in the central highlands, which was a good thing because we never provided them with any land. But initially the effort was superb. Of course the

Vietnamese are very good when they wanted to be at making a good show. When that first plane arrived we had the delegations and the students were there and the banners were there, the whole nine yards. My counterpart, with whom I established I think a fairly good solid working relationship because he spoke essentially no English and the fact that I spoke Vietnamese and he spoke southern Vietnamese, helped, did his job and the province chief made sure that the others did their jobs. I can still recall meetings that he laid it out in no uncertain terms, very much for show, of course.

So, for the first few months the initial resettlement period was handled quite well. My job tended to be filling in those little gaps in one way or another. When something didn't work, something wasn't ordered, something ordered but wasn't received, you could always go to your American counterpart and he would use his vertical channels to get it done. So, I was an expediter. I can recall, for example, having one of the girls rush up to me about the first day of the arrival exclaiming that there were no can openers for the canned food to be handed out to the refugees. Not a single can opener had been provided. So, of course, the way you found can openers was to go out to the local market in Bao Loc where the American P-38s were always available by the hundreds, so I peeled off a few of those piaster funds we had and she went out and came back with a big bag of can openers. That is a small example, but an example.

I could get through to Saigon, but it was very difficult, so we had to work through Nha Trang and I have very little good to say about the efforts of the region in this American structure.

By and large, it was get done what has to be done. If I have to go somewhere to get it, do it. At the same time, I from the very beginning, because I had seen this earlier in my trip, tried to shy away from the classic American reaction to people in need, which is to just take care of them. That was not our job. The job was to get the Vietnamese government to take care of them. So, I would not, unless it was absolutely necessary and a matter close to life or death, intercede and do something for someone, myself. We had a couple of engineer battalions, for example, in the province. It would have been fairly easy to go down and get them to do the road clearing instead of going over to the public works chief and get him to do the road clearing. There are countless examples of this kind of approach. As long as people weren't starving or dying of disease or open to exposure, my policy was to stand in the background, talk to various people and get them to do it. I took this very, very seriously to the point where I tended to stay away from these constant public events. Everything involved in the process was always a big event and they always wanted their American up front. I never did that, I absolutely refused. We would have the "receiving of the rock" ceremony and they would want me to pick out which pile to measure to see if the contractor delivered it, and I consistently refused to do those kinds of things.

I was as self effacing as possible. When you are the big tall white American standing around you don't exactly blend into the scenery. But in terms of the work that I attempted to do, I was very, very careful to do that. It endeared me to the members of the team who understood what we were supposed to be doing, primarily Colonel Thompson, our PSA, but not to others because most of the other members of the team were lieutenants and captains, many not planning on making the military a career and had the attitude of let's spend a year there and get the hell out of there...

Q: This was typical of the military who said going back to the States was going back to the

world.

TOLLE: Yes, they referred to it as the world, no question about it. And, if you were short, you were dying to go. I do recall a running conflict with one of the officers in the engineer battalion, which is course...now this is USARV, not MACV, building the main road here. Several times this colonel in charge of that saw all of these refugees coming and he said, "Ah, ha! Labor! I can get work for my projects." So he would come thundering down in a truck and wanted to drive into the camp and start hiring people. I said, "No, you will not do that. We will go to the various and assorted service chiefs and you will follow the process, so it will be the Vietnamese government hiring Vietnamese refugees, not the Americans." We went round and round on this any number of times. Once he ignored me and went down and I went to the colonel and had the boom laid on him. So, I was continuously involved in this type of thing.

Q: Where you in that area the whole two years?

TOLLE: No, I was only there for about nine months. The project got off to an excellent start. The reception was well done. Two things then became apparent that were going to hamper the long run. One is that the vast majority of the people had no background and no intentions of being farmers, so they left, and thus the numbers dropped fairly steadily. And secondly, as was common with the GVN, initial reception was good, long term follow up was poor. We could not get any useful land for these people and without that there was no viability to what had been planned as a rural farming village. So with the precipitant reduction in refugees and the slipping of the program into doldrums, I attempted to be appointed the New Life Development advisor in Bao Loc. I intended to spend my entire two years there. This, however, did not come about. Apparently I was not high enough ranking to become a new life development officer and I was also hired as an assistant relief /rehabilitation officer. So, this was short circuited...There was a labor day event where wives were allowed to come into the country that September, 1970. My wife came in, had had previous correspondence and landed a job while there with Control Data Corporation in Saigon. She stayed to work for Control Data, which caused no end of troubles because she was supposed to have left and I began to run afoul of the government bureaucracy there.

Q: Whose government?

TOLLE: Our government. So by about eight or so months into my time in Lam Dong, it became apparent that as refugee advisor I was not being employed. Since my desire to become a development officer was thwarted, I was reassigned to Saigon and I ended up remaining in Saigon with the War Victims Directorate for the balance of my two years.

Q: Before we leave this area, could you tell a bit about your problems with Nha Trang?

TOLLE: Nha Trang's problems were two fold. One of them being strictly communication. It was very, very difficult to communicate. The telephone was truly an adventure to try and one found that you began to question the need for these people. There was a fairly large number of Americans located there. They were ostensibly backstopping the individual province people, for example, but they had a very difficult task because the central highlands, II CORPS, comprised

the largest single area of Vietnam. It was extraordinarily under populated, mountainous, and communication was a problem. But, the function of the region was never really made clear to me. I communicated directly with Saigon, because I was closer to Saigon, and the people at the region level seemed to be people who largely came in to visit so that they could write their reports and ask me for information. I spent an enormous amount of my time giving dog and pony show tours to Americans. In fact, our particular refugee settlement because it was Vietnamese being repatriated by Cambodia, was a fairly high priority event. General Collins showed up, any number of one and two star generals, the names of whom I forget. Colby showed up and I briefed him. Everyone showed up. So, for a while it was a very intense thing. I increasingly found myself fighting, if you will, two wars. One was my job with the Vietnamese with the government, which was fraught with frustrations and delays, etc, but was rewarding because you could get things done, could see physical results of your efforts in the betterment of people. However, the other war, was the war behind my back. It was fought entirely with Americans and almost entirely with the personnel branch. This was when I began to discover...this really dates back to my arrival in the country and my wife accompanying me...I try not to over state this, I appear to be one of those individuals who (and I concluded this by 1972), could not function in a government bureaucracy.

Q: I think that is a very important point to make. I had thirty years in the government and I found towards the end I would break out in what I call my bureaucratic sweat, when all of a sudden I would find I was running across a personnel problem. This gets to you after a while.

TOLLE: In the long and short of it, that is exactly what happened to me. It happened to me in a two-year span of time. Personnel lives by rules, everything is in this AID book as far as they are concerned. But, rules can never cover reality. Reality is infinitely complex. If you experience reality that lies in the gray margins between the rules, you are in trouble and I seem to be one of those who continually found myself in this grey area.

Q: Also, there is the tolerance level which if you don't have, you really should get out. Now Saigon. This was not the Saigon that I know, I was consul general in Saigon and had minor responsibility for Da Nang's consulate from 1969-70. But you are 1970-71 in Saigon.

There had been a major troop withdrawal. What was the atmosphere, both American and Vietnamese, that you found. Coming from a small province all of a sudden to Saigon is something I would like to capture.

TOLLE: Almost total difference in atmosphere. It must be kept in mind, it can not be emphasized too much, that this was the heyday of pacification, the time of our success. TET of 1968 had wiped out largely the indigenous insurgency. At no time was security better. For example, as I said earlier, I hate to fly, but if you were leaving Bao Loc you had to fly to Nha Trang and then you had to fly to Saigon. You had to overnight. Well, we had just built this beautiful new road from Da Lat to Saigon and I could get to Saigon driving and I was the first and only American civilian ever to do that from that area and it was a shocking thing when it first happened.

I had heard talk about the high life that was going on in terms of the military at that time. When

you arrived in Saigon you then discovered a climate that had several different interwoven aspects to it. But to this day I refuse to refer to Saigon as the field. Someone in Washington may talk about field officers out there in Saigon, but believe me Saigon was not the field. Saigon was a collection of some of the most fascinating personalities I have ever known in my life. It was the frontier. It was Dodge City. As you made the comment earlier, the people who came out there either couldn't make a living in the regular work-a-day world, didn't want to any more, wanted adventure, maybe the shady ones...we had crooks, we had the idealists, we had...

Q: This was my clientele because part of the job of being consul general is being in charge of American prisoners and I had ones who had earned their first brush with the law in 1944 in the black market in Paris.

TOLLE: It was just a self-contained world. I don't think I have ever lived as well since I lived there. You couldn't spend any money. Your quarters were paid for. I had a vehicle from the GVN, a jeep, but I had it. I had a motorcycle and I lived in a beautiful apartment with my wife. Food was cheap. I could buy bourbon for about \$2 a quart. We used to have champagne parties. It was absolutely unbelievable.

Now, within the War Victims Directorate, I enjoyed that work to a large degree because we by and large had the dedicated people in there. Within that Directorate I found some of the most worthy Americans who served there. I think I was happier there than I would have been anywhere else. To an extent I could spend my working day thinking I had accomplished something. Now mine you, I was essentially a paper expediter. I think I had been promoted to R-7 by that time, but up until that time I was told by personnel that I was both the youngest and lowest ranking American in Vietnam for a number of months. My job ended up entailing a lot of field work and I ended up flying to all 44 provinces of Vietnam one time or other, spending various amounts of time. I literally covered the entire country, most of it while I was in Saigon. So, I would get out of the city often enough to make it worthwhile, but the atmosphere you found among the large number of Foreign Service officers there was one of just serving their time until they could get out.

We had an increasing number of USAID individuals being sent there because USAID was being cut back worldwide. These people would show up without a clue and without an interest and because they ranked higher, they got their jobs. This began to be an increasingly large problem. I was youngest and lowest ranking and within a few months after arrival I became deputy chief of the operations division of the War Victims Directorate, which in effect was 90 percent of it. Through the remaining year we kept getting people in and some of them were excellent people, but by and large they were people in the wrong place. They were invariably older than I was and higher ranking. I was given an FSO-3 as my assistant and I was a 7. I think to our mutual credit this was not a problem. I was very conscious of this and made it a very careful point to work this out. So, I was given the responsibility, and I think I demonstrated ability, to, in effect, run the division, because my superior, Ray Fontaine, who was the head of the Victims Directorate at that time, was also given the additional responsibility of working with Dr. Phan Quang Dan, the minister of state, who was quite an energetic individual and was in many cases working on very different projects.

So, the balance between the two wars I was fighting began to shift very heavily against me. In Saigon, in a bureaucratic isolated world where we lived well, we partied among people who didn't seem by and large to give a great deal of a damn, and the increasing dissatisfaction with this in the first place...what am I doing here, what am I accomplishing? I like to live well, I have no problem with that, but I would much rather be out doing something and accomplishing something good. Gradually the good that I felt I was accomplishing was taken away from me and I just kept getting into these bureaucratic scrapes, primarily over my wife. To bring a wife to Saigon, when all the dependents had been evacuated in 1963, was an extraordinarily difficult thing to do. I took the advise of a vice consul, "Noran Ivanchukov," a Mongolian.

Q: Oh, yes. He worked for me. He was part of the agency.

TOLLE: I rather assumed he was being a Mongolian. I hooked up with him, I think it was in Hong Kong, and explained my situation. He said he was going to be a vice consul and I asked how I could get my wife over to Saigon. He told me he would take care of it, but he didn't, and I ended up in unknowing violation of all sorts of regulations. Cables flew back and forth. It is a long painful story. I have kept all the documentation on this and last night I looked over a journal that I kept. There was an official reprimand, for example, in my file for bringing my wife over. Every one of these things I did on the advice of those people who told me what to do and within my understanding of the rules, I just didn't do it the right way. I fell into one of those grey areas that is not covered by the regulations and I was very intolerant of that. I am not that type person, and I still am not, that can get along in that world.

Q: You left there when?

TOLLE: I left in 1972. Another one of those odd things. I debated a great deal of time as to what I wanted to do. Did I want to stay? It is a long, complex process that eventually resolved itself down to my saying that I could no longer continue to work in a cause in which I did not believe, for an agency which I despised. I think had I remained out in the field my decision might have been very, very different. I don't want to guarantee that, because it was very frustrating to work in the field also and have to fill out these reports and send in a voucher for expenses and have it come back two months later because I sent in three copies instead of four copies and this sort of thing. Be that as it may, I was recruited to stay. Jacobson wrote me a letter asking me to stay. Colby, who had taken a personal interest in me because he was a friend of my father's and I had met him when he visited my refugee projects urged me to sign on for another tour.

This was a major decision because for all of my life from puberty on I had aimed towards a career in the Foreign Service. Although the option of joining it was still there, this was about the time I could have taken the exam again, it began to be apparent to me that this was not for me. What I had prepared all my life to do, if you will, I was good at: on the front war. I never had a problem with the Vietnamese in the sense that I worked with the corrupt and the lazy and everything else but managed to work with them. I had a great deal of tolerance for other cultures, but almost none for my own.

So, I made the decision to leave and ran into another one of those personnel regulations. If you were terminated, you got better travel arrangements than if you resigned. So, instead of resigning

I applied for a position in Latin America, knowing full well that I would never get it. Thus I am terminated instead of resigning and I got better terms, etc.

RICHARD FUNKHOUSER
CORDS
Saigon (1970-1972)

Richard Funkhouser was born in Trenton, New Jersey and was educated at Princeton. His career included posts in Moscow, Paris, Libreville and Saigon. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1988.

Q: What did you do? You went to Vietnam in August or something, 1970.

FUNKHOUSER: I was one year in Africa, and one year was fine. One year's enough. I was offered what they called the DEPCORDS position in the Saigon Military Region, which went from the Cambodian border through Saigon to the delta. We had what was a "Pacification Program," so-called, where we were trying to win the minds and the hearts of the people. It was a very serious operation in which, the fighting military aside, all of the rest of the infrastructure of Vietnam was subject to American pressure to run the country well. Now this means we had responsibility for the roads, for the schools, for the hospitals, for the local militia of old men, old women and children who were left alone in the exposed villages when the young men went off to fight with the ARVN. There was a General in each of the military regions. A three-star General, Mike Davison, was my boss.

Q: You're talking about American generals?

FUNKHOUSER: American generals. We're only talking about the American side now, but it was a bipartite, layered operation: American three-star general, State Department ex-ambassador or FSO-1, two-star so-called. Then an American General one-star, and then a State Department Minister, Counselor or Foreign Service Officer, Class 2. Defense and State were layered in each of the military regions. Perhaps the most unusual feature of this command structure was that the civilian Depcords also served as Senior Advisor to the Commanding General in each of the four Military Regions in South Vietnam. When the Commanding General of Military Region III (Third Regional Advisory Command), Lieutenant General Wagstaff, was on leave for five weeks in late 1971, I acted in his place with the assimilated rank of Major General, officially in charge of some 90,000 Free World Forces (U.S., Australia, Korea). I, of course, deferred military decisions to the military officers under me, but signed all orders as "Acting". I presume that civilian control of the military, e.g., Presidents, Secretaries of Defense et al, provided the precedent, but the role and responsibility was to me unique for a Foreign Service Officer. John Gunther Dean was in one area. Charlie Whitehouse was my predecessor. And each of us had something like 1800 Americans working for us trying to keep the country moving, operating and reasonably democratic on a year and a half assignment. I went from being in charge of an Embassy with ten or eleven people to an operation with 1800 Americans and an equal number of Vietnamese trying to build the infrastructure of the country. (Cf. my article in the 7/97 issue of

the Foreign Service Journal, "Speaking Out," which contains the excellent advice of how to run an organization of thousands which I sought from the former Deputy Under Secretary for Administration, Idar Rimestad.)

Q: How did you feel about it? Let's put it back at the time in retrospect. Sort of the American way of trying to remake a country, a foreign ideology. You know, it was just a different country, different people.

FUNKHOUSER: Well, all I can say to that was I was fully supportive of what Dean Rusk was trying to do insofar as foreign policy and the Pacification Program was concerned. Helping the country; the hospitals, the roads, the schools. It had to be done. Trying to protect the villages. Getting the local militia to defend the villages. I would attend the military meetings, of course, with General Abrams and see that we always knew what the armed forces were doing. But it was very easy to identify with the fact that the job had to be done, as long as the policy was what the policy was, i.e., to stop "dominos" from falling to the communists.

At the end, I had a really serious difference of opinion with my superiors in Saigon. Not with the Embassy or Bill Colby, who had left as the Ambassador in charge of the Pacification Program, but with some of the military. I, having been there a year, made the strongest possible pitch with my Saigon bosses, with three-star General Mike Davison's support. "Start getting the Americans out of the country. Leave one advisor per Province, but don't have 50 colonels, some of them retired and "double-dipping" their salaries, advising a Vietnamese District Commander how to run his war.

Our Vietnamese commanding officers were at that time extremely good in Military Region Three. They didn't need advice. They needed guns and ammunition, what not, but they knew how to fight the Viet Cong just as well as we did. And I almost got removed from Vietnam by the top military brass, because I refused to put in a budget for 50 advisors where we only needed one. As reported to the State Department inspectors February 15, 1972, General Davison and Ambassador Colby, my two immediate superiors, fully supported my May 15, 1971 recommendation for immediate reduction of American advisors. In Military Region III I cut the Cords organization from over 1700 civilian employees as of January 1, 1971, to under 500 twelve months later. Unfortunately, Davison's and Colby's successors changed this policy.

Q: Was this for bureaucratic reasons? I'm talking about the impetus from our military. Or is it they didn't trust, have confidence, in the Vietnamese, or is it just the way we do things?

FUNKHOUSER: It's the way we do things. More was better. If we're not winning, put more in. It was quantity, not quality. Military Region Three stood up best. We did remove a bunch of the advisors. It also destroyed me spiritually to see the American cornucopia being poured into a rathole, basically.

My budget was one paragraph. I got anything I wanted. I didn't want it. "Just write a figure in." It was 'anything goes.' And to a Foreign Service Officer who is used to saving money - in the old days by writing out longhand on one-time-pads to make your phrases more succinct. I couldn't understand it, and I didn't want to see the waste continue.

Q: So, you left Vietnam after a tour of a year and a half? Did you feel that things were going wrong by the time you'd left or not?

FUNKHOUSER: Oh, I did some reports on that for the Department. Marshall Green asked me to summarize where we stood, and I did it in terms of a football game. Letter to Assistant Secretary Green 1/20/72,

"OFFENSE: North is clearly 7-14 points stronger...DEFENSE: Both strong but neither has been truly tested in a one-to-one match-up. that is, without involvement (of outside powers)...SPECIAL UNITS: here the North has an established 12-point advantage... publicity...media... unsportsmanship conduct and foul play...In summary, South remains a 2-4 touchdown underdog in any head-to-head match today..." Three months later Marshall Green asked me for an update he could show to President Nixon which would answer his question, "Can the GVN hack it?" My conclusion dated 3/10/72, assuming continued U.S. material and military support, was "a fragile affirmative."

They were in our territory, but we were holding our own. I thought that the ARVN, the Vietnamese military, would stand up much better. They stood up extremely well in our area. And I really thought that the Vietnamese could hold their own if we pulled out gradually. Start the movement out soon. And I thought that they'd hold. But we didn't pull out really that fast. And I was relatively confident and, as it turned out, wrong.

Q: Well, Region Number Three was certainly the last to hold out.

FUNKHOUSER: South Vietnam collapsed from the top, Regions One and Two.

Q: How did you find, here was a case of the State Department, the CIA and the Army working together.

FUNKHOUSER: Excellently under Bunker, a great Ambassador.

Q: At your level you were saying really with the military, not the military you were working with in Region Three, but the military from the top, that was trying to force more support on the Vietnamese.

FUNKHOUSER: Individuals on some individual basis. That was it. Who knows? I could be wrong. But we all worked extremely well together under Bunker. My only doubts about the superior U.S. diplomatic and military leadership during my tour in Vietnam was how they could not have convinced Washington to get out sooner. Of course, they may well have except for the impossible question of how to do it with minimal loss to our national interest. I was not privy to their personal advice to Washington. I became convinced we just were in the wrong war at the wrong place and never should have been there. Once having gotten in, we were in a hopeless position without winning it. And the television, of course, made it too graphic to the American public what it was like there.

The one argument in support of our role in Vietnam which never failed me in later speeches and conversations was that I hoped America would always be on the side towards which women and children ran in terror. Refugees never ran north!

Q: Did you have problems with the young officers? I'm speaking of Foreign Service Officers coming out to CORDS, which certainly was not exactly what they had thought of diplomatic life being like.

FUNKHOUSER: On an individual basis, some officers were so opposed to the war that I didn't think that they could do their job properly. It's not your job to make policy. You're out here, you've got to do the best you can. Report anything you want, were my instructions to all my staffs anywhere, particularly in Paris. Jack Perry, for example, was strongly against the involvement in Vietnam. I wasn't. I was a "hard hat."

My formative years in diplomacy were molded by successful U.S. policy of resisting Communist expansion globally, e.g., Marshall Plan, Berlin airlift, Cuba. In Korea, Communist tanks invaded the South; in Vietnam, Communist aggressors moved more subtly, by osmosis. I believed the "domino theory." I said, "Anybody on the staff, write what you want. You sign it. I'll send it in. I don't have to agree with you." And Jack Perry wrote a brilliant dispatch from the Paris optic on why this was a most unfortunate policy. He sent it in. Same in Vietnam. "If you don't agree, put it down in writing, but don't let that change your job. You're here to do the job." The trouble with most of the State Department officers in Vietnam, I didn't feel this way because I volunteered and was in a top position, was that they felt that they had done something wrong or they wouldn't be in Vietnam. In other words, if you're expendable, go to Vietnam.

Q: Particularly at that time of experience. It was found that this was not the road upwards.

FUNKHOUSER: Although some of us who were DEPCORDS: John Dean, Charlie Whitehouse went on to a couple of Embassies. John Dean went on to four or five. At the lower level? Those that had studied Vietnamese, of course, and we had some brilliant officers, were in paradise. They had all the best sources. They were listened to. Four-star Generals would listen to Third Secretaries (language officers).

HOWARD H. LANGE
Pacification Program Officer
Hue (1970-1971)

Political Officer
Saigon (1972)

Howard H. Lange was born in 1937 in Nebraska and educated at the University of Nebraska. His career included posts in Hue, Saigon, Manila, Taipei, Beijing and Warsaw. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: You served in Vietnam from when to when?

LANGE: From '70 to '72.

Q: What was the situation when you got out there

LANGE: I went first to Hue. When we arrived in Vietnam, we had some orientation in Saigon. We had a meeting with William Colby, who was in charge of the “pacification” program. We had this notion that during this meeting with Colby, we were entitled to express our assignment preferences within country. He must have been impressed with our *Chutzpah*, but he didn't express any annoyance. He had the weight of a lot of problems on his shoulders, and he would have been entitled to put things in perspective for us. This illustrates that we still didn't quite appreciate the reality of what was happening on the ground in Vietnam. We knew a lot about the Vietnamese culture and language and all that, but the connect between that and what was actually taking place hadn't quite been made. We knew something of the big picture, but we were soon to learn about the little picture.

I was assigned to Hue, which was an interesting place. That was only a couple of years after the Tet Offensive in 1968, which was so devastating in Hue. The mood among the Vietnamese was still very much one of apprehension. Emotionally, they remained hunkered down. The central Vietnamese are a little more reserved anyway. With Tet 68, many had withdrawn into a shell. We had a Vietnamese assistant in the Hue City advisory office who took some pains to limit the number of Vietnamese who knew that he worked for the Americans. He reasoned, correctly, that the fewer who knew, the less likely he was to be denounced as a collaborator and counterrevolutionary if the city again fell under Viet Cong or North Vietnamese control. In 1968, many of such people had been taken to the countryside and executed.

Some members of the advisory team had been captured or killed in 1968. I lived in a house that had been occupied by one who was killed, and there were still a couple of bullet holes inside the house. The maid stayed on at the house, and she erected a small shrine on the north side of the house to propitiate the angry spirits still about.

I didn't spend much time on our military bases. I did see our kids driving through town in their military vehicles. Based on that occasional contact alone, it seemed to me that morale and discipline were very iffy. This was the era of “fragging” incidents, and there were persistent stories about drug use. Incidents in Hue involving U.S. soldiers were rather frequent. During traffic backups at the approaches to bridges over the Perfume River, Vietnamese “cowboys” would steal from Americans in their vehicles; shootings ensued. In the countryside, American soldiers reportedly shot, maliciously and randomly, water buffalo from the roadside, which was of course a terrible thing to do, disastrous to the livelihood of the owner. People-to-people relations were not good.

There was in early 1971 an incursion by regular Army of Vietnam (ARVN) units into Laos, an operation that was named “Lam Son 719.” It was an attempt to disrupt North Vietnamese supply lines, but it was a disaster. Armored units rumbled through Hue in the dead of night headed for Laos and limped back not long thereafter. It was meant to be an ARVN operation, but it came to

depend heavily on U.S. air support. A lasting image was a photo, carried the U.S. press, of ARVN soldiers desperately clinging to the skids of Huey choppers as they escaped the fighting. So it was a pretty grim atmosphere in many respects.

The security in the province right around Hue wasn't so bad, but the westernmost district was mountainous and provided sanctuary for the Viet Cong. Our advisory team in that western district was quartered in a bunker. From that district, we once a month got exactly three rockets into the city just to remind us that the Viet Cong was out there, and this obviously kept people on edge.

Q: What was your job?

LANGE: There were two of us on the Hue City advisory team, and I was also economic advisor on the province advisory team. In retrospect, much of our activity was meaningless. For example, I did studies on potential for tourism and for handicraft industries using the indigenous bamboo. This was stuff that was interesting to do as an economic development person, but we had no chance of getting it off the ground without conditions of peace and security.

Q: Hue had, of course, suffered badly during the Tet Offensive, when the city was taken over by the Viet Cong. Was it the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese?

LANGE: It was the North Vietnamese Army that took the city, though VC agents in the city surfaced thereafter and helped to identify targets for purges, and worse.

Q: A lot of people were taken out and killed. Was there a serious gap in the intellectual, administrative structure of people who'd been killed?

LANGE: One figure is a total of 2,800 killed. A first wave of executions, after the NVA established control, focused on civil servants, teachers and religious leaders. Subsequent purges were aimed at community leaders, intellectuals and those connected with the U.S. You can imagine what this did to the social and political infrastructure. The civilian apparatus was pretty much gutted; it had all been militarized by the time I arrived. All the provinces acquired military governors. We had a good one the year I was there, Colonel Than. But there were stories about his wife, and in fact there were stories about most ARVN military wives at that time, who were making the most of the short time they had to insure the future of their families. I think our province chief was more honest than most; his wife was probably average. The populace was just trying to survive. They didn't have many illusions about their government or political leadership. We would get upset because, for example, in one of the programs to construct community facilities, they had mixed a lot of sand with the cement to make concrete so they could sell the leftover cement. Of course the concrete didn't hold together. So the projects were often falling apart, literally! But the Vietnamese were probably acting quite rationally in those circumstances, where the future was totally uncertain.

Q: I would have thought it would have been sort of difficult to work up enthusiasm for doing the things you were doing, with the situation being such that the future was not really sure. You didn't know where things were going, and the idea of looking at tourism and crafts and all that. I

don't want to say rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic, but at least it was certainly an uncertain future. Was that the feeling or did you feel that things were moving ahead?

LANGE: I guess the concept most of us had was that we were acting on a contingency basis; nothing was going to be possible unless there was some certainty about the future, which there was not at that time. The best you could hope for was to identify some opportunities that could be put in place as it became possible to do so. Some of the guys on the team were more cynical than others, but most of us were just trying to do our best to make something work. Certainly the military guys, they were busting their chops trying to train the regional forces. And maybe there was some residual benefit. At least it would be nice to think so. I haven't been back for a visit, but I understand that tourism is flourishing in Hue.

Q: Did you get any feel for how the people in Hue felt about the Thieu government, the government down in Saigon?

LANGE: Well, there was a lot of unhappiness within the Buddhist community. In fact, we tried to maintain contact with the leaders, because they felt that ever since the Diem government of the early '60s, Saigon didn't have their interests at heart. I don't know if there was any feeling about Thieu that was different there than in any other part of the country. I think a deep-seated resignation had set in that no matter who was in the presidency, they wouldn't have much chance to survive. Elections certainly didn't fire people with much enthusiasm for any particular candidate. I think most individuals in Hue were fatalistic. The psychological climate was negative and depressed, and the physical environment reinforced that. One of Diem's villas on the outskirts of Hue had been destroyed at one point, possibly in '68, and it remained a bombed-out hulk. The former U.S. consulate, closed after it was damaged in Tet '68, was occupied by squatters. People had little faith in Saigon's ability to defend them, as they showed when they jammed the roads to the south during the Easter 1972 NVA offensive.

I have some notes from my first year in Vietnam, in Hue. They pick up in January '71, so it was soon after I arrived, which was approaching the third anniversary of Tet '68. It was very much on people's minds. Several people in the CORDS program there in Hue lost their lives - nine Americans and five Vietnamese. Of course as we now know in retrospect, the Viet Cong kind of shot their load in Tet '68, but that wasn't obvious in 1971, and there was a lot of anxiety. We still had no clear idea of North Vietnamese or Viet Cong intentions. In January 1971, there had been a mining of the railroad - not an uncommon occurrence - in Phu Loc district, which was about a 30 minute drive south of Hue. It killed nine Vietnamese. Two rockets had landed in Hue over the weekend, but they landed harmlessly in the water. South Vietnamese forces responded with three to four hundred rounds of counter battery fire, which of course was symptomatic of the whole Vietnam scene - massive but militarily ineffective response, undertaken largely for psychological reasons.

Some early impressions: A) I sensed Vietnamese hostility in Da Nang when I came through en route to Hue. Lee Graham and I had arrived together (he was on his way to Quang Ngai), and as we walked along the river a few blocks from the "White Elephant" - headquarters of CORDS for MR I - two kids on a motorbike ripped his camera off his shoulder. That was typical of petty crime, but they added insult to injury by taunting us as they rode away. B) The U.S. military was

at that time in the process of drawing down. Morale was pretty bad. I didn't have a lot of direct contact with the military, but having been in the military, I could see the signs. The kids showed no pride in appearance and they weren't disciplined. I saw written in the dust on the back of a truck in Da Nang, "Get me out of this hell." C) On the other hand, in Hue, I visited the Tien Mu Pagoda, which is well known, up the river from Hue. It was very peaceful, but with a background of artillery fire in the distance, the overall effect was bizarre. D) There was a wonderful restaurant in Hue, with dining on a veranda over the river. It was a great place to put the ugliness of war out of your mind.

Again, referring to my contemporary notes, we first became aware of Operation Lam Son 719, the incursion into Laos, on January 27th, 1971. We didn't know what was happening at the time, but in the middle of the night the tanks and APCs started rolling through town. We speculated on what it was about, and basically we had it right. It was a last big push to give Vietnamization a better chance. A couple of NSC staff came through at the end of January - Don Webster and Paul Droge. My impression at the time was that they wanted to be hopeful that something could be done about attitudes and about our relationship with the Vietnamese, even at that late date, but that they couldn't shake their skepticism.

In those early days of my Vietnam assignment, I was preoccupied by what seemed to me the almost universally unpleasant interface between the two cultures - the Americans and the Vietnamese. I was, as were most people who visited Vietnam during that period, particularly dismayed by what the conflict had brought to the country, as evidenced by the prostitutes, hustlers, pimps and thieves. Then there was the despair of our own military, who saw the war in the bitterly memorable phrase as "unwanted and unending, pursued by the unwilling, for the ungrateful". It was a grim picture. I had a talk with a soldier; I don't know if he was special forces or what, but he'd come down from the hills, had been rewarded for a successful ambush by a trip to Australia. What particularly struck me about this fellow was how he'd become desensitized to loss of life and his part in it. Who knows how he later put it together, but at that time he was proud of the technical aspect of how he had carried out his orders, and he described it to me in very clinical detail.

By February in 1971, we still didn't know exactly what was happening in Laos. Then I think there was an official announcement about it on February 9. Part of the operation had to do with Vietnamese troops who had been lifted by U.S. helicopters into Laos, four of which had been shot down. As of the third week in February there was a lot of upbeat talk among our military as to the success of the operation. That it was a disaster was soon to become evident.

In that same month, I went to a local organizational meeting of the Rotary Club. Is this American or what? If we can just help them to establish a Rotary, we'll have the first step down the road toward civil society. This meeting was six months after it had been formed, and there were five Vietnamese and six Americans. The Vietnamese who wanted to carry it forward had been to the United States - not surprising - but there was obvious uneasiness within the Vietnamese group. They talked about having a dinner meeting but noted that security would be a problem. They concluded that they didn't dare get together over dinner. The meeting took place against the backdrop of rumbling and flashes of artillery in the distance.

There was a memorial service near Hue on February 20, 1971, for the victims of the Tet '68 massacre. It was organized by the government; and Pres. Thieu came up from Saigon to deliver remarks. There were several banners. One said, "It is better to die embracing one another than to have a wandering soul." Another: "We are encouraged by the president's decision to enter Laos." The bereaved family members had gathered on one side of the mass grave under a cargo parachute, where microphones amplified their weeping and wailing. Incense burned and food offerings to the deceased included orange soda and French bread. Thieu seemed somewhat awkward; he had senators and generals flanking him, including leading generals of the time - Lieutenant General Quan and Lieutenant General Lam, neither of which made much of an impression on me except for their physical weight - unusual for Vietnamese. The thrust of Thieu's address was that the central provinces would never be bargained away in discussions with the north.

There was an American in Da Nang who was building, as a demonstration to the Vietnamese, a ferro-concrete boat. I visited his project, and he was apparently carrying it forward with some of his own money. This was not common, but it was not unknown in Vietnam. There were Americans such as this one who were so dedicated and so wrapped up in the whole effort that they essentially turned their lives over to their project. He was at the time wrestling with the question of whether he should present the first boat to the local commanding general, to boost his chances of continuing his project with the goodwill of the military.

In March, 1971, I visited District 2 of Hue, which was one of the poorer districts. It included Hue's boat hamlets - people who lived on boats, were not well educated and really the poorest of the poor. They were believed to be among the first to guide the Viet Cong in their looting during the Tet Offensive. This belief was another manifestation of the distrust and bad feelings existing among the Vietnamese.

I was particularly upset by a story that was making the rounds in advance of a visit by Ambassador-at-Large Kennedy. He was a former secretary of the treasury. I don't recall his mission, but he reportedly had expressed an interest in the mass graves, and the order was passed to locate some human bones and bury them at the site so they could be discovered during the visit. I don't know if the story was true or not, but it was definitely considered plausible at the time.

Corruption seemed to be pretty pervasive. It was said that after Tet '68 victims didn't get government benefits unless they paid kickbacks. Even those who did not need assistance were encouraged to make claims so the officials could skim off the top. A teacher told me that a student could pass the high school exam by paying the grader between 300 and 500 Piastres. None of this particularly surprised me, even though I was still relatively idealistic. An account of how things got done came from a Vietnamese businessman. According to him, woodcutters paid a tax to the Viet Cong in order to get their wood out of the forest. Everyone ended up winners: Woodcutters weren't harassed; local officials got their cut because they issued permits to cut the wood; and the market demand for wood for construction purposes was satisfied.

The psychological effects of the failed operation into Laos started to emerge in April. The son of our assistant in the city advisory office was a helicopter pilot. He couldn't eat or sleep after he

came back thinking about the killing he had seen. A barber said that many people died including the brother of a barber who had previously been in the shop. But he said that without U.S. air support it would have been even more of a disaster. Imagine what confidence this showed in Vietnamization of the war. Dan Southerland, an excellent reporter for *Christian Science Monitor*, became very depressed during this period.

For some reason, probably because we were advisors to Hue City, we sometimes mediated incidents involving the U.S. military and the local population. There were frequent traffic backups at the bridges crossing the Perfume River. While sitting on the back of a truck at the so-called Railroad Bridge, which carried north-south through traffic, a GI had his watch taken by a kid, and the GI shot him dead. We were expecting a demonstration. We heard reports about the same time from the district south of Hue that GIs on a U.S. truck had fired M-69s, grenade launchers, at some friendly regional forces, killing them, just for the hell of it. Newsmen were coming up from Saigon the next day to look into discovery of some new graves, and we thought they were going to be on to this story. I visited the family of the kid involved in the bridge incident, and they were boat people. The entire family lived on two adjoining boats. His survivors - who were his father and mother, two brothers, five sisters, wife and two children - the family was anxious to show that he had a job, and he was not a thief. They wanted to pass on stories that they heard at the scene that he was just driving his bike. According to one version he wasn't even involved in a theft. But unfortunately he didn't have a very savory record. He had previously had his teeth knocked out when he had fallen from a truck while stealing from it. The family showed no overt hostility, and as it turned out, there were no demonstrations. A full cup of human tragedy, but no demonstrations.

There really wasn't any terrorism in Hue City. I think that was the case in all sizeable cities in that period; that is, after Tet 68.

Q: I was 18 months in Saigon, and there was the rocket or two that would fall from time to time, but those were aimed at the city.

LANGE: In Hue, it was peaceful enough that we once arranged to hire a sampan for the evening. We anchored out in the middle of the river and enjoyed a meal with wine. We could imagine how it used to be without people firing back and forth. But the downtown area was bracketed by two major bridges, and it was clear that most boats didn't dare venture beyond those bridges. Because of that it was impossible to get out of earshot of the loudspeaker at the theater, which was always blaring. And there weren't any other boats out in the river.

In April 1971, we had a demonstration in Hue. The Buddhists had called the police chief to task for some of his earlier arrests. Then there were counter charges against the Buddhists, including by a group called the "Corps against Communism" for being soft on communism. They alleged that the province chief was soft on Communism, and they even charged that the chairman of the City Council was a Communist sympathizer with well-known Communist associates. I wondered at the time if we were ever going to fight a common enemy.

On April 17th there was "victory" celebration for the Lam Song 719 operation, but there was precious little to celebrate. Most of the people seemed curious to see gathered officials and

military demonstrations. Even at that time, there was deep skepticism that the ARVN had caused any meaningful damage to the supply system of the North Vietnamese, which was the target of the whole operation. That skepticism was well placed.

In June, I again got involved in mediating a dispute. An American vehicle crashed into a house. No one was hurt, but the confrontation went on all afternoon, and there were plenty of weapons around. I had a U.S. military policeman on one side and a Vietnamese policeman on the other. There was impatience and deep distrust, but eventually, both sides backed off.

The Vietnamese really had a love-hate attitude toward us. I once took a boat out on the river, and I thought I sensed dislike, even hate. Some people repeated an insult that they had obviously learned from the GIs – “F___ you!” Then in the next moment I was exchanging waves and smiles with other people onshore. The inner conflict they felt toward our presence was understandable and troubling.

On one occasion, driving from Hue to Da Nang for the weekend I passed a train that had been blown up the day before. It was loaded mainly with Coke and Pepsi, cases of which were cascading down the embankment. I think that commodities for the GIs were the main cargoes for the railroads at that time. The symbolism could hardly be missed.

We once had dinner with a group of Vietnamese expatriates living in various places abroad, back for a visit. They reported that not even their relatives were urging them to return to Vietnam for good, and they did not intend to. Another vote of no confidence in Vietnamization.

I once had a lengthy conversation with me a Mrs. Tuy, who worked in the personnel office in CORDS,. She tried to explain why she continued to be concerned that there could be a repeat of Tet '68. She had 11 children. They had 18 people at their house, when Tet '68 started, and they lost no one. The family took refuge in three different Catholic churches. Family members encountered the Viet Cong or the NVA twice. Once her son was fingered, possibly for execution, but one of his students, who had surfaced as a VC, spoke up for him and he wasn't taken. Another time her son and son-in-law were pressed into labor, but they escaped during an American attack. They finally got to the university apartments and then to Phu Bai, which was an American base south of Hue, and from there to Da Nang. She was very proud of what she had accomplished with her family, giving them all a good education and getting them all through Tet. But she was still very uneasy about the future.

Q: Rightly so.

LANGE: She thought that another Tet or a political sell-out by Saigon was quite possible.

I took a trip in July 1971 to Quang Dien, which is a very poor district along Highway 1 north of Hue. It's located along a lagoon leading to the Street without Joy, made famous by Bernard Fall's eponymous book. The land is very poor - poorly drained and sandy. Still there are a lot of people trying to make a living. They had once accumulated enough to build concrete houses with tile roofs but those had at one point been so damaged that they were no longer useable. People were living in shacks with tin roofs. Their lives had really not changed very much for

generations, except for the added burden since the 1950s of the uncertainty of war.

There was another a district, Vinh Loc, along the coast southeast of Hue. Since '68 we had characterized it as a pacified area. But in a three-day period in 1971, there had been five assassinations with no retaliation and no one coming forward to say who had done it.

In August there were anti-U.S. demonstrations by students in Hue. The immediate cause was a traffic fatality in front of the University of Hue student union in the afternoon. A student on a Honda had fallen under the wheels of a U.S. tanker truck. It happened that there were activists from Saigon present, so the reaction was almost immediate. Banners were out within a few minutes. A vehicle belonging to RMK (Morrison Knudson) -

Q: It was a major construction firm, Pacific Architects and Engineers.

LANGE: Well, PA&E, Pacific Architects and Engineers, was another company. RMK-BRJ was a consortium of four large international construction firms: R for Raymond International, MK for Morrison-Knudson, BR for Brown and Root, and J for J.A. Jones Co. Anyway, a vehicle belonging to this contractor was burned, and the Vietnamese driver was beaten. There were some other attempts at firebombing. The authorities dispatched some PFF – Popular Forces, sort of paramilitaries – to keep the peace.

Q: Popular Forces? Regional Popular Forces?

LANGE: As I recall, the military hierarchy started at the top with Army of Vietnam main force units (ARVN), under Saigon's command; then Regional Forces, under the province chief; and at the bottom in terms of training and equipment, the Popular Forces under local commanders. Anyway, some Popular Forces were posted at the compound because there were numerous rumors of the imminent arrival of rioters. Tension was pretty high at the compound, but nothing happened. A colleague and I had scheduled a lecture presentation at Hue University - I don't remember what that was on - but that was obviously canceled. One reason that the demonstrations died out was that most of the students were away at military training.

In September there was another incident at the end of the bridge where a GI had shot and killed a thief. The students were better prepared this time, and we were told they had been waiting for such a cause. Students who had been at military training had been released the day before. Firebombing was attempted on three vehicles, including two military police vehicles and one belonging to a contractor. One truck was burned.

Q: Did you change jobs while you were there?

LANGE: Yes; I was in Hue for a year - 1971 - and then I went to Saigon in the embassy political section.

Q: You were in the political section in '72 then?

LANGE: Yes, that's right.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

LANGE: Ellsworth Bunker.

Q: What were you doing in the political section?

LANGE: I was in the internal unit. There were six or seven of us, compared to three or so in the external unit. My specific areas were the lower house of the legislature and the Sino-Vietnamese community. I also covered Military Region Two (MR II), which was the central coast and Highlands.

Q: What was the situation in Military Region Two? Was that Da Nang?

LANGE: No, it didn't extend that far north. Da Nang was in MRI. MR II was pretty quiet in terms of terrorist or guerrilla activity. But the Easter offensive of 1972 really shook confidence. Bunker's wife, Carol Laise, was ambassador to Nepal, and Bunker from time to time flew up there on a U.S. military plane. There was a sign-up list in the embassy, and I got on the flight, in April I think. We were there for about 24 hours and had to turn around and come back when we got word of the NVA offensive. The offensive was beaten back, but it seriously shook confidence, especially in the Highlands and in MR I. A couple of times during the year, 1972, I visited MR II. It was a familiar picture: The countryside was pacified in the daytime, but after dark, only the cities were relatively safe.

I have some contemporary notes, yellowed with age, made after the 1972 North Vietnam offensive -- the Easter Offensive. You recall that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was more influential in those days than it is today. A couple of staffers - Lowenstein and Moose - they used to travel there with some frequency, and their reports were always anticipated either with foreboding by the people who were in the Administration or eagerly by those who were critical of the war. I traveled with them to Hue, Qui Nhon and Pleiku. This was in May of 1972, so it was not long after the Easter Offensive. In Hue, which was our first stop, it was quite clear - this is May 26th - it was quite clear that in the early days when the offensive took place that there was a real panic, and most civil servants or professionals abandoned the city. Even the CORDS employees had decamped and stolen three cars from the CORDS compound. There was only one way out, which was the highway south to Da Nang. The general picture was that there was a lack of control, a lack of leadership, with one bright spot. For reasons I can't identify, the national police, who were much criticized -- denigrated as the "white mice", after their uniforms -- had stayed at their posts and done their job. But overall it was a thoroughly dispiriting demonstration of Vietnamization. The picture was that the Americans, while they were there, managed to pull services together and get the military and the civilians working together, but this had fallen apart during the Easter Offensive. When we arrived, maybe 75% or so of the civil servants had returned. About a quarter of the population as a whole had returned by that time. The hospital was staffed again, but all the big retail stores were closed. A few small shops were open. The big central market near the river had been looted and burned. It was a huge conflagration, and the

ruins gave the whole city a shocking aspect. It was obvious that Hue had gone through another terrible time. The only signs of new activity were some decorations and preparations for the celebration of Buddha's birthday, which fell toward the end of May.

There were numerous refugees who had come in from the northern districts; the estimate of the officials in Hue was 19,000, which was up 5,000 from the weeks previously. More were coming in, because they just didn't have confidence that security was going to hold. In fact, the North Vietnamese at that time still occupied the northern part of Huong Dien, which is one of the northern districts. In Phu Loc District, which is between Hue and Da Nang, the railroad had not been operating since early April; the bridges were out. As for the territorial forces, their performance had been mixed, depending on their leadership. No one was making any predictions as to what the North Vietnamese were going to do at that time, but there was at least some confidence in the defense of Hue by the territorials.

The general scene in the city was pretty depressing. Children wandering. The cowboys were everywhere - young kids on their motorbikes looking for prey.

Q: Snatching purses and that sort of thing.

LANGE: Right. There were very few old people, children or girls. At the university, there were still some radical slogans and posters in evidence from earlier days. Some of the bunkers and guard points had been rebuilt. Trucks and APCs were everywhere. At the city market, the center part was still a ruin; there were some small stalls that had been rebuilt around the perimeter. These were fairly busy in the morning. There was a small black market in foods. There were wreaths and flowers on sale.

The people we talked to - both civilian and military officials - their families were all out of the city, in either in Da Nang or Saigon. A Vietnamese major said that overall in the city maybe 30 to 40 percent of the people had returned. He thought maybe people would start coming back after Nixon's summit in Moscow. He thought that once it was clear from the Moscow meeting that there was no "sell-out," which was always what people in the central region were afraid of, that people would start coming back. A civilian said that some families would never come back. His family was in Da Nang and had taken most of their furniture. Everybody was ashamed of the market fire. The offensive was one thing, but the destruction of the market was something that had been carried out by Hue people. Most of the intellectuals - the teachers and the businessmen - had gone, but the Chinese (i.e., Vietnamese-Chinese) had stayed. One person said of the Chinese, "They have nothing to fear from the Communists."

Q: Had the Easter Offensive stopped by the time you were making this [trip]?

LANGE: The offensive had stopped, but some areas were still occupied by North Vietnamese at that time, some distance from Hue. Quang Tri, South Vietnam's northernmost major city and some 35 miles from Hue, I think was back in the hands of the South Vietnamese. But it had been a terrible scene up there in Quang Tri. Air power had played had played a large role in turning back the offensive, but there were the usual mistakes. One of them involved B52s; they had made a mistaken raid on a fire base that was occupied by friendlies. Such events of course added to the general sense of malaise and depression.

Q: What were you getting from Lowenstein and Moose? Was this what they were expecting to see? Was this confirming it?

LANGE: I think they were not surprised. One of our stops was Pleiku. John Paul Vann was still there, and he prefaced his briefing with the remark, "You're not going to like what you hear." In other words, he was previewing a very upbeat picture of the military situation. This sort of confrontational meeting between the American establishment and Lowenstein/Moose was well-established by that time. I don't know how many visits they had made.

Q: A good number. Jim Lowenstein has been interviewed and Dick Moose - I've finished sort of Vietnam and he goes on forever. So I'm still working on it with Dick.

LANGE: I didn't keep a copy of the report from that visit.

Q: They'd be in the records.

LANGE: In Qui Nhon, briefers were Tom Barnes. Lieutenant Colonel Brown, Colonel Grist, Dan Leaty and Cliff Stanley. Did you ever interview Tom Barnes?

Q: I have to check. Where is he now?

LANGE: I don't know. One of the principal topics at this meeting was the performance of the Koreans. I don't remember their areas of operation in Military Region 2.

Q: Well, they had a district below Da Nang, around Quinhon or something was it. There was a certain concern that they were under strict instructions, "Don't take casualties." However if they took any, they were quite brutal in responding. I think everybody steered clear of them.

LANGE: They were feared by the South Vietnamese certainly. I remember I took one of my leaves and visited a friend in Korea. I talked to some Vietnamese about my plans to go to Korea, and they were just dumbfounded. They were amazed, shocked that I would voluntarily visit a country where everyone was Korean. They thought that the Koreans were really quite brutal. A question from Moose and Lowenstein was, "Are the Koreans worth \$350 million a year?" I don't know where that figure came from. The response amounted to "Probably not, but what's the measure of value over here?" Which of course was a key question - how could you put a number on it? Colonel Grist said the Koreans took high casualties to retake An Khe - 116 killed and 400 wounded. He also thought their presence was psychologically important. He agreed that they were "mercenaries," but he went into the difference between them and classical mercenaries. Cliff Stanley, one of the briefers, was obviously dispirited, and at one point lamented, "No one has accomplished a goddamned thing here."

Q: He must have been civilian.

LANGE: Yes. We went from there to Pleiku. The conflict was still alive in the highlands.

Q: Pleiku being the major city in the highlands, in Military Region Two.

LANGE: That's right, and command post for John Vann. He opened with this quote I mentioned earlier, "You're not going to like what I'm going to say." He said Kontum could go either way; that it was still in contention. But he said the North Vietnamese didn't press their advantage after Dakto and that error has been hurting them a great deal. Vann said the ARVN 23rd Division, which had always been a question mark in the highlands, was getting better daily. They were now knocking out tanks on their own, and he thought that the North Vietnamese tank resources were just about cleaned out. He thought that it was quite possible that within six months there would no longer be an enemy threat in the highlands, though continuation of an advisory role was necessary for air support. Even if Kontum falls, he said, Pleiku was still defensible. He said that the other side had underestimated the U.S. response. Vann addressed the Korean role: They could not be brought up into the highlands, because of an agreement. If they were to be brought up, the agreement would have to be renegotiated and it would carry a healthy price tag. In any case, Vann said, we labored under a general misconception that the Koreans could get along better with the Vietnamese than we could.

Q: You were accompanying Lowenstein and Moose?

LANGE: Yes, I was part of the Embassy political section, with reporting responsibility for Military Region Two.

Q: Both Moose and Lowenstein were at this point working for the Senate mainly for Senator Fulbright, but they were both former foreign service officers and later came back into the state department. So they're these inner/outer people. How did this go? Did they tell you what they were trying to see? Or were you trying to control them? Or were they on their own and you were just around? How did that work out?

LANGE: They were veterans; they had clearly in mind who they wanted to see and what they wanted to do. They had no problem with access. As for the embassy and the political section, our posture was to help them as much as we could - to facilitate the visits and help them see as much as they could. The military was very apprehensive about their visits because generally their reports were downbeat. Military reports are upbeat. At that time, the attitudes had been established on both sides. Their agenda was pretty clearly in the direction of deflating false optimism. They were as much insiders as I was, and my role was to facilitate their inquiries where possible and to debrief people in the mission on their findings.

A couple of additional notes on my experiences in MR II. I visited Nha Trang one time and called on Tom Barnes, who was the regional deputy for CORDS. I was planning a drive from Nha Trang to Tuy Hoa, which is 70 miles up the coast. In retrospect, it was a foolish thing to do on my own. I later heard that on the same road a few months earlier, someone had taken a small arms round through the top of the car. But Tom interposed no objection, and in fact pulled out a report that he had made years previously when he was posted in Vietnam, written after a drive on the same road. Some people carried their reporting around with them wherever they went.

I spent the night in Tuy Hoa, where a revealing episode took place. You may recall the monthly

HES report – the Hamlet Evaluation System – an elaborate attempt in which we invested terrific efforts to quantify the various elements of security in the countryside. Very McNamarian. Some on the Tuy Hoa advisory team, including FSO John Finney, had arranged to spend that night in a hamlet, as I recall as sort of a demonstration that it really was safe and deserving of a higher HES rating. Bad decision. Shortly after dark, we received a tense report over the radio that they were taking fire, then... silence. We didn't know what had happened until daylight, when the guys reported that they had spent the night in a ditch, maintaining radio silence to avoid detection. So much for *that* secure hamlet.

In daylight, I visited the remains of a tower on the edge of the city left by the Cham civilization. Similar remnants of the Kingdom of Champa are sprinkled along the central coast of Vietnam, and then there is the excellent collection of Cham sculpture in Da Nang, which was started during the French period. While I was there, it was stored on the south edge of Da Nang, on the road to the airport, under sort of minimum, barbed-wire security. But it survived the war, and I understand is now situated in a handsome museum.

Sometime in 1972, another embassy officer, Jim Nach, and I paid a visit to Tay Ninh City, capital of Tay Ninh Province, on the occasion of a funeral for a prominent Cao Dai elder who had been assassinated, presumably by the Viet Cong. The Cao Dai religious sect was the anchor for a strong social structure, and the Cao Dai was renowned for its resistance to inroads by the Viet Cong. The city is about 75 miles west northwest of Saigon, and about 12 miles from the Cambodian border. We drove out in Jim's Honda, the first car that Honda made. It was a fairly flimsy affair and was powered by a motorcycle engine. I bought one myself – paid about \$800 new as I recall – but only had it for a couple of weeks before it was stolen, from in front of the embassy. Anyway, the drive seemed safe enough, though we did see a Vietnamese Air Force plane making a bombing run a mile or so off the highway. In Tay Ninh, the funeral proceedings involved thousands, and it seemed a prime target for terrorist activity. None took place, however, and as far as we could judge from talking with people, the Cao Dai's anti-communist resolve had not been shaken.

Q: What about the other area of your responsibility, the lower house? Was there much political activity there? Was it significant?

LANGE: Well there was a lot of talk. It was a very active legislature in terms of discussing issues, but one couldn't expect that it would have much influence on the course of events.

Q: Did you get a different feeling toward the central government, the Thieu government when you were down there?

LANGE: Different than when I was in Hue? I don't think so.

Q: How about at the embassy at the time? What was the spirit of the political section as far as how they viewed what was happening?

LANGE: One of the features of life in that office was the relationship with the huge U.S. military presence. There was a degree of conflict between the embassy and the military structure when it

came to reporting on the internal situation. This had a history: It went back to existence in the embassy of a “provincial reporting unit”, which challenged a lot of the rosy progress reports coming out of the military. That unit had been disbanded and replaced by the internal unit, which had less resources to devote to provincial reporting. There was a formal clearance process for our reports with MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam), and Joe Bennett, who was the political counselor, had to fight those battles. We thought that Bennett was excessively optimistic about prospects and tended to curb “negativism” in our reports. After one of my trips to the central region, I wrote a report and Bennett edited it. It came back from MACV eviscerated – lots of strikethroughs and additions. Even Bennett was outraged. It was in our view a denial of reality by MACV. It was unfortunate that even at that point, there was failure to face up to reality, to live in denial.

Q: You say the military seemed to be in denial?

LANGE: Well, that was our view anyway. They wanted to believe that things were a lot better than they were. The military’s “can do” attitude can be a wonderfully empowering approach, but things go haywire when it substitutes for objective appraisal.

Q: You were part of it at one point. There is a military culture. If you’re told to do something, you say “Yes I can sir,” then you do everything you can to make it come true even there’s a damned good chance it won’t work.

LANGE: I think the military was struggling internally with the problem. We had a visit by a ranking general when I was in Hue by the name of Weigand.

Q: Weigand. He was chief of staff at one point, but he was very much involved.

LANGE: Anyway he got a briefing from our provincial advisory team. On the military side, there was a lieutenant colonel out of armor, in charge of military training for the team, who briefed on the South Vietnamese regional forces. At one point Weigand asked a very pointed question about how a particular pacification goal could be attained, given the bleak objective picture of constraints and problems. The poor light colonel didn’t expect that sort of question from one of his own people, much less a ranking general. After an awkward silence, he said, with all the determination he could muster, “Sir, we regard that as a challenge.” And as you say it reflects this notion that you do it – failure is not an option and it doesn’t matter what it takes to accomplish the mission. Declaring the mission objective as unrealistic is also not an option.

Q: How about the CIA at that time? Was there much talking back and forth? They had one floor of the embassy.

LANGE: I had no contact with them. I can’t shed any light on that.

Q: Were the peace talks going on while you were still there?

LANGE: Yes. The agreement was signed about a month after I left, in December 1972.

Q: What was the feeling towards what was coming out of this, for you and your colleagues?

LANGE: I think most of us saw it as trying to make the best of a bad situation. It was clear that the U.S. citizenry would not support what was necessary for a military solution. The notion that Vietnam would hold together, would be able to defend itself was very doubtful but nevertheless there was no choice. I don't know if there was any credible intelligence at that time with respect to the intentions of the North. But I think there was little illusion that if the North launched a military offensive the South would hold. The American military was demoralized and wanted to get out of this limited war that was draining its confidence. As a nation, we wanted to get out "with honor." Kissinger was doing what he could to deliver that.

In December, shortly before I left Vietnam, Ambassador Bunker had me in for a farewell meeting. He had just finished a long dictation session with his secretary, Eva Kim, and as we spoke, rockets were slamming into the airport at Tan Son Nhut. Bunker was involved in the final stages of the cease-fire negotiations, and he was both tired of the war and frustrated with the difficulties of trying to bring it to a close. According to my contemporaneous notes, he said that President Thieu was being "too rigid". He thought that Thieu had violated the negotiating principle of never establishing a public position from which you cannot retreat. Bunker said that, "This war has gone on long enough, and it's time it should be stopped". The ARVN would have lost 50,000 soldiers by the end of this most costly year of the war, he said, with three times that many wounded. There were 130,000 killed on the North Vietnamese side. Bunker said that the South Vietnamese naturally have some objections to the cease-fire, but he thought that they are in very much better shape than before, such as when Bunker arrived six years previously. He said that the Vietnamese had to surmount their internal differences, and he recalled, "That old poop, Senator Hien, once concluded a discussion with the comment that 'that's the way we are!' Well, that's tough, they've got to put these differences behind them."

Ambassador Bunker seemed tired of dealing with Thieu. "I once told Thieu that this question of corruption would one day destroy him, just as it has Chiang Kai-shek." I asked if Thieu recognized the importance of the problem. "He appreciates it intellectually, but the execution is something else." He cited the case of Hoang Duc Ninh, who as Bac Lieu province chief was documented by Colby for 69 clear cases of corruption. He was removed, but five months later, Hoang was the commander of the 44th Special Zone, which was a mecca for smuggling from Cambodia. Bunker contrasted this with the case of Truong (FNU), who if he died tomorrow, the government would have to pay for his burial. His troops know this, and that is why he is such a good commander, said Bunker.

In those December days of 1972, we leaned on South Vietnamese deputies and senators to lend their weight to signing a cease-fire. Our message was not subtle: If South Vietnam fails to sign and is seen as obstructing peace, they Congress would be unable to sustain a robust level of support for South Vietnam. It had to be a bitter pill for the South Vietnamese to swallow, but it was clear that we were determined to withdraw.

Q: Had you met your wife while you were in Vietnam?

LANGE: I met her when she was working at our consulate general in Da Nang. We can't agree

on the date, but I think it was at the 4th of July reception at the consulate in 1971. In any case we met during my year in Hue. After I left Vietnam, we maintained contact over the years. She came to the U.S. in '73, but we didn't marry until '79, seven years after I had left Vietnam. We have a son, who is pursuing a career in the arts.

Q: Was Terry McNamara the consul in Da Nang when you were there?

LANGE: He was the consul general when I arrived, and Fred Brown was the consul general after that.

Q: I may have met your wife because when I was consul general, I was supervising consul general for all of Vietnam, but mostly my sway was very tepid. Terry was technically put under me - I wrote his efficiency report - but there was no real control of him.

HARRY HAVEN KENDALL
Economic Policy Officer, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
Saigon (1970-1972)

Harry Haven Kendall was born in Louisiana in 1919. He joined USIA in 1950 and served in Washington, Venezuela, Japan, Spain, Panama, Chile, Thailand, and Vietnam. He was interviewed in 1988 by G. Lewis Schmidt.

Q: What month in '70?

KENDALL: In July of '70.

Q: You were going to Saigon just as I was leaving Thailand where I had been for three years.

KENDALL: So I sat down and thought about it. I asked myself, do you want this or not. I had two choices, accept or resign. Finally, I said to myself, "Harry, that's where the action is. Why don't you try it."

So I did. I accepted.

Q: Were they only requiring you to stay for a year or a year and a half at that time?

KENDALL: It was two years.

Q: Two years.

KENDALL: So I went back to Washington, settled my family in our house in the Wood Acres section of Bethesda, and took off for Saigon. I got there in October of 1970.

Q: Before we go to your assignment in Vietnam, I think you had been speaking about another experience you had in Santiago. So why don't you cover that now before we go on to the Vietnamese assignment?

KENDALL: This concerned the Vietnam War. We talked of the anti-American, pro-American attitudes there. Talking about these things one begins to recall other things. Each little incident, each little conversation brings up new recollections. The Vietnam war was in full swing at the time. One of our major problems in the information program and getting across an image of an America knowing what it stands for, what it is doing, and where it is going revolved around the Vietnam war.

One of the programs we conducted in the effort to convince the Chileans America was on the right track in Vietnam was sending journalists as well as our own officers on visits to Vietnam to see for themselves. We sent our public affairs officers, we sent journalists, the ones who would go. Some of them wouldn't. I recall that Santiago's leading journalist at the time accepted our invitation and was really looking forward to the trip. To give him an advance orientation, I got hold of a prize winning combat film on the Vietnam war produced by a French team. It was really far too effective. He looked at that film and decided he didn't really want to go.

Q: Scared him to death?

KENDALL: Really scared him. I don't think he had any idea about the ferocity of the combat before seeing that film. But there were other aspects. One of the hotbeds of communism was in the University of Chile's Institute of International Studies. We had good contacts there and worked with their people. But they were one of the most articulate anti-U.S., particularly anti-U.S. action in Vietnam, groups in the whole country. They were very articulate and very effective. They wrote prolifically, denouncing U.S. Vietnam policy as American imperialism on press, radio, and television, repeating the same theme over and over again, so that it would have been difficult for any ordinary listener not to question American motives for being in Vietnam. Of course, many of them were communists and were supporting the official communist line. How many of them were speaking out of their own convictions or simply parroting the communist line it's difficult to say.

As I said, we worked with the University of Chile and brought a number of visiting American professors there to lecture and to interact with the faculty at the Institute of International Studies. Jim Echols, our PAO before Carl Davis, went to Vietnam on the Agency's program designed to help our field officers to tell the Vietnam story and appeared before this group when he returned. I regret to say they tore him to bits. He had learned much but not nearly enough. Another much more effective presenter was Douglas Pike, whom you must certainly know.

Q: He's living right around here now.

KENDALL: Doug is now my colleague at U.C. Berkeley. In fact, he works with me in the Institute of East Asian Studies and heads up our program of Indochina Studies. He had been a USIS officer in Vietnam since 1964 and had published a definitive book on the Viet Cong, so USIS sent him on a world lecture tour meeting with groups like we had at the University of

Chile. He had all the information at the tip of his tongue and could mobilize his facts and information into convincing arguments. So when he came to Santiago we took him to the Institute of International Studies. He answered all of their very emotional, heated questions in a factual, non-emotional manner. But even Doug Pike with his great ability didn't win anybody over. He gave them satisfaction because he answered their question, but he agreed later that he hadn't won any converts.

This was an example of the type of work we were trying to do. But we simply could not make any impression. So as a result we just had to withdraw from the arena. The essence of the whole thing is that we finally decided that Vietnam was a losing issue for us. We just had to stop talking about it in our official output because we got nowhere. Every time we said something they used it against us so we finally just responded to questions when asked. It was a definite decision on our part. Ambassador Korry agreed with Carl Davis and me that this was the best way to handle that particular issue. Just don't talk about it unless you absolutely have to. Don't deny it, but certainly don't volunteer to talk about it with the news media.

These are some of the factors that conditioned my response to my own assignment to Vietnam. I am ready to move over to that arena if you wish to do so.

Q: Let's go on now to Vietnam. You went when?

KENDALL: October of 1970. My assignment was to JUSPAO, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office. There was already a very large contingent of USIA officers there.

Q: Was that the time that Bob Lincoln was JUSPAO? Barry Zorthian, I think, had left just shortly before.

KENDALL: Barry had left and Ed Nickel was there. Maury Lee was his deputy. Lincoln succeeded Nickel.

Before leaving Washington, I asked the personnel officer, "What is my assignment? What am I going to do?" "Oh," he said, "you're going to be an economic policy officer."

"What do you mean, economic policy officer, I don't know anything about economics."

"Oh, you'll learn, you'll learn."

I suppose that being a Foreign Service Officer means you're supposed to be capable of doing anything. I went there as an economic policy officer and stayed two years. My family, of course, was back in Washington on separate maintenance allowance (SMA) as it was called, and the girls were in school. You were allowed three weeks leave for family visitation every six months. So during the two years I was there I was able to come home about three times to visit my family for three weeks. It was a long hard trip but certainly worth it to see your family. My kids got along surprisingly well. When I came back my daughter Nancy said, "Mommy, we'll have to change our whole pattern now. When Daddy was away we were doing fine. Now we've got to adjust to him again." She was a teenager just beginning senior high school.

The Saigon job was interesting, but I felt we were grossly overstaffed. We often think of an ambassador's problems in getting to know his own staff, but there the Public Affairs Officer, the head of JUSPAO, had a staff larger than most embassies. I didn't really feel that during the time I was there that I got to know Ed Nickel very well although we had good relations. I knew Maury much better because I had worked with him in Japan. He was a branch PAO in Yokohama when I was in Takamatsu.

Q: Was John Clyne there at that time or had he gone?

KENDALL: I think John was there for part of my tour, but most of the time I was there, he was not. I knew John quite well in Washington. I'd be hard pressed to name all of the people who were there with me. There were many. John Hogan was in Da Nang; Forrest Fischer was in Hue; Jerry Novick was up in Nha Trang. Brian Battey was in Saigon as were many other USIS officers. Many of my co-workers were military officers with whom I had no previous or subsequent contact. They were intermingled with USIS officers in Saigon and in the countryside in the four corps areas, First, Second, Third and Fourth. Our ambassador was Ellsworth Bunker, one of the grand old men of the Foreign Service. God rest his soul.

Incidentally, Douglas Pike is currently editing Ambassador Bunker's private telegrams to President Johnson for publication by the University of California Press. We obtained them from the State Department under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. They are a very illuminating set of papers.

My job was to maintain contact with the AID and to prepare policy guidances for information output on its various programs, particularly land reform and economic development. Imagine writing guidances for a USIS staff. You ought to be able to just tell them what the policy is and they can follow it, but we had so many people spread around the countryside that it was necessary to communicate to them in writing. I prepared these. They would go out over the PAO's signature, of course.

I remember one project of which I was quite proud. It was a survey of Vietnamese labor leaders to determine what their main concerns were and what approaches they wanted the Vietnamese government to take towards resolving them. I did it over a period of several weeks, traveling up and down the country with my Vietnamese assistant, a man named Ha Quoc Buu, who is today working with Douglas Pike in our Indochina archive. Buu and I traveled to most of the provincial capitals around South Vietnam interviewing local labor leaders in depth. Then, on the basis of these interviews, I prepared a report which Ambassador Bunker commended for use by his staff.

One of the things that astounded me when I first arrived in Saigon was that we were not conducting a standard USIS type program. We were, in fact, running a ministry of information for the Vietnamese government. We were publishing their newspapers and magazines for them and operating their radio and TV stations.

Q: Were the magazines and newspapers published in Vietnamese or in French or what?

KENDALL: Publish in Vietnamese and English.

Q: *In English?*

KENDALL: Yes, in Vietnamese and English, mostly Vietnamese. Most of it was written in English and then translated into Vietnamese. Because of this I suppose I was very skeptical about the whole approach.

I went to Saigon thoroughly convinced that the United States was doing a marvelous job and this was exactly what we should be doing. I came away feeling that we had missed the boat.

I felt we really had made some horrible errors in our foreign and military policy, and that many of our top leaders in Washington and Vietnam had made some very serious mistakes in judgment. We were trying to run a government of a country where we not only didn't understand the language, we didn't understand the culture, we didn't understand the people, we didn't understand the history. We knew very little about them yet we were trying to run the country for them. We were fighting their war for them. We were conducting a horribly expensive program in terms of money and lives and effort based at times on what I would call sheer ignorance, though undoubtedly out of conviction that we were doing exactly what was needed to be done.

On a more personal basis, I got to know the Vietnamese people quite well. I developed quite a few friends among them. I got to know the country and personally derived a great deal of benefit from my experience there. In terms of my contribution to the total effort, perhaps I added a grain of sand to that huge sandy beach of a sterile U.S. policy. I don't know. I didn't really feel good about it.

I still continue my interests in Vietnam and Indochina after these many years. I conducted a small research project on Vietnamese attitudes toward the Soviet presence and published an article about it in our institute's journal, *Asian Survey*. I helped a Vietnamese professor write a book which we called *After Saigon Fell: Daily Life Under The Vietnamese Communists*. It was published by our Institute of East Asian Studies and sold out two printings. It was also translated and published in the Korean language. I work with Douglas Pike in his Indochina Studies Program. I feel good about my own personal experience. I feel very sad about the American experience in Vietnam.

Q: *Would you care to be a little more specific about three or four of the serious errors that we made without going into too much detail? Would you indicate where the areas of our greatest mistakes were, what they were?*

KENDALL: Are you talking about nationally or are you talking about USIS?

Q: *Well, I suppose both since the two are pretty well inextricably interwoven. But you said that you came to feel that we had made very serious mistakes in several fields, and I didn't know whether you were talking specifically about the U.S. information program or whether you were talking about our policy generally or a combination of both.*

KENDALL: I was referring to our policy generally. We plunged that country into deep war. I'm reminded of a comment by Professor Robert Scalapino who is director of our Institute of East Asian Studies. He was lecturing in Vietnam in 1974 or early 1975. He said a very thoughtful Vietnamese officer stood up and said, "Now, professor, when the United States forces came into Vietnam in 1964-65, you came without our knowing you were coming and it took us a long time to adjust to it. Now, you are leaving us and you're doing it without our knowing it and we don't know why. We have difficulty understanding what United States policy is all about."

Professor Scalapino said, "I couldn't respond to that comment."

We sent our people to run their government who didn't know the language or the history of the country. I think the grossest error was the whole *raison d'etre* for intervening in that war. We were intervening to keep the Sino-Soviet alliance from taking over Southeast Asia. We were trying to protect the Vietnamese from China. The Vietnamese have been fighting the Chinese throughout history and have thrown them out on various occasions. Our leaders didn't seem to know this. We were afraid of the Moscow-Beijing Axis and they can't get together.

Q: They had already shattered that Axis ten years before.

KENDALL: The decision to go into Vietnam was to prevent monolithic communism from moving down into Southeast Asia, the domino theory. As history has since taught us, communism is no more monolithic than capitalism. That was one basic error. Another was trying to tell the Vietnamese how to run their own government. We manipulated Ngo Dinh Diem and all of his successors. We have enough difficulty running our own government let alone trying to run somebody else's for them. We imposed decisions upon them which they couldn't carry out, didn't have either the will, the means or the ability to carry out.

The murder of Ngo Dinh Diem was in part our own fault even though our people didn't pull the trigger. We didn't tell them to do it but we didn't tell them not to either.

There is an interesting episode from the 1954 Geneva conference which divided Vietnam in half. After the conference Zhou En-lai extended his hand to John Foster Dulles in a gesture of friendship. Dulles walked on past and left Zhou standing there. Here was an opportunity for our leaders to talk to each other to try to achieve some understanding, but Dulles refused on the basis, I suppose, that he considered Zhou En-lai to be evil. It's the same inflexible ideological outlook that inspired Reagan's remarks on the evil empire.

In Vietnam we based our policies on the sense of morality that not only condemns communism as evil, but even the people who live under communism as evil. As we see now, they are desperately trying to get out from under communism.

These are just some of the thoughts that come to mind. I would say mainly that the United States had some, very few, experts on Vietnam, but their counsel and advice was not sought and if given, was not listened to. The decisions made by people ranging from President Johnson on down were made on the basis of American attitudes, American reactions to given situations

which did not or could not apply to people of the Vietnamese culture. I just think that our country has not really organized its top level decision-making to be able to take advantage of the knowledge and information that is available to us.

Q: Do you think that our information program in Vietnam had any effect at all, or a very minimal effect, or that it was pretty much useless?

KENDALL: It had a great deal of effect on persuading the Vietnamese people that they really wanted to live like Americans. It had its greatest impact on the literate Vietnamese.

Q: On the literacy?

KENDALL: On the literate Vietnamese. I think the ordinary Vietnamese, the ones who had no access to the informational media, were not affected by it except secondarily through their leaders. But yes, we had significant effect on persuading the South Vietnamese that they should modernize their economic and social system. You must remember there was a great deal of travel back and forth, not just Americans to Vietnam but literate and well educated Vietnamese to the United States for training purposes under programs operated by JUSPAO, AID and especially the U.S. military. The Vietnamese are a very intelligent people and they quickly learned to appreciate the benefits of a modern technological society.

The primary influences brought to bear were the military. But when the crunch came, we just simply withdrew and left them high and dry. We trained them in the use of our technology and our military equipment and taught them to depend on the United States as a source of supply, I think improperly so because they were fighting a war in which the heavy firepower we brought to bear was relatively ineffective. But when we withdrew they didn't know where to turn. We had built up a series of leaders who were entirely dependent on American support, and when they didn't get that support in the final hour they became completely disheartened.

They didn't lose to the communists because they didn't have the equipment, they lost because they had lost the will to fight when their source of primary support withdrew. Maybe we lost the war for them. Maybe they lost it for themselves. I don't know.

Q: Probably a combination of both. It would be interesting to know and I suppose there is no way of determining now, whether or not there is any residue of feeling about governmental policies about way of life or anything else left in the country as a result of the American presence there for so many years. Most of them seem to have become disillusioned with the communist takeover and the communist government, even those probably who felt sympathetic toward it before it took over South Vietnam. Do you think probably more of that is due to the insensitivity and stupidity of the communists themselves, the government that took over, then it is to anything that the Americans did while they were there?

KENDALL: You have to give much credit to the arrogance and stupidity of the communists and their self imposed policies since the end of the Vietnam War. They had developed their whole system on the basis of military action with everything done for a single cause, which was to gain independence and unity of Vietnam. Once they achieved this purpose they were insufficiently

flexible to be able to change over to a peacetime mode of life. The people in power were the same people who had conducted their 30-year struggle for independence. Having attained their initial purpose they did not perceive the necessity for change to conduct a peacetime economy. They overlooked the Chinese saying that "You can conquer an enemy from horseback but you can't rule the people that way." It will probably take a new generation before they will be able to change around completely.

Q: But do you think it's primarily the communists that did themselves in with their own people rather than any residual effect that the American presence may have had?

KENDALL: Yes, there is no question about that. I think for the benefit of your series, it might be well for you to talk to Doug Pike.

Q: We will talk to Doug Pike. I don't know whether I'll get to interview him or whether Earl Wilson will try to do that when he comes back through here in February. But one or the other of us will do it.

KENDALL: He is by far the most eloquent, most knowledgeable about our whole experience in Vietnam. He went there in 1964 as a films officer with the idea of studying the Vietnamese method of field communications and developed that into his classic study of the Viet Cong. He has been working on Vietnam ever since and certainly the most knowledgeable in that field.

Q: I think we have probably milked your experience in Vietnam to the extent that is worthwhile on this tape. You went from Vietnam then back to Washington for a time?

FRANK E. SCHMELZER
Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Tuy Hoa (1970-1972)

Frank Schmelzer was born in Massachusetts in 1927. He joined the Foreign Service in 1952 and served in India, Germany, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Michael Springmann in 1992.

Q: Today is December 8, 1992 and this is the second interview with Frank Schmelzer.

SCHMELZER: I thought it might be interesting to say a few words about Vietnam where I served in the CORDS program. I was there from the end of 1970 through the late spring of 1972. This particular organization was sort of a parallel government in that there were teams of American advisers attached to their Vietnamese counterparts, as they were called, at all levels of the government, from the district level through the provincial level and, of course, up to the nation's capital in Saigon. There was an American team in each one of the provinces of Vietnam. The chief of the team was either an American military officer, usually a Colonel, or an American Foreign Service Officer, usually a grade 4 or 3, in the old grades.

Initially I went to Nha Trang, but only for a short while. From there I was assigned to Tuy Hoa, which was on the coast of one of the provinces. I was there for about two or three months, just sort of getting used to the system, the so-called pacification program. I think the things that I remember best there are a couple of attacks we had. The VC were more interested in the military side of the compound than they were in us civilians.

I remember the first time an attack occurred: There was a great deal of commotion and suddenly somebody came running around and got us all in a bunker nearby, slapped helmets on our heads and gave us each a rifle. We were peering through slots waiting for the VC to come after us. There was a lot of ruckus, on the other side of the compound and I think one of the Marines got wounded that night.

The second time that the VC attacked, some time later, I slept right through the whole thing I am happy to say.

Q: How did you actually get things done there? You had to deal with the Vietnamese army, with civilians and the US Army.

SCHMELZER: You would have a huddle among yourselves and decide what you wanted the Vietnamese to do or what you would suggest they should do. Sometimes they would follow your advice and sometimes they wouldn't. If you felt that the matter was sufficiently serious and they were dragging their feet too much and something should be done, then you would kick it up to the next level.

Since the Vietnamese in each level knew that your line of communications with your own superiors was at least as good as theirs and that if your superior decided to push this thing that he would go to his level, the Vietnamese knew he might get a rocket, get kicked by his superior. So we certainly were influential.

This structure, by the way, this quasi-parallel government, if you will, was an outgrowth of our experience in China during World War II where we had a lot of goodies to pass on to the Chinese but our own structure was not very effective. So this was designed to overcome some of these problems. I thought in general the organization was pretty good.

We were also dealing with the Vietnamese civilians. I spent most of my time in Vietnam in Ban Me Thuot up in the Central Highlands. One of the big problems there was the relationship between the Vietnamese and the Montagnards, the indigenous people. The problem was that the Vietnamese were coming in and taking the land. Their style of agriculture was intensive and quite different from that of the Montagnards. It was reminiscent of the English colonists here in the United States and their attitude toward land settlement and the American Indian. The Vietnamese, of course, would go in and take the land and work it very intensively. The Montagnards would look upon the land quite differently. They would cultivate one area for two or three years and then move to another area near by; after another few years they would return to the first area. They wouldn't cultivate the whole area solidly as the Vietnamese would do. But, of course, over time this meant that the Vietnamese were gradually taking more and more land away from the Montagnards. So there was a lot of trouble there.

Towards the end of my stay, we had come up with something that was really rather effective. We had decided to persuade the Vietnamese government to give title to the Montagnards to specific tracts of land. This was made somewhat easier because so many of the Montagnards had been moved from their traditional villages into protective, fortified areas. The idea was to give them title to those fortified areas and the lands adjacent, so that they would be protected from the Vietnamese encroachment. This also had the additional benefit of making the Montagnards more willing to support the common war effort. This, by the way, was a very serious fracture point. In the spring of 1972 when the North Vietnamese attacked in force, in the Central Highlands, one of the people that I was working with was a deputy in the provincial government who was representing the interests of his Montagnard tribal group. He had suggested to Saigon, through his political leadership, that two divisions of Montagnard be created, armed and trained in order to fend off the North Vietnamese. In fact this request was made before the North Vietnamese attack. The answer from Saigon was no, certainly not. Then it was one division? No. Two regiments? No. One regiment? No. Now had such a Montagnard force been available in the spring of 1972, and later in 1975, the result would have been quite different.

In 1972 the North Vietnamese were held because the South Vietnamese fought quite well and the Americans were still there with air power. But in 1975, of course, they punched right through that area. In the spring of 1972 Ban Me Thuot was the headquarters of one of the South Vietnamese divisions...they had three regiments. One was destroyed by the North Vietnamese army. So another regiment moved North to a pass, about 40-50 miles north of Ban Me Thuot. The North Vietnamese got into that pass and this was rather serious because communications between Ban Me Thuot and the northern provinces had been cut. So the B-52s came in to dislodge the North Vietnamese. They bombed that place for five or six days. On the next day, this particular South Vietnamese regiment went in and got "creamed."

The speculation at the time was that somehow the North Vietnamese would sense when the B-52s were coming and they would run out of the pass. The B-52s would bomb the hell out of the place and then the North Vietnamese would move back in. This went on and on. On the sixth day when that regiment went in the North Vietnamese were back in the pass and the South Vietnamese got slaughtered. So then they decided to move the third regiment North. Just about at that time we got news of North Vietnamese tanks being sighted due west of us -- that was 15 miles away on the other side of the river. The river was the boundary between us and Cambodia. So that made some of us a little nervous.

Q: As well it might.

SCHMELZER: Well, one of the military members of our team had been in the American calvary, as he called it, the Tank Corps, for some 25 years. So I called him in one day and we went up to the map in the office and I said, "Billie, I think it would be nice if you could get into a chopper and see just how much of a barrier that river is." "Ah, Jesus Christ, don't bother me with that stuff. I have been in the Tank Corps for 25 years and I tell you there is no way the NVA can get tanks across that God damn river." I said, "Well, look Billie, you are probably right but I would appreciate it if you would just take a chopper and go and look." "All right, but it is just a waste of time."

Well, he went out and took a look. About an hour later he stormed back in and said, "Wow, that river is no problem at all. Come look." And he dragged me over to the map. He said, "Gee, with 10 tanks I could take this God damn town and reduce it to rubble. Look, here is where you come across, the river is only a few feet deep." Billie really got carried away, he was so excited.

Of course, everybody was screaming for various things. One thing that everybody wanted about that time was the "LAWS." It was sort of a bazooka thing that you put to your shoulder to knock out a tank. Suddenly we started to scream for them too. I put in an order for a 100 of them. It took a little while to get them, but I finally did. After that I had three of those damn things in my desk.

The other thing I used to keep around was a carbine. I always had it near me when I went to bed at night.

Q: You didn't trust that your diplomatic passport would protect you?

SCHMELZER: No, no. My hearing improved quite a bit. I got so I could hear a cat walk down that alley outside. And there were a couple of VC attacks on Ban Me Thuot while I was there. But I would just go upstairs where there was another civilian on our team who had been through the wars...he was married to a Montagnard and had a good balcony of solid cement. We would crouch down behind that and wait for the noise to dissipate, which it normally would.

Our organization was essentially a good one. The basic problem was that we were trying to build a nation in one half a nation and it just wasn't going to work. The South Vietnamese, I think, occasionally had the will to fight and when they did they could do a good job. But, somehow the psychology of the whole thing was wrong. It was their war and we made it our war and that was the biggest mistake. We were just there passing out the goodies and to a certain degree trying to tell them what to do and sometimes they would respond and sometimes they wouldn't.

Q: How did other Foreign Service officers think? Were they telling Washington what worked and what didn't? Or were they told to shut up, this was policy and you will carry it out?

SCHMELZER: Quite a few of the people were disgruntled. I remember one young man in Nha Trang who had been there a short period of time, and he was assigned to one of the districts. He decided after about a week that he was not going to take anymore of this nonsense. He didn't agree with the program. So he just decided that he was going to quit. He came in and fortunately the man in charge of our operation in MR2, military region 2 which included one-fourth of the country...a big chunk of the Central Highlands and a big chunk of the northern coastal areas...that man was a Foreign Service officer and he understood the problem. He talked to this young man and found another job for him in which he did very well. He had a contingent of four or five Vietnamese who would go out and interview people...do in-depth interviews on various aspects of the pacification program on rural development, civilian guards training, etc. It was a very valuable product that he came up with and he enjoyed doing it. It was more similar to a regular Foreign Service activity, so he didn't leave the Foreign Service. In fact, he has done fairly well since.

In one of my great moments in Ben Me Thuot I was able to use some diplomacy...I say this with tongue in cheek, of course. While I was there initially there were still some American troops, the drawdown had not been completed. So the PX was there and there was a collection of whore houses. The complaint was that the ladies were charging too much for their services. And a lot of these little plastic vials that drugs come in were being seen all around the outskirts of this compound where the ladies were. So it was decided that something had to be done about this. The good colonel in charge of our team decided that this was a problem for the State Department. So I organized a little convoy and we went down there. There was a jeep with MPs, a jeep with translators, etc. I think there were three jeeps that went, with no flags flying. We went there for a prearranged meeting with the madams. They were very polite. The girls were tittering around the corners watching this. I told these ladies that there were complaints about the prices and that it was not right to have drugs on the scene. If there were anymore complaints on either of these two points, we would have to declare the place off limits. Of course, that would put these women out of business. So things were rather quiet there for a while thereafter.

Q: Were the Foreign Service positions in Vietnam sought after or were they regarded as a punishment detail?

SCHMELZER: I think it is fair to say they were not sought after. In fact, as you know, some of the younger officers resigned rather than go to Vietnam. The Department of State was always trying to keep 100 Foreign Service officers in Vietnam. Most were in this CORDS program. That meant that there were one or two in each province. In Tuy Hoa I was the only one, but in Ban Me Thuot there were two of us. No, these positions were not sought after.

Some of the older officers, of course, the FSO-3s, who saw that their careers were not flourishing, decided to go with it, to roll with this punch. There were some advantages to this. For one thing it was occasionally rather exciting. It was interesting. You learned a lot. You had a chance to see this great bureaucracy in motion. You were learning a great deal about the major problem of the day. And, of course, the Director General would come through every now and then...I think he tried to make it once a year...and would make promises that your next assignment would be a good one.

I remember that in my case the Director General came through and he asked me where I wanted to go. I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, I would like to go to Paris." "Well, Frank, how would you like to go to French-speaking West Africa?" Then I said, "Well, I would like to go to Rome." "Well, Frank, how would you like to go to French-speaking West Africa?" I had been working on my French and had used it during the tour. I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I would like to go to French-speaking West Africa."

ROY T. HAVERKAMP
Area Development Advisor, USAID
Saigon (1970-1972)

Roy T. Haverkamp was born in 1924 in Missouri. He served with the Air Force in World War II and later earned degrees from Yale and Cambridge. Mr. Haverkamp joined the Foreign Service in 1952 and has served at posts in Korea, Sweden, Japan, Cambodia, Congo, Benin, Vietnam, Guinea, United Kingdom, Jamaica, and Grenada. He was interviewed on April 11, 1994 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Oh, indeed it does. Well, then it looks like you got yanked out for Vietnam?

HAYERKAMP: My name came up around the time of the invasion of Cambodia. Some names came up and a friend in the office of the Director General happened to be an old friend from Kinshasa and said, "Oh, Haverkamp would like that." So I was sent to Vietnam.

Q: This was from 1970-72.

HAYERKAMP: Yes. I did not like to go because I felt I was letting the ambassador down and he had been very good to me in taking me there even though he didn't know me very well., and I enjoyed it. Anyhow I went. It was kind of funny because the Dahomians would ask, "Oh, are you going to be the ambassador?" But I learned a very interesting thing. One Dahomian newspaperman said to me, "You know it is too bad, you are going at the wrong time. Foreign diplomats always think they are looking at us, but we also look at you to see if we want to know you and can trust you. And it takes about a year to do that and now you are leaving."

Q: When did you get to Vietnam and what did you do there?

HAYERKAMP: I got there in 1970 just after we invaded Cambodia and after Sihanouk was overthrown. It was in the summer after some training at the Vietnam Training Center. It was August or September of 1970. I was supposed to be an adviser to an office which was to look out for the welfare of what they called the Khmer Krom, Cambodians living in what was then the south of Vietnam. In several provinces they were a majority of the population. They had a special office in the government which was supposed to look out for them. Believe me, trying to talk to the Vietnamese about treating the Cambodian minority compassionately and with consideration was like going into Mississippi and telling Senator Bilbao that he was doing the wrong thing to the Blacks in the South.

Q: We are talking about Bilbao's figure during the thirties and forties, particularly in the South.

HAYERKAMP: It wasn't a ministry, it was an office and not in Saigon but in Can Tho, which was the site of the IV Corps headquarters in the Delta. It was run by an old fuddy-duddy, nominal colonel in the Vietnamese army who was often tipsy and who had almost no influence. He lived in constant fear of the Vietnamese government. As the Corps advisor, it was my job to try to persuade the government to give the Cambodians their fair share of aid goods and reach out to them. But getting a high up decision really to engage the Cambodians in support of the government was a dead loss. Many of the Vietnamese rangers were Cambodians. At one time I saw a group of military prisoners in a Ranger camp. I was walking by and they were speaking Cambodian. I looked around and I said to one, "Oh, are you Cambodian?" He said that all of

them there were Cambodians. I don't know what they did or why they were there.

The Vietnamese government gave up on them. They wanted to use them but not accept them. They wanted them to fight for Vietnam. Strangely enough, several Vietnamese generals I met had Cambodian bodyguards because they were very rarely Viet Cong supporters.

When I got to Vietnam they said I was going to be in Saigon because they didn't know where the office was. The Cambodian monks in Vietnam were demonstrating and they were having trouble with their Cambodians.

Q: I remember in Saigon I got caught in a traffic jam and everybody was screaming about the damn Cambodian monks who would get out in the middle of the road and sit down or something.

HAVERKAMP: The only method the Vietnamese had was to buy them off or suppress them in some way or other. I traveled around the various areas with a significant Cambodian population and met with the U.S. advisors. Then the U.S. general in IV Corps, Major General John Cushman had me sent to Chi Lang on the Cambodian border where the U.S. military had a Special Forces training camp training Cambodians and a special element of an advisory team coordinating military operations across the border and also training Cambodian officers in map reading and other skills, elemental skills. There were also officers from the Cambodian Army participating in air operations in Cambodia staged in Vietnam. It was a center where U.S. military coordinated all of our operations in the adjacent Cambodian Corps area. We had meetings between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians to try to promote understanding at least to the extent where they could operate together. That was all pretty interesting and a little more effective than working with a government not intending to make any changes in the appalling treatment of its Vietnamese minority.

So, I had those two jobs but spent most of my time at Chi Lang.

Q: How was our military commander, John Cushman, who I knew later in Korea. He used to do a lot of war gaming and he struck me as somebody who is innovative and thinking ahead. How did he strike you as the commander?

HAVERKAMP: Well, he was a man who left a very strong impression. He was very able, very hard working getting up at 5: 00 in the morning to study Vietnamese. He was indefatigable. I got on very well with him, liked him and with his support was able to do things that I would not otherwise have been able to do. He was extremely hard on his military staff. His staff meetings were excruciating because if anybody tried to bull his way through or made a statement without any back up or threw out some numbers without checking them, he was merciless. He brought several military careers to an end and was not exactly popular but was feared and I must say it worked. As IV Corp commander he was adviser to the Vietnamese general in charge of IV Corps, General Ngo Van Truong who was one of the most honest and able officers in the Vietnamese army. He is now living in the United States. He was very hard working, he wanted to get on work with the Cambodians. I could talk to him and General Cushman would go with me to see him. But Cushman saw his relationship to his Vietnamese counterpart as one of a management consultant. He would send a weekly or monthly report letter of things that went

right or things that went wrong. The letters I saw were clear, direct and unvarnished. That that was not quite the best way to deal with the Vietnamese who were not from an open society and operated in a society where loyalty was uppermost and trust hard to gain. With us, these kinds of open communications are understood. That being said, after my experience with other Vietnamese generals and Americans who worked with Vietnamese generals, Cushman and Truong were the best. At the end Truong was in II Corps. After the 1972 offensive by the North he had to fold because the general in the Corps above him, I Corps, which was on the North Vietnamese border, bugged and his troops ran. But it was a very good experience working for Cushman.

I also worked for John Paul Vann.

Q: What was your impression of him?

HAVERKAMP: Since I read the book, I didn't know...

Q: It's called the "Bright and Shining Lie" by Neil Sheehan.

HAVERKAMP: Yes. Sheehan interviewed me for the book.

John Vann was sharp and had a better understanding of what was going on in Vietnam than any American or foreigner that I knew. He had influence with military, with politicians. I can remember going to his office to see him and sitting from maybe 10:00 at night to late at night or early in the morning when he would come in and put his feet on his desk and say, "Well, if you came here to bullshit I haven't got time. What do you want?" And then he would talk for an hour and a half or two hours. But while you were there the telephone would be ringing and it would be his girlfriend who owned a pizza parlor, or some general, politician, correspondent or some governor or another girlfriend. The Vietnamese knew that Vann understood them. I never saw the Vann that is portrayed in the end of the book, somebody who allowed himself to be disillusioned or became disillusioned into thinking they could win. One thing I can clearly remember him saying to me was -- we don't know how this thing is going to turn out, but one thing they can't say is that we didn't give them every chance.

He was a guy who was a hands on manager. He would go to an outpost that was being attacked. Sometimes I think he must have worked 36 hours without stopping. But he really knew the situation on the ground. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. He was very, very well informed and a very influential man with the Vietnamese, the U.S. government and the press. Yet, he was a great guy to work for. Bill Colby, who was then head of CORDS was his boss. I went to Colby through Vann. If Vann thought your idea was worthwhile he would make a good presentation for you and you would get an answer. You never lacked an answer. He was never afraid to take up something out of fear of the reaction of the person above him. If he thought it was worthwhile, he would suggest it and make a good case for it. A great boss and a truly unique and brilliant man in Vietnam. I know of no one else whose views were more sought after or listened to.

Q: How were things going at IV Corps, the Mekong Delta, at the time?

HAVERKAMP: Well compared to I Corps, II or III Corps things were pretty well under control. Cambodia was very worrisome because the Cambodian army was ineffective and much of their leadership was hopeless. To be sure, like the Vietnamese there were outstandingly loyal and brave officers who operated successfully despite handicaps on their own side that would have discouraged most. We also had outstanding professionals in CORDS, the U.S. military and other agencies. One Foreign Service Officer assigned to CORDS as his first post was captured and held as a prisoner in a cave for years.

Q: And it was pretty much run by the Vietnamese wasn't it?

HAVERKAMP: Yes, with U.S. advice and help.

Q: This was not a place where we had to put many resources.

HAVERKAMP: In the military sense U.S. troops were mostly in an advisory role. There was a large civilian effort and commitment of resources. There were still areas of strong Viet Cong control in the U Minh forest area and considerable activity in areas such as the mountains in Chow Duc province.

Q: Was there any liaison with the Cambodian army at that time?

HAVERKAMP: Yes. When I was a liaison man in Chi Long the Cambodian Army had six or seven officers who flew with the U.S. light fire team. I lived in a hut with them. The US 9th Division Advisory team was there. We were officially a part of the team but separate because we had official liaison with Cambodian III Corps which was on the other side of the border. The U.S. military brought Cambodian officers down to train them in map reading and on how to use U.S. air assets available to work with them. Requests from III Corps for B-52s or Cobras or air strikes of any kind of support came through that center. They were very naive and would ask for B-52 bombing of some village because Cambodian military prisoners were believed to be there. They would be told, "Well, we have already learned in Vietnam that it is not a good idea to do that to your own people." These Cambodians from the Cambodian military would go along on C&C ships to be the liaison with people on the ground. I did that from time to time myself.

There was a special training camp for Cambodian troops who had been sent down to be trained by our Special Forces. They would round up people and send them down. There would be some little kid there and if you asked him how old he was he would say, "I'm fifteen" in a high pitched voice.

There were also meetings between the Vietnamese and the Cambodian military to try and get them to plan and work together. The Cambodians were always accusing the Vietnamese of robbing and raping and pillaging, burning and looting. Some of which was probably true. At the top level, the generals got on all right.

Early on when General Cushman asked, "Well, what do you think?" I said, "Well, with the Cambodians we are lucky in some way that the enemy is the Vietnamese". This was before we

really knew the extent of what the Khmer Rouge was doing. The Cambodians had tremendous confidence in the U.S. military. It is really heartrending when they end up as the Cambodians did by being killed for having worked for us. But they were very loyal and very supportive.

I tried to get our military intelligence people to take what the Cambodians said seriously and to teach them how a good intelligence officer was demanding, objective, and suspicious.

Q: Did you get any feel about our embassy and how it was taking information, or was this just another world?

HAVERKAMP: After the invasion in of Cambodia in 1970 it became, I gather, within the embassy, a source of disagreement between the MAAG team and the ambassador on the one hand and the DCM and the Cambodians about how much equipment to give them, particularly sophisticated weaponry. But when you look at what they were doing, when Lon Nol was running their war for them, the way he was just leading them from one mass ambush or defeat to another, it was very sad.

Q: Did you have much contact with the embassy?

HAVERKAMP: Only through the military attaché when he would come down with the Cambodians for meetings that we had at Chi Lang. At times an Embassy political officer would come with him. I went up there once to see the deputy prime minister, a man named Son Ngoc Than, who was a leader of the resistance to Sihanouk, at one time. Then we had something called CIDG forces that were trained by our people before we went in, before seventy. They were very effective. They were well trained and disciplined. They had some of their pay with the rest of it going to the monks in charge of the pagoda in the area where they lived in South Vietnam who gave it to their families. They were used for various penetration operations, etc.

When Sihanouk was overthrown we gave up that support. Son Ngoc Than had headed all that group. I met him when I was in South Vietnam and then some time after the invasion he went up to Phnom Penh to be deputy prime minister. When I went up to see him at his invitation, I went to the embassy first and nobody I asked for was available to see me. Afterwards I came back to tell the embassy what had happened and the Political Counselor went wild. "How dare you do this without seeing us beforehand?" That was my only contact.

Q: How about our embassy in Saigon?

HAVERKAMP: I used to go and see the people there. They were always very helpful. They moved in a different world, I think, than those of us in CORDS because they were dealing with the national government. I gather they were having some trouble with the military because according to my friends in the embassy General Abrams censored everything that went out on the military and if it was critical it was most likely edited. And I saw the ambassador from time to time. He was interested in hearing from Foreign Service Officers in CORDS and was always open and cool. He seemed to be a man who knew how to go from the details to the conceptual and to concentrate on what was important. With his entre to Presidents Johnson and then Nixon, he was unusually influential at home and in Vietnam.

Q: The ambassador at that time was who?

HAVERKAMP: Ambassador Bunker.

Q: You left there in 1972. What did you feel about Vietnam when you left? Wither Vietnam in your opinion at that time?

HAVERKAMP: Well, again I didn't see it ending up the way that it did. From the beginning I never felt comfortable with the idea of all of us running around telling province chiefs, district chiefs, and others, how to run their country. Some of whom had been fighting the communists for years. Moreover, in a nationalist war you have to have nationalist credentials and I was always uncomfortable about the effect this had on the Vietnamese government's nationalist credentials. Not so much what we were doing with the Vietnamese and Cambodian military, but with the civilian government in Vietnam. At the same time it was exciting telling people how to run their government rather than reporting on how they were doing. I could never figure out anything in all of Vietnam that was worth the price we were paying. I still can't. We had absolutely nothing there that made it worthwhile for us to make the effort that we made. I wasn't disillusioned when I left. I didn't think it was hopeless for the South Vietnamese.

I would like to say something about the build up of the Khmer Rouge while I was there. We had intelligence reports from various sources on the Khmer Rouge. And the things they were doing were startling. For instance, killing monks which would have been inconceivable even in a novel in Cambodia a bit earlier. Khmer Rouge control was spreading. Reports began coming in from places all around the border areas with South Vietnam and farther north. The loss of control of the countryside was so quick. The terrible mismatch was that you had the incompetent Lon Nol government and you had a ruthless enemy who was taking advantage of his incompetence to reduce the area he controlled. The whole time I was there the dominance of force was on the side of the government, but they were outmatched in tactics and dedication by the enemy. There were, of course, some outstanding, brave and loyal officers whose units performed very well.

ANTHONY C. ZINNI
Company Commander, Marine Divisions
Vietnam (1970-1974)

General Zinni was born and raised in Pennsylvania. After graduating from Vallahona College he joined the Marines, which became his lifelong career. His distinguish career took him to Vietnam, Okinawa, Philippines and Germany, where he served in senior level positions. Attaining the rank of General, Zinni served as Commander-in-Chief of CENTCOM, where he was deeply involved in worldwide missions including Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. General Zinni was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

ZINNI: Those two pieces were never in place in my mind, so by 1970 when I was a company

commander, I began to have real serious questions about how this was going to work out. I just didn't see how we were going to "win" and, of course, I was wounded there and evacuated.

Q: When you went back, you went through an experience very few military officers would have and particularly in something like the Marine Corps. You must've been the odd guy out. People who are used to going together and a whole group of like-thinking Marines and all this and all of a sudden you're seeing it from a different perspective. Did you find that people kind of looked at you a little bit askance or were you a problem?

ZINNI: No, just the opposite, I think, in many ways. Not only did I have that first experience, but when I came back between tours of duty they valued that experience. When I was at Quantico training second lieutenants, I was teaching counter insurgency, I was teaching some of the unusual things that nobody had experience in, like river operations. Since I had a connection to the people, the language, and the South Vietnamese forces are much more interested in that. We ran a mock Vietnamese village that we ran the troops through. I was put in charge of that so I don't think they looked askance. They saw it as a valuable set of experiences that they wanted to capitalize on so I found myself, in the two years that I was back, the 2 ½ years that I was back, that I was concentrating more, studying the insurgency, reading about it but people were coming to me and other advisers. There were a few of us and drawing on that because that was much different than the vast majority of experiences elsewhere. We knew parts of Vietnam that no one else did because basically Marines were concentrated in the north. Obviously, the language and the experience with the people was very valuable to them so that by the time I came back, people recognized you had a set of skills and experiences that was additive to everybody else's and valuable.

Q: Did you have any contact while you were with the Marines with the State Department, the CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support) program?

ZINNI: Only peripherally. In some of the areas where we operated, they were there. We would meet them. What always struck me was when we would take prisoners, we could obviously communicate with them right there on the spot and deal with them and sometimes, as a matter of fact, some of the North Vietnamese and mainline Viet Cong prisoners we took had actually gone to military school with some of our officers and had relationships there. One place we captured a regimental field hospital and the doctor had gone to school with our battalion doctor and they knew each other. So, in talking with the people, it always seemed to me, with the revolutionary development cadres that came into the villages, the CORDS program, those things were more feared by the enemy than were combat units and they were more highly prized and targeted because obviously, that could undermine the basis of the insurgency. I really came away with the impression that we put too much emphasis on winning the war militarily and that stuff, despite the rhetoric that was more marginal when it should've been more balanced, because what I saw is like I said, you couldn't win this war unless you had the people willing to sacrifice for it. We didn't give them anything overall that they could sacrifice for and, secondly, if you weren't taking the war to the door of the North, you know, they were getting a free ride. They chose the time and place. And even at a tactical level I think something like 80 to 90% of the engagements were initiated by the enemy so they chose the time, the fight, usually the place to fight and how they wanted to fight and I don't think you can win a war like that. I even became convinced --

because there's elements of fighting and war activity but it's in the context of a larger conflict that has a political, humanitarian, social, economic element to it -- that we weren't paying as much attention to that I thought we should.

Q: When you came back you were with a unit. Where were you?

ZINNI: In the north, in I Corps, outside of Da Nang in the west. Most of our operations were in the mountains.

It just seemed that everything was just going through the motions at that point. We had committed to withdraw. One of the Marine divisions were out, we were on a downward slope, we were the remaining Marine division and they were planning to remove one of the regiments so it was, the war was winding down for Americans. The South Vietnamese military units seemed to be at that stage of the game well equipped and I think conventionally capable. This was before we pulled the plug on support of, you know, they had a 50-50 shot of fending off any major attacks and of course, they did in the first eastern attacks and then in the second offensive, you know, when they didn't have the wherewithal for full funding. But I think the whole idea of a free-market economy, democracy, all the words that we were saying, the rhetoric of free South Vietnam that had seemed to have worn thin. It didn't seem to be there anymore. I don't think anybody was seeing a clear way out of this by then other than we were going to leave and declare victory and, you know, people were talking about maybe a decent interval. But to me, it would be a matter of time. I felt the South Vietnamese as long as they were given the wherewithal militarily, could fend off defeat but I think over time they couldn't sustain it because nothing was happening in the South politically, economically, socially to make the kinds of changes that struck at the heart of the people.

Q: Did you find with the Marines being an elite unit, were they feeling some of the problems that certainly our Army felt?

ZINNI: Oh yes. I mean there was a draft. The Marines also had to receive draftees as the Army did during Vietnam so it wasn't the all volunteer Marine Corps that it had been in the interwar period and obviously, there were issues back here, the racial issues, the drug culture and everything. I mean, all militaries are a reflection of society, so those issues were washing over into the military too. I mean, arguably, we didn't see it as bad as the Army but certainly we had our moments that were very bad and you could see it. I think still the camaraderie and still the sense of duty and pride was there. It amazed me watching the courage of my troops and their performance in combat when clearly we were out. This was an unpopular war. We had gone from anti-Vietnam to antiwar to anti-military back here and so no one was under any illusion that they weren't going to come back, couldn't wear a uniform. What you saw or what you tend to see is troops performed for each other. They performed for the unit, they performed for the military organization, they performed for their buddies and there was no sense of we were here doing the same kinds of things we were doing at the beginning of the war.

Q: Did you have problems with the racial problems?

ZINNI: I didn't in Vietnam but when I was wounded and I was evacuated I spent 30 some days

in Guam and of course, in different hospitals in Vietnam and the Philippines. I was sent to Okinawa to finish out my tour and so I spent a number of months in Okinawa. I commanded a headquarters company and then a guard company there and the racial problems were really bad there. I mean, we reacted to race riots. Of course, at that time the Okinawans had Okinawan communist groups and they used to attack our posts and so I saw as much combat in Okinawa dealing with race, there were racial gangs out there, Mau Maus, bushmasters and actually, KKK's on all sides and my guard unit was reacting to all this. I think we averaged about every third night we had some sort of major confrontation. I learned a lot about riot control and all the measures that the police use when they have to deal with major riots. So that was an interesting experience.

Q: To move on, after you had an education of a future general dealing with these matters, you had a pretty good education, didn't you?

ZINNI: Yes, and of course, in the years after that. The marine corps tends to be an organization with a lot of deployments. I counted up, I served in over 70 countries in one fashion or another; made deployments in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Pacific and was in Europe for several years with my family based there, in Japan and so you really got this tremendous exposure to a whole number of different cultures. And of course, in reacting to crises, different crises, humanitarian missions, security crises in the Philippines and elsewhere and as a general to the Kurdish situation, at Darfur, in Somalia three tours of duty there and so on and on.

Q: Well, I want to, in these various deployments, I mean obviously we'll come to the Kurdish thing and the Somalia thing but prior to that, did you have any what you might call significant education as far as what you were doing and also what you processed when you were deployed in any of these foreign countries?

ZINNI: Well, I think besides the military sort of evolution of your experience, the war colleges and schools and command at different levels all the way up, I think the most significant thing was the exposure to the different cultures. Living overseas, operating in a number of different environments, working with forces from different nations, so being involved in their environment and in their culture so I think this whole exposure. I mean, we had a mission during the Cold War to go to Norway so we had cold-weather training. We continued our jungle training, mountain training, desert training and exposure to those environments out there so it was sort of this global environment, being exposed to that. And then not only commanding a unit in Okinawa, but I commanded a camp, so then I was required to interact with the local community.

Q: This was on Okinawa?

ZINNI: This was on Okinawa. I had to work with the mayor of Kin, a town that my base was located in and the assembly and so that gave me more exposure to, you know, interaction of working with them and, you know, the social aspect and all that, going to their funerals and to their weddings and everything else and getting to know them on a personal basis, too. And the same thing in Europe and elsewhere and so I think the most significant thing beside the military experiences during that time was the exposure to such a variety of cultures.

Q: Speaking of cultures, talking about the higher education in the military, the war colleges and all that, I have interviewed many Foreign Service Officers who have gone to various war colleges and almost invariably when I asked them to talk about their impressions of the of the armed forces they come up and say to me that the Marine Corps officers who reached these higher institutions of military learning were always the sort of intellectual and thoughtful and I was wondering, can you give any reason for this?

ZINNI: The Marine Corps is unique in several ways, in my experience. I spent a lot of time in the joint world and that's not to take away from the other services to produce magnificent officers. I think that first off you have to understand that we grow up in an environment that puts us constantly around the globe. I think until recent years the other services tended to be base-oriented. We're not. We're in small units scattered around the world, make frequent deployments. I think you're much more, you adapt and are much more comfortable in that environment. I think because of that, too, you see the non-military dimension more and so you get a greater appreciation for the other things that you need to understand. You need to understand economics, politics, you know, cultures and history. I also think in many ways the Marine Corps is much more tolerant of mavericks. I mean, we tend to have a history of mavericks and a history of people who are outspoken or their drummers are a little different than most others. Despite the fact that it's almost a contradiction of being such a highly disciplined organization, there is that tolerance for people and so you can probably get a group of senior Marine officers in a room and be amazed that there isn't a cookie-cutter sort of dimension to who they are.

Q: You know, looking at it from the outside one would think while, you know, jar heads, you know, I mean. Who was the general in Central America in the '20s and '30s? Yes, Smedley Butler.

ZINNI: The Marine Corps has always, because its existence isn't automatic and it's always been under challenge and under the gun; it's always had to ensure it could clearly articulate what it contributed. I mean, there were debates after World War I whether we should become more like the Army and large conventional forces, whether we should focus on amphibious operations, whether we should focus on the kinds of operations we were doing in the Caribbean and the Philippines. Basically, we focused on the amphibious operation because I think we were pressing enough and there were mavericks in the Marine Corps that saw the war coming in the Pacific but we never left any of these. We tried to stay balanced enough to deal with all of these. Plus, the Marine Corps has always been innovative, not only in tactics and organization but technology. I mean, we were the first to really develop use of the helicopter, amphibious tractors, amphibious operations, special organizations within the military, very adaptable structure, the air ground task force organized at a very low level. Even now with the Osprey and the amphibious, which are very controversial, it tends to be where we are. We tend to stay on a cutting edge in all these things and we are highly willing to experiment, not only in terms of organization, tactics and equipment but, I mean, in terms of thinking too. When General Cray was the commandant, he actually generated a revolution in military thinking for the Marine Corps, sort of a renaissance in looking at what was then called maneuver warfare but it was not so much what the term might imply in terms of movement of military. It was how you think about things, how you maneuver

mentally and mind set as opposed to thinking in terms of attrition, you know, where we had sort of evolved to in the U.S. military to an attrition based thought process, where you processed terrain and enemy troops. He wanted to think differently about that. It exposed us more to thinking about, again, the non-military aspects of conflicts you might face.

DONALD MCCONVILLE
Economic Officer
Saigon (1970-1974)

Mr. McConville was born and raised in Minnesota and was educated at St. Mary's College in that state. After service in the US Army overseas, he joined the Foreign Service in 1962. Specializing in Economic and Trade issues, Mr. McConville served in a number of posts abroad, including Panama and Vietnam as Economic Officer and as Economic Counselor in Korea, Malaysia, Mexico and the Philippines. In Washington, Mr. McConville also dealt primarily with International Trade and Economic matters. Mr. McConville was interviewed by Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when?

McCONVILLE: I arrived in about July of 1970 and I left in January of 1974, so I was there about three and a half years.

Q: A good, solid tour.

McCONVILLE: At the time that I arrived, they didn't have an economic section in the embassy as such. It happened to be just coincidental with my arrival there was a named Chuck Cooper, who was an extraordinarily bright and able fellow, a doctorate from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). He had been at the Rand corporation, he worked for the Council of Economic Advisors and so forth, and he'd been involved in the whole Vietnam operation for some years by that point. He was still only in his upper 30s, I think. He had just come back out there again. He was very well connected within the White House and so forth, and he had come out there on the condition that he would be Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs in the embassy but he'd have no staff over there. He had one staff assistant whom he would put on special kinds of tasks, but other than that the Joint State/AID Economic Office would serve as his staff. We would also serve the AID director. Cooper had been out there before and had been out there within the AID structure. That had left him very unhappy, and he wanted to pursue economic policy with the Vietnamese government independently of the AID operation *per se*, so that our Joint Economic Office, which probably had at least 10 officers or more - two of us were State Department people assigned there; the others were all AID officers headed by the office director, who was an exceptional guy Cooper had brought back out.

Q: Who was that?

McCONVILLE: His name was Bill Sharp. Sharp had a doctorate from Harvard and so forth in economics. Cooper had very strong convictions about persuading the Vietnamese to adopt very dramatic economic reforms, which were basically going to be far more market-oriented. That was his objective, and he had strong backing from very important people in the administration. Sharp was one of his close allies, and Sharp was placed at the head of the Joint State/AID Economic Office. Most of the AID people in there were all either doctorates or masters' degrees in economics. Here I was with my economic background consisting of primarily this FSI course, although I had a little training at the University of the Philippines. But it turned out to be an enormous opportunity for me in many ways. First of all, one of the problems was, when you went through this FSI economics course - it was an intensive course - but for a lot of people who then went on to fairly ordinary economic assignments somewhere else in the State Department operation, they really didn't have a lot of opportunity to develop and apply this breadth of economic training that they had acquired, so you tended to lose it fairly rapidly unless you got it in such a concentrated dose. Well, I had this great fortune of finding myself working with professional economists, and while I was at a disadvantage to some extent in that I didn't have the depth of economic academic training that they had, still I had enough that I could, by being very desirous of acquiring more, be able to develop this and work with professional economists and get an enormous amount of on-the-job training. Unlike most economic jobs in the State Department, which were reporting on what was going on in the economy and so forth and a lot of other things that didn't require a great deal of in-depth economic background, the Joint Economic Office, State/AID, and I, we were in fact the advisors to the Vietnamese government on running their economy. We worked extremely closely with the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Finance and so forth, and we in effect were working with them on running the Vietnamese economy. It was an extraordinary experience. Because of that FSI economics course, I had enough background that I could fit into this, and I continued to get an economic education while I was doing it. Now, my first job in the State/AID Economic Office was as what was known as the rice man. It turned out to be a job of pretty considerable consequence. In Vietnam during this period, much of the countryside had been taken over by the Vietcong and all the people had fled to the cities, so the production of rice had fallen dramatically so that in the mid-'60s they had begun importing rice from the United States. In the United States, of course, we had this PL-480 program. They were importing it under PL-480, and that was not the cheapest rice in the world, by any means, but the US government had an interest, and if you're going to import rice, you import it from the United States under the PL-480, because of the political weight of the rice people and rice industry in the United States.

Q: Louisiana and California and Arkansas.

McCONVILLE: Right. You know, almost all rice produced in the United States is exported. At that time we weren't very competitive with anywhere in the world. Much of the rice being grown in the United States was being grown to export to Vietnam. At the same time, what was happening then, more and more of the countryside was indeed becoming pacified, and that was particularly true in the delta where most of the rice was grown, partly as a consequence of the Cambodian incursion. That, and also the fact that the AID effort there had put a lot of resources into developing the high-yielding energy rice varieties down there, and so as a consequence, rice production was growing again rapidly in Saigon. They still at that point hadn't had enough yet to be able to supply the central and northern parts of South Vietnam, Danang, and those kind of

areas up there, but they were at least accounting for a substantial amount of the rice in Saigon. Some of my predecessors, they'd first gotten extremely pessimistic about getting this rice out of the delta and they'd been giving forecasts about how much rice was needed for the upcoming year. As I say, much of the rice being planted and was growing in the United States was actually just being grown for this market and wouldn't have been grown otherwise. So they were forecasting that there were going to be ever increasing amounts needed. Well, at some point this leveled off, and so suddenly the forecasts had proven to be excessive overestimates of the need, and rice was piling up everywhere and they had every possible grain storage in Vietnam filled with rice. Some of it was being eaten by rats. Of course, the price of rice was practically on the floor, and all this sort of thing. So it would have been a big fiasco. Then they went from that circumstance to one in which now they were growing all of this rice in the delta, and one of the big issues with the economic policy was getting the Vietnamese government to raise the price of rice, which they considered to be a big political issue, so that there would be more incentive for the farmers down there to grow it. That was a big issue we had with Vietnam, and that was one of the reasons why all of this was being centered in the economic office rather than the agricultural AID office, because it was so much an economic issue. My immediate predecessor had gone through the circumstance where, between he and the AID agricultural office, they had become overly optimistic about how much rice they were going to get out of the delta and they kept telling Washington they didn't need any more rice. Washington was under all sorts of pressure from the people who were growing it there saying this was causing a calamity in the U.S. rice production, and so forth. It turned out that some of this rice that they were expecting to come out of the delta didn't materialize and suddenly they had rice shortages. The Vietnamese government was panicking because they were fearful that, if rice prices shot up too much and there were rice shortages, this could of enormous political consequence. So they used some of their cash reserves, which had largely been supplied by AID, to go buy rice in Taiwan and in Thailand. This caused a political explosion in the United States because of the fact there was an excessive amount of rice in the United States in storage there because of the expectations that they were going to need more in Vietnam. So this then had been the other side of the coin and there had been tremendous brouhaha about that sort of thing. So as I stepped into that job these were the sorts of things I had to avoid, and I had to come up with realistic projections about two things: first of all, about how much rice we were going to need for the upcoming year and, secondly, to work with the Vietnamese government on rice price policy, finding ways to persuade them and to increase the price of rice to be able to stimulate more domestic production.

Q: How did you find your Vietnamese counterparts?

McCONVILLE: The ones that we worked with were, for the most part, very good. There was a very limited pool of them, particularly on the economic side. AID had been sending people back to the United States for economic training and various other kinds of training, and these people were beginning to return to Vietnam at this point. They had had very good educations and were very young and bright, doctorates and so forth from top schools in the United States, and very much imbued with U.S. and Western attitudes towards economics as opposed to the old Vietnamese style, and so forth. These people were the ones that Cooper was counting on to be able to bring about the kind of economic reforms that he was espousing, and he had enormous standing with them. They had built small cadres around themselves of people who were like minded, and these people were of exceptional quality. Now, once you got beyond them, then

there was practically nothing. The caliber of the typical civil servant was abysmal. Many of these people only showed up for work about once a week or something. So this small handful of people would have to do so much, but those people on the whole were very capable and very gifted and they were a pleasure to work with. In any event, this was one of the big issues I dealt with in the first year over there. Again, I used a combination of some of my economic training. For instance, the agricultural group, which is very, very large, in our AID mission, they had brought in large numbers on, TDY and so forth, of agricultural economists and so forth, who would devise all sorts of elaborate schemes for forecasting, none of which were worth a damn because the input that they had into it, the data, was so bad. But on the other hand, I had dug into this deeply enough to be able to accommodate those with that data. I knew what data actually did have some significant and which didn't. I put together my own little supply-and-demand curves, which by the standards of these guys were pretty primitive, but in fact they worked. So they were of some help to me. I went out and saw rice merchants and farmers and so forth and I traveled a great deal in the delta, going down with the people from the Vietnamese Ministry of Economy - we traveled together down there - and coming up with my own assessments of just how much rice was going to be available. I would send in this report once a month, the rice report, and I would keep everybody informed back in Washington what was going on. In fact, I got to be very, very good at it.

During my tour, we were always pretty close to the mark; we never had another fiasco. But then we went through this series of efforts to increase the rice price, to get the Vietnamese government to do it and then how to deal with that, and I learned things about that. For instance, when you raise the price of rice, one of the most important things was to have rice plentifully available. People were more prepared to accept an increase in the rice price as long as they were confident that they could get the rice. So every time we went through one of the rice price increases, we would work with the Vietnamese to have rice available widely. With any hint of any sort of shortage, they'd get more rice into the market right away and stabilize it at that price. By doing this, then we were getting increasing amounts from the delta, and by the time I actually got my first year done, we were actually making the first shipments up to Danang of delta rice, which was the first time they'd had it up there in probably a decade or something like that. So it was a success story. I was getting an awful lot of practical experience, but at the same time we worked long hours in that office. Only some of the very senior people had their spouses there. The rest of them that were married - I wasn't married myself - had their wives in places like Taiwan or Bangkok or the Philippines and would see them a couple times a year, two or three times a year. So we were all bachelors in effect and we lived near where we worked, so we typically would start very early in the morning and wouldn't usually get out of there until at least seven or 7:30 in the evening, and we routinely worked Saturday mornings. It was standard; you were expected to be there on Saturday morning. Usually about midday on Saturday. Sometime around 12 or one o'clock you'd get off, so you'd have Saturday afternoon and Sunday. But this also stimulated a great deal of camaraderie amongst us. All of this time while I was doing this rice job and was earning a very good reputation for it - and I got a lot of confidence from Bill Sharp and Cooper and the other people in the office - I was also absorbing an awful lot of what these other people were doing. I was particularly fascinated with the financial work, working with the financial aspect of the economy. So I was learning this on the side. After about a year or so of the rice job, an opening came up on the financial side, and they agreed to put me in it.

Q: Before we leave rice, was rice being used when you were there as a form of payment to civil servants and people like that?

McCONVILLE: The civil servants did have some right to buy rice - I think they got a 100-kilo sack a month or something like that - so that was one of the benefits of being with the civil service. But rice was so readily available at that point that I'm not sure that that was anymore a major factor. But, yes, the civil servants did get some rice.

Q: Did you run across the rice buzzsaw from the Senators from Louisiana and others? If the Delta was beginning to produce its own rice, and a more palatable rice than we were producing in the United States, I take it, I would have thought that people from California and Arkansas and Louisiana would get kind of annoyed that....

McCONVILLE: They were annoyed, and this was, of course, one of the pressures I was under. I, at all costs, avoided a situation like my predecessor had gotten into where we had been underestimating the needs. At the same time I couldn't overestimate or it would depress the market there. But the amounts coming in from the United States that we needed kept falling. We stuck to our guns and we were right. By that time, there had been a greater appreciation in the U.S. that this simply was coming to an end, there wasn't going to be this huge market in Vietnam anymore, and if the rice was there in Vietnam, that era was coming to a close. They hadn't been happy with it, but by this time they had shifted their eyes elsewhere to some extent. It was still always in the background. If you miscalculated and you suddenly ended up with not enough rice in Vietnam and they brought in something from Taiwan or something, the consequences would be profound. There was a lot at stake in this job. Anyhow, after I got through with that, I actually got into the financial side, and before very long I was the head of the financial unit. There were three of us. The other two were AID people, both of whom had come after me, but one had a doctorate in economics and the other a master's in economics, and here I was the head of the unit, and I earned their respect. I had learned an awful lot, and I was fascinated by this. You know, there was always a war going on. By this time the number of American military involved was dropping dramatically. When I first arrived in mid-'70, I think the total number of troops in the country was down to 150,000, and they kept dropping.

Q: And it had been up to a half a million.

McCONVILLE: And then they were scheduled to keep dropping even further. Then, of course, by '73 or the end of '72, the truce was signed and we were down to 50 uniformed military in the country including the Marine guards. So during most of the time I was there, the American troop presence was either falling and the American troops were not involved in that much more combat themselves. It was in this Vietnamization process, so it wasn't quite as devastating in that way as it may have been earlier on. But the war was still going on all this time. At the same time on the economic side of things, the reforms that Cooper had pushed so vigorously and which the Vietnamese adopted in a series of two major reforms were having an extraordinary impact. It was just absolutely fascinating for me to see firsthand what these kinds of policies could do. A big problem, for example, was the exchange rate had been fixed at 118 piaster to a U.S. dollar through most of the war years because of all the hyperinflation. Inflation had been 30/40 percent; it hadn't been hundreds and hundreds of percent like it was elsewhere, but it still was grossly

overvalued. Well, one of the major reforms was to get the exchange rate up to a sustainable rate, and over a period of two reforms they got it up to around 400-and-some pesos to the dollar, and then the black market disappeared, because at that level the black market just didn't have any reason to exist anymore, so the black market in currency disappeared. And they had consolidated customs, tariffs, and so forth, so again black marketing in that sense, because tariffs were dropped dramatically and so forth, was no longer a major factor. Exports had been zero during most of the war years with this greatly overvalued Vietnamese currency - they'd only had about 10,000,000 dollars a year, which had all been rubber, which had been subsidized because of the influence of some of these rubbers growers. But with this new exchange rate, the exports went up the first year like 10 or 15 million; then it was up 20; and the next year it was heading up to 100 million - and to see all these things working, and suddenly because when you had a market working.... AID had a study commission some years earlier on post-war policy for Vietnam, so they had written this enormous volume, volumes - it was probably 10 books - on exports from Vietnam post-war. They had predicted they would get so much for tea and so much for some of these traditional exports. The fact is that, once they got the exchange rate up to a sustainable level and it became economically legitimate and economically rational to begin exporting and to bring in some products and do some work on them and re-export them, and so forth, there was a whole range of things being exported from Vietnam, small manufacturers of one kind or another that nobody had ever mentioned in these books. None of the things that they talked about as being exports ever really emerged. This was going on in places like Korea and Taiwan and so forth, this whole process. This is in fact where some of these economic policies had first been developed. It was just extraordinary to see how this worked and the way that it stimulated all sorts of entrepreneurship, how the Vietnamese people, once given the opportunity, would respond to the market forces and that the economy would become as dynamic as it did in a very short period of time. Then there was the '72 offensive when the North committed 13 divisions and so forth. That was a tremendous shock.

Q: The Easter Offensive, or something like that?

McCONVILLE: '72 was the offensive, and as a consequence of that, that really sort of stunted the economy again because of all the political concerns this raised, plus the fact that, from the point of view of any kind of economic aid, the U.S. Congress now was sort of reluctant to give any more aid, plus you had the tremendous commodity prices at the time and the oil crisis, so that our aid in that last year or so that I was there was being used entirely simply to fund the oil imports. There was nothing left for anything else. But it showed me just what you can do with sound economic policies and how people respond to that, particularly people with the kind of cultural attitudes that most of Asia have. So that was a lesson that I came away from Vietnam with, was struck with profoundly. But the whole experience - this was part of it - I was enjoying the work so much, even though again there was always this overhang of the fact that the war was going on. They wanted me to stay. I wanted to stay, was tempted to stay longer, but at some point I figured I just had to get out of there if I was going to continue a career. One other sidelight during that period of time - it was again in '72 or early '73 - Cambodia was coming into crisis during this period, and the Khmer Rouge were running over more and more of the country. Of course, this was in the post incursion period. As more and more of the country was overrun by the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia which had been a rice exporter, was suddenly facing shortages of rice. Well, the first year that this happened, in fact it turned out to be a false shortage. They

didn't have an economic section in the embassy as such. The AID mission was the economic section of the embassy in Cambodia, and they didn't have anybody over there who'd had any experience with rice and so they had sent of these panic cables to Washington about the need to get rice right away. There wasn't any available right at the moment from the PL-480 or anything they could get there fast enough, so they had to use some of the AID funds and purchase some from Thailand and Taiwan. Of course, this caused a political uproar in that context. Then what happened was the shortage proved to be inaccurate. In fact, there was a good deal of rice around and they didn't need this rice and it got wasted. It had been a big embarrassment. Well, the next year the same thing happened again. Suddenly the Cambodians were saying that there was this acute shortage of rice and they want to go buy rice. So Washington, this bunch of people who dealt with rice and such topics in AID and the Department of Agriculture and so forth, they were extraordinarily skeptical of this reported shortage and they wanted somebody to go over there and find out what the situation truly was, and they wanted me to go over there because they had confidence that I was someone who could find out what was really going on there. So I was asked to go on a TDY (temporary duty assignment) over to Cambodia, so I went over there. Cambodia was getting increasingly insecure at the time. The capital of Phnom Penh was relatively secure, and some small area around it, but then the only other major place that was secure was Battambang Province up near Thailand, which is where most of the surplus rice was produce. In fact, a lot of it was produced commercially up there. They had some big holdings that had produced rice on a commercial scale up there. So I would fly up to Battambang, went with a Cambodian official there, and tried to get at the bottom of all this, and I came to realize what had happened. In fact what had happened was that - you know, since the Lon Nol takeover, the throwing out of Prince Sihanouk, prices through this period had gone up dramatically. To back up just a bit, after all this involvement in Vietnam, when we reestablished an embassy in Cambodia and had a very modest AID mission and it was just the economic section of the embassy, half a dozen people or so, the by-word was supposed to be that we weren't going to get involved again like we were in Vietnam, that we would give these people some resources, they'd largely decide themselves how to handle it, and then we'd just wash our hands of it.

While most other prices had gone up by a factor of something like 150 or 200 percent, the price of rice was actually no higher than a couple years earlier. The Cambodian government had taken great pride in the fact that they had managed to keep the price of rice stable, and, you know, all the other prices were rising. What this means in economic terms is that the price of rice was deflating dramatically relative to all other prices, and what happened as a consequence of this, and particularly because so much of the rice up in Battambang was being raised on a more or less commercial basis, the people who had been raising it commercially had absolutely no incentive to raise any more rice. They'd lose money raising rice. So there were huge areas up there that had gone out of production. They had also been allowing them to export it previously about a year or two year earlier. The government had decreed they wouldn't allow any more exports, so they had this fairly significant surplus and it had taken a year or so to draw this down. In addition, it was complicated by the fact that there was a significant drought that year. In fact, they were almost literally out of rice up there. There was still some rice up in Battambang, but it wasn't going to last more than a couple of months at most.

I talked to the rice merchants in Phnom Penh again. I had come to learn how to deal with these rice merchants; I had a lot of respect for these Chinese rice merchants. They were very clever

and they were very shrewd, but one thing they almost never did, they never lied to you. They wouldn't tell you anything more than you asked. I also found out that if you went around to enough of them, if you kept hearing certain things, they were probably true. So after seeing a lot of these people, they had kept telling me that there really is no rice out there. And in all these areas where people were saying that the Khmer Rouge were occupying the area, and then once the price of rice gets high enough, it will suddenly mysteriously come out of the woodwork. "There is no rice out there. I have cousins and so forth that are out there. There is no rice out there." So I finally came to the conclusion that indeed there was no rice out there, that there was enough to last for a couple more months and then they would literally be out of rice. As you got nearer and nearer to the bottom, suddenly rice would simply disappear because it would become so valuable. So you wouldn't get all the way to no rice before you start having a real crisis on your hands. So I came back and pronounced what my findings were, and nobody wanted to back it in the embassy there, and the AID mission insisted I send out the cable all on the basis of 'McConville says'. So the cable literally went out "McConville says," not the embassy or the AID mission, "McConville says." I wrote this report explaining what happened and the consequence of the fact that the rice prices had been artificially kept so low for so long, what was happening there, and I said that within a couple of months they were going to have a very severe rice crisis, that right now the only rice left was in Battambang and they were still being able to transport it down there but that could be interrupted too. Then I went back off to Saigon, and within about two weeks of my getting back to Saigon, the road was cut between Battambang and Phnom Penh, so that rice that was up in Battambang now could not get down there. And within days, they had a terrible rice crisis. Soldiers were breaking into rice stores and stealing rice and there were riots, and Washington panicked. "We've got to get rice over there right away." We had some rice in Saigon, so we were able to get the Vietnamese to agree that some PL-480 rice that we still had there, would be flown over to Phnom Penh, and some of it we arranged to ship on small craft up the Mekong River. We had an amazing guy there in the AID mission who could deal with all these little small craft captains and pay them enough to get them to take this chance to take it up there. Suddenly then I was the guy who had told everybody this was what was going to happen. They wanted me to go right back to Phnom Penh and to oversee this operation of getting the rice rationed and so forth to people and to get the rice prices increased and get something done about it. Two weeks earlier, as I say, nobody wanted to have anything to do with my forecast; it was all my forecast, not theirs. I came back and I was king of the roost. I told everybody what was happening. It was a couple weeks of the weirdest thing, getting that rice out there. That experience in Cambodia was something else. At that time the ambassador was in Washington, on home leave or something like that.

Q: Which ambassador is this, Graham Martin or...?

McCONVILLE: No, he was in Saigon. I'm talking about the ambassador in...

Q: Oh, John Gunther Dean?

McCONVILLE: No, that was long before him. It was a guy - I can't remember his name now - who was a career foreign service officer. His whole attitude had been we won't try to tell these people what to do in this kind of thing. So he was off in Washington for some reason, and Tom Enders was the deputy chief of mission. Enders was a diametrically opposed sort of personality.

So when I came in, Enders was all, "What is it we have to do? I want to know," and I told him. Of course, my whole report had explained that so much of this had to do with the price and one of the first things you had to do was get the rice price up to some kind of realistic level so there would become incentive to plant rice at least for the next year, and there was still some possibility they could get some rice in the tail end of that year. I still remember this meeting. Enders was about six foot seven inches tall. He's sitting in this meeting and he's got the AID mission director, his economic counselor, and he's sitting in the room, and he looks at me and says, "What should the price of rice be?" I said, "We've got to do a good deal more analysis for that before you can say specifically what it should be, but it has to come up dramatically." He said, "Name me a price," so I said, "Twenty-five" whatever the currency was, and he turns to the AID director and says, "You go over to the Ministry of Economy and you tell that's part of the agreement. We've got to have that price up to 25." Then I told him, "First of all, if you're going to raise that price, you've got to have plenty of rice around." I said, "I can assure you from my own experience that people will be more willing accept an increase in the price of rice as long as they feel confident there's plenty of rice around. That's what really panics them when they don't think there's any rice around." So indeed that's what they did. Then Enders wanted me to stay over there and he wanted me to do the whole financial. He wanted to get involved dramatically with getting their economy back. So I told them I really didn't have the depth for that, and we ended up sending one of our really well-qualified analysts to go over there and work there for a year or so. Then I had to keep going back from time to time to keep helping with this rice situation. I did about half a dozen two- or three-week TDYs in Cambodia during this period, and it was getting dicier and dicier over there all the time. In fact, before I sent off this cable in which I stuck my neck way out, I had to somehow reassure myself that indeed there wasn't going to be rice coming out from these areas around Phnom Penh, that these rice merchants had convinced me would not happen. These areas were shaky as far as security was concerned, but some one from the Ministry of Economy in a UN vehicle would go out into these areas. I persuaded them to take me with them, and we went out and toured around, because I had my neck out so far, and I came away reassured that indeed there was not going to be any rice coming out of those areas. When the ambassador there at the time learned that I had done this, he gave me a bit of a lecture for having done it. He said, "I appreciate your professionalism, but..." but it was my neck going out there. But whatever, I did this, and in fact there was a lot of consequence involved to what I had done. But the irony of all of this was there was almost no one in the State Department working on economic issues in Vietnam. They had one FS-05 or something like that, and he was of no consequence. So all of the people who were aware of all this were people in AID, people in USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), people at the National Security Council and the White House and so forth, but no one in the State Department. I recognized that within the State Department I was going to get almost no credit for this, because no one knew about it, and they certainly didn't know of the stakes that were involved or appreciated it. Like those people in USDA and AID and so forth, when they had a crisis, I was the guy they wanted specifically, and in fact I did the job, but it really wasn't going to be doing me much good in the State Department. So I finally accepted the fact that, if I wanted to get somewhere in the Foreign Service, I simply had to get another assignment out of Vietnam. I did, and I'm going to Korea, Seoul. That was my first tour there, '74 to '77. When I first arrived there, it was a joint State/AID economic office, but AID was phasing out, and during the second half of my tour it was totally a State operation. But again that experience in Vietnam, particularly working with all the professional economists, was a terribly enriching experience. It didn't do me an awful lot of

good in my State Department career except in the sense that I learned more economics out there.

Q: Well, this is the great fun of the Foreign Service. Well, this probably is a good place to stop. So we'll pick this up in 1974 when you left Vietnam. By the way, when you left Vietnam, how did you feel things were going in Vietnam at the time you left?

McCONVILLE: Well, unfortunately it was pretty clear things weren't going well. The truce had been signed, of course. I left in January 1974. Like most of us who had been there for a while, I had a network of colleagues, some from AID, a few from State, but many of them had been there quite a bit of time and they had spent an awful lot of time in areas all over Vietnam. They were extremely knowledgeable, and most of these people, who I had enormous respect for, were very despairing of the way things were going, that the idea that the Vietnamese government would be able to sustain this long after the truce, that things were going downhill. And the economy was suffering too as a consequence, and the fact that the only economic aid we were getting at that point really was to buy the petroleum because of the huge increase in the price of oil at that time. I left in January of '74. It was April of '75, of course, when Saigon collapsed. I think when I left in '74, I expected that was likely. It always troubled me deeply, particularly the economy, because after those reforms were enacted I came away convinced that, had they been able to stop the war, South Vietnam had the kind of people around in some of the economic policy positions, they had the economic reforms in place, and just the entrepreneurship and the work ethic of the Vietnamese people was such that, had they been able to stop the war, Saigon or the South Vietnamese at least had all the makings of being another eventual economic miracle and that you could have another repeat of a Taiwan and a Korea there. I still believe that's true, if they can ever get rid of the communist and socialist government they have. They tried to open up a bit to the West, but from all I understand, most of the bureaucracy, the communist bureaucracy, has never really been willing to do anything more than fairly superficially for them. They're doing better now than they were before. They've opened up some, but it's still a big disappointment. I have no doubt that, had they been able to stop the war and pursued those kind of policies, if you're looking now 25 years later, Vietnam would be another one of the Southeast Asian success stories from an economic perspective.

ARTHUR MEAD
Foreign Agricultural Service
Washington, DC (1970-1975)

Arthur Mead was born and raised in Wisconsin and educated at the University of Wisconsin and American University. After service in the U.S. Army in World War II, he joined the U.S. Department of Agriculture and was involved in its overseas relief and grain storage operations, including the administration of Title I, Public Law 480. During his career Mr. Mead dealt with many overseas programs, including those concerning India and Vietnam. Mr. Mead was interviewed by Ray Ioanes in 1994.

MEAD: Rice production in Vietnam was not fatally hurt by the war but there was great difficulty

getting it from the Delta to Saigon partly because of interdiction. Also, much of the time the farmers had rice but had little incentive to turn it over to the government since the economy was not producing goods for them to acquire. When I was in Vietnam in the early 70s, mainly to meet with the country team charged with determining the import requirements, I was invited by the Minister of Economy to go to the Delta with him as he tried to squeeze more rice out of the farmers. This was a periodic chore on his part to try to get more rice moving to Saigon. I did fly down to the Delta on Air America, but with USDA personnel.

We continued to have rice programs with countries such as Indonesia and Korea who had to stay in line behind Vietnam, but usually there were enough funds and rice to go around. That was true until the early 70s when world wide commodity difficulties arose as they seem to do every decade or so. The price of rice and grain rose sharply and the administration worried about domestic problems and inflation. A special decision making group was formed to ascertain the priorities of countries for a reduced program and to settle on the amounts of commodities to be made available. USDA took the position that it had no problem with arriving at a figure but since the commercial demand was strong, it did not want the funds made available for this assistance to reduce funds for other programs administered by the Department.

It was somewhat of a problem to determine availabilities of rice and grain but that was taken care of partly by reducing traditional carryover quantities (untested quantities that didn't come into play enough over the years for a rigorous review of their validity) to more realistic levels. This becomes a bit technical but the so called carryover amount was an important part of the computations to determine commodity availability. For example, the traditional carryover for wheat for years was 600 million bushels, which was the annual domestic use of wheat. It may have involved some creativity, but quantities were made available in 1973 and 1974, but at greatly reduced levels. I should say here that some of what I would call modernizing of carryover stocks took place during the problems in the mid sixties.

It was clear to me that the eligible recipient countries would find hard currency to fill much of their requirements if Title I was not made available in sufficient quantities. This was the substance of an impact statement requested by the ad hoc group. Thus it became a matter of who would finance the requirements and the decision was to let the recipients carry the load. Our Economic Research Service stated it could not do the impact statement so we were able to punch it out with the informal help of individuals in that service who we dealt with regularly.

One incident illustrates the concern the Administration had over prices and inflation. I received a call from the Assistant Secretary saying that he was negotiating with the National Security Council (it may also have been with the Treasury group dealing with possible price control) asking what minimum quantity of rice could we get away with in taking care of Vietnam and Cambodia. I asked him if I could massage that a little and call back. No, he wanted an answer right now. So it was my estimate of 600,000 tons, which turned out to be adequate but cost about \$300 million. That plus wheat and other commodities to Vietnam resulted in that country getting a high percentage of shipments for the year quantitatively, but especially high in terms of value.

This led to great concern on the hill and legislation about 1975 provided for a large set aside for countries, under Title I, which were less developed. I believe it started out at 75 percent being

reserved for these countries and then changed to 70 percent. Those provisions prevailed for a number of years. The provision used World Bank criteria for categorizing poorer countries; fortunately for Title I, Egypt fell into the eligible group.

While we did ship 600 thousand tons of rice to Vietnam and Cambodia under Title I because of their high profile, we shipped only 800,000 tons of wheat world wide; that's a dribble compared to ordinary Title I annual shipments. We did, however, keep the donations programs at more reasonable levels for direct feeding and other projects.

Another problem associated with Vietnam was the difficulty caused by the imminent fall of Saigon. Ships carrying Title I cargo were docking in other countries because of the risk of going into Saigon. This was some time before the Spring of 1975, of course, and the ships nestled themselves safely in the Philippines, Korea, Thailand and other havens. Our problem was that legally we had passed title to Vietnam at U.S. ports so that with the proper documents Vietnam representatives could take charge of the rice, wheat, tobacco, and cotton etc. at the safe havens.

We obtained legal authority through the Treasury to take the goods. Since time was of the essence we authorized the agricultural attachés to sell the commodities under certain guidelines and we did pretty well under the circumstances. At first the foreign affairs agencies wanted to donate some of the food to Asian countries but we convinced them that we didn't have the time to make such transfers and proceeded with the sales. I don't recall the values involved but it may very well have approached \$100 million or may have been substantially more. The only major selling problem we had was in Korea where the offers for wheat were much too low and I called the Economic Minister in Washington to make it clear that we needed a better response. It worked. The other downside came a bit later when the GAO speculated that we should have had a greater return. That inquiry didn't take up much of my time.

If I didn't say so earlier, I now say that rice took up a good deal of my time; the factors included the high profile of the recipients such as Vietnam and Korea, and the high profile on the Hill in the few rice producing states. For example, I received a call from the Deputy Administer of AID (the agency that naturally caught the heat from the Hill's foreign aid appropriations people) asking that we issue a purchase authorization that day for Vietnam, the device to get sales started. The problem was that we had no agreement with Vietnam to apply a purchase authorization to, but we would have one the next day when an agreement was scheduled to be signed in Saigon. I told him I would not order our operations people to issue a PA since it was not legal. To make a long story short, we ended up issuing a press release saying that an authorization would be issued the next day when the agreement was signed. They, whomever they were, couldn't wait one day.

Q: I think in this case it was the Vietnam War.

MEAD: So there was a heavy White House involvement then. Vietnam, of course, got special treatment during LBJ and continued through Nixon. There was not much difference because that was the high priority, and in terms of assistance, food aid was secondary only to bullets. You just

had to maximize shipments to Vietnam.

MELVIN R. CHATMAN
Senior District Advisor, USAID
Cuchi and Bien Ho (1970-1976)

Mr. Chatman was born in Oklahoma and raised in California and Michigan. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he pursued theater interests before serving in the US Army in Korea and Vietnam. In 1970 he joined AID and spent the rest of his career with that agency. His overseas postings include Vietnam, Malaysia, Bangladesh and San Salvador. He also had assignments with AID in Washington and New York City dealing with refugee, rice imports and training issues. Mr. Chatman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.

Q: You were there until when?

CHATMAN: The 29th of April of '75.

Q: 1970 is the beginning of the Vietnamization program.

CHATMAN: Also too I went down to AID when they found out that I could speak Vietnamese and they said we will get you on with AID. So that was an easy transition. I went back to the States for like two months for my security clearance to process because they wouldn't accept a military so they had to do some more investigations. So I had to go back to the States for two months. After waiting two months I was back in Vietnam.

Q: Then where were you?

CHATMAN: Do you remember a place called Cuchi?

Q: Is this when the tunnel oh no...?

CHATMAN: Right, I was in the district next to Cuchi; I was in Trang Bah, which was considered the worst of the 54 districts in Vietnam it was considered like the 53rd or 54th worst one security wise.

Q: Well this is...there were the tunnels and there was a horror sale wasn't there, I mean plantations or...?

CHATMAN: Yeah, plantations.

Q: And the Viet Cong were doing very nicely there.

CHATMAN: Right, that is where they did the [inaudible] and all that stuff.

Q: So what were you doing?

CHATMAN: I was a district senior advisor, which meant that I was the civilian that worked with the military in that district. That was my first assignment. I was there for six months and then they sent me to Bien Hoa and I started working out of Bien Hoa headquarters doing fuel work, different kinds of projects and things like that on behalf of USAID.

Q: Let's go back to the time you were in Cuchi. What were you doing, I mean what...?

CHATMAN: District senior deputy...

Q: But what does that mean?

CHATMAN: The districts, the advisory team for each one of the districts, were considered as military MAG teams (military advisory teams) and each one of those teams had a person who worked with a civilian, a civilian who worked with a civilian. I was the civilian who worked with a civilian there but all the other people on the team were military. I was the only civilian.

Q: What was the situation there? In the first place were you aware of the activity underground and the tunnels and also out in the plantation area?

CHATMAN: All you had to do was just wait until it got dark and you'd hear the activity. They would shoot up and run through the village. You could hear firefights outside the wall where I lived. All the time there was something going on, just a very bad place.

Q: Looking at it was there the possibility of moving significant military strength either American or Vietnamese in to clean it up or was that...?

CHATMAN: They did that but they had significant determination by the...like I said that was the worse, if they ranked the districts in order of the security problems the districts of Cuchi and Trang Bien were like 53, 54 out of 54 districts. So the VC (Viet Cong) there was a lot of American presence, the 9th division was there but there was also a very, very determined effort on the part of the VC to not allow that to stop their activity.

Q: Well I would think that dealing with the civilians there they must have been hold up in their bunkers and staying out of sight weren't they, because they would be the principal targets of all this VC activity?

CHATMAN: You know about the RD cadre, the rule development cadre?

Q: No.

CHATMAN: They had those people all over the place; they were getting killed like everybody else was, the soldiers. I can remember one day when one of their compounds was raided while

thirteen or fourteen of them got killed in one night. They were young kids; they were like a self-defense force.

Q: Yeah.

CHATMAN: And, of course, they were all kids and not soldiers.

Q: Yeah, it was almost like a Peace Corps.

CHATMAN: All the Peace Corps wearing rifles, a little worse. Their mission was security it wasn't...

Q: I mean security but they took young kids without much experience.

CHATMAN: Right, young totally inexperienced kids. It was unfortunate.

Q: After a while what was your attitude? Did you think my God if they can't clean this place up then they aren't going to clean any place up? Or what did you think?

CHATMAN: I think I had sort of a little bit of an innocent optimism for a long time and it took me, because I guess I was a stubborn and too much of a flag waver, a lot longer time to realize that that whole idea was not working out than it should have. I think in my last several years there I was convinced the war was over and that we weren't going to make it.

Q: Well then when you moved from Cuchi where did you go?

CHATMAN: I went to Bien Hoa.

Q: There that was a very large American base; it was a main supply base, wasn't it?

CHATMAN: Right, but that area had, it was called region three and it included Saigon so our headquarters that I worked with was a USAID headquarters for region three. While it was actually the military region three we had a...I can remember his name was Robert Funkhouser, he was embassy.

Q: Dick Funkhouser?

CHATMAN: Yeah, Robert or Dick?

Q: I think maybe it is Robert but I've interviewed him a long, long time ago.

CHATMAN: But we had the ConGen (consulate general), we had a ConGen system and he was the ConGen for region two.

Q: Well then what were you doing there?

CHATMAN: Various types of projects that were sponsored by AID to get the civilians involved in a democratic system. I can't remember all those, but it was all kinds of things.

Q: As you were working with these people did you feel we were trying to impose something that wasn't going to last? You spoke Vietnamese, were you getting any feeling it was a nice idea but they just, it's just not part of the Vietnamese system?

CHATMAN: Yes, the answer is yes. But I did as I said before I think it took me a longer time to admit that than it did for a lot of other people. It was probably my fourth or fifth year before I even stated entertaining that because I was gung-ho. I had come out of the military I was gung-ho for the flag and we're going to do this. I stayed that way for an abnormally long time.

Q: Then after Bien Hoa where did you go?

CHATMAN: I went to Da Nang.

Q: You were there...?

CHATMAN: Until the end of it.

Q: Until the end?

CHATMAN: I was there until one month from the end because Da Nang fell one month before Saigon did. I was in charge of the evacuation from Da Nang and then I was in charge of the transportation for the evacuation out of Saigon.

Q: Let's take Da Nang. When you got up to Da Nang this was before all hell broke loose wasn't it?

CHATMAN: It was really started then during the prisoner exchanges. Remember the peace was supposed to be there and all these plans and such, that is when I arrived in Da Nang which was about '72ish.

Q: How did you find Da Nang?

CHATMAN: A little scarier than Saigon, there was a lot more VC activities up in that area closer to the north. I was in Quong Nam, have you ever heard of Quong Nam?

Q: No.

CHATMAN: One of the provinces, an old very historical province with a lot of historical villages and stuff like that. I got into studying Vietnamese artifacts and things like that so it was very interesting to me. But it was closer to the north so you felt a lot more threatened. The possibility of something actually happening was there, it was definitely there.

Q: You were there when I guess the initial attacks were well one was up in the...

CHATMAN: Quong Tri.

Q: Quong Tri.

CHATMAN: That was the northerly most...that is where it started.

Q: I think didn't they pull out what was the Vietnamese First Division or something.

CHATMAN: I can't remember the details.

Q: What was in Da Nang? I mean were you and your compatriots seeing it falling apart?

CHATMAN: Yep, it was falling apart.

Q: What was your impression of AID as an organization in Vietnam.

CHATMAN: It didn't have the whip that it needed to have. It had the money to give everybody, which we gave everything away, but when things did not work right we had no ability to punish or correct the situation so it wouldn't happen again. So something would happen, they changed the Vietnamese and the next guy would come and be a bigger crook than the guy before. Our military career performance system dictated that if you wanted to get ahead the system that you worked with the Vietnamese had to show some improvements or otherwise it reflected on your performance. When you got to that level everybody made sure that the system at least report wise functioned a lot better than it did when they started, because that was part of the deal. Very seldom did you see a guy say, "Well look in the year that I've been up here the situation is worse than it was when I started." That was not heard of and if you multiply that by everybody in the system each one having his part of the pie then it was a corrupt system, we weren't getting the truth out of them. I think what's more is he exhibited the lies that he told were criminal, that he had some of those bags.

Q: You were involved in the evacuation of Da Nang?

CHATMAN: Very much so.

Q: I've seen pictures, of course, of the airplanes pushing people off and all.

CHATMAN: There is a book called The Fall of Saigon that describes a lot of my participation in evacuations.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

CHATMAN: I was trying to organize everything. Quong Ngai was in one of the southern provinces of region two.

Q: Quong Tri would be region one wouldn't it?

CHATMAN: Excuse me let me get myself together. Region one, it was a southern edge of region one. I was in Quong Ngai.

Q: It's not Quong Tri?

CHATMAN: No, no, no Quong Tri was the north. It was next to the bottom of North Vietnam. It was the southern district, the southern province of region one which was, I can't remember...

Q: Well we can pick that up.

CHATMAN: Quong Ngai, whatever it was it was a southern part but it was one of the worst provinces as far as the Viet Cong military presence and I was evacuated out of that up to Saigon. I was sent down to that province because there was no American down there. I was down there for about two weeks and the place got overrun. When I was evacuated out there were bombs being dropped, or mortars being dropped onto the airstrip. As the chopper was taking off I could see these things being blown up around us. We took off and that was the end of it. Then I was in Da Nang for about a month after that and then the same thing happened in Da Nang and we were put on the barges, they had a whole bunch of barges that came out of Da Nang and they had all the problems and things. Then when I got down to Saigon because of my experiences up there they said, "Look you've got to help with the evacuation of Saigon." So I was in charge of the embassy transportation, all the buses that took people from the liaison pick up points to the planes on time. I was the control officer and every day I set that thing up, that was my parting thing. I did that until the last night.

Q: How did you get the buses from the embassy to Tan Son Nhut Airport? I mean there must have been mobs all the time around the embassy.

CHATMAN: There were mobs around the embassy but they never picked anybody up at the embassy. There were staging points throughout the city that the buses were told to go by. Every day they had a meeting and at the meeting the various organizations would say I have so many people that I need to have picked up and taken to the airport. We would have the staging points, let's say there were ten staging points and we would say okay you have 15 people at point number one, which is on the corner of this. You have them there at six o'clock in the morning and we will send a bus. We did that for ten or twelve different places and had the buses come by, pick the people up and take them to the airport. The Vietnamese were unexplainable, did not get involved with these buses. The Vietnamese did not take American hostages for some reason, which I swore they were going to do up until the end of it and they just let this thing happen. I do not understand why they didn't interrupt them.

Q: Were you involved in getting Vietnamese employees, or government, and of course the families were terribly extended?

CHATMAN: All these people were whatever they said to be there I had no control over who was going to be there. I had the control over saying so many people had to be at this point and that was what we could pick up with the bus and the bus would go to the airport and that's the end of

it. They told me the numbers that would be from each agency and I would make sure the bus was there on time and got out to the airport.

Q: You must have...if you were told 15 there must have been more than that.

CHATMAN: Yeah but surprisingly we did not have many problems with the buses and I'm not sure for the whole reason. I think a lot of people maybe did not still think it was going to happen.

Q: Did you find that there was a problem getting people out of there just personally saying I don't want to go?

CHATMAN: Big problem and that was one of the biggest problems. There were a lot of Americans. We had probably three or four days where we could not fill up the airplanes simply because there were Americans saying they did not want to go. We kept begging the Americans to get on the buses and go. There was a period where the buses went out to the airport from these rally points probably one quarter full, that's it. A lot more people could have gotten evacuated.

Q: Were you finding I know a number of people I know came back to Vietnam from Washington to get their wives or their families or their girlfriends, or what have you out? Was this...did you get involved with this?

CHATMAN: Yeah but I wouldn't know, I mean I didn't care what the name of the...the organization had to have the people there whoever they chose to be there that was up to them whether it was one of their hookers or one of their mother-in-law or girlfriend or what, that was their problem. I just had to have the bus there and then make sure the bus got to the airport and cleared it when it got back.

Q: Were your drivers reporting problems of Vietnamese authorities not allowing people on planes?

CHATMAN: Yes they were. The way that they solved that was that the guys said, "Here is \$200 thousand, you put it in your pocket, you get out to the gate and you just make sure you get through." They just bribed them, the guys who were causing the problems were, that I am aware of, were the guys, the PFC, one PFC at the front gate at Tan Son Nhut who could sit there and say, "No you can't go through, and everything was stopped. So he said we will take care of him and they did.

Q: Did you get the drivers out?

CHATMAN: The drivers were mostly Americans until the Americans all ran out, then the problems started to become a little more sensitive because they were Vietnamese drivers and obviously they were taking advantage of the system, but it never fell apart, it never fell apart.

Q: So how did you get out?

CHATMAN: Helicopter about two hours before the ambassador left.

Q: Did you sense the concern that in the days that the ambassador was almost fighting the evacuation? He was...

CHATMAN: In a matter of sense that he was, he was totally against the evacuation because he believed there was panic and I also thought that for us to start taking massive amounts of Americans out very visibly so would have really panicked the Vietnamese and it didn't. Why it didn't I do not know? All it would take was a couple of ARVN soldiers in the middle of the street to stop the whole operation and it never did, it never did. I was out wandering around by myself at night before the final evaluation, I was always worried about somebody pushing me up against the side of the wall with a gun and saying you've got to get me out of here or I'm going to kill you. That was my one of my biggest worries and I was never bothered.

Q: I'm just trying to think of...did you have any particular friends or something in the Vietnamese community that you were getting out? Was there a problem of getting the Vietnamese to face up to the situation too?

CHATMAN: No, there were plenty of Vietnamese that wanted to get out of there. The biggest problem with the Americans is they didn't want to go. There were plenty of Vietnamese that wanted to leave.

Q: Were GIs, I understand that there was a significant number of essentially deserters from American military units had gone maybe even years before into the depths of Cholon or something in the black market and all that.

CHATMAN: I don't know anything about that.

Q: That wasn't an issue?

CHATMAN: Never an issue, there may have been some but I never heard that, if there was an issue there never was a problem. If you were American, if you were white looking you could get on the buses with no problem. You are supposed to have some documents or something but if somebody stopped and you were white looking they'd put you on the bus and say don't worry about it, just get out of here.

Q: Well then where did you go? You say you left just shortly...

CHATMAN: I went to Guam. I was on Guam to help with the refugees who were coming into Guam. There were several boats full of refugees that I was evacuated with. We ended up in Guam and I helped process refugees in Guam for a while. Then, where did I go, I went back to the States and worked as a coordinator for resettling refugees in the state of New York, still working with the Vietnamese.

ROBERT H. NOOTER

**Assistant Administrator, USAID
Washington, DC (1970-1975)**

Robert H. Nooter was raised in St. Louis, Missouri. He attended one semester at Purdue, joined the Marines during WW II and was assigned to a V-12 Unit. However, he graduated from the University of California with a B.S. in Industrial Engineering in 1947. He was called back into the Marines in 1951 to fight in the Korean War. In 1961, he attended courses at the Harvard Business School. He became interested in government service during the Kennedy Administration, and international affairs during his service in the military. He also served in Liberia and Uruguay. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on January 6, 1996.

NOOTER: John Hannah came to AID early in 1969, and somewhere around the latter part of 1969, he offered me a position as Assistant Administrator to run the Vietnam operation since Jim Grant was departing. I accepted in spite of the fact that I had serious reservations about the U.S. Government's Vietnam policy at that time. It seemed to me obvious that the people of the United States weren't prepared to support that war anymore, and our best policy was to get out. However, it was the Nixon administration's policy to withdraw from Vietnam, and therefore I thought I could work on the Vietnam program in good conscience. I didn't think it was a bad idea that we would give the South Vietnamese, who had taken a lot of their current positions because of the U.S. role, a chance to run things themselves if they could, if they had proper equipment and training. Therefore turning the war over to them in an orderly way in a reasonable period of time was a sound policy and one that I could support.

So with that in mind, I accepted the job as Assistant Administrator for Vietnam. I started working on it about February 1970, although my clearance and confirmation process still had to go forward, but I nevertheless began running the program. Just a word on the confirmation process might be interesting. In all administrations Presidential appointments had to go through the White House. Some administrations took that down even to mission director and lower level positions, but in any event all of them required political clearance for Presidential appointments because that had to go through the Senate and be cleared, among others, with the Congressmen in the states where these people came from. So my nomination went forward sent by John Hannah. John had two presidential appointment selections that were not career, but because he was relying so much on the career staff, he was having trouble getting his clearances through the White House, who wanted to put a number of political appointees into the system. To my experience the Nixon administration was not as insistent on this as the Kennedy administration, and the Johnson administration was quite good on career people also. I thought that actually the Kennedy administration was more political than either of the other two.

Q: That's interesting because certainly the Johnson administration was very supportive of the bureaucracy and the staff of professionals and career people. The Nixon administration in my exposure to it was much more political, and pushed much further down the line in terms of being sure people were political.

NOOTER: Now that you remind me, it got more political the longer the administration went on. Now most administrations are the most political up front, then become less political during their

tenure. But in the Nixon administration, maybe they were just a little bit sloppy at first, but they were fairly loose at the beginning, then toward the end it became more difficult.

Q: I got caught up in the subsequent period I guess...lower levels.

NOOTER: In any event, when they looked at my background, of course I had come in at a fairly high level in the Kennedy administration, and my whole record didn't look so politically pure to the White House. So they held it up for some time, and finally after about six months of John Hannah pushing and pushing trying to get it through, a senior political person, I think his name was Bell, in the White House, called me up one day. He said they were reviewing the request for my clearance and he asked how I had voted in the 1968 election. I didn't hesitate very long before I told him that I had voted for Hubert Humphrey, thinking this was pretty much the end of my appointment. For whatever reason, my nomination was approved the next day. Now a lot of things happen in the government that I don't understand, but this is one of the most puzzling.

Q: Maybe he already knew who you voted for, or thought you were an honest man.

NOOTER: I don't know whether he gave me credit for honesty or what. I don't know, but for whatever reason he approved it, and it went on up to the Senate and I was approved with no particular problem.

The Vietnam operation was enormous. I think we had some 2200 people in that Bureau either in Washington or the field, most of them of course in Vietnam. AID provided staff for two kinds of programs. One was the more or less regular economic programs: agriculture, various kinds of technical assistance, and infrastructure programs. The other program was the staff that we provided to the CORDS organization in Vietnam. CORDS was a mixed military/civilian operation and it was headed up by someone in Vietnam who reported to the ambassador. He was not under the military and he was not directly under AID although roughly half of his personnel came from AID. AID wasn't directly responsible for the CORDS operation in the field, but we nevertheless kept an oversight of it and were kept informed about it, and played some role in it. It also did link to some extent with the more traditional AID programs that we had such as in agriculture and refugees because the CORDS people in the field would be actually involved in working on some of these programs in the field.

During the course of the next several years the staff size came down immensely. I don't remember the exact numbers, but we were in a phase-down mode. I think we had 400 people in Washington when I first started and in a couple of years we reduced that to less than half, and the same in the field. I don't remember the exact numbers. As I mentioned, the policy of the government at that time was that we were in a withdrawal mode, that we were helping the Vietnamese get on their own feet to take over the war in a military way, and we were trying to help them straighten out their economy with the notion that the U.S. would withdraw in some period of time.

I ran the program from 1970 to 1974 when AID reorganized, and I'll get to that later. It was run as a separate Bureau until 1972, at which time the program had been reduced in size to the point where there was a reorganization and all the programs that were funded with what was called

Supporting Assistance were merged into a single region. At that time it included Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and also a program in Jordan. I don't think we had a program in Israel yet, but if we did that also would have been included.

Q: So it was an economic support bureau?

NOOTER: It was called the Supporting Assistance Bureau. It administered the money that had a political motive -- an economic purpose but a political motive -- and it was a separate line item in the foreign aid bill.

Q: But it was not regionally oriented?

NOOTER: It was not regionally oriented. It was administered on a world-wide basis, but the only areas we were involved in at that time were southeast Asia and a little bit of it to the Middle East. Then occasional bits of Supporting Assistance went to other places such as Malta under a base agreement that I'll talk about later.

But between 1970 and 1972, which is the period that I'll cover first, I was running just the Vietnam program. Of course what I found when I started going to Vietnam on visits, and I did visit every part of that country over the next several years, was that the atmosphere was dominated by the U.S. military upbeat style which doesn't really brook the thought of defeat. While there was no explicit rule about this, one quickly got the sense that things were off limits. It was simply an unspoken atmosphere which partly, I guess from my own military experience and partly from experience in general, I sensed immediately when I came out to Vietnam. Things that were thought of as going badly or not working maybe could be mentioned but always in the context of how they could be improved to make them work, never in the context of the fact that you shouldn't be doing them at all. And this led to unreality in some parts of the Vietnam program. When people go back and wonder what happened, this atmosphere, which has a lot to be said for it in a situation where you are winning, was one of the reasons that created some unrealistic situations. I thought the *Best and the Brightest* by David Halberstam and *A Bright and Shining Lie* by Neil Sheehan capture this very well.

I also met John Vann, who was almost a larger than life character, very well described in the Neil Sheehan book. I don't know if the audience to this oral history will know who he was, but he was a military man who had been in Vietnam up until 1963, I believe as a Lieutenant Colonel. John became an outspoken critic of the tactics that were being used in Vietnam because he thought they were ineffective. He resigned from the military as a protest. He had been a close friend of Daniel Ellsberg, who released the Pentagon papers. And John left Vietnam and the military in protest to the policies, and became an outspoken critic of the program. He worked for Martin Marietta for two years, and then was hired by AID in about 1965 and went back to Vietnam as a civilian in the CORDS program.

By this time he had some audience of people who listened to the things that he said, and he did have some influence on the policies at the time and caused them to become more effective. But ultimately, John also was committed to helping the South Vietnamese to prevail. I think John never could quite accept that the South Vietnamese weren't going to prevail as a separate entity

from the North.

But anyway, he was quite a charismatic character, and in many ways very unlike me but oddly we hit it off very well. And I must say I learned a lot from John. I went on tours of the countryside with him in his area. At the time I came out he was in charge of the CORDS program in the Delta. There were four regions of the country, and he was in charge of the Delta region. I remember I shocked him and all of his staff when I first went down to the Delta. They began doing what was standard procedure there, which was to take you into a Quonset type hut and give you a military-type briefing with statistics of what was going on. And after the first briefing I said to John, "No more briefings on this trip, John," because I felt I wasn't seeing anything. I was seeing the inside of a Quonset hut and seeing some figures, but I wasn't seeing the countryside, I wasn't seeing the people, I wasn't getting a feeling for what was really going on. And so while that threw the schedule into a turmoil initially, John could appreciate my response, and he spent the rest of the tour showing the Delta to me in quite a different way.

He liked to take you in his helicopter, which he piloted himself most of the time. The way to see how good the rice harvest was was to fly about 20 feet above the houses in the helicopter and look down in the yards to see whether the piles of rice in the yards was big or small. I had a lot of admiration for John, his views and what he thought, and I learned a lot from him.

Q: He obviously had a very definite strategy he followed in what he was trying to do. Can you describe that, what he was trying to bring about?

NOOTER: I can't remember so many of the details about the program, but I think for one thing the earlier policy had been to have villages that were encompassed in barbed wire and were cut off from the surrounding country, making them into enclaves. John didn't agree with that, among other things. He believed in his CORDS people being out in the countryside and not simply letting the Viet Cong take over at night, but being out where they could dominate the landscape at night as well as in the daytime.

I recall he disagreed very much with the Agent Orange program which was an attempt to defoliate the forests so the Viet Cong couldn't hide in them. In retrospect this was one of the most stupid things you could imagine doing, not to mention the environmental effects that have come from it. He thought that it was absurd, and was one of the few people to say so at the time. Other than being enormously energetic and trying to get down to the grass roots and understand what was really going on, and working with the people at the level where they lived, I can't remember anything else.

Q: Do you have a sense he was trying to understand the Vietnamese frame of mind or attitude or culture?

NOOTER: Yes, that would be true, and trying to support them and get them to take the lead in running things and securing their own defense. Of course ultimately I think he would have been unsuccessful had he lived. He died in a helicopter crash just before the collapse. He was at that time in charge of II Corps, which is where the North Vietnamese principal invasion came through. I always used to say, half in jest, that Vietnam would never fall so long as John Vann

was alive, and in retrospect, that's about the way it went. It collapsed not so long after John died.

Q: He wasn't responsible for all of the CORDS operation but just one area, is that what you're saying?

NOOTER: Actually, in his last tenure in II Corps, when the U.S. direct military involvement had decreased and we had less U.S. military there, he was put in charge of not only the CORDS people but all of the military people who were in that Corps. That was considered kind of a revolution to have a civilian in charge of military units, even though he'd been a former military officer.

Q: Okay, we can continue with Vietnam.

NOOTER: Ellsworth Bunker was the Ambassador at the time that I was there, and he was in charge of the CORDS program as well as the AID mission there. I found him to be a most remarkable person. I guess he was about 76 at that time. He had the natural instincts of the true administrator, to my mind. He never seemed to get involved in unnecessary detail, but he always seemed to know the important things that were going on and what to become involved in. He had an ability to separate the wheat from the chaff in a way that was more profound than any executive I'd seen. I thought he was also extremely sensible, level-headed, and never had any illusions about the job that was there to be done, but also did everything he could to carry out his assignments in the best possible way.

Bill Colby was in charge of the CORDS program. He later became head of the CIA, and we'll go into that some more later. Bill also was extremely reasonable and sensible and good to work with. But as I say, nobody wanted to hear anything out there about how things weren't working or how they might not succeed.

Q: That included Colby and Bunker too?

NOOTER: Less so, but it permeated the whole atmosphere. I recall as the withdrawal was going on, in 1972 I was out there on a visit and Colby had arranged a dinner for his senior CORDS staff. There were about 20 of us sitting around a table and at the end of the dinner I suggested we go around the table and ask each person at the table what they thought would happen after the U.S. withdrawal was complete. They did this, in this case in a very frank and open fashion, and two things of note stand out: one, at that time both Colby and I were reasonably optimistic about the chances of the South Vietnamese pulling it off by themselves. But I noticed that the people who were the most pessimistic were the ones at the lowest levels who were out in the countryside and had the closest contact with the people. It was more possible to be optimistic in headquarters than if you were out in the hamlets. And of course they were the ones who were correct. The other thing was that after the meeting one of the people at the dinner came up to me and said "This is the first frank and open discussion I have ever heard in Vietnam the whole time I've been here." I guess maybe with the U.S. withdrawal having reached the stage where it was, it became more acceptable to be open and candid. Colby had no reservations about this openness whatsoever. It was not he who was imposing this lack of openness in the prior period.

Q: What were the people from the lower levels who knew the hamlets, what were they saying about the situation there being pessimistic -- what did pessimistic mean?

NOOTER: I can't remember the details, but I guess they were aware that while a lot of Viet Cong had been killed in the TET offensive, the Viet Cong sympathizers and the North Vietnamese were still there, they were in the countryside, and once the U.S. pulled out they doubted the South Vietnamese ability to pull it off, to retain the leadership.

There was one incident that convinced me that it was going to fail, and that was a military exercise later in 1972 when the U.S. by this time had fully trained and equipped the South Vietnamese army. They were all ready to go and so the U.S. military and the Vietnamese army planned an attack by the Vietnamese army up near the 39th parallel to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail. They were to go in and do that with some U.S. air support, but the ground forces were to be entirely South Vietnamese. They would actually be going into Cambodia, I guess, and/or Laos, but it would be Vietnamese troops.

I happened to be up in Hue at the time, near the 39th parallel, when we got the reports of what happened in that engagement. It was clear that the North Vietnamese, when faced with a threat to the Ho Chi Minh trail, mounted a stiff resistance that completely beat up the South Vietnamese troops, who left their equipment and came running back across the border. I remember seeing General Abrams, who was in charge of the U.S. military forces at that time, shortly after that in Saigon. He was another realist. I liked Abrams very much, a very sound fellow, which was certainly not true of all of the military that had been there. He confided to me that the South Vietnamese had been soundly whipped. It seemed to me that if they couldn't sustain themselves in the face of a real confrontation with the North Vietnamese troops when they were fully armed and equipped by the U.S. and still had U.S. air cover, they certainly weren't going to do it after we left.

In any event, we did spend a lot of time during '70, '71, and '72 on the economic program. Charles Cooper was working in State on the economic program for AID and State, and later went out to live in Saigon running the economic program on the U.S. side. He was quite excellent.

We had a good Vietnamese counterpart, the Minister of Economy, named Ngoc. He was very sensible. I give the credit to Chuck Cooper and Ngoc, who developed a good macroeconomic policy, where they devalued the exchange rate enormously, even though this meant that temporarily it reduced the flow of U.S. financial resources that the U.S. military had to pay for its operations there that were being bought at an overvalued exchange rate. But nevertheless it was healthy for the economy to change the exchange rate and put it on a sound basis. And believe it or not, even with the war going on, the period following the TET offensive was relatively stable, and the Vietnamese economy began to respond and we began to get some good results. This came from the countryside, that is at the rural level. But of course ultimately that got disrupted as the political and military situation deteriorated.

Q: Who was the AID director during this time, do you know?

NOOTER: First Don McDonald and then Bob Mossler. They were both extremely capable

people. I think it was in that order. Anyway, those were the two in the time I was there. They were both very competent and ran good programs.

We had one interesting program there in the Mekong Delta. It is a rice-growing area where rice is grown as the flood of the Mekong River recedes. Once the rice crop is grown there's a dry season when nothing was grown traditionally until the next flood. The AID mission introduced a crop of sorghum that could be grown in the dry period, and within two or three years an enormous quantity, it seems to me like several hundred thousand tons a year, of sorghum was grown in the Mekong delta at a time when nothing had been grown before. I thought if one wants to look for interesting and startling successes in the AID program, that would be one example. I would be fascinated to know what happened now that the North Vietnamese have taken over, whether that sorghum crop remains as a cultivated crop. My guess is that it did but I don't know for sure.

Q: What about, we were involved in doing any of the rice developments at all?

NOOTER: Yes, we introduced the IR-8 rice variety. We spread the use of IR-8 rice, but that was already in place when I took over. I think the big issues had to do with the pricing of rice, the availability of rice markets, and how the South Vietnamese collected the rice. Sometimes the rice wouldn't come to market before the exchange rate was devalued; prices were unduly depressed, and so the government was inclined to go out and collect it at the point of a bayonet. We argued that that was not a good way to run an economy.

I think the issues related to rice at the time I was there were more related to policy issues and marketing rather than technical issues. Part of the recovery of the economy was in rice production. As the rice prices rose, more rice was grown and came to market. If the price is reasonable, farmers will grow it and sell it. But under wartime conditions, the South Vietnamese first instincts were not to handle it on a market economy basis. But Minister Ngoc understood that and agreed, and went along with us to implement the policies that brought things around.

Q: Were there other programs of significance? We spent a lot of money. What were we doing mostly?

NOOTER: A lot of the program was what you would call just general program support -- providing foreign exchange so that goods could be imported, which doesn't really promote development. In fact, it can be an impediment to development under certain circumstances even though it will keep people fed and clothed in the short run. There was a big balance of payments component to the program. The technical programs were heavily in agriculture.

Q: What were the AID people doing who were out in the rural areas?

NOOTER: Most AID people in the rural areas were CORDS people. They were involved in rural development programs, for example. If there was a sorghum program they would help see that the crop was introduced and that farmers understood how to grow it.

Q: So were the AID people kind of backstopping the CORDS effort?

NOOTER: The AID mission located mainly in Saigon supported the economic part of the CORDS program in the field. Generally it worked reasonably well even though the organizational arrangement was not very centralized. But the cooperation was pretty good.

Q: What was your sense of the Vietnamese people that you worked with?

NOOTER: As I said, the fact that they could produce a minor economic miracle in the middle of the war convinced me that they had the potential to be another economic tiger once that economy got straightened out if the war were ended. And I guess the present Vietnamese government is beginning to loosen things up and let some market response take place. If they carry that far enough, I have little doubt we'll have another tiger in east Asia.

Let me add one more thing. In this whole period we had a series of refugee programs. It was a very major and active part of the program, feeding and housing and dealing with the refugees that were generated by the war, and of course that varied from time to time. Actually it would be better to talk about this in the context of Cambodia and Laos, when I took over those programs, because the refugee programs were even more important in Cambodia than in Vietnam. But that was one activity of the AID mission that was important.

Q: How about the dealings with Congress on Vietnam, and the public opinion about that at the time? Were you caught up in the general hysteria about the situation?

NOOTER: First, on Congress let me take a minute to talk about that. I began testifying before Congress in 1969 after John Bullitt had left, when I was acting Assistant Administrator. Within the AID system, the Assistant Administrators always went up to defend and try to justify their portions of the program to various committees within the Congress. John Bullitt was a master at testifying. He'd been a New York lawyer and was a good judge of human nature. He was more successful in dealing with Otto Passman than anyone had ever been before. I had the advantage of John's counsel and advice before I had my first testimony before Otto Passman, who was in charge of the Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance of the Appropriations Committee in the House.

Otto was alleged to hate the foreign aid program, although perhaps he didn't hate it quite as much as his reputation alleged, but he certainly used his chairmanship position to humiliate all the witnesses who came before him. In 1962 when I had just joined AID, Ed Hutchinson had just been made Assistant Administrator for Africa. Ed was a rather feisty, very dedicated, very serious individual and very competent. But Ed refused to take Otto Passman's bullying and would try to fight back. The result of that was that he was up there testifying for 28 days for testimony that would normally take one day or two days at the most, because Passman simply wouldn't let him get in the last word.

On the other hand, John's counsel to me was simply to not fight the problem. Just accept the fact that Passman was going to dominate the situation, and the best thing to do was simply to make it as brief and painless as possible, although not letting him put something totally erroneous on the record, but short of that, to simply get on with it, because much of what Passman dealt with was

minutiae and details that were part of what he wanted to build as a record but wouldn't affect the overall appropriation level much.

I followed that advice reasonably successfully. From those experiences I developed the Passman five-to-one rule: that is, what I learned was that whatever you said favorable about the program, Passman would put five times that much on the record that was unfavorable. If you talked for a minute he would talk for five or maybe ten. If you talked for an hour he would talk for five hours. So you might as well save your breath. The ratio would always remain the same. And that's what Ed Hutchinson had trouble accepting.

On the other hand, my first testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee was a high point. That committee was quite a serious and sensible committee, and was trying to learn something as well as paint records. It had quite a diverse membership from all the spectrums of the political scene, and they were prepared to enter into a serious dialogue with a witness and have some sensible dialogue that would reflect facts and opinions and had some value. I had an extraordinarily good session with them during my first major appearance before a Committee.

Q: Do you remember who the Chairman was at the time?

NOOTER: Clem Zablocki, who was a fine man. He was kind of a Chicago ward healer, but in the Harry Truman sense of rising above his background when he got into a responsible position. And Zablocki had a serious interest in the AID program, which didn't mean he was in favor of everything but he wanted to do it in a responsible way. He ran a good committee with a good staff and good membership. That got my Congressional testimony off to a good start, and while Congressional testimony was always difficult, I enjoyed it with the exception of Otto Passman or Clarence Long who succeeded him and who was just about as bad.

Q: Did you get involved in any public debates on Vietnam?

NOOTER: Yes, one of the difficulties, of course, of being in charge of the Vietnam program was that popular discontent was growing by leaps and bounds. There were frequent demonstrations in Washington against the war. I had five children at that time, most of them teenagers, who were all actively against the war, as were most of my friends. So it was an extremely difficult period on a personal level. My family was all very good about it in many ways, I guess, because they knew I was against the war, too, even though my job caused me to do certain things in connection with it, which I hope I did in a responsible way, but that didn't mean that I favored our being there. What I favored was our withdrawal, and I guess that fact made it a little easier within the family. I don't think my children ever resented my role in it, nor did my wife, who was equally as much against the war as my children.

I do remember some good friends coming from St. Louis for an anti-war demonstration once and asking if they could stay at our house. In fact, there was a big crowd of them and we let them sleep in their sleeping bags in our basement. I remember saying they were perfectly welcome to do that, and some of my family went to the demonstration, but the only thing they couldn't do was put a Viet Cong flag in the front yard.

Q: What about the public in general and the press? Did you have a lot to do with them?

NOOTER: I didn't have many dealings with the press but I did have one or two press conferences at the request of State. I remember one of these. I was naive in dealing with the press. The economic situation at the time, probably in 1971 or 1972, was coming along pretty well and State thought it would be useful to give a briefing on the economic situation. So there was a press conference arranged in which I made a statement and then answered questions. The whole thing went on for 45 minutes or an hour. I remember after it was over when I came out everybody was very pleased with the way it had gone and what I had said and the impression it had made. I said, on the other hand, that I was horrified because out of that 45 minutes or an hour I realized that the reporters would pick one or two sentences and that would be their story, and I didn't know which ones they would pick.

And it turned out that the only thing that made any significant story was a reporter from one of the wire services who had asked about the level of aid that would be needed over the next ten years. I think at that time it was \$750 million a year, and he interpreted something I had said to mean that it would be necessary to maintain that level for ten years, which I hadn't said but that was his impression of what I'd said. Therefore, he quoted me as saying that seven and a half billion dollars more in economic aid was needed for Vietnam. When I saw the wire service story and called him to try to get him to correct it, he refused because that would mean he would have to admit he had made an error. And so that was the story that was generated out of this wonderful press conference. Generally I took a low profile with the press, which was fine with me.

Q: Did you do any speech-making? Were you asked to go out and...?

NOOTER: I did not actually; I was spared that. I didn't have a role in trying to make a public case for the program.

Q:presenting the administration's position to the public and all that?

NOOTER: At a personal level I remember helping to arrange a meeting one time with some anti-war people. One of them had been a shipmate in World War II of Bill Sullivan who was the senior person in the State Department running the Vietnam program, to talk about it, but I didn't make any public appearances in that respect.

Q: Did you have any direct dealings with the White House at that time?

NOOTER: Henry Kissinger was the NSC chairman, and the economic and military programs were really run out of the White House. Within the State Department, Kissinger's link to the State Department was Bill Sullivan who was a Deputy Assistant Secretary. They didn't go through the Secretary; they didn't even go through Marshall Green who was the Assistant Secretary. It was a direct link to Bill Sullivan. There was a committee that met several times a week of which I was a member which Bill Sullivan chaired, and there were several people from Kissinger's staff who came over along with people from the military and the CIA as well as myself from AID. This was the nucleus of the planning and the policy implementation within the government for the Vietnam program.

Q: Was it simply a strategy for withdrawal that you were talking about?

NOOTER: That came, of course, out of the political campaign. It was Nixon's policy even before and certainly after his Asian mission with Marshall Green, the whole policy of withdrawal and more restrained U.S. commitments abroad.

Q: But the assumption there was you withdraw, at the same time the aim was the South Vietnamese would be capable of carrying forward independently without us...

NOOTER: Exactly -- it was to give them a chance to make it on their own by helping to arm them and equip them and helping strengthen their economy. Then we would pull out and it would be up to them to make it on their own.

Q: And they presumably had the capacity to do so?

NOOTER: That's right, or if they didn't that would be the end of it, which of course is what happened.

Q: And there was a recognition at that time that that was a real possibility?

NOOTER: I believe that only became a realization as things got farther along, especially after the attempt of the South Vietnamese army failed to carry out a successful military operation on its own. In a way I was surprised the North Vietnamese held back as long as they did after that particular engagement, which was about 1972. They didn't really mount much of a serious attack until about '74. I guess they decided it would be less costly in lives to wait till the U.S. pulled out and they'd be able to take it as a pushover, which of course is what happened.

The thing for me personally that was uncomfortable was that while I was comfortable with the policy of withdrawal, the rate of withdrawal was so slow. It was slower than I anticipated when I took the position. I came to believe, though I never had any proof on this from anybody, that the withdrawal pattern was set to be sure there was not a collapse before the 1972 election. There were enough U.S. ground troops there until 1972 that it would not fall before that time. I am fully convinced of that although, as I say, you have to accept that only as my opinion. I can't quote statistics or even direct quotes from anybody to say that that was the basis of the policy. But certainly if you saw what was going on and the rate at which withdrawal took place...

Q: And you were involved in the strategy session...?

NOOTER: Not in everything. We really weren't involved in the rate of the military withdrawal.

Q: Not on the military side, but I would think on the economic side there would be certain assumptions about what you were trying to accomplish?

NOOTER: There was no question that on the economic side the Vietnamese could handle it at any time. They had gone through their changes in macroeconomic policies in 1971, and they

were able to handle it after that.

There was one ironical event when I was away on a trip somewhere -- a mission to Vietnam or a vacation somewhere in about 1972. I came back and everybody was in a tizzy because the Defense Department had sent a letter to the Secretary of State saying that while the military program seemed to be progressing well, they were seriously concerned about the state of the economy, and couldn't State do something to fix that. In fact it was totally untrue, but it caused an enormous flap. It was generated by some economist the Defense Department had hired to look at Vietnam and work on it, and who had somehow put Secretary of Defense Laird, who had been a congressman from Wisconsin, up to writing this letter to the Secretary of State.

Q: Did you have any meeting with Kissinger or any dealings with...?

NOOTER: That's interesting. I was going to mention that while I met regularly with this working group, I never did meet Kissinger until about 1972 when President Thieu came for a visit to the United States. The agreement was that he would meet Nixon at San Clemente, and so all of us involved in the Vietnam program went out to San Clemente, Nixon's residence in California, and met with the Vietnamese there. And there I met Kissinger for the first time. I came back and told my wife that it was an irony that I'd been working in the program for two years and had never met Kissinger, and finally met him in the men's room. The meeting at San Clemente was interesting in that I remember Kissinger telling us ahead of time that by all means don't bring up any economic subjects because Nixon hated economic discussions, and the fact of the matter was that all the Vietnamese wanted to talk about was the economy.

The other thing I recall was Nixon talking with us ahead of time, making the rather cynical statement that the substance of the meeting was absolutely of no importance whatsoever, the only thing that was of importance was that Thieu and Nixon be seen as meeting by the press and by the public. And that was his perhaps absolutely correct but cynical view of that meeting.

I haven't given a real flavor of the tenor of those times. It was during that period when the Pentagon papers were leaked, when demonstrations were frequent and volatile and Washington was swamped with demonstrators.

Q: I get the impression that you were a little bit isolated or insulated from this somehow...that you weren't directly attacked or confronted on this.

NOOTER: It was certainly all around us - demonstrators out in front of the State Department and so on. When I first joined AID, the State Department was completely open, there were no guards, anyone could come in off the street and walk the corridors of the State Department. It was only when there were some bomb explosions, maybe a bomb blew something up on the first floor, that they began putting in guards. After that it was quite a different Government, and it was in fact quite a bit more enjoyable previously. I remember somebody saying how surprised John Bullitt was when he heard I accepted the Vietnam job, I guess because I'd been vocal in my opinion that we should pull out of Vietnam well before 1970. But as I say, I felt I could support the withdrawal policy, but I would have done the withdrawal in two years rather instead of four years or five years.

Q: What about the attitude of people within AID toward the Vietnam bureau and that operation?

NOOTER: There was enormous pressure for AID people to go to Vietnam at the time when there was a huge staff there. Many of them didn't want any part of the war, and had joined the Agency because they were interested in economic development. They didn't see Vietnam and certainly not CORDS as economic development but as war support. When I was in Liberia, for example, people would be called to go to Vietnam and they would deeply resent it and try to find ways not to go. AID actually had to have a policy of forcing people to go at the threat of dismissal because the requirement for staff was so huge compared to the amount of people who would be willing to go without being forced.

Now the ones with whom I worked, once they were assigned to it, to my knowledge all did their jobs as earnestly and as conscientiously as they could. There was no holding back or anything like sabotage or anything even approaching it, nor do I remember people complaining about it once they had the assignment. Once they were there and working, they did their job.

But there was a lot of tension and a lot of feeling in the Agency about Supporting Assistance, that this was really more political than economic. I'll talk about that later when I get into other Supporting Assistance programs. My own view, not so much on the Vietnam program but in general, was that if we could get Supporting Assistance, it could be used for economic development. It didn't make any difference to me whether it was called Development Assistance or Supporting Assistance, we should use it as best we could to achieve economic development. And if it was easier or better to get it by calling it a different name, that was all right with me. At the same time I did feel an obligation that it be used in a serious way and not, for example, for buying fake opium.

Q: What, maybe this will come later, did the Vietnam situation have an impact on AID, or its perception of what AID is about in terms of congressional views or support? At that point we had, what 18,000 people on the rolls, and Vietnam was a factor that took a large staffing, and then it started going down as we phased out, but what was the image of AID or was it affected, did you have any sense, by the Vietnam domination of the AID operation?

NOOTER: My view is that the development part of the program went forward pretty much the same, although later, for somewhat other reasons that don't necessarily just relate to Vietnam, certain political programs got protected at the expense of the development program. But I don't think that was so true in the Vietnam years.

Q: There was the Fulbright view, or other view, that economic assistance got us involved in a country and in a situation which we then...and therefore he set up these limits, that only so many countries could have only so much of this and so on?

NOOTER: I guess you're reminding me of a view that became popular. I didn't think it ever had any credibility but the fact that Mr. Fulbright thought so was of some significance.

Q: There was the issue there of having economic assistance and development assistance in the

same country, and people were very upset because development assistance, I think, was being used in Vietnam for purposes that were not development. I've forgotten the issue now but...

NOOTER: My view at that time, and I remember saying this in staff meeting, was that 80% of the support for the foreign aid program was for cold war reasons and 20% was for humanitarian reasons. And if you had to rely on the humanitarian alone, if you want to use that term for the purest kind of development assistance, you would get about 20% of the funds you would get if there was a communist threat in the world. I remember believing that at that time and I am inclined to think that it was true.

But now what has been interesting to me, as things have developed now with the breakup of the Soviet Union and so on, is that in a sense aid has become more enconced in our thinking than it was in 1970 because I think in spite of the fact that the aid budgets are being cut, there is a recognition that there is a U.S. role providing foreign assistance even in spite of the absence of a communist threat. And this support is somewhat larger than I would have anticipated 25 years ago. We haven't seen this fully played out yet. We don't know what it will look like in 5 years or 10 years.

What I'm saying is that the support even for the development assistance part of the program was based on political reasons to a fairly large extent anyway. It was just that Supporting Assistance was more directly related to a situation that was politically important than the average situation in the developing world.

Q: Well, we'll come back to that later. I think the specific point, and I can't remember precisely...did you ever meet with Senator Fulbright?

NOOTER: Oh yes, many times.

Q: Was the view that economic assistance particularly was getting us in situations where we had then to get more and more involved, and that therefore certain legislative restrictions or processes were starting to be built in, limiting where we could provide this Supporting Assistance, and you couldn't have it in the same country where there was development assistance and so on. Because there was something at the time trying to use Supporting Assistance in a way that he thought was contrary to what Congress' intent -- I can't remember the issue?

NOOTER: Yes, I do remember that but I don't think that was very broadly accepted except by Fulbright himself. What did happen was that before Vietnam, aid was something that liberals would support and conservatives would be against. And out of Vietnam did come liberal antagonism in some quarters to foreign involvement of almost any kind, including development assistance. For example, you had Fulbright, who had been a person inclined to support foreign aid, who turned against it, and then he became an ally of the conservatives who were willing to cut aid for traditionally conservative reasons. But I don't think the Fulbright view that aid would tend to get the U.S. involved in foreign entanglements was one that was broadly accepted. Certainly it was not by other aid supporters such as Hubert Humphrey or even people like Senators Stennis, Percy, Javits or Aiken.

Q: Well we can come back to that. We've covered a lot. (end of tape.)

NOOTER: In 1974 the Agency reorganized again. The AID management found Supporting Assistance was spreading to different regions in the world, and it was thought of as not very efficient to have this all managed from a single Bureau. I must say that I got a lot of sympathy in the years that I was managing the programs in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Israel. It was kind of a running joke that one person would be burdened with all of these hot spots. But in fact it was all quite fascinating.

CHARLES HIGGINSON
Junior Foreign Service Inspector
Vietnam (1971)

Mr. Higginson was born and raised in Massachusetts and educated at Harvard University. After several years in private law practice, he joined the Foreign Service in 1961. His service in Washington and in posts abroad concerned primarily economic matters, notably Fuels & Energy and Food. His foreign posts include Brussels, Algiers, Rome and Luxembourg, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. Mr. Higginson was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1998.

Q: Tell me about how that came to be in 1971 and what your experience there was.

HIGGINSON: The Department was very worried over equal treatment of all new Foreign Service officers who were automatically sent to Vietnam and wanted to be sure that they were equally treated by promotion panels. Since some of the Foreign Service officers were assigned to very small villages in Vietnam where they had almost no contact with Foreign Service officers, it was thought that it would be a good idea to have the inspectors see every State Department employee in the country and do a very complete personnel report on each one of those. That being decided, it was realized that this was much too much of a job for the usual Foreign Service inspector team. Therefore, they decided to augment it and also to experiment with what was called junior Foreign Service officer, middle grade. So, Dan Phillips and I were selected to be the first guinea pigs for this experiment. We were sent to Vietnam. Luckily, I knew Dan from a prior work relationship. We were already good friends. That made it much easier for the whole assignment.

We went to Saigon in early June. As an economic officer, I was assigned to look at economic cone Foreign Service officers. Then the political officer saw the political officers. First, we worked in the embassy. That way, the leader of the team, Ambassador Sweeney, who was on leave from his ambassadorship in (Inaudible), I believe, could also review our role as neophyte inspectors and make sure that we learned all the ropes correctly. I remember, this was just after the Paris Offensive. I would say militarily, if we won the war in Vietnam, that was when we had most won it. It was really quite a peaceful time, at least in the southern half of the country. Vietnam was divided into four corps. The first corps was the northernmost; I did not ever get to the first corps area. The second corps had some fighting, but was reasonably peaceful. Some

inspectors went out through that corps and through the third corps, which included Saigon.

Q: You saw officers.

HIGGINSON: Yes. First, as far as impressions in Saigon, it was very peaceful, quite comfortable, a very large embassy and a mammoth American presence. I'll get back to this later. I also remember clearly that every weekend, we all went over to the political officer's house. He had a swimming pool, and had large water polo games that were a long way from the hardships that one considers when assigned to Vietnam. I also remember, we thought we'd like to go swimming at a beach. Ambassador Sweeney asked permission and it was duly granted. We hadn't realized that it entailed an airplane ride up to the beach area. He had the equivalent rank of a four star general, so we had to have armed jeeps in front and in back of us to go to the beach. One soldier had to stay within 50 feet of Ambassador Sweeney when he was swimming. He would be holding his machine gun right over his head. They also put a machine gun location right at the top of the beach. It wasn't totally peaceful and it seemed excessively unnecessary.

The young American officers that I interviewed in Vietnam were very capable and dedicated. They really put their utmost into trying to bring the Vietnam countryside into 20th century democracy and a stronger economy so that, hopefully, it would exist on its own. I really want to give the highest praise to these individuals. They certainly colored my future thinking on the Vietnam situation. They really had gotten out into the country. I remember a lunch with one farmer and the local CORDS program village representative. He had just put his whole life into the Vietnamese. The whole village liked him and worked with him. The farmer expressed his gratification. It was also brought home to me quite clearly that there was quite a way to go when, as we were leaving, the farmer offered me his daughter.

Later on, I was asked by the deputy ambassador (We had two ambassadors in Saigon at that time.) to stay on in the Economic Section. I graciously declined. From my point of view, there was no chance that the Vietnam experiment was going to work. It worked fine as long as we were bringing in just billions of dollars into the country's economy. As long as that could continue, I expect it's part of Vietnam (and as far as Vietnam is concerned, I was sure it could continue), but I also didn't feel that we could continue to put that sort of money in there and assume that the money started to be reduced. I saw the economy in Vietnam going to shreds very rapidly. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. Plus, of course, you couldn't take your family out there. It was less than attractive to me.

Q: Who was the Deputy Ambassador at that time?

HIGGINSON: Ambassador Sam Berger. He was an elevated DCM. But I believe he was also confirmed by the Senate. So, it really was an ambassadorship.

Q: And the number one ambassador was Bunker?

HIGGINSON: Yes.

Q: The focus of your activity there as an inspector was on the junior Foreign Service officers,

evaluating their work, rather than a program that they were doing. Or were you involved in both?

HIGGINSON: It depends on what you call the "program." We were involved in the program of the operation of the embassy as a Foreign Service mission. We were specifically told not to involve ourselves in whether we should be in Vietnam, or we shouldn't be, or we were doing everything wrong as far as the Pacification Program was concerned. That we were told not to be involved in. I believe Ambassador Sweeney treated that in his cover memorandum to our report. Basically, our report was to look at the operations of the embassy and, more specifically, Dan and I were meant to make sure that each junior Foreign Service officer got a thorough efficiency report out of the inspectors.

Q: I assume there were some junior Foreign Service officers in the embassy in Saigon as well as the many that were out in the provinces.

HIGGINSON: About half would have been in Saigon itself or over at the CORDS headquarters. Less than half the embassy was scattered around Saigon itself.

Q: And you evaluated them.

HIGGINSON: Yes. One of the things I had to do was the communications. I remember wondering about some of the mail expenses. But again, that was too close to the heart of the whole matter and I suggested that that issue not be raised further.

Q: When you say "communications," you mean the communications process within the embassy?

HIGGINSON: Yes, the airplane flights and things like that, which were, in my opinion, a little excessive.

Q: How long did this last?

HIGGINSON: This lasted three months. It was a chance of a lifetime. I was and still am very pleased to have been out there, to have seen what the U.S. tried to do out there. I came back some years later during the difficulties over Vietnam and the demonstrations in Washington and I agreed to be a monitor for the Department of Justice to make sure there wasn't police brutality in Washington. Therefore, I was down in the center of the demonstrations. I and a lawyer with the Department of State, Jerry Carter, kept together and watched and were extremely impressed by the care that the police took in not being too aggressive in controlling the crowd. Then just towards the end when everything got tear-gassed, the crowd started throwing rocks at the Department of Justice and the organizer of the march with extreme bravery stood up on the wall between the building and the rocks to try to keep down the rock throwing. One person next to me picked up a rock and fired it at the building. I stopped him and asked, "What did you do that for?" He said, "Look, I took a bus for three hours to get here for some action. There's nothing going on and I want to see trouble." He couldn't have cared less about Vietnam and what we were trying to do there.

I just mentioned that because of the conflict in my mind and the dedication of the U.S. team in Saigon trying to really rebuild this country and then back home where the whole issue was being lost, the real total lack of interest in the Vietnam issue per se, but one of really youth demonstrating and trying to assert itself against the government.

Q: But you also said that you really wondered whether South Vietnam was viable, whether it could really work without the billions of dollars in money, commitment, time, military strength that the United States was pouring in there. So, you really didn't see that it was a winnable situation when you were there that summer.

HIGGINSON: I'm not talking about a military point of view. I really was not involved in the military aspects. They simply provided helicopter flights all over. I just thought that the economy was so dependent upon U.S. aid that there was no way that we could sort of extract yourself without the South Vietnamese economy failing, which I assumed would bring on a greater communist progress in taking over the country.

Q: Let me ask you to sum up a little bit more about your experience as a mid-level officer as an inspector for three months. In 1972, I was sent on a similar program to Copenhagen. So, the situation was very different. I thought my main reason for being there was not so much to evaluate junior officers, but simply to add some more manpower to a small inspection team to make it possible to finish their work there in a reasonable period of time. I felt that it was very useful for me to sort of look at a different embassy that I had been serving in in terms of all its dimensions. I thought that was an experience that, even though I never was an inspector again, was very useful. I don't know if you felt similarly or whether you were so specialized in terms of the great numbers of junior officers that that had to be your primary focus.

HIGGINSON: Certainly from a time point of view, writing up all those efficiency reports took up a lot of time and attention. But I think I commented earlier that an aide to an Assistant Secretary was a wonderful way of seeing the Department and training for junior middle grade officers. I thought the junior inspector program from that point of view was very successful. We had a meeting every morning, all of the inspectors, and you saw their view of what they were worried about and what they had seen at the embassy. It's a wonderful opportunity. The two areas that I was responsible for, communications and the Economic Bureau, were certainly of interest to me. I am a special case in that I had never been in a real embassy. The Mission to the European Communities does not have a communications section, an administrative section, a consular section. It is purely a political and economic division stuck off in a separate building which the embassy completely serviced. So, it was especially good for me to see the service end of foreign service.

LILLIAN E. OSTERMEIER
Secretary to Ambassador Bruce
Paris (1971)

Ms. Ostermeier was born and raised in Illinois. After graduating from Business

College she worked as secretary and administrative assistant with a number of organizations in the private and government sectors. From 1956 to 1969, she was assigned to the United States Embassy in London as Secretary, first to Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission Walworth Barbour and subsequently to Ambassadors John Jay Whitney and David Bruce. Her final overseas assignment was as Secretary to Ambassador Adolph Schmidt in Ottawa. Ms. Ostermeier was interviewed in 2002 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Oh. Well, you went with Ambassador Bruce to the peace talks. What were the peace talks?

OSTERMEIER: They were going to try to settle the war in Vietnam. I think we had one previous – whatever his title was. It was quite an international announcement when Bruce was going to go to the peace talks. I didn't participate. I didn't really know what was going on. He would go. He was more or less a figurehead, because the embassy had its speakers, the representatives. Because of his prestige, he was a very important person.

Q: Were things going to his office that you were dealing with, concerning this?

OSTERMEIER: Very little, very little. He spent a lot of time on some personal things. These were personal diaries he brought up to date, and what have you. But, he would go to the meetings. What was his name? The Foreign Service office, who is now dead, was the principal representative. They would go together. But Bruce was really the name. I'll think of the man's name.

Q: Did you feel that Bruce was feeling a little left out, or beginning to get bored with the whole diplomatic business, or not?

OSTERMEIER: I don't know. He did something for UNESCO. What does UNESCO stand for?

Q: Social organization; United Nations Social and Economic Organization, I think.

OSTERMEIER: He had some dealings with that in Washington. Then, he had a great tragedy in his life. His daughter was killed.

Q: Yes, terrible.

OSTERMEIER: I think he was probably glad to get back into a more active life, but he only stayed a year. He knew he was only going to be there a year when he took the job.

CRAIG DUNKERLEY
Consular/Political Military Officer
Da Nang (1971-1973)

Ambassador Dunkerley was born in Wisconsin and raised in several states in the

Midwest. He was educated at Amherst College and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. In 1970 he entered the Foreign Service, serving abroad in Da Nang, Tokyo, Yokohama, Fukuoka, Brussels and Vienna. During his career Mr. Dunkerley became a specialist in NATO and International Security, Disarmament and Arms Control matters, and served as Special Envoy for Conventional Forces in Europe from 1997 to 2001 with the personal rank of Ambassador. He also had several tours of duty at the State Department in Washington, DC. Ambassador Dunkerley was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: When did you come in?

DUNKERLEY: I came in very late in 1970, actually coming on duty in the A-100 course at FSI, the Foreign Service Institute, in the first few days of a cold January.

Q: How did you find your basic officer course?

DUNKERLEY: Obviously quite different than it is now. It seemed much more abbreviated. There was, at that time, very much a focus on practical preparations for the basics of traditional embassy jobs, how to draft a political memcon or economic reporting cable, how to prepare a diplomatic note. It all seemed geared in that direction. Of course, at that time most people were being shipped out to consular duties as their initial assignment. After initially being slotted for a consular job in Curacao, I was invited to apply, and ended up being paneled instead for a posting with the Consulate in Da Nang, Vietnam. I did six to seven months of Vietnamese language training in Washington and arrived in country in November of 1971.

Q: Back to the A100 course, what was the group like in terms of women, men, minorities, backgrounds etc.?

DUNKERLEY: All of the above. As I think back, there was a fair amount of diversity and mix among my classmates. Good folk. It certainly wasn't exclusively white males from Eastern schools. But I am not going to be particularly memorable in coming up with any special insight from that far back. Although I do recall now one of the questions put to me at my oral exam: How did I think world history might have been different had the horse been indigenous to America instead of Asia. I've forgotten how I ever got through the answer.

Q: How did you find Vietnamese?

DUNKERLEY: As a tonal language, it was difficult.

This was a period in which the American presence in Vietnam was shifting since most of our military forces in country were in the process of being drawn down. As a consequence there was an increased emphasis in my Vietnamese training towards the economic development assistance work and political/military functions that would be performed by the U.S. people going out there for CORDS - civil operations and rural development support. That is to say, the emphasis related to work out in the countryside in the provinces and hamlets and such like that. I was in a slightly different situation by being assigned neither to that sort of work nor to our quite large Embassy

in Saigon, but rather to the then small Consulate in Da Nang, the second largest city in Vietnam and located in regional Central Vietnam with its own politics and problems.

I was there at the Consulate for about 18 to 20 months. The first half of my tour I was assigned primarily consular duties, but those increasingly became related to political/military reporting. That turned out to be what I was doing full time for the latter half of my tour there.

Q: When were you there?

DUNKERLEY: From late 1971 and through all of 1972 – which was the year of the Easter Offensive by the North Vietnamese Army when they came through Quang Tri City, just to the north. I was there through the first six months of 1973, following the Paris Cease-Fire Accords. During that latter time, I was involved in following local developments and the international monitoring group that was observing adherence to the Cease Fire Accords.

Q: Who was consul in Da Nang when you were there?

DUNKERLEY: Frederick Z. Brown was the Consul. Immediately following the Paris Cease-Fire Accords, when the post was upgraded and enlarged to become a Consulate General, he became Consul General. He was a very able, energetic individual. He was an excellent first boss.

Q: He has been teaching at George Mason.

DUNKERLEY: Yes, I believe so.

Q: Let's talk a bit about vice consular duties, what were you doing?

DUNKERLEY: Obviously, since this was still a war zone, consular duties were devoted to a fair amount of American Services-related work. We had an ebb and flow of American contractors and merchant mariners who would have a variety of problems. We also did a lot of adoptions of local orphans and the like – and I recall a fair number fiancée visas for U.S. servicemen. But, given that this was a region amidst war-time conditions – a highly artificial situation, I didn't face the full panoply of consular duties and visa work that you might usually have on a first tour assignment at a big embassy.

Increasingly, however, I was taken up with political/military reporting on developments throughout the region. As I said, this was a time when the American military presence was being drawn down significantly. It was still present with specific units and in smaller numbers, but the exercise of American military power by this time was increasingly by air. At the same time, the South Vietnamese were seeking, with our considerable assistance, to develop their own military strength, in both regular units of ARVN - Army of the Republic of Vietnam - and those on the local level. But also on the political front, the Thieu regime in Saigon was attempting to build up new political parties, new political structures to support the country as the Americans pulled out.

All of this was tested severely in 1972 – after I had been in country a few months – during the major Easter Offensive launched by the North Vietnamese Army. They struck quite heavily in

the part of Vietnam that I was in – that part of Central Vietnam which was known as I CORPS or Military Region One (MR-1). They succeeded in taking Quang Tri City in that spring, routing the ARVN Third Division that had been defending that town just to the south of the DMZ; they subsequently came quite close to seizing Hue City on the other side of the Hai Van Pass just to the north of the city of Da Nang. To the south of Da Nang, there was increased activity and attacks in neighboring Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces as well. There was at times intense fighting, air strikes, and massive refugee flows throughout these parts of the region. During this time the city of Da Nang itself and the military facilities around it were rocketed regularly.

(As I think back now on all of this, I can remember how some of those NVA rockets would sound coming in sometimes at night – oddly enough, it was like both sizzling bacon and fast sled runners on crusty snow when shooting overhead and then a loud dull-sharp crack as they'd hit a few blocks away).

So this was a six to seven month period during which the responsibility of the Consulate – the Consul General and the two Vice Consuls – was to provide a steady stream of reporting and analysis, from a Foreign Service perspective, on the efforts of the South Vietnamese regime, both militarily and politically, first of all to avoid collapse, secondly to regain lost ground and thirdly, to lay more viable foundations for the longer term. It was all a very close-run thing.

Q: What were you doing?

DUNKERLEY: We did a lot of reporting out of the city of Da Nang proper. Mike Owens, the other Vice Consul, and I would periodically go out into the provinces, visiting all the prefectural capitals in MR-1 like Quang Ngai City or Hue. We would meet with South Vietnamese figures: government officials and local politicians, local clergy, local businessmen, teachers and the like. We were seeking to gauge a sense of popular mood, track the effectiveness of local South Vietnamese government entities, determine if possible directions that some of these efforts might be going, and so forth. Though we reported how ups and downs in the military situation could have a decisive effect on all of this, we were not concentrating on straight military reporting because of course that was the province of the remaining U.S. military advisors with the ARVN units.

Q: On the non-military side, what was your impression of the South Vietnamese government, how it was reacting? Specifically, what did you think of the officials?

DUNKERLEY: It was a very mixed picture. When it came to the lessons learned as a young Foreign Service officer – from my months in Vietnam in watching the South Vietnamese government and army respond to the great military crisis of 1972 and then the first six months following the Paris Cease Fire Accord in 1973 – I came away with several disparate impressions. For example, I developed a much greater sensitivity to the tremendous complexity and ambiguity inherent in such a situation. It was not something that lent itself to straightforward black-white interpretations. War and peace in central Vietnam in '72-' 73 did not lend itself to overly-simplistic interpretations, let alone easy predictions – either of the sort that one would hear in the era of campus protest within the United States or, conversely, in periodic official assertions as to

the strength and effectiveness of the Saigon regime.

This was probably not surprising given the nature of Vietnamese politics and society of the time. There seemed few clear-cut good guys-bad guys in that sort of situation, as evidenced on a daily basis in my working contact with a variety of the local South Vietnamese officials, politicians and average citizens. Some seemed dedicated and effective, others less so, circumstances would change, and initial impressions could be misleading.

The other thought that I took away from my experience in Vietnam was probably a greater appreciation for the pressures within government service (often indirect and implicit) that shape the performance of U.S. organizations and their reporting and analysis in such situations.

At the time, I thought this might be particularly true on the military side; there was such an investment on our part in ARVN and in the efforts in the various prefectures in MR 1, you can't help but think that that provided some incentive to accentuate the positive.

Q: What was your impression of the performance of the military up around Quang Tri?

DUNKERLEY: Again my impression was consistent with the theme: there was no simple answer. There was no monochromatic characterization that one could give of the South Vietnamese military performance that year. In some cases, there was great confusion and incompetence leading to very serious military setbacks, particularly initially. Some individual South Vietnamese military leaders and units failed. On the other hand, there were also a number of performances by senior South Vietnamese officers and their troops that were quite courageous, skillful, heroic, and indeed, in the end, they did succeed in 1972 against daunting odds.

Q: Was the Northern Army forced out of Quang Tri?

DUNKERLEY: Eventually out of Quang Tri City. I think some elements were still to be found the north of the Quang Tri River and below the DMZ. There were still significant portions of central Vietnam that were under serious North Vietnamese army control when, of course, the Paris Cease Fire Accords were signed in early 1973, ostensibly freezing the situation on the ground in place...

Q: Looking at the civilian side of things, what was the role of the Buddhists at that time?

DUNKERLEY: The A Quang Buddhists had been a major factor in political life in that part of central Vietnam in earlier years. We spent a great deal of time at the Consulate trying to understand their positions and to explain ours to them. So there was at the time some interaction with them.

Q: What was your impression?

DUNKERLEY: As the details were so long ago, I'll have to pass on that.

Q: How about working with CORDS?

DUNKERLEY: CORDS was still in place in 1972, but with the Cease Fire Agreement early the following year, its formal structure and much of its activities in MR-1 were subsumed into what then became the new Da Nang Consulate General and its operations. I recall that a number of the CORDS people still engaged in support and development activities in the countryside were then folded into a rather extensive reporting operation throughout the provinces following the Paris Accords – part of an immediate push to expand reporting. Additionally a number of FSO's with prior Vietnam experience were called back on temporary duty at the new Da Nang Consulate General. Similar efforts were made in other parts of Vietnam, the only difference being that there they were actually establishing new consulates. In our case of Da Nang, we were already in place.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

DUNKERLEY: I was there under Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker towards the end of his tour. I left in 1973 so I was not there when he was followed by Graham Martin.

Q: In your reporting, did you find either through Fred Brown or through the embassy that there were constraints on your reporting?

DUNKERLEY: No. I personally did not. For his part, Fred encouraged initiative in reporting.

Q: Did you coordinate early on with the CORDS people and the ones out in the field?

DUNKERLEY: There was always a fair amount of discussion with our CORDS counterparts. Of course, we were very eager to gain their insights. But prior to the consolidation in early '73, we both had separate reporting channels.

Q: How about our military presence at that time? We were withdrawing our troops as part of the "Vietnamization" program at that time. Were there military observers left?

DUNKERLEY: American military advisors were assigned to all the ARVN divisions and major units in MR-1. Also at the prefectural or provincial level, there continued to be significant U.S. military assistance – and advisors – to the local Regional and Popular Forces as part of the overall CORDS effort.

Q: Were you getting much feedback?

DUNKERLEY: A certain amount, but it varied in volume and quality.

Following Vietnam, I came back to the States and did a brief stint in the East Asia bureau.

DOUGLAS WATSON

**Province Development Officer, CORDS
Saigon (1971-1973)**

Mr. Watson was born and raised in the Washington, D.C. area and was educated at California State University at Los Angeles and Harvard University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1966, he served in a variety of posts throughout the world, including Cairo, Athens, Madrid, Saigon, Quito, Islamabad and Port au-Prince, Haiti, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. He also served in the State Department in Washington, on Capitol Hill in the Pearson program and was a member of the US delegation to the United Nations General Assembly in 1991. Mr. Watson was interviewed by Thomas J. Dunnigan in 2000.

Q: When that pleasant tour ended, you went to Vietnam. Tell me how that came about.

WATSON: Well, I went to Vietnam for six principle reasons: to see if I could make any sense out of what our policy was by being on the ground; to make a contribution to our efforts there; to work with the U.S. military; to work for another agency (I was assigned to AID with what was called CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support); to get promoted faster (I thought that would be such an avenue); and to make more money (there was a pay differential).

So, from Spain I returned to Washington with the family. We got somewhat settled in to an Arlington apartment. I had training, about five or six weeks, only general orientation. Included in that training were 19 hours of early morning Vietnamese language training. That was the total, which didn't do you a hell of a lot of good, maybe enough to get you from the airport to the embassy.

Q: What did your wife think about your going to Vietnam?

WATSON: That is interesting, a very good question. I think that I was very inconsiderate of my wife and my daughters and their own needs. I was a fairly controlling spouse and father, without here getting into murky psychological issues. Since my "career", I believed, was ultimately for all of us, then if I got promoted and increased our earnings that was all to the good. Well, what about them? Where was the father? Where was the husband? So, my wife, I think, were she here during this interview, would say, "I went along with him. Those were things that he needed to do." But during my career she played "second fiddle" in so many respects. Of course, not until much later in our lives was I fully appreciative (and probably still am not fully appreciative) of everything that she did as a parent and, of course, as a spouse, and how much she gave to the family unit, how much she nurtured us all. As a matter of fact, once I was in Vietnam, and she ran the home and our daughters I could see she had done it beautifully, when I first came back on my first brief leave. Vietnam was an 18 month tour. You had to serve 90 days in country before you could come home on R&R, and then you had to serve six months before you could leave for your second stateside R&R. 90 days to the day I took my first R&R, six months to the day I took my second R&R. The first time I came back after having arrived in Vietnam in late September, if I'm not mistaken, and I was able to leave there perhaps on December 21st or so to come back to the U.S., at Christmas time. My wife had done a magnificent job with everything. Shortly after my arrival home, four or five days into it, I said I thought something ought to be a certain way.

She sat me down and said, “Look, I’ve been doing this now for three months. Can we reach an understanding?” This was a real eye opener for me on how unappreciative I had been in our relationship.

So, on initial arrival in Vietnam, I arrived and was processed throughout the Embassy and the AID folks. Vietnam was simply different. I stayed there as short a period as possible, 18 months to the day. I was assigned to a small province, Sadec, in the delta just north of Can Tho, which was our IV Corps a regional headquarters. I was one of three Sadec Province Development Officers (PDOs). I reported to the Deputy Province Senior Advisor, a Lt. Colonel, U.S. Army. He reported to the Province Senior Advisor, a civilian.

Q: A chain of command with civilian and military both?

WATSON: It was both. The composition of the MAC-V CORDS teams in any province (and I can’t even remember how many provinces there were, something like 17 or so), the bulk were mostly military. In Sadec, we had a small U.S. advisor military presence, maybe 30 or 40, but there was an attendant U.S. military assistance group also assigned there with whom we had a close working relationship. But it was not unusual to have a province senior advisor be a U.S. Army colonel and the deputy be a civilian or the reverse, where the civilian would be the senior advisor. After three months in Sadec, Wilbur Wilson, who was then the MAC-V CORDS main man, flew into Sadec one day and said, “You’re just the man we need to be the Deputy Province Senior Advisor in the adjacent province, Vinh Long.” (Frankly, I think I was a just warm body to fill a billet, not that I had yet demonstrated any particular talents.) This was a bigger province with a much larger team and a much larger U.S. military component, about 200 U.S. personnel total, and perhaps 30 Vietnamese employees.

So, I went to Vinh Long as the Deputy Province Senior Advisor (DPSA) to a U.S. Army colonel, Wally Veaudry, a fine officer. Consequent to that position, I rated four U.S. majors who ran district operations (District Senior Advisors they were called) and each of the U.S. Army majors and captains running a particular function - logistics and supplies, personnel, operations, intelligence, public affairs. I also supervised and rated one Lt. Colonel who largely oversaw administrative functions, and the NCO Sergeant Major. I recall that in Sadec, the previous province, I also, as a Province Development Officer who had some responsibilities for health matters, rated an Air Force captain who had medical advisor responsibilities. When I rated him after about ten weeks together, towards the end of my three month tour, I gave him a 65 on a scale of 100. The Lt. Colonel brought me in and asked me if I had any idea what I had just done. I said, “Yes, that is about where he fits, C-minus, D-plus.” He said, “You’ve just ended his career. He’s got to be in the nineties or he’s out.” I said, “Really?” and jacked his rating up (what did I know?) to some point where it was more acceptable to the reviewing officer, the Lt. Colonel. And in fact this young officer wasn’t in fact that bad. Then I found in rating the Majors in Vinh Long province, I learned from the lieutenant colonel who worked for me, overseeing most administrative issues, , and from the colonel for whom I worked, that really for a major, evaluations pretty well needed to start at about 92 and work their way up, anything else was death. So, advised, I took that seriously. One of the officers I rated, Major John E. Miller, a wonderful young officer, later became a four star general, retiring about 2000. There were a number of good officers. Certainly, the opportunity that I had sought to work with the military

was certainly fulfilled. I learned a great deal. That served me well later on when I had to work a lot with Marines, military attachés and advisors, the intelligence community, and then as a sometime political advisor during the Haiti intervention, and in the Jamaica based interdiction of Haitian “boat people.”

Also, working with AID was interesting. Many AID employees, and probably a lot of us with State, too, were not in Vietnam because we particularly cared about the future of Vietnam. Vietnam was where the jobs were. The money was good. Oh, the waste of resources was evident, on the civilian side and the military side. So, I had a chance to work with AID and to see some nominal successes, and to have insights into the corruption on the part of the South Vietnamese, the military largely, and how things would disappear (rice, cement, bricks, rebar). We did make some differences in the quality of life. It was wonderful working with young Vietnamese in education, the teachers, the doctors, the nurses. To witness death from military attacks, the death of Vietnamese, the wounding of Americans, of being fired at, although it might just have been a couple of sniper rounds. I never felt I was really in great danger, although we all were to some degree. It was interesting to find myself initially acting as though I knew what it was that I was doing. I certainly didn't. I was flying by the seat of my pants in that whole area of working with the military, working with AID, and in the development area when I first arrived. When Frank Taylor, who had been the economic Counselor in Madrid, and whom I knew just slightly, came over as a part of the IG inspection staff to do an inspection and to evaluate my performance after I had been on the ground in Vinh Long for about two months, he was dazzled. He thought I knew what I was doing. It's not that I fooled him. It's just that so much of our work was Greek to him. The fact that I knew anything at all was for him probably impressive.

Q: As an FSO, what was our relation, if any, with the embassy?

WATSON: None, and all the better for it in my view. I was delighted not to have any relationship with the embassy. I visited it a couple of times. I had the chance to go to Saigon with our province chief, attend a dinner with him hosted by one of the DCM's and at which in attendance was Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. Bunker was such a delightful man. From everything that I was able to ferret out, he certainly seemed competent. His senior DCM (there were a couple of minister counselors there) was a fellow by the name of Josiah Bennett, a very patrician gentleman with considerable Asian area experience. I was very impressed with him as well. I had the chance to meet as well Jackie Bong, a Vietnamese woman who had been married to a Vietnamese who was assassinated there, if I recall correctly. She later married a Foreign Service Officer, Lacy Wright. She too was at this dinner.

As things wound down in early 1975, I couldn't wait to leave in March, 1975, at my 18 month anniversary. But George Jacobsen who headed MAC-V CORDS out of Saigon, in his wisdom thought that what I ought to do was go down to Can Tho and extend my tour and be the political reporting coordinator. We were establishing these regional offices then as things wound down. His suggestion was absurd. I didn't even speak Vietnamese. How was I going to coordinate these reports? But I was able to go there and help a bit until I finally left the country. I spent my last couple of months in Can Tho working with several outstanding officers - Frank Wisner, Ken Quinn, Lacy Wright, Tom Barnes, a number of other capable officers. And I did get achieve from that Vietnam assignment the things I had sought: experience with another agency,

experience with the military, a promotion, higher earnings (that pay differential having helped us substantially). But I never found sufficient reasons for us to be in Vietnam at that level of commitment.

Prior to the Vietnam tour, I remember as a part of our Vietnam orientation, our visit to the Central Intelligence Agency for briefings. Robert Komer briefed us on how important our role was in Vietnam. I asked essentially “why were we (the USG) there?” and he came up with some “democratic” pap, which most of us seemed to swallow whole, as I judged it. It was not a satisfying answer. I recall my “tour end” evaluation paper, in which I used an old Jimmy Durante quote “Did you ever have the feeling that you wanted to go and yet you had the feeling that you wanted to stay?” That was Vietnam for me. I had scarcely a clue during my 18 months as to how Vietnam really functioned. I wasn’t at a level like Ken Quinn or Tom Barnes, who understood much of the dynamics and the politics. I just muddled through.

Q: Were you ever in any personal danger from the attacks or the snipers out there?

WATSON: Not really. I recall going down a canal in a small boat and there were rifle shots. You heard the rifles and you heard the whizzing of rounds going through the grass. Then we were shot at aboard helicopters. I don’t believe the ships I was in ever took any rounds, and I traveled in helicopters frequently. It wasn’t necessary that I be on combat missions in most instances, but I felt I needed to go on some missions to learn, to be informed, to understand more fully what our military colleagues were doing, not just to rely on operations and intelligence reports and briefings. But it was also as much for the experience as it was to show my military colleagues, who were regularly in harm’s way, that I, too, was willing to take some risks. I thought that was critically important, especially in my relationships with the U.S. military officers. There were some positive relationships, some negative relationships. I had to brace a few military fellows. My “bracing” efforts were applauded by my supervising colonel. I learned a great deal about the military, particularly about the Army. I developed a substantial respect that I had not theretofore had. I think that knowledge and respect served me well over my career.

Q: Would you say that CORDS was a suitable program for an FSO?

WATSON: Absolutely. We had some competent officers doing our reporting, who often had access to a lot more information than embassy folks. To what extent that field information really fed into embassy reporting, or to what extent it fed into Agency reporting both in the field and in Saigon, I don’t know. My view increasingly was that our reporting wasn’t going to make a hell of a lot of difference anyway. Political policy had been decided in Washington and we were proceeding full bore. Now, 25 plus years later, with McNamara having revealed that everything was not always quite as crystal clear as had been pretended, my guess is that of those Foreign Service Officers who remained in the Foreign Service, who made a career of the Foreign Service, the Vietnam CORDS experience probably keenly broadened their understanding of the political process, and the key roles of the intelligence community and of the military. Vietnam for me was a significant experience and a very good one.

Q: You mentioned Ambassador Bunker. Did he ever visit your area while you were there?

WATSON: No, he didn't. I don't know how much field visiting he, in fact, did. I don't recall visits by embassy personnel. I remember Dick Holbrooke and other key Congressional staffers visiting us. Dick Moose, I think, also paid a visit.

Q: Your tour in Vietnam was certainly an interesting one, if perhaps a watershed in your career in some ways. When that was over, you finally got to Latin America.

WATSON: I did indeed, at long last.

ROBERT A. LINCOLN
Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)
Saigon (1971-1973)

Robert A. Lincoln was born in New York in 1921. He joined USIA in 1955 and served in Syria, Ceylon, Turkey, Vietnam, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed in 1989 by G. Lewis Schmidt.

Q: You went out to Vietnam in 1969?

LINCOLN: I went out briefly on orientation in 1967 --

Q: I mean to be the head of JUSPAO.

LINCOLN: 1971.

Q: 1971.

LINCOLN: Yes, the middle of 1971. I had stayed in Turkey through from 1966 to the middle of 1971, five and a half years.

The main reason I was ever concerned with Vietnam was that I was one of the PAOs from different countries who went out on the special USIA-sponsored orientation trip. We went around the country and I recall particularly a couple of things. An officer of USIS by the Cambodian border said that if Disney had wanted to start a war, this would have been it.

Then there was another American officer -- these are quotes, and fairly common ones apparently -- who said that what we should do now is stop everything, build a wall around the country and charge admission. In one year we'll get all our money back. That was the way they felt.

When I went there on orientation in 1967, as I said, I filed a number of reports and made oral comments to the effect that I am not sure what we are doing is at all right. Again, you didn't question what the military was doing, or what the U.S. as a whole was doing, because even though if you did question it that wasn't really our USIS business.

We could speak specifically about the informational/cultural operation. I didn't think that we should be in the position of operating for a foreign government anywhere, but that is what had happened in Vietnam.

Shakespeare was one of the few men who listened to all of this. Here you have a man who was looked on as being very anticommunist, very right of center, and who therefore should have approved of everything in Vietnam. He had strong reservations about it. He was among those influential with Nixon as president in saying that we should find a way to get out. It would take time, you didn't do it overnight, you didn't follow recommendations of the New Yorker or the demonstrators or what have you, but nevertheless whoever became president should find a way.

Thus, in the middle of 1971 I went there to Vietnam as PAO.

Q: Had the old Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office organization been already abandoned, or was it still in existence?

LINCOLN: It was still in existence. I went out with flat-out instructions from Frank Shakespeare, first, to find a way of getting rid of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office; second, to get all of the military out from under USIS control (we had a whale of a lot of military positions) and to change JUSPAO back to a normal USIS and to cut that back in terms of personnel and budget. Those were strict instructions.

Lionel Mosley was still USIA director of personnel and was marvelously cooperative. A couple of things happened when I first went out to Vietnam on assignment as PAO in 1971.

For one thing, the first full day I was there, USIS people literally -- that is, Americans -- lined up at the door wanting to come back to the U.S., saying their jobs were worthless and they shouldn't be there. One of them was Wilson Dizard, head of research and operations. Wilson thought we could immediately eliminate two of the American positions in his operation here in Saigon and Frank Scotton, could take over.

On the military side I found 102 American military positions in the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office.

Q: Wanting to leave, I presume?

LINCOLN: The way to get eliminate them was fairly simple. Whenever one was vacated you just didn't get around to refilling it, and pretty soon the Army took the position back.

Q: Military officers rotated about every thirteen months, I recall.

LINCOLN: It was fourteen, as I recall it. Within a year, there was hardly a military position left in JUSPAO. Where we had fifty-some civilian positions, we cut the figure back to thirty-some. Within a year and a half we had changed JUSPAO over to a regular USIS operation and thus, had Vietnamized the old JUSPAO.

The number of local positions we had was never known, really. When I was assigned to Vietnam, there were five hundred and some on the payroll. A lot of those were tombstones, people who didn't exist but the paycheck was being collected, et cetera, et cetera.

We cut that back in no time at all -- oh, I don't know, let's say to a hundred or something like that.

Now, in March of 1972, there was the immense invasion from the north called the Easter Invasion. This was one of the few which the North Vietnamese lost their shirts on, much to everybody's surprise.

One of the things that we did was a tremendous amount of VOA broadcasting. We were able to broadcast on medium wave eighteen hours a day. Ken Giddens was then the director of VOA and Frank Shakespeare, of course, was the director of USIA, and they coordinated but fast. Within just a matter of weeks we were broadcasting the eighteen hours daily to the north.

We had a number of hours per day, I couldn't tell you how many, coming off the IOU kW USIA transmitter in the Philippines, which was then the largest in the world. It broadcast over water to Hanoi. The result is that the signal boomed into Hanoi.

One really important listener in Hanoi was the British consul general. He had to come down and report to Saigon fairly often.

Q: He was operating -- he was in Hanoi?

LINCOLN: Hanoi, yes, the British consul general in Hanoi. He came down to Saigon once every month or two, to report in because, after all, his ambassador was in Saigon. We could then find out how the VOA signal was coming in.

Last summer, I wrote an article for the USIA Alumni Association News about the Easter Invasion, and I'd like to quote from it. "Whether you supported or opposed the creation and doings of JUSPAO, it is hard to question the effectiveness of a unified information-cultural operation when it came to the 1972 Easter invasion from the North..."

"The 1972 Easter Invasion...was supposed to be a blitzkrieg from north and west to Saigon. In a matter of hours after it started, all elements of USIS were in action. They would not have been if run by a variety of separate official and unofficial departments and institutes in Washington.

"Officers involved came from varied backgrounds but were responsive to one Agency, USIA. Policy Officer Frank Scotton, for example, once a public affairs trainee, found his talents in demand in radio.

"CAO Bill DeMyer, whose final responsibilities concerned the largest Binational Center in existence, saw to it that library distribution points and English language classes had the latest and

most accurate information about the fighting.

"Research Officer Bill Gausmann, who had been a USIA labor information specialist, kept close track of the misinformation being supplied in and by Hanoi -- and Hanoi's reaction to information from USIS. The information section worked around the clock supplying material locally and to IPS in Washington. All obviously were coordinated closely with the government of the Republic of Vietnam.

"Did the broadcasts work? In a captured diary, one North Vietnamese officer recorded his reliance on VOA, not Radio Hanoi. The latter claimed his troops were in Hue in the northern part of South Vietnam. VOA gave what the officer knew were facts: the troops never reached Hue -- he was with them...

"Thirteen years later, a communist-oriented history, in emphasizing South Vietnam's military problems, said the Easter invasion nonetheless showed that the North Vietnamese army had not yet learned enough. On the spot and at the time, USIA in 1972 was equipped to give a far better account."

I would guess that about then, the early 1970s, was a glory period of USIA. You were PAO over in Thailand, I know. Who was PAO in Japan at that time?

Q: Wasn't Ned Roberts PAO in Japan then?

LINCOLN: No, Al.

Q: Al Carter.

LINCOLN: Yes. I liked Ned much, much better, I might add.

Q: Al was a big joke among the Japanese.

LINCOLN: He was the one who installed the program under which, let me see, they kept records on everybody and -- it was like the old and discarded Program Planning Budgeting System, which recognized only figures at the expense of human factors.

Q: Also, you had a clean desk. Every time the branch post knew Al was coming they would clean off the desks and put it all in locked files.

LINCOLN: Marvelous.

Q: They would have just a couple of papers on the desk all the time that they were working on. As soon as he left, they took all of the stuff out of the files.

LINCOLN: I hadn't heard that part of it. That is a lovely story.

Q: Well, what else do you have to say about Vietnam, now that we have had this diversion?

LINCOLN: I think Vietnam is a good illustration of the fact that the United States should never stay so deeply involved in a war when we don't have domestic support.

It is interesting to me that it was a Republican administration which finally decided to make the changes.

The second thing that it illustrated was that we shouldn't rely on our military to try to convince a people of the value of democratic governments or democratic ways of doing things.

It is not part of the military background, just as I don't know a darned thing canons, I don't expect them to know something about a parliament, but that is what was happening out there.

The military were, in fact, running almost everything in Vietnam and that was one of the reasons for getting rid of the joint U.S. Public Affairs Office. Too many people felt that by having a joint U.S. Public Affairs Office we therefore were bringing the military under our control, at least that aspect. We weren't -- just the opposite.

Q: Very often the military was the one that was in control of the regional area.

LINCOLN: I couldn't agree more. The military people we would have in individual areas would often be the senior people and the chief people and the U.S. civilian just another guy. We couldn't do anything.

There are all kinds of illustrations of this. I remember one of our USIS Officers, for example, whose name I will not mention, who was talking about the fact that where he was -- and he was a province chief -- the military really ran the province. He said, we tried to run the informational side but they were the ones who made the final decisions on it or, if they wanted to cancel something, killed it.

The fellow Funkhouser whom I mentioned in Syria earlier, came out to run III corps with the embassy. Although he was the civilian in charge of III corps, he wasn't really running things, not at all. (III corps was the one closest to Saigon.) Again, he wouldn't say an awful lot about such matters. He didn't get along well enough with civilians -- civilian Americans, that is, over at the embassy -- to ever criticize in that fashion.

Ellsworth Bunker often seemed to lean more on the U.S. military than on the U.S. civilian. Incidentally, he had two deputy ambassadors while I was there. Charlie Whitehouse was the last and before him it was --

Q: Berger, Sam Berger.

LINCOLN: Sam Berger, and Sam was brilliant.

Q: He was the political counselor in Tokyo when I was there years before.

LINCOLN: Then you knew him. Well, I worked hand in hand with him during most of the time that I was in Vietnam. I was more and more fascinated. I saw him back here --

Q: *Sam Berger got sacked out --*

LINCOLN: At any rate Sam had cancer back here. The point that I was about to make was that Ellsworth Bunker, as ambassador there -- a fascinating old aristocrat, of course, and an awfully good mind -- seemed to lean more heavily on Abe Abrams who was the chief U.S. military general, than on his civilian staff.

Q: *They established a very close relationship and Julie (Abram's wife) thought the world of Ellsworth, and of course with Carol Laise, Bunker's wife, being up in Nepal and bouncing back and forth they saw each other an awful lot.*

LINCOLN: Well, the civilian-military differences I found quite interesting, because you would have figured from the outside, if you were an American, that there ought to be American civilian control of U.S. operations. Even in the embassy sometimes there wasn't. We used to have weekly luncheons over at Bunker's house, everybody who was on the U.S. mission council. There were, let's see, twelve of us. At the end of the luncheon, time after time, Abe and Bunker would privately go off somewhere and spend fifteen or twenty minutes -- or longer -- discussing this, that or the other thing. You could see it and feel it all the while.

I found it very regrettable.

One of the times in which civilian control was maintained was in something I was involved in. This was after the invasion in 1972 from the north, when we formed a special task force, which was made up of the military who were there, the Seventh Air Force, one of the people from CIA, Embassy and AID representatives, myself and one or two of our people.

The task force was concerned with all informational activities toward North Vietnam. We met daily and really decided things. The task force was placed under USIS direction by Ambassador Bunker, which may have been unusual because I assumed that the Saigon station chief for CIA plus its people in the U.S. had worked their heads off to get it placed under CIA direction.

Back here in Washington the activities were under CIA direction, which was confusing. Whenever I discussed with Washington what we were doing locally, it was with a CIA man who was in charge of the task force here.

This was an anomaly, but in Saigon, we kept it entirely under USIS control. How did it happen? Through people like Scotton who were just much faster and had better information.

At that time one of the compromises we made -- and I hated to have to do this as a professional informational cultural operator -- was to allow the Seventh Air Force to increase the dropping of leaflets particularly over North Vietnam.

Most of us from USIS used to privately and quietly say that the U.S. has dropped enough paper

over North Vietnam just during this one invasion to take care of all of North Vietnam's toiletry needs for the next ten years.

It was very costly for the United States and I don't think that it really had much effect, but in order to get other things we wanted, we had to go along, and we did. That was the compromise.

Q: The leaflets were practically all printed at the USIS Regional Service Center in Manila, too. The things were put together in Vietnam but they were sent to Manila for multiple printing.

LINCOLN: Yes.

Q: I have forgotten who it was in RSC Manila I was talking to. They said the stuff went out of there, thousands and thousands, every week.

LINCOLN: Another thing that the planes dropped -- and this was very expensive but may have worked -- were small radio sets.

The Seventh Air Force paid for the production of a number of these small units, about the size of a cigarette pack, which were pretuned to medium wave. They were not pretuned to an individual frequency. You could get the whole medium wave band, but only medium wave.

They were dropped in special styrofoam containers with parachutes by B-52s over North Vietnam. How many were dropped? Thousands, I suppose; I forget. I did, however, keep one of them, one that we used for testing purposes, with me for the next several years because it worked so well, an amazing little machine.

Q: Who put them out?

LINCOLN: The Air Force bought them in Korea from private Korean companies. We considered the dropping part of our medium wave broadcasting operation. The Seventh Air Force was very happy.

Q: How long did you stay in Vietnam?

LINCOLN: A year and a half. I left there in April of 1972, April 1 or thereabouts.

Q: Ellsworth Bunker was still the ambassador when you left?

LINCOLN: He was the ambassador.

Q: You weren't there when Graham Martin replaced him?

LINCOLN: No, but we at USIS Saigon had arranged beforehand to bring John Hogan down from the north to be Martin's press attaché. John was up there in Da Nang in charge of our operation. You know, you never know when you'll run into somebody you have known for

many, many years.

I knew John back in the mid 1950s when he was in Cairo, Egypt. I knew the girl he married there. John I found up in Da Nang. The system while Bunker was Ambassador was to bring Hogan down whenever Ward Kirchwehm, who was the press attaché under USIS direction for the embassy, went on local or home leave.

We brought him down twice and the embassy thought the world of him. He had the Irish blarney, every bit of it. Among other things, he had a capacity for drinking.

Hogan did a very good job, and when I left the arrangements had been completed for him to replace Kirchwehm as the embassy press attaché. John had been in Saigon several months by the time Graham Martin came.

What else is there for me to recall about Vietnam? Well, a wonderful line from Ambassador Bunker. I had decided to retire toward the end of January in 1973, because I wanted to retire while Frank Shakespeare was still director of USIA. Frank, you recall, had made the announcement that he was going to leave USIA at such and such a time, I think it was February.

Q: *February or March of 1973.*

LINCOLN: Yes. So, at any rate, I called Frank, because we had phone service, fantastic telephones to Washington. I called Frank and said that the following day I was going to tell Ambassador Bunker of my retirement, but I wanted to be sure that he, Frank, knew about it beforehand. Frank could understand.

So I went to see Bunker the following morning saying I said I didn't want to let the USIS staff know because morale would be affected. Bunker thought for a minute and then said, "Well, Bob, sorry, we'll miss your wife Catherine."

Q: *[Laughter.]*

LINCOLN: She had worked on Episcopalian church affairs with him. End of conversation. Well, it wasn't ended that quickly. He did add in some detail that I'd be missed, too.

Interesting things that occurred out there -- now, let me see. Oh, yes. The whole scandal of Watergate was brought to Vietnam on such and such a day at about 11:30 a.m. or 12:00 noon through Stars and Stripes, the Pacific edition. They carried the first AP Wire Service story on it.

Over at our house, having a drink before lunch, at were Glen Garment from the White House and Frank Shakespeare. Both of them were visiting Vietnam at the time. They were old friends, as you know. As soon as Stars and Stripes appeared they took one look at it and, well, they weren't exactly ashen but they weren't happy.

They went off into a corner and talked for fifteen or twenty minutes and then came back. I will never know what they said, but I do know that within weeks Frank announced that he was

leaving USIA very, very soon.

He was a straight-laced Catholic, as you know.

Q: *Oh, yes.*

LINCOLN: A very moral man. I don't think that morally and ethically he really approved of Watergate, but I don't know. He has never said he didn't. There is no way of our knowing.

Q: *I don't think he did.*

LINCOLN: I believe this, but I have nothing to go on.

Q: *I believe it. The reason I believe it is because I think he was cut out of the plans by that time.*

LINCOLN: His only contact by then at the White House was Garment. He didn't have other contacts there.

Q: *I believe he was completely out of the inner circles at the White House.*

LINCOLN: You are correct, I think.

Q: *It started when he got cut out of the National Security Council by Henry Kissinger.*

LINCOLN: When did that occur?

Q: *I have forgotten when the time was.*

LINCOLN: Approximately?

Q: *Although getting a place at the Council, of course, he never was a member.*

LINCOLN: Well, we have never had a director as a member. It has always been ex officio.

Q: *True.*

LINCOLN: One or two other favorite things. I remember once being brought in on -- since it has been declassified it is all right to mention, because I don't remember the subject -- one of the famous rocket telegrams from Washington. President Nixon wanted to know who had released such and such a piece of information.

Well, I heard in twenty-four hours from a correspondent that it had been leaked in a CIA briefing. I knew it hadn't been from us and I was pretty sure it wasn't from the embassy and I thought it was the military. Apparently, it was a CIA briefing; the correspondent who told me what was said, who said it, where, when, and how hadn't used it. He didn't know that we and Washington were concerned.

The journalists to whom it was leaked didn't know it was the specific leakage that Nixon had objected to. Rather, they thought that he objected to the CIA's constantly giving them information.

When the rocket arrived, the ambassador figured out pretty quickly who were the possibilities, including USIS, of course. He called me in as soon as he got it, within less than an hour.

I was supposed to double check all our people to see if there was a possibility of leakage from them. I reported back to the Ambassador twenty-four hours later that it couldn't have come from us. I didn't tell him that I had learned where it might have come from. I will never know whether he found out or not; there was an awful lot of leakage.

One well-known correspondent for a fairly well known newspaper said to me very recently in the last year or so, "I seldom discussed a lot of the operations with you. There was a simple reason: I could get more information elsewhere."

Q: The CIA ran its own press conferences.

LINCOLN: Yes, it sure did.

Q: Do you have any other comments about your time in Vietnam?

LINCOLN: I was fortunate in being able to review for the Richmond (Va.) Times Dispatch in 1987 the book *In the Jaws of History* that Bui Diem, former South Vietnamese Ambassador to the U.S., wrote about the war in Vietnam. Both in Vietnam and in the U.S., he was in the middle of what was going on. I'll quote from the review some of his principal points:

"One, the South Vietnamese people, especially the leaders, bear the ultimate responsibility for the fate of their country...

"Two, American intervention seemed a natural extension of such earlier American policy actions as the Marshall Plan in Europe, the Berlin airlift and the military move against China in Korea....

"Three, subsequent strenuous U.S. opposition to the intervention often centered on the matter of morality, but in Diem's view, it was not immoral to work with an 'admittedly flawed' South Vietnamese regime....

"Four, it was still all wrong for the Americans to come in and take over. The United States should not have taken the entire burden on itself instead of searching for ways to make a decisive impact while limiting its exposure.

It is in his further discussion of the last point that Bui Diem happens on the reasons the United States put little political or military trust in its ally. The financial and moral corruption Americans encountered in Vietnam was well beyond anything most had encountered before."

As an American, I had to say this about Bui Diem's views:

"Finding it practically impossible to rely on South Vietnam either militarily or politically, the Americans unsurprisingly counted ultimately on nothing more from Vietnamese leaders than a modicum of equilibrium...."

We could not rely on the South Vietnamese, and thus were in a hopeless quandary: to support South Vietnamese democracy, we had to rely at least to some degree on them to carry the ball; if and when they failed, we were not in a position to carry it ourselves alone. Vietnam was their country and we neither could nor should take it over.

Q: *Anything else?*

LINCOLN: Two among the major assertions I have been making should be repeated.

First, the United States should not get involved in an overseas war operation for which there isn't strong domestic support.

Second, the U.S. government should never accidentally or otherwise get itself in the position of turning over so much of a political operation to the military.

I believe we did both of those things in Vietnam. I think it was terribly regrettable.

Perhaps one other item should be underscored, and that is that as much as we criticize any number of things that Nixon may have done, he was after all the man responsible for finding a way out of Vietnam for the United States.

Everybody said that it wasn't perfect and of course it wasn't. But the idea of so many of the opposition here in the U.S. -- the demonstrators, the newspapers, et cetera -- that the U.S. should just pull out, I think, was all wrong. I feel that we had a responsibility to a whole lot of Vietnamese people and to a lot of other foreign people to stick it out and try to leave gracefully.

Q: *I think the main thing --*

LINCOLN: We did, after all, effect a peace conference and the Paris peace conference -- let's see, it was February 1973 that peace was declared. It wasn't perfect but what else could you do from the U.S. standpoint?

Q: *The only other thing I think we might have done, once they were well along with that peace process, was to devise a better way to rescue a lot of the Vietnamese who had been with us and whom we knew would be left to the mercy of North Vietnam ultimately -- of course, we couldn't admit that that was going to be the case but we had to know it. I think we should have made better arrangements for them.*

LINCOLN: I couldn't agree with you more, because there were any number of Vietnamese whom I knew very well who were, one way or another, faithful to the U.S.

There was one woman, for example, who was one of the more prominent Vietnamese women, who, when her husband was assassinated while I was in Saigon, worked for USIS at the binational center. She got out of Vietnam at the last minute. She got out through the quiet influence of the wife of the chief political officer, not through USIS or other people who were directly responsible. She was darned lucky to have gotten out.

Q: *She sure was.*

LINCOLN: She knows it. I have often talked with her since. I don't know where she is today, but I used to see her quite often.

Q: *The Ambassador didn't do much to help the Vietnamese employees.*

LINCOLN: No. John Hogan said, before he died last year, that he lays a lot of the responsibility for the difficulties at the feet of Ambassador Graham Martin.

Q: *Lots of people feel that way.*

LINCOLN: I didn't know Martin.

Q: *I know him because he was ambassador in Thailand the first four months I was there.*

LINCOLN: Oh, really?

Q: *I had known him briefly before, but not well, just to say hello to.*

LINCOLN: Mim Johnson, now heading the concerned USIA Alumni Association Committee, has come up with suggestions about how we should try to take care of some of the people who worked for USIS who were left in Vietnam. I am not sure that she has the answer, but this is an illustration of the problem we still face.

IRWIN PERNICK
Office of Political Military Affairs
Washington, DC (1971-1973)

Mr. Pernick was born and raised in New York City and educated at City College of New York (CCNY). After service in the National Guard he joined the Foreign Service in 1963 and was posted to Rome. His other foreign posts were in Thailand, where he was Public Affairs Officer and, in Yugoslavia, Political Officer. At the State Department Mr. Pernick held a variety of positions dealing with a variety of issues including Political/Military Affairs, Military Sales, and Press and Public Affairs. Mr. Pernick was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1997.

Q: *Did you work on East Asia?*

PERNICK: Yes.

Q: *Because of your experience in the area?*

PERNICK: We had a few people doing regional work. East Asia was the biggest thing and obviously Vietnam. I was pleased that I was able to work on that. It involved a lot of interesting work. We tried to anticipate needs, argued for certain programs, writing testimony for the Assistant Secretary or for the Director and even for the Secretary. The last year we starting doing more congressional stuff when it became clear that we had to provide a lot of the bulk of the testimony that the Secretary would give before the committees on the Hill.

Q: *I was involved in some of the Security Assistance programs a little later and certainly the congressional aspect was very important both in terms of testimony but also in providing information and sometimes even negotiating*

PERNICK: Yes. We didn't do too much of that but had to; of course, prepare the T document, the congressional presentation document which was the annual budget document.

MICHAEL G. WYGANT
Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)
Pleiku (1971-1973)

Michael G. Wygant was born in New York in 1936. He entered the Foreign Service in 1959. He served in Southern Rhodesia, Togo, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Australia, and the Federated States of Micronesia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

Q: *Then you left Moscow and spent a short time in INR. And then you mentioned Vietnam. Off you went. How did that come about?*

WYGANT: Well, I was at a point in my career where I felt that I needed to get overseas again. Vietnam was certainly the great issue of the day, and, I felt, basically the issue of my generation. To have had an opportunity to go there and then not taken that opportunity, I felt, would not be good. I got a great deal of support from Lee and the family on this, because it was considered a rather unusual decision to make.

I was not forced to go; in fact I volunteered to go. The CORDS program sounded like an interesting program. It looked as though, if South Vietnam were going to make it, the kinds of things that you could do with the CORDS program were the sorts of things that would stabilize the political structure and make it possible to develop a non-Communist government in South Vietnam which would function and be able to provide services and economic opportunities to its

people. So it was for a mixture of reasons that I volunteered to go.

Of course I had no idea that I was going to Pleiku when I left Washington, but I did know that I was going into the CORDS program and that I would be in one of the provinces.

Q: You went out there in 1971 and you stayed until '73. What was the atmosphere in the department, sort of both the training and the people who were sending you out?

WYGANT: It was a very controversial period. There were a lot of FSOs who were being forced into Vietnam assignments who did not want to go. This eventually developed into a confrontation between a few of the officers who flatly refused to go and the Foreign Service, which said: "The needs of the service say you shall go; otherwise, resign." The upshot of it was that officers who refused Vietnam did not resign, or at least were not forced to resign. The "needs of the service" effectively passed into history around this time we're talking about.

Having served in the Soviet Union, I had a very clear idea of what Communists would do in any country that they controlled. That wasn't anything that I would ever wish on anybody. So, therefore, I frankly was not all that sympathetic to the strong movement in this country that felt we shouldn't be involved in Vietnam and that we should just pull out and let events take their own course.

But this was a very turbulent time in the Foreign Service, both in terms of what Foreign Service involvement would be, and whether State Department FSOs could be coerced to go into a program that they didn't really want to be a part of, or coerced to go to Vietnam at a time they didn't want to go to Vietnam.

Q: Was there a feeling of hope, cynicism, or is it difficult to characterize?

WYGANT: All of the above, I would say, when I arrived out there in the fall of 1971, there was a feeling that the South Vietnamese military forces were getting better, and that the North Vietnamese were at least not any more difficult than they had been, in military terms, and that perhaps we were beginning to make some impressions through the civil operations programs in CORDS, in some of the provinces anyway.

For example, shortly after I went up to Pleiku in September 1971 (by plane) a group of us were actually able to drive all the way from Pleiku down to the coast and then down along the coast and into Saigon. And that was the first time American civilians had been able to make such a trip in several years.

Q: This was that famous road that twice was cut.

WYGANT: There were several famous mountain roads that could be easily cut, yes. But the roads I mention were open and we were able to do it. We drove in two cars, eight of us, both American and Vietnamese who came down and then also drove back. We observed only one firefight (at some distance) near a river crossing north of Saigon. We were obliged to wait for about an hour for ARVN to clear out some Viet Cong on the other side of the river. So the

security situation was improving to a marked extent. And of course this was also at a time when there was a tremendous drawdown of U.S. forces; President Nixon was pulling out the forces in large numbers every month.

Then we got into the spring of 1972. Everybody talks about Tet '68, but there was another major offensive during Tet in 1972. It didn't get nearly the same headlines. Tet '72 certainly didn't have the same political impact that '68 had. But, in military terms, the South Vietnamese acquitted themselves reasonably well. The provincial capital just north of Pleiku, Kontum, was surrounded by a couple of North Vietnamese divisions in March, 1972 and it looked like we were going to lose this province. In fact Kontum is all of twenty miles north of Pleiku city. But the South Vietnamese dug in. And with a little bit of help from what was left of the U.S. forces but very largely on their own the South Vietnamese forces, finally dislodged the North Vietnamese and forced them to withdraw back into Laos, which was right next door.

This was typical of what the North Vietnamese would do: hang out in the border areas of Laos and Cambodia and come in to South Vietnam when it suited their purposes.

By the time that offensive was over, which was in the early summer of 1972, in my opinion the South Vietnamese position was as good as it had ever been. Throughout the rest of that year there was a very strong American movement for negotiations. The negotiations almost came to a conclusion at the end of the year, and then, as people may remember, they broke down and Nixon ordered a bombing of the north once again. Eventually the cease-fire agreement was signed on January 27, 1973.

I was part of the small civilian CORDS group in Pleiku that saw the last of the U.S. forces pull out in March of '73. By that time the only U.S. military forces left in Vietnam were a small but still substantial number of military advisors down in Saigon at the MACV headquarters. During my last few months in Vietnam it was strictly a civilian operation, and we were watching what was going on and trying to get a feel for the place.

Q: Could you explain, you were in what in military terms is known as Two Corps, in the highlands, and Pleiku was the major city of..

WYGANT: Pleiku was the military capital of the Second Military Region, yes.

Q: What were you doing?

WYGANT: When I first arrived, our team was composed of about 150 men. Six of us were civilians with the other 144 U.S. Army. Our Province Senior Advisor, as the team leader was termed, was Chris Squire, a Foreign Service officer and good friend from Moscow days, and I also served with him in Australia. Unfortunately he passed away shortly after retirement a few years ago; a fine man. His deputy was an Army lieutenant colonel. The way it worked in CORDS was: if the Province Senior Advisor was a civilian, his deputy would be military; if it was a military Province Senior Advisor, a civilian deputy.

We civilians were basically advising the South Vietnamese provincial administration on the

whole range of civilian services. We had a sanitarian on the team who was dealing with public health issues. We had an education specialist who worked with the director of education for the Province of Pleiku. We had a logistics expert who was dealing with some of the civilian supply problems. We also had a police advisor. In those days we had police advisors in each of the provinces. This man had been a state trooper from the Los Angeles area and he was the advisor to the provincial police.

My immediate deputy and I were basically involved in all kinds of programs that were being supported by AID for relief in the provinces. We spent a lot of time on refugee relief, because there were a number of Montagnards (the population of Pleiku being largely Montagnard not Vietnamese) who were short of food and had other basic human needs.

Q: There had been a major resettlement program, bringing them into areas where they could fortify.

WYGANT: Where they'd be safer.

Q: How was this working?

WYGANT: There wasn't a great deal of this going on when I arrived in 1971. But then, when the offensive broke out in the early part of 1972, we immediately began to have enormous refugee problems. The interesting thing was that, whether Montagnard or Vietnamese, the population always moved toward the government side; they never seemed to move into the areas controlled by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. So that whenever fighting broke out, you had enormous numbers of refugees who were trying to stick with the South Vietnamese administration.

And this was the problem we faced that spring. We had to close the schools in Pleiku and re-open them as refugee camps. We often had as many as 15-20,000 refugees in a town that only had a population of about 40-50,000 at the best of times. We also were moving them as fast as we could down to the southern parts of Two Corps, which were considered safer and further away from the heavy fighting.

The fighting during the 1972 Tet Offensive was pretty much fixed battles between division-size units. It wasn't hit-and-run terrorist stuff, it was North Vietnamese divisions battling South Vietnamese divisions, in a Korean War type of classical military confrontation. Moreover, in Pleiku we didn't have the problems that still existed in some other provinces of an indigenous Viet Cong that remained active and dangerous. Most of Pleiku's indigenous communists were wiped out as a result of Tet '68.

Q: I'm interested in relationships. One of them is just sort of an internal one. I mean, here are Foreign Service officers working with military. We don't even speak the same language and often don't have the same outlook. How did this work, looking back on this?

WYGANT: Well, there were a lot of strains. I think in some respects it was probably more difficult for the military to try and figure out who we civilians were and what we were trying to

do. I remember the lieutenant colonel, the deputy Province Senior Advisor once said, "I never know what you guys are. You're just Sam, Tom, Dick, Harry. I don't know whether I should salute you or whether I should..." I mean, they had a hard time figuring out who we were and what we did.

But the other side of the coin was that most of us had had some kind of military experience ourselves, so that the military way of doing things and the military outlook was not alien to us. If we get into these kinds of situations in the future, frankly I don't think there would be the same basis for understanding between the Foreign Service and the military, because so few Foreign Service officers, let's say under the age of forty, have had any military experience.

Q: I served in Saigon from '69 to '71, and I had four years in the barracks as an enlisted man. I wasn't wild about it, but I knew the lingo and there was this common understanding.

WYGANT: And I think that was our case too. For instance, the administrative officer for our CORDS team was a former Army chief master sergeant. He was wearing civilian clothes, but he sure knew the Army backwards and forwards. And I can't think of anybody who was with that group of mine that hadn't had prior military experience of one kind or another. So therefore we used to kid each other a lot and there was a certain amount of rivalry, comradely rivalry I guess you could say, but I think we basically got along pretty well. Occasionally you would get either a military officer or a civilian who really had a difficult time dealing with the other group, but that was the exception, I think, rather than the rule.

Q: What about dealing with the Vietnamese? I suppose I ought to really say dealing with the Vietnamese and the Montagnards, because these were two quite different groups. How did you deal with the Vietnamese? You know the definition of expert in the United States is: "A son of a bitch from out of town." And you were kind of the son of a bitch from out of country. How did this work with the Vietnamese officials?

WYGANT: My principal counterpart was the deputy Province Chief. In those days all the province chiefs were military officers, and the principal counterpart for the Province Senior Advisor was the Province Chief. The deputy Province Chief was always a civilian, so he was my principal counterpart. And I used to spend several hours a day with him and we'd go over what was important, what was going on.

Q: Using French?

WYGANT: I had two different deputy Province Chiefs. One spoke good English, so he and I used English. But his successor was a somewhat older Vietnamese who spoke excellent French and very little English, so with him we used French. I could speak a few words of Vietnamese, but I never really studied the language all that much, so French was very useful.

Q: How did it work?

WYGANT: Generally I think it was a good cooperative effort. The bottom line was that a lot of the resources and the money was obviously coming through the AID pipeline, and therefore the

civilians on the team were the ones who could turn the tap on or turn the tap off and could help in those ways. But I don't want to be too cynical about this. We had a genuine rapport there, and I think the civilians had worked out particularly good relations with their counterparts on the Vietnamese side.

Obviously there are enormous cultural differences between Vietnam and the United States. The Vietnamese have an ancient culture and are justifiably proud of their history. They are an efficient, hard-working people, but a people who have not, at least in the Western sense, been able to organize themselves politically in ways that would bring the nation together. The Communists have done it, through hard-headed totalitarian tactics, but those who were not Communist were never able particularly to bring this together. So therefore you got a great variety of attitudes.

A number of the Vietnamese, in fact I would say probably the majority, were more involved with family and clan and class concerns than they were with a more general nationwide concern. And their concept of efficiency and getting a job done can be quite different than the American concept thereof. The prevalent feeling seemed to be that you looked out for your own and you didn't have to worry too much about those who were not affiliated with you either by class, clan or family.

And that was difficult, because we were trying to administer a program that would provide for the people of the province regardless of their backgrounds.

The Montagnards were considered to be almost subhuman as far as the Vietnamese were concerned. They are an aboriginal people who had been in Vietnam long before the Vietnamese started coming out of China two thousand years ago. They are Montagnards because the Vietnamese had chased them up into the mountains out of the valleys where the Vietnamese could grow rice and do the things that they wanted to do. The Vietnamese never cared too much for living up in the mountains.

I think, unfortunately, the Montagnards were treated the way a rather unsophisticated indigenous people can be treated by a much more sophisticated outside group which comes in and wants to take over land and property that belongs to an aboriginal people.

Q: Did you find yourself in the position of being the intermediary?

WYGANT: Oh, yes. The CORDS program, in fact the whole U.S. program, had to deal with South Vietnam's population in ways that made sure that the Montagnards were properly taken of. And the Montagnards basically saw the United States, as they had seen the French earlier, as their protectors from the Vietnamese.

Q: There has always been this relationship of the Montagnards, and one can also talk about the Bedouin and other groups, that people from outside take to them very well. They're sort of an attractive people...gentle, I guess is the term. Did you feel resentment from the Vietnamese: What the hell are you doing?

WYGANT: I don't think so. I think the Vietnamese that I dealt with had had enough Americans around to know the way we were going to behave anyway, and so if they had any reservations, they didn't voice them.

The one great distinction that you could make (it's terrible to make generalizations, but I think I will in this case) between the Montagnards and the Vietnamese was that the Montagnards were fairly simple and straightforward people, and, the way an American would look at it, an honest people. You would ask one a question, and he would give you a straight answer. If a Montagnard said he was going to do something, he would do it. Because they were unsophisticated, they were quite easy to deal with. And they were men of their word; they would do what they said they were going to do, or not do it if they didn't want to.

This was not the case with the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese are much more complex. It was often difficult to find what the real motivation was behind a particular course of action. If you felt that you had a program that was successful and that things were working and so forth, you might find after a while that it really wasn't going well and that it wasn't working, because the kinds of commitments that you thought you had from the Vietnamese administration sort of melted away. Without putting value judgments on this, I think it's just two different ways of approaching things. The Vietnamese are far more inclined to do things from their own inner motivations and their own approach to life, in ways that might be considered devious or underhanded by outsiders. But basically it just takes a long time to find out what's really going on with the Vietnamese.

That was not the case with the Montagnards. And I think that's why a lot of Americans, as the French had before, found the Montagnards to be so pleasant to deal with.

Q: What about corruption?

WYGANT: Corruption was of course an enormous problem in South Vietnam. I'm sure a certain amount of it was going on in Pleiku when I was there. I never saw any blatant examples of corruption. The Province Chief, who was a Montagnard by the way, lived a fairly simple lifestyle. He didn't have a grandiose mansion or a lot of visible personal property. Certainly the provincial administration seemed to be living in fairly modest circumstances. There were indications that some of the ARVN generals at Two Corps had a lot of extra material goods and were skimming things, but that was more of a general impression than hard evidence. I would say that blatant, out- and-out corruption and misuse of property and money and so forth was not a problem in Pleiku when I was there.

Q: How about direction from the embassy?

WYGANT: The embassy didn't really have much to do with us. We reported to the AID administration in Nha-Trang. Two Corps actually had a bifurcated capital. The military headquarters was in Pleiku, but the civil administration for the region and all of the civilian offices plus AID headquarters were in Nha-Trang down on the coast. So we basically were following the directives of the AID mission headquarters in Nha-Trang. I guess, in the two years that I was out there, I got to Saigon maybe a half a dozen times, and usually I'd go by the

embassy and have a chat with some of the political officers whom I knew, but there was very little involvement of the embassy in what we were doing, until the last few months of my tour.

Once the peace accords had been signed and our military had gone, then indeed we did become more responsive to directions from the embassy. Nha-Trang was designated a Consulate General with an FSO Consul General assigned. We had one up in Da Nang for the First Military Region, and one over in Bien Hoa for the Third, and down in Can-tho. So then it became a more traditional Foreign Service setup. From that point we were dealing a lot with the Consul General down in Nha- Trang.

Q: You left there when?

WYGANT: I left in May of '73.

Q: What was your impression whither South Vietnam?

WYGANT: When I left in 1973 I felt that South Vietnam had a real chance to make it. I would guess that in the spring and early summer of that year the South Vietnamese were in about the best shape they'd ever been in. Things obviously began to fall apart rather quickly thereafter. And I guess there was a general deterioration into 1974, to the point that when the North Vietnamese made the decision in '75 to make another big push, that was enough to carry them to victory. Of course you had to understand what was going on back here in the U.S. regarding the tremendous upheaval in the U.S. political structure, the lack of support on the part of the American public and the Congress for the South Vietnamese administration, and the demoralization that I think must have set in rather quickly. Entering 1974 the South Vietnamese must have felt basically that the Americans were going to abandon them and that they would have to do it on their own, but with a feeling of inadequacy in being able to do it on their own. The optimism attending the cease-fire in the early part of '73 rapidly deteriorated.

Q: Were you at all concerned about the American presence being, my God, you know, the equivalent to almost at the county level in a foreign country?

WYGANT: The surprising thing was that I did not feel, or did not sense, any real resentment on the part of the Vietnamese toward that degree of American involvement. I guess we had been there so long and they were so used to having Americans around that basically, at least in Pleiku, there was not much resentment.

For instance, we mixed all the time with Vietnamese and Montagnards, to a far greater degree than the military did. My wife and family were not in Vietnam with me, so I was on my own most of the time and I'd often go out to dinner together with my Vietnamese counterparts. Both professionally and socially we were pretty close, so I did not feel that there was a resentment.

Of course, I would imagine that the CORDS experience varied tremendously from province to province. I know that in one or two of the coastal provinces in Two Corps there was much stronger support for the Viet Cong and for the North, and, there, perhaps there would be resentment of Americans or what Americans were doing. But that wasn't the case in Pleiku.

GARY L. MATTHEWS
CORDS
Da Nang (1971-1973)

Gary L. Matthews was born in Missouri in 1938. He graduated from Drury College in 1960, Oklahoma State University in 1961, and Columbia University in 1969. He served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1955-1958 and joined the Foreign Service in 1961. His career included positions in Germany, Poland, Vietnam, Malta, and Washington, DC. Mr. Matthews was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

Q: What happened then after 1971 when you left the Soviet Bureau?

MATTHEWS: In late 1970, I think it would have been, I was delightfully informed that I would be assigned to embassy Moscow via a year in Garmisch, that was then the Army language school, or whatever they called it, Detachment A or R, and which you can appreciate, was wonderful. And I began to think my way into that. At about the very same time, I was rung up by the chap who was handling assignments to Vietnam, who asked if I would come by and talk to him about taking up an assignment in Vietnam. I went by to talk to him, and to make a long story short, I decided to abort the assignment to the Soviet Union, Garmisch, etc., in favor of going to Vietnam.

Q: Looking at it from a career point of view, the Mecca for anybody involved in Eastern European affairs, and particularly going to the Garmisch thing, would be Moscow. Vietnam by '71 was beginning to go down hill.

MATTHEWS: It was the beginning of the Vietnamization program, a real turning point, and that to me is what it was. Of course, I had long thought about Vietnam. It had been a consuming experience, as you know, for many during the '60s, and I just felt I wanted to be a part of it one way or the other. In my case it was indicated that...and I also wanted to go up where there would be action.

Q: In old Civil War terms, it was known as seeing the elephant, which is exactly what I did.

MATTHEWS: I hadn't heard that, that's a good term. I was given fair assurance that I could be posted up to I Corps near Da Nang, the northern most part of South Vietnam. And, in fact, all of that came to be. Of course, everyone in the office of Soviet affairs thought I was mad to do this, but I did it. So I eventually took some training at the Vietnam training center, located in Rosslyn.

Q: It was in the garage?

MATTHEWS: No. It was in a separate building at the time. And I had a minimal fast course, very fast, in elementary Vietnamese, and shipped out and got to Vietnam in August of '71.

Q: I always like to put at the beginning of a section, you were in Vietnam from when to when?

MATTHEWS: From August of 1971 through March of 1973. So I arrived in Saigon, hot and humid, all those well known attributes, the sounds, the smells, and sorted out the initial confusion of their not being quite sure of who I was, when I was arriving, but that was sorted out. I had been somewhat anticipated, so I was eventually sent out to Ton Son Nhet airport, put on a DC-3 or C-47, the military version of the old DC-3, and flown to Da Nang up in the northern part of South Vietnam for assignment to Hoi An, which was then and now the provincial capital of Quang Nam province, slightly south of Da Nang, sort of surrounding it, a very hot action area for especially Viet Cong at the time, although also including North Vietnamese regulars. The adjoining province was Quang Nai, of course, where the My Lai incident took place. I was assigned as assistant province senior advisor for Pacification. Indeed, there was a lot of pacifying, and I primarily worked with Vietnamese military people for the most part, but also some civilian people across the range of programs. I found it utterly fascinating. It had its unpleasant moments, we were being shelled and mortared, mostly mortared, but we were out in the field a lot which I liked.

I replaced a fellow who had been killed when his jeep ran over a mine in a little village. This was one of the same villages where I went in periodically to check on this and that. I always thought of that chap when I rode over the same roads. He had the bad luck to hit the mine. It was a time, speaking about Vietnamization, when all of the main force units, US main forces were being withdrawn. We had essentially an advisory effort for pacification throughout the province, which had maybe eight districts, with small teams of US military personnel. I had a lot to do with that because, being the senior advisor in charge of pacification, I dealt a lot with those programs that were administered by the district team, so I was out all the time either by helicopter, and also often by road. I always felt that I should be out there on the same roads that I would tell other people were more or less safe to drive, at least during the daytime. I would have quite happily finished off my time in Quang Nam. I got to know a lot of the Vietnamese officials, including Buddhist officials who had a number of criticisms of the South Vietnamese regime to say the least.

But then I was asked in early 1972 to transfer to Thua Thien province north of Quang Nam, to be the deputy province senior advisor. We had a somewhat larger advisory team there. Not too long after my arrival the North Vietnamese army sprang a surprise attack, the so-called Easter offensive. Strong North Vietnamese forces came storming down highway 1, across the demilitarized zone, wrapped up all of Quang Tri province which was the northern most province of the demilitarized zone, and came on across the provincial border into Thua Thien, heading toward Hue with Soviet-made armor, armored personnel carriers and all manner of heavy artillery. This was major combat, and of course being deputy at that point, I worked directly with the province chief who was a colonel, and was charged with provincial forces in all of Thua Thien. Well, when the North Vietnamese invasion took place, mostly coming due south from the north, as well as some elements of North Vietnamese guerrillas coming in from the west from the mountains off the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the main line South Vietnamese forces, the first infantry division plus the South Vietnamese also had a Marine division, those troops were all thrown up against the North Vietnamese regulars, along with a number of our regional provincial

forces. And eventually we fought back the North Vietnamese and they were all but decimated, those that would be caught out.

Q: In a way this helped lead to the peace accords. I mean it was a time when they tried a real main line attack, battle attack, and it didn't work.

MATTHEWS: And, of course, the reason the North Vietnamese were eventually beaten back is we brought in massive air power, B-52s flying out of Thailand, which we called Arc Lights, to bring against those elements, we also had Tac Air mostly flying out of Da Nang and elsewhere in Vietnam. And also I think we still had one squadron of US helicopter gunships which we could call on for support. We essentially had beaten back the North Vietnamese by the end of April-early May. The rest of my time there was marked by incursions, usually by North Vietnamese forces because the Viet Cong there as elsewhere up in that part of Vietnam had really been quite severely decimated during the Tet Offensive of '68. A lot of their infrastructure had been destroyed. So there were Viet Cong elements but most of what we had to deal with were North Vietnamese regular army forces, making incursions into the low lands coming out of the mountains off the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This is subsequent to the big Easter offensive. At that point they weren't trying to get down across the DMZ anymore. But my memory of my service there was mostly one of being either on the ground or up in the helicopter with my counterpart, the Vietnamese province chief, the commander of sector forces while we were responding to whatever incursion there had been the night before on the part of North Vietnamese forces.

Q: I'd like to go back first when you're in Hue, and then move to the other. Can you tell me what a pacification officer...what did you do? Talk about maybe a day, the type of things and more details.

MATTHEWS: Well, it's hard to explain. This was the CORDS program in revolutionary development support, it was the pacification program. Bill Colby helped set it up. Bob Komer was a big wheel in that. These were high officials. There was a very fine gentleman, Colonel Jacobson, who worked out of the embassy in Saigon. Colonel Jacobson was a heck of a nice guy. He'd had a prominent role in defending the embassy during the Viet Cong attack during the Tet offensive. CORDS was a panoply of programs, with liberal doses of US funds to further civic development. It was everything from building school houses and clinics, and providing tractors, to trying to train village peasants to guard their own perimeters at night. I came in just at the transition point when the Phoenix program which was designed to identify and capture or kill members of the Viet Cong infrastructure when that was being transitioned to the same program with a Vietnamese name, Phung Huang. There was much less US involvement with it, although there were some of us who did work in that area.

The pacification program, at least as it then existed up where I was in Vietnam, had its very distinctly civil peaceful purposes and aspects, how to provide equipment--tractors, maybe even miracle rice seed to peasants who were trying to develop their rice paddies, or their lands, to new school buildings, new clinics, to the other end of the spectrum which is where you were trying to deal with the quite significant military threat, and terror as a threat, on the part of the Viet Cong and up where I was more often than not the North Vietnamese regular army. So it encompassed a wide range of programs. When I was in Hui An in Quang Nam province, that tended to be more

towards the civilian side of the spectrum. We would certainly get involved periodically in the military aspect, and we were shelled, mostly mortared, periodically at night by the enemy. But it was more of a mixed civilian and para-military operation focused on aid programs and counter-insurgency programs.

Once I transferred from Thua Thien to Hue, it moved quite quickly and significantly towards the military side of the spectrum because of the enormous enemy threats that we had there.

Q: Before we move to the military side, how effective did you find the South Vietnamese government, problems of corruption or direction, or what have you?

MATTHEWS: I have to say, and I've thought about it a lot, that obviously there was corruption. This was not only, if you will, the Southeast Asian way of doing certain things, but there was a war going on and you had all the elements that create fertile ground for that kind of thing. On the other hand, I must say I often was operating in very hostile territory with just Vietnamese colleagues and I never had any reason to doubt their effectiveness, their dedication, and the like. I worked almost all the time with Vietnamese, not with other Americans, and with the benefit of hindsight after the fall of Vietnam in '75, it always struck me, even when I was there, but later after I left--perhaps you shared this too--that we had the great luxury that we could go in and however long we stayed, there was a finite end to our tour, even on the part of those of us that were there more than the eleven months-thirteen months, whatever it was the usual military tour. But those guys, whether they were colonels or buck privates, they were there forever, no matter what happened.

Q: And the war had been going on...

MATTHEWS: The war had gone on forever.

Q: ...more than a decade.

MATTHEWS: So I could never fault them if we were going out on a patrol in an area of the province which was appropriately notorious for being dangerous, you could never really fault the captain, or whoever it was on the Vietnamese side for choosing a path that was less likely to bring him into a booby trap or to an ambush, because two months down the road, or a year later, he was going to be on some path where that probably would happen.

Q: When you were dealing with a situation during the Easter offensive, and that period being on the military side...here you are, you're a civilian, what were you doing on the military side? I'm talking about specifics.

MATTHEWS: Well, I really wasn't a civilian in many of my duties. We must be very candid about the hierarchy of the CORDS operation. My boss was a full colonel. I was his deputy, a lieutenant colonel, and then the officers working for me were majors and lieutenant colonels. When I went out on military operations, as I did with the province chief and others, I put on a green suit...I certainly wasn't out there in a suit and tie. There were no distinctions. None of us in the advisory effort at that point were commanding troops in the field. For that we relied on our

Vietnamese counterparts. But the US colonel, whose deputy I was, had his family safe-havened in the Philippines, so he traveled there quite regularly. And, of course, I became the acting senior advisor and it seemed more often than not every time that happened some big enemy incursion would take place so we would be up there shooting and getting shot at.

Q: What would you do? I mean specifically.

MATTHEWS: Well, specifically we would help with the communications and logistics. Obviously we had our regular radio nets, etc., but we still had some helicopter gunship assets which I could call for and usually get if there wasn't a higher priority elsewhere in the province, and bring those in in support of say an operation to retake a village. That happened quite regularly. If it was really a major concentration of North Vietnamese forces you could ask for US tactical air to come in for air strikes. Although by the time I was up in Thua Thien those tactical air support assets were already quite diminished over what it had been a year earlier in Quang Nam. We had, as I recall, some role in bidding...you actually bid on B-52 strikes, but that was in the mountainous portions of the province. Not that many miles removed from where you were, but that was more against suspected major concentrations of North Vietnamese forces, and those requests would perhaps come from the province chief who got it from one of his commanders that there was a North Vietnamese main force battalion at such and such coordinates, say west of Hue, and we would go through our military advisory channels and try to get air strikes. The sort of normal week in and week out stuff would involve our essentially being lips and teeth with the Vietnamese forces to show solidarity, and usually they sustained the effort on their own part. I was in a number of fire fights together with my Vietnamese colonel where there were no US assets to support us. When we could, we would support them with air, including flying in their troops.

Q: Did you find yourself using weapons?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yes.

Q: At the level you're dealing with, your bag is diplomacy and this is...

MATTHEWS: This bag was never diplomacy.

Q: But there is something about being a professional military man who has gone through the whole training, so by the time you get to lieutenant colonel you've got somebody who understands infantry, air tactics, the whole thing. And you had some military experience, didn't you? But like most of us, it wasn't at that level of sophistication or experience. How did this translate?

MATTHEWS: It seemed to be no problem because at that point where I was in Vietnam with the nature of the challenges we faced, we were sort of all in it together. As I say, it was not a question of commanding troops in the field. That's a military prerogative as it should be, but because of the peculiar and unique situation that prevailed in the "advisory program" there were few distinctions between whether you were a serving US colonel or a serving US Foreign Service officer holding the billet of a colonel. The bane of our existence I should say, or certainly

mine but I can say ours, once I transferred up to Hue was related to the North Vietnamese Easter offensive, that was eventually broken and thrown back, but related to that was that the North Vietnamese had brought off the Ho Chi Minh Trail Soviet heavy artillery, 122 millimeter and 130 millimeter artillery, and put them in caves and other well concealed spots in the mountains overlooking Hue, from where selectively they would shell us several times a week. And unlike the notoriously inaccurate 122 millimeter rockets, which I was quite familiar with from Quang Nam, or even the 81 millimeter mortars, the artillery, of course, is deadly accurate once you have your marking rounds in the box. So my memories of my assignment there are probably especially vivid from the shellings, especially when the shells killed and injured people around me.

Q: How did you find the morale of the South Vietnamese during this period you were there?

MATTHEWS: Coming back to what I said a moment ago, that all things considered and given the fact that they were going to be there until the end no matter what, it was astonishingly good. The major exception to that, which was a real catharsis for all of us...I shall never forget this, was as a consequence of the Paris Accords which would lead up to the cease fire in February of 1973. I recall going over to province headquarters, this was in advance of the public announcement, to present to the Vietnamese colonel, I can't remember if the province senior advisor, the US colonel, was there with me or whether I was acting but I was with a couple of other Americans. And I'll never forget how shocked and bitter he was when we briefed him on what all was to transpire, and, as you recall Stu, a major provision of the agreement was that North Vietnam was allowed to keep its forces that it then had within South Vietnam. The province chief exploded into, I'd say anguish, more than anger, but there was certainly some anger there. My God, he said, this will be the end of us for sure because there's no way in the world that you can have a deal with Hanoi which leaves in place, as it were, massive numbers of North Vietnamese troops, and not think that whenever they choose, they will strike us again. And I remember we had talking points, the usual this and that to mollify him, and I said no, no, the US will be very much watching this and we'll be quick to react if there should be...

Q: Was that close to the end by the time you were leaving?

MATTHEWS: That's right. In fact I had the unique experience of going out to the Hue airport...we were asked to make ready, and at this point I had been appointed the province senior advisor, the senior person, and on very short notice we were to make ready billeting arrangements for the North Vietnamese party which would arrive from Hanoi to take over its role in the cease fire peace deal. So among my last experiences in Hue was going out to the airfield, the main one outside of Hue, and being there that night when a US C-130 flew in and out of the plane stepped 30-40 North Vietnamese officers in uniform. Of course, we had security all over the place to get them safely to where they were being billeted.

Q: You left there when?

MATTHEWS: I left right around the first of March. Suffice it to say in the strange and wondrous workings of things, I had no idea of what was to become of me following my assignment to Vietnam. I would happily have stayed on in Vietnam. I found it fascinating, loved Southeast Asia

then, still do. To my utter astonishment I got a telegram. One of those things where they actually paste the words across the yellow piece of paper, informing me that I was being directly transferred from Hue, Republic of Vietnam, to Leningrad, USSR, via Russian refresher training.

Q: So we'll pick it up next time, but first when you left in March 1973, in your impression, whither South Vietnam?

MATTHEWS: My impressions, which were very much affected by the anguish of the province chief, were that we certainly had not seen the end of this. I never had any sense that the US would not follow through and stand up and be counted if the North Vietnamese did not observe the cease-fire for their part. I was shocked when it happened and the US did nothing to help.

JOHN A. BUSHNELL
Program Analysis, NSC, The White House
Washington, DC (1971-1974)

Mr. Bushnell was born in New York State and educated at Yale University and McMurray College. An Economic Specialist, he served primarily in senior level positions at Latin American posts, including Bogota, Santo Domingo, San Jose and Buenos Aires, dealing primarily with Economic and International Trade issues. An assignment to the Staff of the National Security Council was followed by tours as Deputy Chief of Mission at Buenos Aires, Chargé d'Affaires at Panama City, and subsequently as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Mr. Bushnell was the recipient of several awards for outstanding service. Mr. Bushnell was interviewed by John Harter in 1997

Q: This is Monday, February 23, 1998. When we broke off, John, you were getting your family moved from Geneva to Washington and settled in a house in the Washington area.

BUSHNELL: I went back to Geneva but wasn't there for long. Of course, the people at the NSC [National Security Council] were eager to get me back. A replacement was designated for me in Geneva, and he arrived on TDY to attend a conference, but his visit gave me a chance to introduce him around. After two or three weeks I came back to Washington and went to work at the NSC.

Q: Whom did you check in with?

BUSHNELL: Wayne Smith headed an office in the NSC called Program Analysis. The NSC had a small staff, 50 or 60 officers and about an equal number of support people. There were three or four people for each region of the world. Then there were specialized people of various sorts. Finally, there was the Program Analysis Office which had been created by Kissinger. Its purpose was to handle major issues or problems in which Kissinger was directly involved and where he felt a need for independent and, as he put it, more advanced and more intellectual detailed staffing than what he was getting from the various bureaucracies in the government. We had

eight officers in the "Program Analysis Staff." Its main task was SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks], the strategic weapons negotiations with the Russians and other negotiations with the USSR. Most of the staff was devoted to that. However, we also had the Pentagon budget and the various issues of US force structure. Wayne and one other staff member worked on that. Then, because Vietnam was a big issue, and especially a big issue with Kissinger, Wayne was tasked to provide analysis and intellectual guidance on Vietnam, not on political matters but analysis of how the war was going, what the accuracy of intelligence was, and such matters. He maintained high level contacts with the military and intelligence people. John Holdridge [Foreign Service Officer seconded to the NSC] was the chief East Asian person along with John Negroponte [another Foreign Service Officer on secondment to the NSC]. They handled the political aspects of the Vietnam situation. There were military intelligence people on the staff who did the briefing on Vietnam. Program Analysis basically had the military and intelligence analysis.

There was an economics office headed by Fred Bergsten; Bob Hormats was also in that office. Fred was more interested in general international economics than in Southeast Asia issues, and such issues were soon transferred to me. When I joined the NSC staff, the only White House coordination of international economic policies was through this NSC office, but, while I was there, a separate White House office outside the NSC was established to coordinate international economic matters. Of course the President's Council of Economic Advisors had considerable interest in international economic matters, but the Council was not given a coordination role. Kissinger would frequently say he did not understand economics and was glad to have others handle economic issues. But when there were major issues such as price controls, an embargo on soybean exports, and the 1973 oil crisis, Kissinger saw economic matters had great political impact, and he then became very active on these issues.

Q: I thought that Bob Hormats replaced Fred.

BUSHNELL: Fred was the senior person until sometime in 1972. I believe Ernie Johnston was still there and was then senior until Chuck Cooper took over the office in the spring of 1973.

Q: He left some time right about then.

BUSHNELL: Soon after Chuck Cooper replaced Fred Bergsten, I switched over to that office. When I started back to work at the NSC in April 1971, the Indonesian job was essentially completed. Although I had a watching brief to see that the President's decisions were implemented, that did not take much time. What took most of my time was the re-equipping of the Vietnamese military, so that they could do more, and eventually all, the fighting. I also dealt with intelligence; I set up an analytical system. We had maps showing each of the provinces of South Vietnam. Using various indicators, we did a monthly review of the situation which went to Kissinger and the President. We were basically trying to win the war, province by province. We developed a model of the South Vietnamese force structure and a list of the forces which were the most efficient, so that one could try to make the best use of them. Doing that job absorbed most of my time into 1972. Of course, during this time, unbeknownst to me, Kissinger was already involved in secret talks with the North Vietnamese. He would go to Paris to meet with them.

Q: So what were the principal issues you were working on?

BUSHNELL: I was working at first on military intelligence and military assistance and then on economic matters. In terms of the military, I was not involved in following what US troops were doing on the battlefield but in trying to equip the South Vietnamese military forces so that they could discharge their responsibilities. I did attend frequent briefing which covered all aspects of the military situation.

Q: Presumably, you had to go to Saigon to see the situation on the ground.

BUSHNELL: Oh, yes, I made numerous trips to Saigon. The first trip was in July, 1971. On that first trip I went by myself. I tried to take some home leave, which I was entitled to, in California, where my parents lived. I took my family with me to California and, after a few days leave, I left them there and continued on to Saigon. I spent about 10 days in Saigon and then came back and had a few more days' leave in California.

Q: So tell us about your mission in Saigon. Whom did you see, what did you do, what did you observe, and what were your conclusions? I take it that this was the first of several trips.

BUSHNELL: Yes. In Saigon I spent most of my time in the Embassy and at MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam], talking to people.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

BUSHNELL: The Ambassador was Ellsworth Bunker.

Q: You had known Bunker from your time in the Dominican Republic.

BUSHNELL: Yes. Kissinger sent a message, which I drafted, to Bunker indicating I would be coming out and urging I be educated on several things. A Colonel, who was assigned to Ambassador Bunker, took care of me and handled my logistical needs. He arranged for me to call on Ambassador Bunker the first day I was there. I think this Colonel was absolutely flabbergasted because, when the two of us walked into Bunker's office, the Ambassador looked up from his desk and said: "John, it's about time you got on board for some real work!" I spent quite a bit of time talking to Bunker. As you say, I had known him well previously. Ambassador Bunker had an excellent overview of the situation. Of course, and this was no secret at this point, what really drove policy was Bunker's monthly cable on the situation to President Nixon. The cable went through the Secretary of State and then to the President. The cables in this series were fairly long. In them Ambassador Bunker dealt with those issues and developments which he considered of special importance and those matters needing Washington attention. He did a masterful job of integrating different matters together.

Q: Did Ambassador Bunker draft this series of cables mostly himself, or did members of his staff prepare drafts, and he restructured them, or...

BUSHNELL: It was a combination. Basically, he drafted the final product, but various people in the Embassy and in our military prepared pieces to go into it. I read these reports for years. There was an occasional paragraph which one could see had been excerpted from a cable or paper prepared by someone else. Generally, this monthly report was prepared as though Bunker were speaking to the President. He took whatever inputs he got and added to them. I never saw too much of that process in Saigon.

Q: Who were the principal people in the Embassy who would have contributed to this cable?

BUSHNELL: Oh, I don't remember. Most of my time was spent with the US military officers, not with the Embassy. The only part of the Embassy where I spent a considerable amount of time was in the Economic Section, headed by Chuck Cooper who was the Minister for Economic Affairs.

Q: Cooper was in Saigon at that time?

BUSHNELL: He was the Minister for Economic Affairs. Ambassador Bunker had brought him to Saigon.

Q: Hadn't Cooper been working for RAND [Research and Development Corporation, a private research organization which had contracts with the federal government]?

BUSHNELL: Yes. Bunker had recruited him after he had done some Rand work on Vietnam. He was the Economics Minister, and he was trying to develop reasonable economic policies with the South Vietnamese. He had a large State Department staff and a much bigger AID [Agency for International Development] Mission, a gigantic AID Mission. This was another element where I spent a lot of time. Bunker and Cooper convinced me that the U.S. needed to do much more to develop a viable economy in South Vietnam. This became my big issue. It was not sufficient to train and equip the Vietnamese military; without a strong economy to support the military, the South would not be able to defend itself.

The South Vietnamese economy could produce some things for the military, both their's and our's, and I worked to change policies so the U.S. was prepared to buy as much as possible in the South Vietnamese economy. For years we bought a lot of services from the South Vietnamese economy, but we bought almost nothing in terms of material or equipment from the South Vietnamese economy. They could produce uniforms and all kinds of other things, including simple equipment. There were factories that produced these things, but there was no system for us to buy things from the South Vietnamese economy. We bought almost everything through the military system in the United States. I pushed the idea of buying from the South Vietnamese economy. Ambassador Bunker raised this idea with the President in his cables. The President endorsed it. The military assigned Brigadier General Wickham in MACV to follow up. General Wickham, who went on to become NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] commander in Europe, was an up and coming general officer who was assigned this task of finding places where the military could buy materiel and equipment in South Vietnam and make this system work and quickly. He could get people out there to follow up. He had a big staff and really dug into this matter. I spent a lot of time with him on all my subsequent trips to Saigon and also

worked with him when he would visit Washington. Of course he had many problems with the military bureaucracy. Often I could help cut through these problems, particularly by getting my colleagues at OMB to talk with Defense or issue budget instructions.

I am getting far beyond my first visit. When I got to Saigon, Bill Colby [later Director of the CIA] was still there, but I do not recall whether I saw him on the first or on some subsequent visit. My recollection of trips to Vietnam is dazed. First, I suffered from the time change.

Q: Saigon is halfway around the world from Washington.

BUSHNELL: All of my trips were fairly short; I never really got acclimatized. Then, of course, since I was assigned to the NSC, my work schedule was absolutely packed every day, from breakfast through the evening. I just went from one appointment to another. I had a dozen or two dozen issues that I was looking at. I went from one thing to another, and people became a blur. There were all of these military people, and we had all of these Province Senior Advisers [coordinators of activities] in the various provinces. Most, but not all, of the Province Senior Advisers were military officers. There were also Deputy Province Senior Advisers, who were usually civilians. They made reports, which were put into a system. I spent a lot of my time on this because of the province maps which we prepared for the President. I wanted to see how they were preparing their situation and incident reports, based on what criteria, and how confident they were in their evaluations. They had perfected these military dog and pony shows [briefings, with audiovisual support] which were translated onto charts until the cows came home. The purpose of all of this was to try and make some sense of the situation.

Q: Could you basically summarize what impressions you obtained, recognizing that there was beginning to be a great controversy in the U.S. over all of this?

BUSHNELL: It wasn't beginning. The controversies had been going on for at least a few years.

Q: But what impressions did you have about the whole Vietnam "mess"?

BUSHNELL: By the time I got involved with South Vietnam in April, 1971, the basic decision had been made by President Nixon that we were going to pull out of the country, gradually, and turn the situation over to the South Vietnamese. As a result, we were downsizing our military effort, and that decision had already been made. The main policy questions were how fast could we withdraw troops and what economic and military assistance should we give South Vietnam to allow the South Vietnamese to win the war, while reducing the US presence. Thus essentially the parameters of the policy were set. Although there was great controversy about whether we should pull troops out of South Vietnam immediately, it wasn't as though the issue itself was undecided. There were times when we accelerated this process by attempting to disrupt the North's logistics. Bombing would be extended to additional areas as well as other military measures. However, these apparent escalations were still in the context of moving our forces out. When I first visited South Vietnam, we still had the power to negotiate with Hanoi. Saigon was a dynamic, bustling city. There were real problems involved in moving around the country, although there were still a lot of Americans there. The South Vietnamese economy was doing reasonably well.

Initially, I visited IV Corps, which included the Mekong Delta area South of Saigon - the rice basket of the country. Most of my later trips to South Vietnam took place in a different context. During my first trip I went out on my own and set my own agenda. It was generally a get acquainted program.

Q: How many trips did you make to South Vietnam?

BUSHNELL: I made nearly a dozen trips to South Vietnam.

Q: From the summer of 1971 to...

BUSHNELL: My last trip was in the first half of 1974. Thus I visited over a three year period. I was going to South Vietnam almost every other month in 1972. When Kissinger was in Paris, negotiating with the North Vietnamese, he would send General Al Haig, who was his Deputy National Security Adviser, to hold the hand of the South Vietnamese, so they would be able to understand what we were doing in Paris. I would go with Haig on his trips to South Vietnam. This was a good way to go, because he had his own Air Force plane, and the logistics of this kind of travel were easier. I reached the point where I could get a lot of sleep on these flights, Haig permitting.

Haig was a real work horse on these trips. We would generally work a full day in Washington. Then, about 7:00 PM, we would go to Andrews Air Force Base, get into a KC-135 jet [military version of the Boeing 707], take off and have dinner on board. Then we would have a meeting with Haig to plan the program we would follow in South Vietnam and what each of us would try to accomplish. We generally didn't have time to do the preparation before we left the office. We would review whatever we were planning to do, develop talking points, and discuss where each of us would go. If we were lucky, we would finish that meeting by, say, 11:00 PM, Washington time, when we could go to sleep. The aircraft had bunks, so we could actually sleep. Once I actually slept through a landing and takeoff in Alaska on the way to Saigon. Thus we had a fair chance of arriving in Saigon reasonably rested even if our body clock was 12 hours behind local time.

We would usually be in Saigon for two days. Then Haig would go North to the border area and look at the military situation with our troops there. That was where most of our troops were stationed. I would go South and look at the economic situation and see how things were going in the Delta. That's where most of the South Vietnamese industry and agriculture were located. MACV would provide a helicopter to fly me around. Other people on the Mission would visit other areas, often in connection with various counterinsurgency issues, especially near the Cambodian border. Then we would all fly back to Washington. Usually the trip was little more than a long weekend; almost always they were over weekends.

One humorous note. My brother-in-law, who was an FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigations] agent in New York, was known to have a few beers on a Saturday. Often, if we arrived for a visit on Saturday afternoon, Bob would not be home. His wife would say, "He's gone to the Glenview," the local pub. He came with his family to visit my family over a weekend. They

arrived at our house and were told: "John is not here. He's gone to Saigon. He left on Friday night and will be back on Tuesday." My brother-in-law said: "Well, that's the damndest thing I ever heard! My wife keeps complaining when I go to the Glenview for a few hours. Here John goes to Saigon for the whole weekend!" [Laughter] I made a half dozen long-weekend trips to Saigon when I was assigned to the NSC staff. Most of these trips were secret; we did not even learn of them until a couple of days before and could tell our families only the minimum.

Q: Did you participate in Haig's meetings with senior South Vietnamese officials?

BUSHNELL: Generally not. I did my thing, and that was more than enough to occupy my time. For example, I never went to see President Nguyen van Thieu. When Ambassador Bunker and Al Haig called on South Vietnamese officials, they was generally accompanied by John Holdridge from the NSC staff. I usually met with the Economics Minister and other senior Vietnamese economic officials, usually with Chick Cooper and some AID officers. In the Delta I met with the senior political, military, and economic Vietnamese as well as with our advisors.

Q: But you did get fairly well acquainted with the situation in Saigon during this period?

BUSHNELL: I attended the meetings on the plane going to Saigon and many other meetings. Little time at those meetings was spent on issues I was concerned with. Senior NSC people didn't really care about the details of what I was doing. Haig wanted a strong economy and the right mix of military assistance, but he did not have time for the details. If I needed help, he was always prepared to make a phone call or send a memo. Most of the time on the plane was spent in preparing Al Haig for his calls in Saigon. These preparatory meetings gave me an insight into the things that were going on in Saigon and in the Paris negotiations. When I was in Washington, I wasn't as much involved with the political issues.

Q: So you were concerned to some extent in the issues Al Haig was handling in Saigon and a little bit more about the matters you were concerned with.

BUSHNELL: The big issues Al Haig handled involved trying to convince the South Vietnamese Government that we weren't going to sell them out when we dealt with Hanoi. However, at the same time, he emphasized the South Vietnamese had to be serious about pulling their own weight. This was the line that had to be emphasized. The South Vietnamese had to control their corrupt bureaucracy, and they had to get serious about their programs to draft people and train and equip them properly for the Vietnamese Army. There was a whole series of things that the South Vietnamese needed to do better than they were doing to get their own act together, as Haig put it. But we needed to avoid pushing them so hard that we would seem not to be fully behind them. We needed to leave their pride intact.

Haig had an additional set of issues regarding South Vietnam which, at first, I was not involved in, although I became very involved in later on. These dealt with the rate and nature of the withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam. He had to consider which military forces would come out and how many of them, and when. This could create tensions among the commanders in South Vietnam. The commanders always wanted more, not fewer, forces. In my experience all military commanders always want more forces. Certainly, there were things to do and places

where we were not adequately staffed. However, the main thrust of our efforts at this point was to withdraw our forces. There were great tensions between withdrawing logistical support people and bringing home front line troops. The great majority of our forces in Vietnam were always support. Haig's view was that we should really cut back on the logistical tail, leaving our combat forces in South Vietnam to do their job. Our military didn't seem to know how to cut back on our logistical forces. At the time President Nixon was deciding how rapidly our forces in South Vietnam should be drawn down.

About every three months the Department of Defense presented a paper which basically gave the President three options on our force size in Vietnam. These options were usually increase our forces, keep them at the same level, or reduce them a little bit. These were not real options as far as the NSC staff was concerned. I was assigned the task of preparing real options. That was very difficult to do because it was hard to get real cooperation from the Pentagon in terms of what the real priorities were and what could be achieved. Kissinger didn't want the President to say: "Pull out 50,000 troops" and stop at that. Kissinger's staff was concerned about withdrawing front line divisions, as the logistics people wanted to do. What Kissinger wanted to do was to withdraw logistics people as much as possible while keeping the fighting forces.

We finally came to drafting National Security Decision Memoranda which would say we would withdraw this or that quartermaster detachment or close this hospital or that aircraft maintenance shop in order to direct the withdrawal in a way that we thought it should be directed. I did most of this staff work. I found this very difficult because it required so much work to find out just what various units did. I had detailed print outs on what units were assigned to South Vietnam. Then the question was what some of these people did.

Q: Was that what you were trying to do when you were on one of your trips to South Vietnam?

BUSHNELL: No. It was never very important on these trips. I remember getting some of the information on duties of various units when I was in South Vietnam, but that was really never my central focus. I was doing this force planning in Washington.

Q: What was the quality of military intelligence? You were plugged into it, I assume.

BUSHNELL: Yes. The intelligence on military targets was good. The problem was that basically we were fighting a guerrilla war. It wasn't a matter of one army fighting against another army.

Q: It was like the American Revolution.

BUSHNELL: Something like that. Even troops that came from North Vietnam didn't necessarily operate in large groups. At times they would go into action as squads, which would try to recruit new troops.

Q: Essentially, it was a godawful, political mess which we construed as communism versus something else. However, it was really a very complex political, military, cultural, social, and ideological problem. It was all mixed together, and you can't categorize those things in purely military terms.

BUSHNELL: It was an awkward situation for us to deal with because our military is pretty good if the target is another military force. Find their tanks, their planes, and their troops and attack them. That's what our military knows how to do.

Q: I've been reading John Keegan's "History of Warfare," which goes way back to the earliest, neolithic societies. The thing is that the nature of warfare has constantly evolved, and it has always been different in different areas and at different times. I think that for the military people currently serving it is a question of trying to apply the lessons of the past to the present situation.

BUSHNELL: Really, it wasn't so much applying the lessons of the past. Rather, our military tried to apply the structures, skills, and equipment which they had.

Q: Which were designed to meet the problems of the past.

BUSHNELL: Yes. They certainly were not well designed to meet the sort of enemy they encountered in Vietnam.

Q: Again, I don't think that any military force can do that.

BUSHNELL: It wasn't really the military aspects of the situation which were the problem. There were times when North Vietnamese military divisions invaded South Vietnam. There were times when there were fairly large scale, military battles in Vietnam. Against that sort of thing I think our military was pretty good.

Our intelligence apparatus, whether military or civilian, was weaker. This was a guerrilla war which, in effect, went on in virtually every hamlet in South Vietnam. In any given hamlet there were some people who were somewhat sympathetic toward the communist side or somewhat against the existing government or power structure. The mix was different in each hamlet. Some hamlets would fight against the Viet Cong. In other neighboring hamlets people would give the communist forces food and shelter if they came through. Support for the Vietcong varied not only from hamlet to hamlet but also from time to time. Some might be willing to do something for the communist side if they were sure that they could get away with it. If it looked as if the communists were gaining strength in the area, they might help them. If the communists weren't gaining in strength, they might not be willing to help them. Essentially, each Vietnamese family was trying to figure out how to survive. The struggle had been going on for years in many ways.

Q: Or at least for a number of years.

BUSHNELL: In the long course of history the tendency was for the more dominant culture and power from North Vietnam to have a great impact in the South. Often, this meant that North Vietnamese forces moved into South Vietnam, and even into Cambodia and Thailand. There were also many people who favored the communists and who had been in South Vietnam for a long time. Ideology was only one of the factors in the Vietnamese struggles. It is an agricultural society, and there was a continual battle for land, especially fertile land where rice could be grown. In the mountains the local residents, acting sort like tribes, either fought to retain their

land or struck deals with one side or the other; quite a few threw their future in with us when our troops were in the area, but they had to consider other alliances once our troops departed. We found it hard to convince the government in Saigon of the necessity to provide real support to these mountain peoples.

The Mekong Delta, which includes the most southern provinces in Vietnam, is a very rich agricultural area. Rice, in particular, can be grown there fairly easily; two or even three crops a year. Then, for a thousand miles to the North of the Mekong Delta, people have to try to scratch a living out of the land. The soils are often poor, and the area is not always well watered. Maybe there are a few areas that are fairly good. However, it was often difficult to grow food crops in these places. You have to recognize that this was a basically agricultural society. Thus the tendency was for people from this thousand miles to the north of the Delta to move to the Delta and take over areas where it was easy to make a living. Some from the north had lived in the Delta for generations. The people who live in these southernmost provinces have good crops almost every year. They are not faced with as many challenges as people in other areas were. I guess that is why they became soft, as many in Saigon put it, and therefore were easy prey for people from North Vietnam.

Q: These people are not really military people.

BUSHNELL: No. And military intelligence didn't really deal well with this situation.

Q: How about the people who worked for the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]? Did you become aware of what they were doing? What was your impression of them?

BUSHNELL: There were a lot of them in South Vietnam.

Q: One of their problems was that there were too many of them.

BUSHNELL: I don't know whether there were too many CIA people in South Vietnam or not. I don't think it took any genius to figure out that the military didn't know the Vietnamese culture and the Vietnamese language very well. The military found it hard to fight this kind of war. Often, our forces didn't know who the enemy was. That's why we had incidents like the one at Mi Lai. The enemy turned out to be the bus boy or the kid who was shining your shoes. A couple of the senior economic officials with whom I worked turned out to have been Vietcong all along; one I remember as quite a good economist who seemed to support what we were pushing to strengthen the South Vietnamese government. When you don't know who the enemy is, things become very difficult. When you move from one place to another, you don't know who may attack you. When somebody sticks his head up, you don't know whether you should shoot him or not. If you don't shoot him, he may shoot you. This was a difficult situation for our military to be in. There was a broad recognition of this situation, and that's why we tried to use intelligence people to try to sort this out. However, CIA didn't have the resources to handle this problem. I think there were no resources in the United States to handle this problem. We were too culturally and linguistically limited to handle it.

Q: Of course, I think that we never should have gotten involved in South Vietnam. However,

that's another problem.

BUSHNELL: The intelligence people were able to develop sources of information, people who would sell them information. In some cases we got good information on where people were moving and where there were communist staging areas, for example. In a Vietnamese family struggling to survive someone was often available to sell information. They may have had some ideological reason, but maybe they didn't. It didn't matter. They may have sold honest or dishonest information. With the usual short America view, we would check out information for a few weeks or months and then determine this was a reliable source. The Vietcong, on the other hand, would often leave resources dormant for many years at a time.

Q: Exactly.

BUSHNELL: The intelligence people were sophisticated in some of the questions they asked. However, we never got to the point where we could really paint a comprehensive picture of what the situation was with any confidence. We had bits and pieces of information. That is why at the NSC we tried to develop a province evaluation system that was based more on statistics that could be measured, such as reported incidents, flows of refugees, market prices. However, I soon found that much of the data we used as supposedly actual measures were in fact just guesses prepared by province advisory teams or others at the end of each month.

Q: I think it was certainly up to the State Department or political and economic analysts in the Embassy in Saigon to evaluate this situation. Their judgment should have been sought and relied upon. What was the quality of our work there?

BUSHNELL: By the time I got into it, I think some of the people in our military and in the Embassy had really stopped trying. That's the impression I had.

Q: I think so, too.

BUSHNELL: They tended to report on what the high muckety mucks were doing in Saigon. Of course, there were a lot of State Department officers in South Vietnam. That's because we had people out in all of the provinces. What we were trying to do was to...

Q: Win the hearts and minds of the people.

BUSHNELL: Well, yes. That was the right thing to do. However, the situation was a bit different from what most people think of in terms of hearts and minds. What the State Department officers assigned to South Vietnam were trying to do was to get Vietnamese who were in power, that is, who were in charge of a province or part of a province (or for that matter the national government) to discuss with us what the real problems were, that is, what was going on, and then try to deal with it and gain effective control. However, many senior Vietnamese province officials were not even from the province and did not themselves really understand the local forces at play. Sometimes their main interest was only to get funds or material. As you got down to officials in lower ranking positions, there were many people who were just trying to survive. It was hard to persuade these people to side with the Saigon Government, which was certainly no

model of an honest or efficient government. In the Delta I tried to encourage tax schemes to provide support for the central government, but most farmers in the Delta were opposed to paying for the Saigon government. I think the Vietcong did a better job of raising funds in the Delta, but, of course, their tool was the threat of violence. Finally, we resorted to having the government buy most of the rice; it could then sell the rice in the cities at a considerably higher price and in effect collect taxes that way.

It was hard for State Department officers, let alone our military, to appreciate that we were dealing with people who were fantastically skilled at supporting both sides at the same time. A number of really hard core Viet Cong held positions under the Saigon Government. They would give the impression that they were the most dedicated people in the world, but they were 100% on the Viet Cong side, as we later found out.

Q: Exactly.

BUSHNELL: The war among the Vietnamese was a very long war. One of the great asymmetries was that we were always under great pressure to make it a short war. Americans wanted to finish it and go home. Whereas the Viet Cong view was that this was a very long war. It had already been a long war for them lasting generations. As a result, they could go for months or years at a time, lying low and doing nothing. I think the South Vietnamese also knew it would be a long war probably lasting beyond their lifetimes. This was one reason we found it so hard to get any urgency into South Vietnamese actions.

Q: I guess Vo Nguyen Giap [former North Vietnamese Army commander] will always be considered one of the great military geniuses. He understood the nature of this war better than we did.

BUSHNELL: I'm not sure one had to be all of that much of a genius to understand it. I think there were quite a few people in the Government, like Henry Kissinger, who came to understand the nature of the war. He understood it and was able actually to influence it. Most Americans dealing with Vietnam were much more constrained in what they could do. Even for those who would go out to a province and develop a pretty decent understanding of the situation, it wasn't clear, in that culture, how they could change things. To people who wanted to have a foot in each camp there was nothing decisive about the situation. There was no clear reason why they should take their foot out of the other camp.

Q: We can discuss all of these things, which is old stuff. How about our AID [Agency for International Development] programs?

BUSHNELL: AID was traumatized by the situation in Vietnam.

Q: It's just not the kind of situation where an aid program really makes much sense.

BUSHNELL: It's hard. The situation in South Vietnam did not fit the normal pattern of AID activity. AID would go into a province and teach people how to handle health oriented projects and how to implement health programs. By most criteria, AID handled this sort of program fairly

well. However, the AID people did it by the numbers, that is, mechanically. There was nothing wrong with the health projects implemented by AID. They were just as good as any other health projects handled by AID elsewhere in the world. But AID exercised no control over the system. After prolonged efforts by AID, government officials, and the people who were assisting them to build a health clinic, there might never be a doctor or a nurse available to work there. There would be a building, but that's frequently all that there was. In fact, the result was often a big minus, in my view, because, when people saw this building being constructed, they thought that they might get some health services out of it. When they didn't get improved health services, they would feel that they had been let down. AID usually takes a long view, but in Vietnam most AID people were as eager to go home as everyone else. Some AID people told me it would take decades to bring about real change in the economy, but no one in Washington wanted to hear about such basic programs.

I spent much time with Chuck Cooper [Minister for Economic Affairs in the Embassy in Saigon] who was responsible for large amounts of AID money supporting the Vietnamese economy through the Vietnamese Commercial Import Program [CIP]. Through this program we provided all kinds of imports which were sold in the commercial market and the government could then use the funds obtained for the war and development efforts. We were, of course, involved in trying to eliminate corruption and administer the money committed to Vietnamese programs properly. Problems like corruption were always hard to handle.

Q: Did you actually have a hand in determining how the appropriation requests were structured?

BUSHNELL: Yes, that was part of my job, on the economic side.

Q: Did you have flexibility there? Was there scope for imaginative recommendations?

BUSHNELL: Generally, what we would get through the regular bureaucratic process would be too little money for Vietnam. President Nixon wasn't prepared to increase the total of aid worldwide. If we needed more money for Vietnam (as we regularly did), we had to obtain it by reprogramming from wherever we could. I became sort of a scrounger. Where I could identify an AID program that was not moving on schedule or where the political priority had been reduced, I would work with OMB and AID management to reprogram for Vietnam or Cambodia for which I also had responsibility. I was continually trying to capture money from every place I could find in the world to put it in Vietnam. The same problems arose in the budget process. AID would ask for too little money for Vietnam expecting that the White House would increase it and thus increase the AID request in total. I would work with OMB to find places to cut the request to increase Vietnam within the same, or a smaller, total request. The Government in Saigon would ask for more money every time we reduced our forces or it looked like we might be reaching an agreement with the North. Thus in some respects increasing economic assistance became almost a part of the peace negotiations. Personally I hated to see good AID programs cut to fund Vietnam, and I was often able to defend a good program. I was surprised how many weak AID programs there were when I became engaged in this scrounging.

Q: Did you have to figure out some way of diverting funds that should have gone to AID

programs in Latin America, for example?

BUSHNELL: The Bureau of Latin American Affairs didn't have much money at that time. What was available was not in the supporting assistance category. The toughest fights were with programs dealing with the Middle East, which were substantial. What happened on the budget was that, finally, at the end of the budget cycle in December, say on New Years Day, I would have to be in the office and write an option paper for the President to decide whether he would fund Vietnam programs at the levels we wanted and, if so, where would the funds be taken from. He always approved the full amount for Vietnam. These option memos were hard. There were strong arguments for some of the Middle Eastern programs, including domestic political arguments. However, they were the only sources where the amount of money we needed for Vietnam could be found. Kissinger would make clear to the regional NSC staff that they should help me find funds in the programs for their countries, so my personal relationships around the NSC staff were not complicated. OMB also received guidance from Kissinger and, I suspect, the President, so OMB officers were solid allies. After awhile many people in State and AID would not talk to me about assistance programs because they identified me as a threat.

Q: You mean that the NSC [National Security Council] staff actually got into that process? I would have assumed that this would be handled by AID or the OMB [Office of Management and Budget].

BUSHNELL: OMB was quite helpful. Technically, OMB would prepare the main memorandum for the President dealing with the foreign assistance budget. I would work with OMB to get the Vietnam programs as high as possible. In fact, they were quite effective in scraping up money from various programs which were fairly marginal or questionable. Typically, if we needed an additional amount, say, \$450 million, to take an arbitrary figure, the bureaucracy would agree on about \$250 million. Then OMB would prepare a memorandum and add an additional \$50 or \$75 million to the recommendation. Then, when they sent their memo through Ken Dam, or whoever it was, Kissinger would sign a memo which I would draft. This would say, in effect, that even OMB is short of recommending the amount needed and suggest a couple of options to reach the target amount.

Q: This is Side B of Tape 8 of the interview with John A. Bushnell. What kind of recommendation would you make?

BUSHNELL: There were several rounds in this process. I don't think we ever recommended increasing the total amount of the budget for AID or PL 480 [surplus agricultural commodities]. If we were going to increase the OMB mark for Vietnam or Cambodia, we had to obtain the funds from somewhere else. In effect, we had to say where we would reduce the budget elsewhere. Sometimes we would wind up with some arbitrary figures, say, taking \$50 million from Latin America and \$50 million from African programs. We would leave it to others to figure out how to allocate these total cuts among the various countries. Sometimes my colleagues at the NSC would give me indications of where to regenerate funds. Kissinger would then approve this.

Q: What did you think of the USIA [United States Information Agency] program?

BUSHNELL: I don't recall having anything to do with that in Vietnam or with the worldwide effort to build support for our Vietnam policy. I was vaguely aware that part of the public affairs effort involved trying to persuade the Vietnamese Government in Saigon to act like a democratic government that wanted to be supported by all of its people. Instead, some people who worked for the Vietnamese Government often acted like little dictators. They ran things and used the structure of the government to keep the benefits largely for themselves. Part of the problem was that we tried to use public affairs, broadly speaking and beyond what USIS [United States Information Service] was doing, to try to build support for the Vietnamese Government. In effect, we were trying to do their job for them. I don't think that we were very effective at doing this, but I didn't have much exposure to this effort. I know some of my colleagues on the NSC staff regarded all of this as a tremendous waste of time and money.

Q: As long as Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker was there, he was central to everything, right?

BUSHNELL: He was central to anything within Vietnam that might be described as a big issue or big decision. However, an awful lot of things went on without his knowledge, especially in the military and intelligence areas. The scope of the Embassy's activities was so immense. Very little went on that he was actually opposed to. Of course Kissinger was in control of the negotiations with the North. Washington decided big military issues such as the bombing of Hanoi.

Q: Of course, President Johnson wanted personally to control too many things himself, which was insane. That was before you worked on South Vietnam.

BUSHNELL: Kissinger had a broad, strategic overview. He was able to take everything into account without getting into the details except where his staff showed him details that were interfering with what he wanted to do. However, when he got into detailed problems, for example, of redeploying forces in South Vietnam or bringing our troops home, he was quite capable of handling complex issues and even making them seem simple.

Q: It's easier to get into a war than it is to get out of it.

BUSHNELL: That's right, even from the logistical aspects alone. One of the continuing battles I had was that logistical lead times were too long to meet NSC targets for drawing down forces. The logistical tail is so long it takes months and months to ship out equipment and forces, get rid of a facility, and deal with all of the other things associated with the withdrawal. A year after you begin a withdrawal of a unit you still have a lot of its people in country who are still engaged in the process of the withdrawal. That is very frustrating when you are trying to reduce the number of Americans in country without overly reducing fighting forces. I was continually pressing to reduce logistical personnel and units and turn these functions over to contractors or the Vietnamese. We knew that our forces were going down in numbers. The question came up: "Why didn't we stop sending out new equipment and material?" By the time you order material from the U.S. and put it into the pipeline, a year and a half goes by before it actually gets there.

Q: And we frequently need replacements.

BUSHNELL: Yes, but it still takes a year and a half. The problem was, since we were doing this withdrawal in three-month increments, we never knew what the situation was going to be twelve months later. The logistical structure of the armed forces at any given time seemed to be working on the basis that we had virtually the same force structure that we had had in South Vietnam a year and a half earlier. Thus equipment and supplies ordered long ago were being delivered, even if the units originally needing them were no longer in Vietnam. We knew the President wasn't going to stop the withdrawal, but the military acted like he might reverse course. Thus, a lot of stuff that had been ordered would be shipped to Vietnam and then would have to be re-packed and shipped back. It took a lot of soldiers to do that.

Q: Wasn't it [name indistinct] who said that the way we could get out of Vietnam was by sending ships and planes out there to move the stores and equipment out.

BUSHNELL: That's true, but it's not what we did. The ships that went over were full of new supplies. It would have been easier for us to get out if we turned over to the South Vietnamese much of our equipment. This was generally what Kissinger and other people in the NSC thought we should do. The South Vietnamese were to replace us, so why not give them our equipment. Our military argued that the Vietnamese were not prepared to maintain, and in some cases use, our sophisticated equipment. Moreover, we did not want some things to be at risk of capture by the communists. Also in many cases there was no new equipment in the pipeline for the redeploying units. My problem was to sort out where the military had sound arguments and where they just didn't want to give something to the Vietnamese. It was a case by case struggle. Fortunately some military officers like General Wickham helped make sense of it.

Q: Did you meet Graham Martin [last Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam] in Saigon?

BUSHNELL: Yes.

Q: Do you recall the circumstances under which you met him?

BUSHNELL: The first time I met him was at the NSC [National Security Council] in Washington, as he was preparing to go to South Vietnam. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker had had an official airplane which was provided for him in Saigon in part to travel to and from Nepal to visit his wife, Ambassador Carol Laise [who was Ambassador to Nepal during part of the time that Ambassador Bunker was Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam]. Ambassador Martin decided he wanted to have an airplane dedicated for his use and asked the NSC to arrange it. There was quite a humorous discussion about where he might want to visit at one staff meeting. I think Brent Scowcroft was the Deputy National Security Adviser to President Nixon by that time. He said: "No. We gave Ambassador Bunker a plane because the President really wanted to keep him in Saigon far longer than one could expect someone to serve, but now we are phasing down." However, it was finally decided that the Air Force would provide a Special Missions plane to fly Ambassador Martin out to Saigon when he first went to post. He would arrive in the big aircraft marked United States of America, even though it would not stay in Saigon at his disposition after that.

Phil Odeen, who had replaced Wayne Smith, said to me: "It's just about time for you to go to Saigon. You can fly out there with Ambassador Martin." I said: "Fine." I called up the State Department, said I needed to go to Saigon, and asked if I could go out on Ambassador Martin's plane. I was told Ambassador Martin was not taking any passengers on his Special Missions aircraft; there were many people who wanted to fly to Saigon with him, especially those who were on recreation leave in the States, so the Ambassador was solving the problem of choosing by not taking anyone even those on official business. I told Brent Scowcroft, and he said: "I arranged for the plane for Martin. Consider yourself on that flight." The same State Dept desk officer later called me and said: "John, you've done it again! You're on the plane." I went to Andrews Air Force Base at the appointed hour. Ambassador Martin was traveling with two staff aides and his dog. There were only the four of us, not counting the dog, on a 707 aircraft, and there were not the several hours of work I was accustomed to when traveling with Al Haig.. We flew first to Honolulu, to CINCPAC. Ambassador Martin spent some time with CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific], but I didn't sit in on his meeting. I don't think he wanted me there, and I got a lot done with the staff relevant to my work.

Ambassador Martin had a fairly distant manner. I never got to know him well. I had worked day and night for weeks with Ambassador Bunker in the Dominican Republic so I had a long standing close relationship with him. He was a very warm individual. I only had a few trips to Saigon while Ambassador Martin was there. I never established the kind of relationship with him that I had had with Ambassador Bunker, who always wanted to sit down and talk about serious matters.

Q: I don't think anyone had a close, personal relationship with Graham Martin. I knew him fairly well in Bangkok. Did you have any particular impression as to how Ambassador Martin operated?

BUSHNELL: By the time Ambassador Martin went to Saigon in mid-1973 as chief of mission, our military withdrawal was completed. Our policies were really pretty well established. There were only details of economic and military assistance to the South to be worked out. At this point I don't recall reading any Martin to the President cables. I think he operated like other State Department chiefs of mission. All aspects of our involvement in South Vietnam were being phased down. Wherever he looked, people were leaving. Also I was spending less and less time on Vietnam myself after the cease-fire and the withdrawal of the military.

Q: He had a fairly ignominious tour of duty in Saigon.

BUSHNELL: The end for South Vietnam came quicker than anybody that I know expected.

Q: Do you have any further comments on Vietnam?

BUSHNELL: I might add one footnote -- an unusual experiences I had in December of 1972 when President Nixon decided to resume bombing of Hanoi. The purpose of the bombing was, of course, to pressure the North to reach agreement at the peace talks. However, in preparing for the NSC meeting on resumed bombing, potential targets had to be chosen. Phil Odeen, a military officer on the NSC staff, and myself spent several hours in the Pentagon targeting center. It was

easy to agree to avoid targets close to prisoner camps, but there was then a lot of disagreement on what to hit. Kissinger had instructed us to choose targets that would really get the attention of the leadership. The military seemed to prefer targets that might disrupt the supply of materials to the South. Of course, in North Vietnam it is hard to identify many really lucrative targets. They weren't an industrialized society. They didn't have ball bearing factories, and what factories they had were dispersed. Thus the selection of targets was difficult. We drew up a paper with a few agreed targets and two or three sets of potential additions for the NSC principals to consider.

Q: Was this in December, 1973 -- the Christmas bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong?

BUSHNELL: No. It was 1972. The bombing lasted 12 days. Most of the targets selected in the NSC meeting were hit. Peace talks resumed. On January 27, 1973 the cease-fire agreement was signed. I didn't attend the NSC meeting at which the decision was made on which targets to attack. However, later the same day or the next day I departed with Haig and a few others on another secret mission to Saigon. This trip we flew first to Hawaii. Then, after a visit of a couple hours with CINCPAC, we took the shortest route to Saigon, which required a refueling stop in Guam, which was where the B-52 bombers were stationed. We arrived in Guam, and Al Haig was able to make an appearance at the final briefing for the pilots who would initiate the bombing of Hanoi. We saw the air crews get into their planes and saw them take off. Very seldom do diplomatic officers participate in such strategic decision-making and then see the decision being implemented. Watching these B-52s take off gave me an eerie feeling. Almost as soon as they had taken off, we left for Saigon. The President and Kissinger thought these bombing raids on Hanoi and Haiphong were going to make a fantastic difference. They certainly brought Hanoi back to the negotiations in Paris, but I don't think that they made much of a difference to the situation in South Vietnam.

DAVID LAMBERTSON
Spokesman
Paris (1971-1973)

East Asia Bureau, Regional Affairs
Washington, DC (1973-1975)

David Lambertson was born in Kansas in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Redlands in 1962. He entered the Foreign Service in 1963, and his assignments abroad included Saigon, Medan, Paris, Canberra and Seoul with an ambassadorship to Thailand.

Q: Yes, how do you get, when does that cable come in that says here's your next job?

LAMBERTSON: I honestly don't remember what I did or exactly who I was in contact with to make sure that my next job was the Paris Peace Talks. I don't know that I actually went after that job with great fervor or whether it was offered to me, but I was happy to have it. I would have preferred to have gone there directly from Saigon in 1968, but going there in 1971 also interested

me. I was surprised, I suppose, that the Talks were still going on in 1971. I left Medan in the spring of 1971, and traveled to Paris by way of Tunisia where I visited Arch Calhoun, my former boss in Saigon. I got to Paris, it must have been in April of '71, although I then went back to the United States and then turned around and returned to Paris.

The Paris Peace Talks by then had been going on for three years and not a whole lot had been accomplished. The American delegation by that time was led by David Bruce who I came to respect and admire, a very fine gentleman I thought. His deputy was Phil Habib. So, I was once again in familiar territory. Steve Ledogar was the press spokesman, Peter Collins, who had been with me in Saigon, was a liaison officer and that is what I also became. I was also the admin guy for the delegation the first year I was there, which entailed occasional arguments with people in the embassy in Paris over such issues as whether we could continue to use their spacious library. If you've ever been in the embassy in Paris you know they have a marvelous paneled library - a wonderful room. We used that library again in 1989 when I was in Paris for a conference on Cambodia. In any event I had some administrative responsibility, but not that much. Then we had a change in leadership in the delegation after I'd been there a few months. David Bruce left, and William Porter, the former deputy ambassador in Saigon, former ambassador to Algeria and at that time ambassador to Korea came from Seoul to replace Bruce as head of the delegation.

Q: That change representing?

LAMBERTSON: Then Phil Habib went to Seoul to replace Bill Porter as ambassador to Korea.

Q: Is that a normal rotation of people?

LAMBERTSON: David Bruce was a high-profile political appointee on the order of an Ellsworth Bunker, and appointing William Porter, however distinguished his career might have been, represented a slight diminution in the status of the post. I suppose that's because by then Henry Kissinger was engaged in his own line of negotiation and really didn't much care what happened in Paris, except that it was an operation we had to keep going because the North Vietnamese themselves demanded that it continue. So, Porter became the chief of the delegation. Phil left. Heyward Isham replaced Phil and became the deputy. Steve Ledogar left and I became the press spokesman for the delegation - a far more interesting job for me than being liaison officer and general factotum.

I might add that something else happened at about that time which was somewhat significant in my life - I married Sacie and acquired three wonderful stepchildren. Whatever success I enjoyed subsequently, I owe to her, at least mostly. That was in the summer of '72.

So for the last year, roughly, that I was there I was the spokesman for the delegation. That meant participating in a four-way, on-the-record press conference following each plenary session of the Paris Talks, which always took place on Thursday afternoons at the Hotel Majestic near the Arc de Triumph.

Q: Four way, so American...?

LAMBERTSON: North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Viet Cong - called the "Provisional Revolutionary Government" - and ourselves.

Q: Of course, this is a big thing for the press, especially American...

LAMBERTSON: That's right. The Paris press corps during the Vietnam Peace Talks was much larger than before or since in terms of American representation and probably in terms of other foreign representation also. When the Peace Talks ended in January of '73 an awful lot of American newspapers closed up shop in Paris. Many of the correspondents there had been with the subject since it began in May of 1968 and at least some of them had a very good knowledge of the way the talks had developed, the history of what had gone on, in a way that I really did not. Therefore, they could be formidable questioners in a press conference situation.

Q: Actually it's a daunting job to handle the press. Richard Boucher seems to have permanently ensconced himself into that. As you say you must have gotten some tough questions or slid off the podium once or twice?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, because the press corps was inclined to be highly skeptical of any of our claims and critical of our position. Certainly that was true of the foreign press and also true of some of the American press. What made it especially difficult was that I was not an "authoritative" spokesman because Henry Kissinger was doing secret negotiations while we were having our open plenary sessions and the two could quite often diverge. The subject of our plenary sessions sometimes, often, had nothing to do with what Henry was talking about. Our talks had basically become exchanges of polemics, which as I mentioned the North Vietnamese considered very valuable. This was a weekly opening to the world for them. That's why they wanted it to continue even though the real business was being done between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. As 1972 wore on and Kissinger's activities became more and more open, or less and less secret should I say, my job as spokesman got harder.

In the beginning Kissinger would come and go into Paris, and no one would know he'd been there except perhaps the head of our delegation. His travels were arranged by the defense attaché in Paris, who later became chief of the CIA, General Walters, Vernon Walters. He handled Henry's clandestine movements in and out of Paris.

By the summer of '72 it was well known that Kissinger was engaged in these talks. By the fall of '72 his arrivals in Paris were no longer a secret although they weren't advertised, but people knew he was there. Still later on there were motorcycle paparazzi chasing him around as his motorcade moved from one point to another. It became gradually more and more an open thing. As it did, and as correspondents were clued in at least in a general way from briefings in Washington and elsewhere about what was going on in the private talks, I'd get interesting questions directed at me on these Thursday afternoon occasions and I seldom knew any more than the journalists did about what might have happened.

I was really under a constraint. I was not supposed to say anything about Henry Kissinger's activities - how dare I. On a few occasions when I did, my wrist was slapped and I was told not to do it again. I once ventured to characterize, for example, the "tone" of Henry's meeting the

previous day. I was informed that Kissinger was displeased, and that so was Le Duc Tho, and that I should desist. It was an untenable position for a press spokesman, when you don't really know what's going on and you're not even allowed to say what you do know - and you're dealing with a press corps that knows about as much as you do.

I would also often get into exchanges having to do with American military operations in Vietnam – for example, whether or not a flood control dike with an anti-aircraft position on top of it was or was not a legitimate military target. One of my worst hecklers was the Australian communist writer, Wilfred Burchett. I was frankly relieved when my press spokespersonship ended, although I had appreciated the temporary notoriety it gave me. My mother occasionally saw me on the nightly news.

Q: It certainly must have been different, given the initiative and challenge of being in Vietnam and then to be totally circumscribed. I mean you can't get two more different ends of the whole Foreign Service experience.

LAMBERTSON: I suppose that's right. It was just a function of the fact that the real negotiation was taking place elsewhere. The press was constantly probing to see if they could get any insight through this one channel available to them into the still essentially secret process. I may have been circumscribed, but the job most certainly was challenging.

Q: Speaking of insights, you were saying at one time Kissinger came through town and he briefed a group of Embassy officers?

LAMBERTSON: Kissinger and Dick Smyser came through, and I suppose Winston Lord must have been with him also. He met with our delegation and he talked with us about his visit to South Vietnam, during which I think he was trying to get Nguyen Van Thieu to agree to more forthcoming formulations that he could use in his secret talks. He also discussed at some length his stopover in Pakistan and briefed us on the situation on the subcontinent, in which I had no interest. I couldn't understand why he felt it necessary to talk about that subject. Then he left. He neglected to mention that he had also gone from Pakistan into Beijing, secretly. William Porter was in on his secret, but nobody else in the delegation was. Vernon Walters probably knew about it also. We read about it in the papers a couple of days later.

Q: The talks finally do come to some resolution though, right?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, in October of 1972 Kissinger had his "peace is at hand" press conference. One of those brilliant performances he was capable of. There were some snags between that point and the final agreement, which caused us to unleash B-52s over North Vietnam at Christmas 1972. We got an agreement then, finally, in January of 1973. William Rogers, our Secretary of State, came to Paris to sign the agreement. Kissinger had earlier initialed the agreement with Le Duc Tho. We had an elaborate ceremony on, what was it, January 25, 23, something like that, 1973 ending American participation in the Vietnam War. Our withdrawal began immediately and POWs returned within the next month. South Vietnam was more or less on its own.

Q: In fact, did you leave Paris shortly after this? I mean that must have been the end of the Peace Talks delegation.

LAMBERTSON: Porter left, but the delegation was to become the core of a joint economic commission. I don't know if you remember that about the Vietnam Peace Talks. We were going to give them lots of aid had this agreement worked out, and a joint commission was to be established as part of the agreement and was to begin its meetings immediately in Paris. So the delegation remained more or less intact, but as I recall I had very little to do. By early April my family and I were on a six week tour of Southern Europe, and shortly after we got back, I left Paris. Needless to say the joint economic commission, if that indeed was the name, never amounted to anything. My work ended essentially in January.

Q: You started working on landing the next job. Did you call them or did they call you?

LAMBERTSON: It was time for me to go back to Washington. I hadn't served in Washington in a real job since that disastrous first assignment. Again, I can't remember whether somebody asked me to come back and be a sort of junior policy officer in EA/RA (Office of Regional Affairs in the East Asia Bureau) or whether I knew it was available and lobbied to get it. Maybe a little of both. By then I was comfortable with the East Asia Bureau. I had begun to make a name for myself within the Bureau and it's possible that I knew enough about the flow chart that I was able to identify that job and maneuver myself into it. In any event, I went to EA/RA in the spring of 1973.

Q: Who was the head of regional affairs?

LAMBERTSON: Bob Martens. His deputy was Dick Nethercut, another China guy, right? Both good men.

Q: Yes.

LAMBERTSON: Oh and Louise McNutt was in the office. Do you know her or do you know who she was?

Q: She was there forever, wasn't she?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, forever. She was the daughter of Governor Paul McNutt of Indiana, who was one of FDR's great political rivals within the Democratic Party and had been sent off to the Philippines as Governor General to sort of get him out of FDR's way. So Louise spent her girlhood in the governor's mansion in Manila, at least a few years of it. A wonderful woman with an office piled high with every UN publication that had ever been cranked out. One time our Pentagon liaison told her he had hidden a secret document in her bookshelves, and she would have to find it. Louise was wonderful.

Q: But isn't that the point, the regional affairs office in the State Department bureaus, I don't want to say was the "pick up" office, but they covered the broader, intra-regional issues.

LAMBERTSON: It was a collection of very disparate functions. Louise was our United Nations officer and I think was pretty good at knowing what was happening at the UN and how it might affect what we were doing. There was a POL/MIL function - the guy in EA/RA kind of liaised with PM as well as with the individual country offices. Harriet Isom was in the office, in fact, I replaced her, and one of my functions was "SEATO affairs".

Q: Oh, goodness.

LAMBERTSON: We had a vault, the "SEATO vault," as if something secret had been produced that required being kept in a vault. I think during my tenure that job ended and the vault was cleaned out. SEATO was officially put to rest.

Q: What are your responsibilities? You're a fourth tour officer now?

LAMBERTSON: Yes, my title was "policy officer" and I did have an actual policy-related job, which was to design and disseminate to the field - and hope for cooperation from the field - annual policy analysis and resource allocation documents. Do you remember those things? PARA was one acronym for them and they had others as the years went by. They were taken seriously by some posts and not at all seriously by others. It was my job to put the thing together, to get it out to the field, to keep track of who had responded and who hadn't and to do whatever we had to do with it when the submission was made. Dave Osborn was the ambassador in Burma at that time, and he really took it seriously. He thought it ought to be redesigned, and he reportedly spent hours with his office floor covered with papers and flow charts, and he sent in something that was quite interesting that I'm sure nobody really looked at. He probably had time on his hands in Rangoon.

Then, as 1973 moved into 1974, Vietnam was beginning to fail and the frailty and the flaws in the Paris Agreement on Vietnam were becoming more and more evident and the North Vietnamese military had moved into the South in a big way. They were putting pressure on Saigon on many fronts and it was pretty clear that things were headed down the drain. This continued to be a major preoccupation of the bureau, of course, and I got drawn back into the Vietnam business from my EA/RA position. I was interested in what was happening and put myself forward and was increasingly involved in writing papers related to the situation and writing congressional presentations, all that sort of thing. By the second half of 1974 I was probably working on Vietnam more than anything else.

John Helbe was Phil Habib's special assistant. Phil being the Assistant Secretary at this point. One of my more vivid experiences while in EARA was attending the 1974 chiefs of mission meeting in Honolulu, December of '74. I went there, I guess technically, because I was the policy officer and we were supposed to be talking to ambassadors about those PARA documents.

Q: Now a chiefs of mission meeting, isn't that where the ambassadors from that region all get together and share their experiences hopefully with the thought that one person's experience is going to improve the others' performance.

LAMBERTSON: That's right. For years it had been traditional to do it in Honolulu in

December. That was still the practice when I was in Bangkok. I'm not sure whether budgetary or other things have interrupted that tradition, probably so. In any event I went to that meeting. As I said, I had a faint excuse theoretically because of my titular job as policy officer, but I really went there because of the Vietnam aspect of it. We knew that Vietnam was going to be an important agenda topic and John Helble was good enough to make sure that I got on the airplane.

I remember it quite vividly - at least I remember the tenor of the exchanges that took place on the subject of Vietnam. Particularly at a Sunday morning discussion we had at a private estate right on the ocean, on the North shore of Oahu. Some rich person's place had been given over to us for the day. We went out there by helicopter and sat around the pool and the subject was primarily Vietnam and Cambodia. Although the day started with a briefing by a guy from the EB (Economics) bureau - Mike Ely maybe - on the 1974 trade act, an important new piece of legislation. When the discussion turned to Vietnam there was a lot of tension in the air because of the bitter feelings of Graham Martin toward Phil Habib and toward Washington.

Graham Martin was quite sure that Washington could and should be doing more to help our friends in South Vietnam. Phil Habib was explaining to him and to the others assembled around the pool the political realities of 1974 in the United States, particularly after the election of an overwhelmingly more Democratic, young and very anti-war House of Representatives - the so-called "class of '74." So, I was aware of the problem that existed between Graham Martin and Phil Habib because I guess it was semi-public, but John Helble also kind of kept me up to date, describing the occasional telegram that I wouldn't have seen from Graham Martin to Phil. Martin seemed to be convinced that Washington generally and Phil in particular could be doing more than was being done to stem the tide. John Gunther Dean was also present and he had equally gloomy things to say about the situation in Cambodia.

Q: I wonder about some of the other observers, I think Kintner would have been there from Thailand and Ambassador Unger would have been there from the Republic of China.

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall what they had to say in the Vietnam discussion. I don't remember details of the discussion - just the atmospherics of it. I do remember Ambassador Unger arriving with a briefing book that must have been six inches thick, literally. Such a detail guy. A very nice man, but I couldn't believe it when I saw this thing he was carrying around with him.

Q: The China God does its work.

LAMBERTSON: He didn't want to leave anything to chance when it came to having what he needed with him.

Q: So, actually, what you're really saying here is that domestic political changes have occurred that will impact on the conduct of foreign policy or what one can do in foreign policy?

LAMBERTSON: Oh, absolutely.

Q: It goes back to Clausewitz, if the public doesn't support you, you're in trouble.

LAMBERTSON: That's right, and by then the public had generally stopped supporting this effort.

Q: Your vantage point is regional affairs. The public support stops and still that's a hard thing to watch. I mean you had been there. You had Vietnam experience, but now you're working with the Hill, you're doing papers.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, as I said, in 1974 there'd been an influx of new almost exclusively anti-war Democrats into the House. I went with Phil Habib one afternoon to a large room in the capitol building where we met with the House Democratic caucus. It couldn't have been all of them. I don't think there were 250 people in the room, but there were an awful lot, including people like Phil Burton of San Francisco, Bella Abzug and Patsy Mink. Just outrageously outspoken people. It was a very tough meeting. I wasn't doing the talking, Phil was. I was just his spear-carrier. It was a kind of an eye opener to be in the same room with that much anti-war sentiment all at one time. It felt good to escape from it. That was indicative of the atmosphere. We were asking, incidentally, for \$750 million more in military aid in the spring of 1975 for Saigon. In 1975 that was real money, you know. Congress was not inclined to provide any.

Q: That's certainly one of the lessons that you ultimately learned in this business: whatever policy you're pursuing has to be publicly acceptable, but most Foreign Service Officers to a fourth assignment don't get a real live exposure to those political currents.

LAMBERTSON: We were all exposed to those currents with respect to Vietnam, at least after I left Saigon in 1968 and as the situation worsened. You couldn't be unaware of the political reality surrounding the Vietnam issue. But it was interesting to brush up against it first hand as I did quite a lot in the spring of 1975, going up to the Hill with Phil and also a couple of times as part of Kissinger's entourage for those huge hearings of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

Q: Ultimately Saigon falls April 30, 1975.

LAMBERTSON: Right, I was in the Ops Center that night.

Q: Coincidentally or...?

LAMBERTSON: I'm sure it was not coincidental. The bureau must have had some kind of special watch going on.

Q: You could see it coming. It wasn't just that day.

LAMBERTSON: It wasn't just that day, but a number of days leading up to it. I remember sitting in a small room with Phil and with Larry Eagleburger that night, and I have a copy someplace of Saigon's last telegram, signing off. Also, during that period when it became evident that Saigon was going down the tubes, there was a lot of preliminary work that got underway on the refugee front and I was in on some of it. Frank Wisner was a prime mover in that. I forget where Frank was working at that point. A number of people were involved. I met

with them a couple of times, and we were talking in a preliminary way about how this likely large influx of people was going to be handled, before it became an official government project. Then after the fall of Saigon, I remember going with Phil and Wisner to a hearing before Ted Kennedy's subcommittee. He had a subcommittee that had to do with refugee issues. Do you remember that?

Q: No, because I always have refugees starting with...

LAMBERTSON: He had a guy by the name of Jerry Tinker. Do you remember that name?

Q: Yes, that sounds familiar.

LAMBERTSON: Jerry was a classmate of mine at Redlands and he was for years Kennedy's staffer on refugee issues. Kennedy chaired a hearing on...

Q: We had Cuban refugees and all that sort of stuff.

LAMBERTSON: ...on preparations for handling the exodus from Vietnam. Then about the last thing Vietnam-related that I did and about the last thing I did in EA/RA – that must have been within a week of the fall of Saigon - we got a memo from Brent Scowcroft, a Scowcroft-Springsteen memo in which the Department was asked to provide the White House a paper on the “lessons of Vietnam.” I became the chief author of that and I collected a lot of views from people in the bureau. Everybody had things to say. I wrote that memo, Bob Miller cleared it and Phil signed it and it went back through the Springsteen-Scowcroft channel. I got a copy a few years later and have since acquired a legitimate declassified copy through the FOI process. It's a good memo - the sort of thing we might have done well to read carefully before our latest adventure in the Middle East.

Q: Let me take you back to a couple of things that you've mentioned. Planning ahead for refugees. There's a tension here between it-ain't-going-to-happen-and-even-if-it-is-you-don't-want-to-make-preparations-because-you'll-make-it-happen and the need to plan to ahead.

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and so there were these informal meetings that took place, and I was kind of on the margins of those as I said.

Q: There wasn't a refugee bureau at that time.

LAMBERTSON: Is that right?

Q: I'm fairly certain. It comes to me as a result of all this.

LAMBERTSON: It probably came about in the Carter administration, right?

Q: Yes. I think so. One of the things that...

LAMBERTSON: After 1977.

Q: This is tape three. We were discussing post-fall of Saigon refugee thinking. You were saying that policy initiation was at a different level than you. You were on the side, so who was thinking refugees?

LAMBERTSON: Well, not necessarily on a different level, but I wasn't as intimately involved as people like Lionel Rosenblatt and I think Frank Wisner and a few other guys who really did a lot to lay the groundwork for what became a plan.

Q: Now the ultimate circumstance they faced was rescuing people at sea, getting them to the Philippines, arranging for countries of first asylum to accept the refugees. I mean that was a major effort there, but yet let's see you actually come out of regional affairs shortly after the fall of Saigon, so?

LAMBERTSON: I shifted gears very soon thereafter, and I was never directly involved in the big refugee program, other than that we had a Vietnamese refugee family living with us for a few months that fall and winter.

Q: You were saying you were in the Ops Center with Larry Eagleburger when the news comes over. What did the room feel like?

LAMBERTSON: Well, it wasn't a "you could have heard a pin drop" type situation. Everybody knew what was happening and undoubtedly everybody had their own thoughts on the subject as that last telegram came in. I remember Phil and Larry Eagleburger reacting quite normally to the evening's events, as they both were inclined to do, with very little phasing them. To me it was a huge thing.

Q: It brought down the curtain.

LAMBERTSON: Yes. It was a very moving and emotional evening for me and I'm sure for lots of people.

JOHN WOLF
Consular Officer
Da Nang (1972-1973)

Ambassador Wolf was born in Philadelphia in September, 1948. He was educated at Dartmouth College and graduated with a degree in English and American art. He joined the Foreign Service in 1970. He has served in Perth, Western Australia, Da Nang, Vietnam, Athens, Greece, Islamabad, Pakistan, and several high-level positions in the State Department. He was Ambassador to Malaysia and Assistant Secretary of State for Non-Proliferation. Ambassador Wolf was interviewed by Kenneth Brown in 2014.

Q: And you transferred to Da Nang.

WOLF: To Da Nang directly.

Q: And that was an unaccompanied tour I assume.

WOLF: No, Mahela was with me.

Q: At that time --

WOLF: I remember I was walking down the St George's Terrace talking to Carl Jacobson, the commerce officer. And they were building one of Perth's first major, skyscrapers. I was saying that by the end of my tour (in six months) they would have topped out that building. And I arrived at the consulate to find a telegram saying, "Before transferring to Da Nang, you should request permission as a key new officer on Ambassador Bunker's staff for, Mahela Wolf, spouse, to accompany you to Da Nang."

So the first message was, "Who's going to Da Nang? Wolf has another six months."

Back, "Oh sorry, we forgot. We meant to call before, but..." Eventually my CDO (career development officer) called up and said, "Oh, I'm so sorry, I sent the telegram before we had a chance to call. But I assume you'll agree to this transfer."

And you know, I sort of thought about it for all of a second and thought, "Career continues? Career ends."

Q: Yeah, right.

WOLF: So I said yes -- but apparently two people had said no beforehand.

Q: Really?

WOLF: I guess I wasn't the first choice. And that comes back to when I went to Perth I remember Mr. Lacey had apparently fought against having a young first tour officer. He said, "I need somebody with experience because, I don't want to have to spend all my time supervising." And I'm not sure they didn't do the same thing in Da Nang. I went, and Mr. Appling, too went off to be the deputy ambassador in Saigon, which was really cool because he had become a friend and mentor.

Q: But he was in -- when he was in Australia as DCM working for the ambassador, who was the ambassador at that time?

WOLF: What was his first name? Walter Rice.

Q: Rice. Was he a political appointee.

WOLF: Yes.

Q: Did he -- but it seemed to be a pretty well run embassy and, and its contacts with the constituent posts were pretty well conducted?

WOLF: I suppose, but my range of vision from Perth was pretty limited.

Q: Yeah, it was above your pay --

WOLF: That was super above my pay grade. I was an FSO-8.

Q: Yeah, so no great --

WOLF: I was one of six professional diplomats in West Australia, which made me an object of curiosity.

Q: (laughs) Well, when did they change the rules about families being able to go to Vietnam?

WOLF: Most families were not there. They were safe havened in Bangkok. But Mike Owens, who was my predecessor in Da Nang, had his wife Jane with him. I guess Da Nang was a reasonably safe place. Some of the AID (Agency for International Development) spouses were there as well.

Q: So if you were willing to --

WOLF: If you had no -- I mean there were no children.

Q: Yeah, no, yeah, OK.

But when having spouses come to a place like Da Nang, they weren't requiring that the spouses be employed there at the post?

WOLF: Mahela had worked as a teacher in Australia, but there were no schools and no military schools or anything in which to teach in Da Nang. So she helped to run the commissary and she volunteered -- she taught English to Vietnamese women.

Q: But it wasn't a requirement --

WOLF: No.

Q: -- to be allowed to be at post.

WOLF: No, no, no, no.

Q: Because that's essentially -- I hadn't realized that that would have been permitted at that

time.

Q: So you didn't get home leave.

WOLF: Between Australia, no, I was deferred. I went as a direct transfer We flew to Hong Kong for a couple of days. And then we got on an Air France plane. I remember walking down the steps at Tan Son Nhut only to see smoke rising at the end of the runway. Mahela stayed onboard, since she was going to the US to be naturalized before coming back to Vietnam (She was Trinidadian by birth).

Q: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

WOLF: I was taken in by Josiah Bennett? Do you remember --

Q: I remember the name.

WOLF: He was the minister counselor for political affairs, and Mrs. Bennett was his spouse -- what a whirling dervish she was. She was my hostess for those first days in Vietnam, while I was going into the embassy, but the rest of the time she was taking me around. She had been born in China. She was the daughter of a Mandarin family and she then married and moved off to the U.S. But she was just this dynamic, probably tiger mom.

Q: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

WOLF: I remember that was a great way to start. And then I went off to Da Nang and Fred Brown -- did you know Fred?

Q: Yes.

WOLF: And Fred Brown was the consul and, you know, I couldn't have asked for a better consul. Fred was *amazing*. And again, very helpful.

Q: How many people at post?

WOLF: You mean how many Foreign Service people at post?

Q: Well, who made up Da Nang?

WOLF: So there were Fred Brown, Craig Dunkerley, one Foreign Service secretary, and me. There was an AID CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) mission and there was a very large regional affairs office.

Q: Mm-hmm.

WOLF: And there was still a residual military presence when I got there.

Q: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

WOLF: Marines? A few army on our side of the river, and I believe Marines across the river.

WOLF: I arrived in Vietnam right after the US election -- indeed the day Dr. Kissinger announced "Peace is at hand." (I had the chance to joke with him many years later that I was pretty certain he was not referring to me).

Shortly after the ceasefire, the consulate was upgraded, and Fred became the consul general. We moved into what was known as "the White Elephant" which had been the AID mission right on the riverfront. So we had this amazing combined mission, with all kinds of resources, including aircraft, helicopters, and even two beach houses on what then was known as "China Beach."

Q: And a beach house.

WOLF: Actually the regional affairs guys' house was nicer, and they had Filipino FSNs working for them, supremely good cooks. They'd host weekly cook-outs where they'd roast a pig or whatever. Parties with those guys was great because when you'd show up at a party at their core house, you know, in the front room there was like a square coffee table and people were asked to deposit their weapons.

Q: (laughs) There'd be a pile of --

WOLF: A pile of all kinds of guns, rifles, whatever.

Q: Sounds like the Old West.

WOLF: It was, it was Da Nang.

Q: And what were your responsibilities?

WOLF: So I the consular officer; in addition I was responsible for the U.S. contractors who back-filled as the military departed.

Q: American contractors.

WOLF: American contractors, they managed communications and a variety of other things for the Vietnamese. This was new territory for me, but the Embassy left me to work out coordination procedures. I do recall tho' one visit by the U.S. Brigadier General in charge. At a point, we needed him to come and crack heads, which he did. I did the consular work, which was largely protection work and a few visas -- often for fiancés of soldiers. I remember too that was the first time I saw somebody deceased when I was doing citizen protection work, collecting and protecting his possessions--

Q: First time in your life to have seen some --

WOLF: First time in my life. Fortunately, there weren't that a lot of those cases, but I graphically remember that room. There was a lot of work related to adoptions and registrations of births. Registration of births was pretty difficult because you had to do a certain amount of detective work to establish the validity of the claim. And if I'm not mistaken decisions may have been approved in Saigon or Washington because it was pretty controversial stuff.

Q: These were usually military with Vietnamese women?

WOLF: Yes. We also did a very limited amount of visa work, mostly immigrant visas. Every case was complicated and I had a great resource in Saigon, Laurie Peters, who provided a lot of telephone support. We also issued a few non-immigrant visas, mostly to third country contractors who wanted to go to the United States and generally didn't qualify, and fiancés generally from departed soldiers...they required scrutiny since a number of these arrangements were shams. "How long have you known Cp'l xxx...fifteen minutes!"

As in Perth, where there were a variety of third country nationals who applied for visas, but didn't qualify under the Immigration and Nationality Act presumption of intending resident.

Q: Going to be a detour along the way.

WOLF: It was really complicated in Da Nang. Fraud was rampant. So my daily caseload was a consular work, a little bit of contact work, like with people who ran operations on the pier -- a little bit of political work, but Craig Dunkerley was the political officer and, with his Vietnamese, he did most of the substantive stuff. Mine was mostly just networking in order to be more effective when I needed to find somebody who could help with whatever.

Q: Then you didn't get involved on the reporting side?

WOLF: I didn't do a whole lot of reporting. One substantive thing I did do was the post E&E plan (emergency and evacuation)...that was the real deal, and a plan that the post had to use several years later as Da Nang was falling to the North Vietnamese. I remember one, early iteration suggested we use helicopters flying from the courtyard of the consulate general. That idea was shelved quickly when the military liaison reminded me that helicopters have a transition time, after they rise and before they move laterally, and that our helicopters would be an easy target. We settled on boats down the Han River.

After I had been at post for about 10 months we had corralled the contractors and things were working pretty well. Also, the consular work had fallen off to nearly nothing -- except I still was doing a *lot* of authentications. In the old days, you know, you used to authenticate that it was the signature of a foreign, qualified foreign official.

Q: Exactly.

WOLF: And you used to do it in like 10 copies, you'd sign them all. And I just remember that, as my workload -- as all the other things sort of tapered off or disappeared, the authentication work continued *relentlessly* to the point where I'd be sitting in my sandbagged office with no

windows, sitting behind a big desk that we had commandeered from the army when they left Vietnam. My consular assistant would come in and hand me piles of authentications, but I was so starved to do work and I'd start signing quickly. And I actually got down from John S. Wolf to John Wolf to J. Wolf to JW to J-line. That would cut the stack of these things to 30-40 seconds of work, but then I'd think to myself, "Great, I've done my whole morning's work," (*laughs*). It's about then that I started lobbying for a transfer, pointing out that what the post needed was another reporting officer, somebody who spoke Vietnamese. French was not exactly that they wanted to speak in Central Vietnam. Eventually the director-general visited Da Nang on a tour of the new consulates and Fred let me host the DG for lunch so that I'd have a chance to lobby him after lunch when I was driving back to the consulate general. Good that it was on the way to the consulate vs. return, because when I was returning home a tire fell off my Jeep and I ended up in a drainage ditch. It probably would not have helped my case if the DG had been there, but he wasn't. Anyway, the effort paid off and a few weeks later we were transferred off to Athens.

Q: Well, was your work there -- because you mentioned the sandbagged office -- was your work there very much affected in terms of security, in terms of --

WOLF: It was constant. You could drive in the city, but if I went for instance to Hoi An one of my consular assistants would drive, and I remember he use to keep a loaded revolver under a pillow on the front seat. We couldn't drive north to Hue. When we went to there, we went in one of our short-landing/take-off aircraft. That recalls my one war story -- well there are several war stories, but my only close escape... Mahela and I were up in Hue looking at the imperial capital which had been badly damaged in the 1968 Tet offensive. The royal palace was in bad shape. We flew up and stayed at the AID compound. The compound had a tall radio mast right in the center of it. And that night as we were sleeping in our trailer the Viet -- North Vietnamese or Vietcong or whoever it lobbed three or four rockets at the encampment. And they used the mast as their aiming point, so --

Q: Oh Lord.

WOLF: -- the rockets landed 40 or 50 feet away, on the street just outside the compound and on the street. One killed several Vietnamese. I remember when the first rocket hit we were asleep. But as we had been briefed on what to do, so we dashed out to one of the revetments they used as bomb shelters. When we got there, and it was only a few seconds, we found an AID guy there who had on his Flak jacket and his boots were laced up, he had a helmet.

But one of the two -- one of my two or three best Foreign Service memories came from Vietnam...fast forward 20 years and I was going out to be ambassador to Malaysia. I was being briefed at the Pentagon after a luncheon they had hosted. Back in the early '90s they did briefings in a dark room using viewgraphs in place of Power-Points. I was falling asleep. It was like an after lunch class and I was kind of dozing, but I vaguely heard from the back of the room someone speaking about how 20 years before, a young vice consul in Da Nang...had helped his wife and him to adopt their Vietnamese orphan daughter. And he was said, "I just wanted to come today to say thank you."

Q: Oh.

WOLF: -- Special moment!

Q: That's a nice story.

WOLF: And I've always remembered that. You know, in the Foreign Service we say we think about a lot of big things, and I suppose we do sometimes. But also among our stakeholders are people like those whom I helped, people who every day turn to State. I had a chance to do something that changed a family's lives. We made a difference, and Foreign Service officers do that every day in ways that maybe only they knew. And it had taken me 20 years before I realized it -- I mean I had a few tears in my eyes because I thought this is what we do, this is why it was such a great career.

Q: At the end of our careers I think we look back and say, "Did I make a difference?" And that's a clear example, your case, where you did.

WOLF: Yes. It happened in 1973? So I was 25-years-old. So you know, for me that was cool.

Q: Well, that's, that's a good example of what a consul does. You also mentioned your experience with the first dead body, and I remember mine as well. Were there other cases, sort of consular cases, either in Perth or Da Nang that sort of stand out in your mind? Sort of things you had to deal with as a consular officer?

WOLF: Perth. Not in Perth. I mean people got locked up and, and we got 'em out of the lock-up --

Q: I'm sure they were glad to see you.

WOLF: I suppose. As I said, in Vietnam, there were a number of other things, adoptions and recordings of U.S. citizens' birth that that we did. There was one other story that didn't have quite the same happy ending. I mentioned Mahela taught English to Vietnamese women. And she became good friends with a young lady whom she was teaching. After Vietnam fell, the woman's husband, who was in the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), was rounded up - - I think she got out on the last plane or a boat or whatever. But he ended up in a re-education camp and it was only some years later that he was reunited with her in France. So --

Q: They did get back together.

WOLF: They did get back together eventually. But that was one of countless stories about the war's messy end. We felt badly about our friends, but there were thousands of people left behind, many who had worked for the US. I was in the Operations Center on the night that Saigon fell. And I remember Washington was frantically messaging Ambassador Martin to leave, but he was trying to get as many people out as possible, until finally the Secretary Kissinger told him "Get out" ('cause delay was causing inordinate risk to the American troops running the evacuation.)

Q: Well, Da Nang later became quite a hotspot at that time, didn't it? I mean after you left.

WOLF: Well, when we were there it was really quite safe -- in the city. There were three divisions around the city. And it was not until 1975, in the spring, when they pulled one of the divisions out of the line, that it created a big hole, and the North Vietnamese swept through, straight down to Saigon. But I remember our house -- our next-door neighbor was General Trong who was the core commander or area commander -- he was the military officer in charge of Military Region 1. So, his house was protected by a reinforced squad and tank. The mayor was right behind us. He was protected by a similar group. And then on the other side of us was a family of American Baptist Missionaries. And we always knew that if the end came maybe the right way to go was towards the missionaries as opposed to the two places where the ARVN was. The city was 5-6 miles from the airbase. It was regularly rocketed. They rarely rocketed our part of the city. But, every night, we heard rockets or artillery on the other side of the hills. We had a radio in the bedroom, one of those big military style radios that was constantly on...and all nights we'd hear the Consulate General's marine guards warning re various threats. The SOP (standard operating procedure) was if they said -- "Players" (group name for ConGen employees) -- there's an attack underway we were supposed to go into our reinforced bunker. The trouble with our reinforced bunker was it was the porch off of our bedroom. While it had been sandbagged and reinforced on the sides, they left the glass door --

Q: Oh Lord (laughs).

WOLF: Just put some tape. So --

Q: Where was Mylar when you need it?

WOLF: So, our SOP was rolling under the bed, which seemed a lot safer.

Q: Was that from where Terry McNamara evacuated the --

WOLF: He was the consul general in Da Nang, and yes he took a boat down the river and out into the harbor where I think the Navy picked them up

Q: I think he had to sort of scramble to assemble a little bit of a convoy. We've got his account you might be interested in.

WOLF: I returned to Da Nang in 2012 for the first time since the fall of South Vietnam. It was a remarkable experience. I started out in Hanoi staying at the Metropole Hotel. I was actually there on the day that they were commemorating reopening of hotel's wartime bomb shelter. And they were very proud that this was the place where Jane *Fonda* and other American activists used to take cover from American bombers over Hanoi. They asked me if I wanted to attend. I passed on it. The next day, I went to Da Nang and I went to 12 Le Than Ton, which was where our house was. But the whole block, indeed whole city, was transformed. There were seven new bridges across the river and on the China Beach side, on the ocean side, the whole area had been developed with industrial estates, and resorts, including golf courses. And downtown Da Nang looked much, much, much different. There were no refugees sleeping in the streets; there'd been 400,000 when we were there. And our street had been completely redeveloped; six properties

had been turned into a dozen or 16 properties. And when you stood outside of our gate it was a little shop store -- shop downstairs and house upstairs.

Q: Is there anything you want else to say about Da Nang before we move on?

WOLF: I was glad to have done my tour in Vietnam. As you'll recall, for a generation of Foreign Service officers, service in Vietnam in essence checked a box. But it was more than just that. I think it was valuable to have seen up close what was a seminal moment for a generation of Americans. I realized that there were many thousands of people who were trying very hard to make our effort work. Perhaps it was misplaced idealism, or indeed misplaced realpolitik. But whatever our many motivations, clearly there the Vietnamese on whom we depended weren't working hard enough. So the message is you can't lift up by the bootstraps somebody who doesn't like wearing boots.

But, during our time there, we worked with many interesting people, well intentioned -- good people. And we left friends behind. And the interesting thing was to go back 40 years later because very little of what we feared in the Seventies had happened. Yes, there was a communist government, but I spent some time talking to communist leaders, including two deputy prime ministers. And others. Several were "communists," but a different brand than we had feared. I recruited six or seven Eisenhower fellows after we launched our program there in 2013. Several, especially from the south, were free-market businessmen who supported continuing reform of the system. Who would have thought...!

Q: Exactly.

WOLF: So that was Vietnam. I left and I went on --

Q: When did you leave?

WOLF: In the late fall of 1973?

J. RICHARD BOCK
TDY
Bien Hoa (1973)

J. Richard Bock was born in Philadelphia in 1942 and educated at the University of Washington and Princeton. He entered the Foreign Service in 1965. His career included posts in Bremen, Bien Hoa, Saigon, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Beijing, Berlin and Melbourne. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: You went out to Vietnam for a while. Why did you go out?

BOCK: When the cease-fire negotiations were finally coming to fruition, they required a very rapid withdrawal of virtually all American military forces. We still had a defense attaché and that

kind of thing. The U.S. government determined, I think fairly early on because I picked up rumors of this, that they wanted to have people in the field, “cease- fire watchers,” to replace all these various advisory teams that had been out there and which were going to be withdrawn – not replacing, they wouldn’t be anywhere near the same numbers. So, the idea that eventually came up was to recruit people who had former experience in Vietnam – if possible, Vietnamese speakers – anywhere they could find them in the Department or in embassies elsewhere and send them off as soon as this thing kicked in. So, I was among the many people who were asked to go out on a TDY to Vietnam to do this and I said, “Yes.”

Q: You used the term “recruit,” but it was more than recruit in some cases, wasn’t it?

BOCK: It was more than recruit. It would have been very difficult for an individual officer to say, “No, I won’t go.” However, there was a balancing act in terms of where they were coming from because their current offices were often in a position to say, “No, we simply can’t spare him” and that was particularly true at embassies abroad. So, not everybody who was on the initial list went and often because of that.

Q: But you were in Washington... Somebody could come charging down the hall from the higher reaches and say, “What do you mean you’re stopping this man?”

BOCK: Yes. But I was very willing. I think most of the people who came up for this were also willing in the sense that they had had their Vietnam tour. It wasn’t like three years, four years earlier when you had these junior officer classes coming in and being dumped willy nilly into Vietnam, which caused a great deal of heartburn. This was people who could see what it was about, who were also thinking, “Cease-fire. This is a big deal.” Trying to see if the cease-fire is going to take hold is also a big deal.

Q: When you heard about the agreement, what was your initial reaction?

BOCK: I’m having to guess because my memory isn’t that clear on it, but I think I was pleased that they finally reached an agreement coupled with a certain amount of skepticism as to whether it was going to work or not. But it was clear to me that the only way we were going to be able to settle Vietnam was through some kind of an agreement. I had no way of knowing whether this one was going to work or not, but I was pleased that people higher up seemed to think it was.

Q: You went out and were there for how long? Where were you?

BOCK: The assignment was for six months, although I only stayed for four. I was assigned back to Region III, which was now a consulate general rather than a military region. It was the consulate general of Bien Hoa. I was assigned initially to the same province I had been in before with responsibility for a second province, Binh Long, which was up along the Cambodian border and had only isolated pockets of government control. It was largely forested and to some extent rubber plantation area which had been overrun by the North Vietnamese in 1972 during their big offensive and was still largely under their control. So, there were only limited things one could do.

Q: What was the situation in your two provinces?

BOCK: There was the difference between Binh Duong, which was largely under government control, and Binh Long, which I just described. There were liaison offices being set up between the South and the North Vietnamese. These existed in Binh Long. The International Control Commission to monitor the cease-fire was being formed and eventually they had a couple of teams in this area, one in Binh Long and one down in Binh Duong. These were the Poles, Hungarians, Indonesians, and Iranians, at least initially. So, in terms of monitoring what was going on, part of the task was to see how these ICC teams were working and, if they were having difficulties, to report back to a higher headquarters and make sure that somebody got on it and tried to work through the problems.

Q: Who was your consul general?

BOCK: Bob Walkinshaw was the consul general. I think he was relatively recently arrived, but I'm not sure.

Q: How did you get about and what did you do? What did you see?

BOCK: Well, I was again going out and talking to Vietnamese government people, to any sort of non-government people that I could identify. There were some political party representatives around that I could see. I tried to gather as much information as we could on attitudes towards the cease-fire, whether there was any low-level fighting going on. And then talking to the International Control Commission people. How did we get around? My memories of that relatively short period are not as good as my earlier tour. In Binh Duong, I drove pretty much around like I had before. To get to Binh Long, however, you had to fly. That was a bit of a challenge because one result of the cease-fire agreement was that all the military transportation was pulled out as well. During my previous tour, if you wanted to go somewhere, you'd place an order for a helicopter and you'd get a military chopper to come and pick you up and take you where you wanted to go. Well, those were all gone. That responsibility was turned over to Air America, which was flying fixed wing for a while and was now flying choppers as well. I do have a very specific memory of going into Binh Long the first time and realizing that this Air America pilot didn't know where he was going. He was taking me to some place I definitely did not want to go. He was guiding himself by the wrong road. I had to sort of set him straight.

Q: What would happen if you landed in the wrong place? Were there places that you just couldn't go? Supposedly, if it's an open country, you could go anywhere you wanted.

BOCK: Yes, that wasn't open country. It wasn't anywhere near an open country. On the road leading north from Saigon through Binh Duong Province, once you got to the north end of the province heading up into Binh Long, there were Viet Cong checkpoints there. No American would go through them. No Vietnamese government official would go through them. I don't know what would have happened, but I'm sure if you ended up in a situation like that, you would at least have been held and there would have been problems resolving it, so it was something that we were very much under instruction not to try to wander our way into non-government held territory.

Q: What were you getting from the people you were talking to about the situation? Here we're looking towards setting up a country and the situation is such that you've got major foreign troops in that country hostile to it.

BOCK: Yes. It was all pretty tentative during the time I was out there. There was no major fighting that I can remember anywhere in the region, certainly not in my area. Getting the cease-fire mechanisms set up was slow and difficult. There were all these nice things in the agreement which said "These liaison offices will be established in such and such. The ICC will be established in such and such." None of that worked particularly well. So, during the four months I was there, I would say most of the focus was on just trying to get the mechanisms to work. My role was not to get them to work but to try to find out where they were breaking down and to describe the situation so that people could do something about it.

Q: Was the ICC in place when you were there?

BOCK: They were in place in Saigon. They were very slow in getting out into the boonies, but they were getting there. They were certainly everywhere by the time I left.

Q: How were they seen?

BOCK: I don't think they were considered all that effective. They were useful in the sense that they were a restraint or a constraint of some sort on hostile activity on either side. But it's the same kind of situation with UN peacekeeping. If you've got a peace to keep, these people would serve a useful purpose. If you don't have a peace to keep, they're not going to help much. That was pretty much what you had in Vietnam and we didn't know whether we had a peace to keep or not; it was that tentative.

Q: Among people that you knew, was this cease-fire seen as a fig leaf to get us uninvolved or was it considered to be serious?

BOCK: It was increasingly seen as a fig leaf. You will remember the context here, that Nixon as part of the cease-fire tried to include a very large military aid program to South Vietnam and that was overruled in Congress, so that we went into the cease-fire with the signal from Congress that South Vietnam was to a considerable extent on its own. There were supposedly real constraints in terms of weapons and ammunition, something I can't really judge. But there was certainly a strong psychological component to this where the Vietnamese tended to more and more think that they were on their own. Of course, once probes by the North Vietnamese forces started toward the end of '74, or maybe the summer of '74, that led to the fairly rapid collapse, at least the psychological collapse, of the military. That all happened after I left, but I began to see the beginnings of that psychology there.

Q: Were you able to be a dispassionate observer to this or was there a problem speaking the language, getting out and all, identification and all this?

BOCK: I think that I was hopeful that the thing would work. To what extent that colored my

views at the time, I don't know. It might have. Having spent that much time in Vietnam, I really wanted to think it would work.

Q: You left there a little early? Why? What did you do?

BOCK: Well, there was this massive sending out of people. Then after a while it became clear that maybe not that many people were needed. Rumors started flying that they were going to draw down this- (end of tape)

I was planning on getting married that summer. At this point, I knew I was going into language training immediately thereafter. So, I had an incentive to get back in enough time to arrange the wedding, have time for a honeymoon, and begin language training. So, when word came out that they were going to be draw people down, I said I wouldn't mind leaving a month or two early.

MICHAEL W. COTTER
Vice Consul
Can Tho (1973)

Ambassador Michael W. Cotter was born in Wisconsin in 1943. He graduated from Georgetown University in 1965 and received a JD from the University of Michigan in 1968. Postings throughout his career have included Saigon, La Paz, Can Tho, Quito, Ankara, Kinshasa, Santiago, and an ambassadorship to Turkmenistan. Ambassador Cotter was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

COTTER: Anyhow, I went back to Vietnam in January 1973. There was a Consul in Can Tho, who was Frank Wisner. We were assigned as Vice Consuls. Although there were fewer of us than there had been earlier, I was originally living in Kien Hoa, back in the province I had been in before. I was responsible for Kien Hoa and Gocong provinces under the general supervision of another Vice Consul, one of two officers who were in My Tho. We reported on the cease-fire. This was interesting. That was the... What was the name of the Commission? I can't remember, but it was composed of Poles, Hungarians...

Q: I think it was called the ICC.

COTTER: ICC, yes. I think there was an "S." International Commission of Control and Supervision, something like that. It was comprised of Indonesians, Canadians, who were, in theory, the pro-government people of the Commission, and Poles and Hungarians who were the pro-Viet Cong element. The government, the Viet Cong, and the North Vietnamese were all supposed to participate in this Commission. In fact, in the six months I was there, you only met a couple Viet Cong, as they were not trustful enough of the system to actually participate in it. The North Vietnamese maintained that they had nobody down in the Delta, so there wasn't any point in their participating. These Commissioners from the other countries moved into military installations and held lots of meetings and wandered around aimlessly. I must say, they were not

able to do much. The cease-fire may have been negotiated in Paris, but as with most of these things, the devil is in the details, and actually implementing any kind of a disengagement on the ground was much more difficult, particularly when there really hadn't been any engagement. This kind of thing works much better if you have set piece armies, and you can identify a front line. But, it was very hard to do it in the Delta, where there were no front lines. The Viet Cong were skeptical enough that they really weren't going to expose themselves again. The North Vietnamese, as I said, were not really willing to admit they were engaged in this.

I remember the great difference between the Poles and the Hungarians. We were all briefed on this, of course, as to who were actual military and who were military intelligence types. The Hungarians were quite a sophisticated group, most of whom were language officers and most of whom were assumed to be military intelligence. The Poles, on the other hand, tended to be regular Polish Army officers with an interpreter attached, who was usually identified as the political officer. There was another difference. The Poles arrived in Polish Army uniforms, which were wool. The Hungarians had very nice, dress cotton uniforms, that they wore. The poor Poles just suffered unimaginably in the Delta.

Some things wouldn't change. While we were there, at one point, Polish National Day came up, so I put my suit on. It was probably the only time in the six months I was there that I wore a suit. I went to the hotel in My Tho where the Poles celebrated their National Day at midday, of course, because you couldn't do this at night. We had warm Vodka. It was 100 degrees, with 120% humidity. You sat there in this non-air-conditioned hotel, wearing a suit with the Poles in their wool uniforms, drinking warm Vodka. You would no sooner drink it, than it would explode out of all of your pores.

It was an interesting time period. As I said, I think the most difficult part of it was that part of our role was to be there and to assure the Vietnamese we were committed to them forever and a day, when by 1973, of course, the writing was on the wall. It was quite clear we weren't going to be there. Anyhow, for three months, I was back in Kien Hoa. Then, the two officers who had been in My Tho left after three months. One of those officers was Desaix Anderson, who may have just retired. He was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Asian Affairs. I can't remember who the other officer was. At that point, I moved up to My Tho and had responsibility for the three provinces, Dinh Tuong, GoCong, and Kien Hoa. I was there for about six months total, during which we were given one leave, one vacation. I had, somewhat foolishly, agreed that if they got my successor out to La Paz early, I would take my leave and go back to Bolivia, and introduce him to my contacts. So, I had a ten-day vacation. It was about 36,000 miles that I flew back to Bolivia for a week. I turned around and flew back to Vietnam. It was an incredible flight, across the Pacific, to California, and then down to Miami.

Q: You were there, looking to see that the North and the South Vietnamese stayed in their proper places, is that it?

COTTER: Well, that the cease fire would be implemented, that fighting would end, and to observe how the ICCS was doing its function. Now, it may have been that this was somewhat more successful. The first six months, of course, were chaotic. Again, down in the Delta, where I was, there wasn't organized fighting. It was guerilla war, to the extent. There really wasn't much

of that, even when I was there earlier. There were no set battles, and every day you would have casualties, primarily from night patrols, and people would run into mines. There would be an occasional fire fight, but not much conflict. As I said, in Kien Hoa, in particular, the 1972 Tet Offensive had really emasculated the Viet Cong. By the time we got back in 1973, there were not very many Viet Cong. The same was true in Dinh Tuong, which was the province that My Tho was the capital of. The six months I was there, almost all of it was spent jockeying around the various people, trying to arrange meetings, that the government and the Viet Cong would both come to, and endless negotiation with the ICCS, and under what terms such a meeting would be and where people would sit, and where it would be. Nine times out of ten, the meeting would be held, and no one would show up. Some of them would come from the Viet Cong headquarters, but there wouldn't be any local officials there. Enormous amounts of time by the ICCS were spent again on simply their own housekeeping, getting food, getting mail, getting organized, sorting out where they were. I don't know, because I lost track of it when I left, whether this ever succeeded. My sense is that it never really did, that it sort of floundered around, but the North Vietnamese or the South Vietnamese didn't have any intention on making it work. As a result, it very quickly degenerated. The Indonesians, as I recall, pulled out even before I left. I can't think who replaced them. They didn't stay in it for more than six months. As I say, it was never really successful. You had some meetings where you actually had a Viet Cong officer, usually from somewhere else, who participated. You would go visit a village to determine who actually controlled that village. But, by and large, it was a somewhat fruitless exercise.

After that, I was assigned back to Washington. I sort of had the anomaly in my career, except for Vietnam to Bolivia of never having two overseas assignments consecutively. I would have an assignment overseas and then back to Washington, and almost always back to desk jobs.

Q: While you were this truce commission, again, when you were talking to your fellow officers, what was the feeling about this, at that time, this whole cease fire business?

COTTER: The feeling was that we were bailing out, and that the Commission was essentially there to provide cover for us to leave. I certainly didn't anticipate, in 1973, what ended up happening in 1975, that the whole thing would collapse like a house of cards. As I say, one was fairly confident about the Delta, that the war had been won, in most parts of the Delta, that the Viet Cong presence was minimal, and the North Vietnamese presence was increasing, and in the long run, in a guerilla type conflict, North Vietnamese regular army presence was not going to win. The government had its act together considerably. We had done an awful lot to improve the life of people. It was really in 1973, rather than earlier, when I noticed the impact we had on raising pigs, for instance. The first ten months I was out there, we were working on this. When I went back in 1973, you saw practically none of the swayback, fat, traditional Vietnamese hogs. Some industry had come down to that area, shrimp fishing and other things, with the decline of the war, which had declined considerably down there, simply because the government had consolidated its hold on most areas. When the government fell, I guess, like a lot of people who served in the Delta, the perception by this time, and I was far away from it, was that once Central Vietnam fell, the government pretty much gave up the ghost. They never had any interest in the Delta. There was never any effort by the government to leave Saigon and move down to Can Tho. Once the game was up, they all fled and left the Delta pretty much to defend for itself. Ted McNamara, who was then Consul General, escaped on his famous trip down the Mekong River, I

think, after the Embassy in Saigon fell.

Q: *Terry McNamara.*

COTTER: Terry McNamara, not Ted. He had tried to get, as I recall, assistance and was unable to. They finally commandeered a river boat and put everybody on a river boat. As I recall, it was a few days after Saigon fell.

Q: *A few days after, yeah, something like that.*

COTTER: There was never any effort by the South Vietnamese government to regroup. I think there would have been some potential. There is not much potential for doing that, if you have North Vietnamese troops with tanks coming down the pike, and you have no military assistance to counter it. But, I felt very badly about Vietnam because, as I say, I think it was a winnable war. I remember feeling that when it did fall in 1975, and I was back in Washington, having terribly conflicting feelings about that. Friends of mine and colleagues of mine were going back and taking in refugee families, something that I really wasn't prepared to do, which again, conflicted me, because I sort of had the feeling that I should have. A couple of colleagues actually went back against flat orders not to, returned to the country, went on their own hook and helped people...

Q: *Lionel Rosenblatt*

COTTER: I can't think of who it was either who went back with Lionel. As someone who believed in what we were doing when I went out there, who saw nothing in the time I was in Vietnam, to lead me to believe that what we were doing was not the right thing. I was very conflicted when it ended, and for a long time, years afterward really. Then, when you saw what happened in Cambodia, it sort of led one to think that, again, we had made a mistake in not sticking with what we were doing.

RICHARD W. TEARE
Deputy Principal Officer
Nha Trang (1973)

Richard W. Teare was born in Ohio in 1937. He received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1948. His career includes positions in Barbados, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, New Zealand, and Australia. Mr. Teare was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in July 1998.

Q: *In '73...where did you go?*

TEARE: That was to Na Trang and I was Deputy Principal Officer.

Q: *You were there from '73 to?*

TEARE: This was a TDY. I was there for in the end just about seven months, which was the longest of anyone in this first wave of TDY people. But we had an enormous amount of talent in that group of 44 including Frank Wisner, Parker Borg, Richard Mueller and others who have gone on to greater prominence in the Service. Frank was my counterpart, Number Two in Can Tho. I think the Principal Officer there was Tom Barnes and somebody said Teare ought to go to the Delta, that's what he knows! Where I had worked best during my regular tour. Somebody else said, "Well they've already got Wisner down there and we have to spread the talent around" and so forth. Well there were ten Provinces I think in Two Corps and we had one Officer in each and everyone at least for a little while. We got very good coverage of what was going on, particularly in the Highlands. Jim Mack, now Ambassador to Guyana, was our man in Dien Bien.

Our job essentially was to monitor the effectiveness of the cease-fire and on the Government's side its efforts to build itself up as a political force or to develop a system of political organization that would equip it for the hypothesized peaceful political competition with the Communists. So we worked very diligently on that. We got some very good stuff. Most of which however only went back to Washington by Airgram I think, in fact I know what we prepared was almost entirely Airgrams so it would take three or four weeks to get there and get distributed. But we got some beautiful reporting and we really knew what was going on, what the Vietnamese were doing at the Corps and Division and Province level.

Probably the best of all the Officers I had was Richard Mueller who started up in Can Tho Province. His reporting was absolutely beautiful. Not only was it succinct and nicely worded and full of good insights, best sources and so forth, but it was beautifully typed!

Q: This was before the word processor!

TEARE: Oh way before. He was using a portable typewriter on his knees or on a table in the mess hall in what had been the Advisory Shop in Can Tho. We used a variety of means, couriers, Air America pilots would carry this stuff back. We had processors in Nha Trang if need be just putting it on Airgram mats and shipping it off to Saigon. I was the Reports Officer and the Coordinator of what all we were doing. Anyway we nominated Richard Mueller for the Director General's Award for Reporting which had just been instituted a year or two earlier. Saigon nominated Cal Mehlert, one of its Officers who was assigned there on a regular tour and Saigon I think was very confident that its nominee would win, certainly would beat out anyone from the provinces.

Well as it happened this TDY program was the baby, the pet of the Director General, Bill Hall then. Alex Johnson as Under Secretary for Political Affairs had been involved in putting it together. So that maybe gave us a little leg up. Anyway Mueller won the Director General's Award that year. Now the TDY program had such attention focused on it that as I said that was probably a leg up but we were particularly satisfied that we had beaten out Saigon's candidate whose reporting in our view had not been anything out of the ordinary. Furthermore we thought that Saigon was complacent about it all and deserved to lose.

Q: What were you seeing here in Two Corps?

TEARE: Well in general we saw a Government of Vietnam and armed forces that were more sinned against than sinning. This is not to say that they were perfect. Indeed they launched air strikes a couple of times when they shouldn't have. But in general they were behaving themselves pretty well and they were of course essentially in a defensive posture. That is the nature of the Government's responsibilities in guerrilla warfare. You are the one who has to keep the roads open and the other guy can come along and close them at times and places of his choosing. That is easy to do. Keeping the roads open is hard.

Furthermore we had a pretty good sense of military capabilities and vulnerabilities. In Da Lat Province, around Ban Me Thuot there were no RVN units at all.

Q: RVN being the Army of the Republic of Vietnam?

TEARE: Right, these were the regulars. There were a regiment in Pleiku and I think at least a couple of battalions in Ton Tun, but no RVN whatsoever in Da Lat which is a very large province with only a couple of lines of communication in a pretty scattered population. There were only regional and popular forces. But it was wide open essentially. Jay Blowers, our man in Da Lat, wrote a report in which he said "I believe that if the North Vietnamese ever decide to launch a major countrywide offensive they will begin it here, in Da Lat Province." And that is precisely what they did two years later, in 1975. They came in through Da Lat, they quickly took Pleiku, they worked their way down to the coast effectively cutting the country in two and they moved North toward Da Nang and South down the coast eventually reaching Saigon.

The Two Corps Commander as I recall was quite corrupt, certainly no better than he needed to be but I think we also had some influence on him in the direction of observing a cease fire. First of all we wanted the cease-fire to work, we believed or hoped that it would. But we wanted the onus for breaking it to be on the North Vietnamese and to the extent that that could be pinned down I think there were more violations by the North Vietnamese. They went on essentially with what they had been doing which was building up their supply system, their lines of communication, developing their intelligence. They were simply somewhat less blatant about it than they had been before.

So it was a heavy time with all this talent reporting through me. Now not too many people lasted out the full six months. Some people started being pulled out earlier. Parker Borg I think was working for the DG at that time. He left after three or four months so we moved Richard Mueller down from Can Tho to Pleiku to cover both provinces from report headquarters in Pleiku. Similarly I lost a couple of others along the way.

Meanwhile the Department was finding people to come out on regular tours of duty, the staffs of three new consulates and Da Nang and to keep Saigon going. Those people began to show up. Meanwhile Jim Engle, who was the Principal Officer in Nha Trang, was pulled out and sent over to Phnom Penh to be DCM. He never actually assumed that position because Tom Enders was there and didn't want to leave and Ambassador Swank didn't want him to leave or something. Anyway supernumerary...I think Swank left, Enders became Chargé, Engle was still there as

DCM, I don't know what happened to his assignment in the end.

But I was Acting Principal Officer in Nha Trang, so I was the one who got to fly around on the airplanes all the time and do the odd ceremony. Through the AID people, or the remnants of CORDS, I had a force of more than 2,000 Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs). Although I didn't direct their daily operations or try to, nevertheless we were involved in feeding people and helping build roads and that sort of thing. So it was quite a little empire.

I shared a house with Steve Johnson, the son of Alexis Johnson. Steve was originally sent out to be the liaison with the Canadian contingent of the ICCS, because as he liked to say he spoke Canadian already. But that turned out to be not much of a job and then the Canadians pulled out with our blessing, I think, because they found the tactics of the Poles and Hungarians so frustrating, the obstruction. The Poles and Hungarians could never be mobilized to go out and investigate a violation if it had been headed by the VC, whereas the Canadians wanted to go out in a big way and energetically document violations no matter who was responsible. They didn't mind at all catching the VC or the NVA in the act. So the Canadians pulled out and Steve became surplus in Saigon and so came up and joined us in Nha Trang.

He and I shared a house and the house had been the one that John Paul Vann occupied during his time as Director of CORDS and MR 2 and is where he kept one of his minor wives. It was quite secluded. It was down on the south end of the beach in Nha Trang. It was comfortable. We were only there a few hours each night. We were working dawn to dusk and beyond. I think the whole time I was there I only swam in the ocean, which was just across the road from my house, a few times.

It was all work and it was really intense and begging the question what was being done with all that we were reporting I have never felt more engaged or more productive I imagine at any time in my career.

Q: Well what was the feeling of your group, whenever you had a chance to talk, whither Vietnam and what did the Peace Accords mean?

TEARE: I would say we concluded that they didn't really mean very much. We saw the pattern of violations going on which were let's say two thirds of them committed by the other side. But more to the point we saw Thieu and people on the non-Communist side were not making good use of the time that the Paris Agreement had bought for them. Thieu's idea of political organizing was to declare the existence of a Government Party and then have everybody join it. If you were a civil servant your pay would be docked if you didn't. Well that is not how you build loyalty or political support. But that is the way Thieu went about it. And the Party was I think heavily Catholic which he was himself and if anything it probably resembled the Diem-ist organizations more than it did anything else. The loyalty was skin deep at most.

Was there another election along there? Probably there would have been one in '75, I don't know if they got around to holding it before the collapse but anyway it was not impressive. There was coercion; there was no spirit in it. So this was a Government that was essentially a tenuous structure with little popular support. The main thing that kept people on the Government's side

was fear of what would happen to them in the event of a Communist takeover and not all of them were so terribly afraid of that. Life was not easy. There was some prosperity. There was more profiteering in the cities I suppose but the countryside was pretty much what it had always been. No fertilizer, no good system of irrigation, no assurance that you could get your goods to market or that you would get a decent price for them if you did, constant risk of death or injury from stray military action even after the cease fire.

Q: What about the Montagnards? I mean these were always sort of our...I mean particularly our military loved the Montagnards.

TEARE: True enough.

Q: Did you have a large group of Montagnards in your area?

TEARE: We did but I can't recall that there were any special military programs anymore involving them. I think the civilian AID side, the remnants of CORDS the AID element, had some special programs in the highlands for the Montagnards but it was nothing that I focused on particularly. I think they were no happier under lowland Vietnamese administration than they ever had been and maybe less so. But in those months in 1973 they just didn't seem to be a major factor. I'm sure we reported a bit on their doings.

Q: Were we looking, I mean were you seeing reports on the Vietnamese military?

TEARE: Oh yes.

Q: How were they doing?

TEARE: Generally rather badly when they had to go into action. I remember just from my own non-professional observations worrying about things. I made one trip I've forgotten the purpose now within Bin Vinh Province. We flew in a helicopter, a Huey belonging to I suppose the Air Force or maybe the 22nd RVN Infantry Division and I noticed that a couple of the lights on the control panel, the gages on the control panel, had been covered with black electrician's tape. I asked the pilot why and he said "Oh...red light came on. We don't like red light so we cover it up." I decided after that I would not fly with the Vietnamese Air Force ever again.

The equipment was falling into disrepair. Guys were getting sloppy in their uniforms. They were sleeping at outposts in the daytime the way they always had down in the Delta. There was not any sense of commitment, of discipline of esprit, but by definition under the cease-fire they weren't involved in too many actions so we didn't have any great opportunity to observe them doing what they were supposed to be doing.

I remember though going to visit the ICCS outpost in the town of Minh Hoa which was one District North of Nha Trang. I remember that the Indonesian there, a major I guess pulled me aside and said "How much you Americans spending on this war?" I said I think we are spending about thirty billion dollars a year, which was roughly the figure at the time. He said, "If you give us, the Indonesians, ten billion dollars for one year we will clear out all the North Vietnamese

and Vietcong.” And I said that was a tempting offer but I don’t have the power to do it. I’m sure of course that was braggadocio but I think it did represent the sense that the Indonesians believed they knew how to deal with Communists or to deal with anybody who got in their way. Certainly that spirit was lacking in the Vietnamese. Not that they couldn’t be cruel, torturing prisoners and that sort of thing. But they just didn’t have the get up and go of the Indonesians.

Of course nowadays, speaking in the middle of 1998, we see some reason and have for some time to second guess the Indonesian forces but that’s another story.

DOUGLAS R. KEENE
Temporary Duty, Monitoring Peace Accords
Saigon (1973)

Mr. Keene was born and raised in Massachusetts and graduated from Colby College. He joined the Foreign Service in 1967, serving first in Vietnam and subsequently at Middle East posts including Jerusalem, Karachi, Cairo, as well as Amman and Muscat, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. His Washington assignments also concerned primarily Middle Eastern matters, including the Arab-Israel problem. Mr. Keene was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

KEENE: But in ’73 after the Paris Accords were signed with the Vietnamese, they sent me back to Saigon on a TDY (temporary duty) to monitor the cease-fire. They sent 44 of us, I think there were, back, and I think I got that honor because I was the only officer they had who spoke Polish and Vietnamese, and the Poles were on the ICCS (International Commission on Control and Supervision). And so they set us up—me and the other guy who spoke Polish (but not Vietnamese), in I think what was the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) safe house down by the Saigon River—it was great. We were supposed to have the Poles over you know and entertain them and subvert them.

Q: Where were you assigned now?

KEENE: Saigon.

Q: What were sort of your feelings as you went out there about the peace accord?

KEENE: We worked in the embassy that time, and they set up something called provincial reporting in that time. We were all given a corps to follow, and every day—and you know they set up those consulates in all the corps. They were reporting, and we were supposed to—four of us--put together a daily report, and then do some longer term think tank things. So, they gave me I Corps, probably because I had never been there before.

Q: That’s the one to the north.

KEENE: Yes, so I went up, traveled and visited several times...trying to figure out what was going on. That's what we were supposed to do.

Q: You were there from when to when?

KEENE: That was just three months. I guess January through March.

Q: Was much happening at that point?

KEENE: No. There was a momentary lull. Our troops were leaving, and it was a little surreal. Under the accord, the North Vietnamese were allowed to set up offices or little compounds in the South, in the provincial capitals. You'd walk around Da Nang and see this guy with a red star on his helmet—it was kind of weird. There was a little lull in fighting then, and it's when the POW's (prisoners of war) were released during that period. We were on tap to help out with that, though it didn't prove necessary. And some South Vietnamese prisoners were released. I remember I was up in Hue at the time and saw the truckloads of POW's drive past as they came out.

Q: Did you get any feel for how the South Vietnamese government viewed this development?

KEENE: Not well. They thought they were being kind of abandoned...or at least a step toward that, which is how it turned out. I don't know, within the embassy you could get every view possible, from the "it's hopeless," to people who still believed with great fervor. There were some people who stayed there forever. They really got into it.

Q: Did you have any desire to hang on there, or was this just something to get through?

KEENE: I always liked Vietnam, when they weren't shooting at you. But it always meant separation, and that was a problem.

Q: You left your wife behind in Warsaw?

KEENE: Yes.

Q: Let's go back to...again, when you left Vietnam the second time, did you feel the peace accords were going to hold?

KEENE: No, I didn't. It seemed to be more for domestic political reasons than a good, solid agreement to me.

SAMUEL B. THOMSEN
Principal Officer
Saigon (1973)

**Liaison, Joint Military Commission
Hue (1973-1974)**

Samuel B. Thomsen was born in Minnesota in 1931. After serving in the US Army from 1952-1954 he received his bachelor's degree at University of California Los Angeles in 1956. During his career he had positions in Vietnam, Laos, Washington D.C., Botswana, Nigeria, and an ambassadorship to the Marshall Islands. Mr. Thomsen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996.

Q: Sam, why don't we stop at this point, and we'll pick it up. You were slated because of your Vietnamese, back to Vietnam. One couldn't get away from that particular tar baby, could one?

THOMSEN: In fact I wanted to go back, Nick Veliotis was by then special assistant to the deputy secretary, and invited me to apply for the junior special assistant position, and I decided instead to take the levy back to Vietnam and see what had happened in the time I'd been gone, which may or may not have been a good choice. Another one of those career decisions that may or may not have been the soundest.

Q: Well, one never knows. As we do these things, talk to people, we all look upon career decisions, but there's more to life than a career. The real fun of the Foreign Service is the fun of the foreign service, and going where the action is, and where you're interested in. And not just moving up the ladder.

THOMSEN: Thank you for saying that because I've often second guessed myself. But that was my decision at the time to go back and see and be a part of it and help finish what we'd been involved in seven years before.

Q: Just to put on the record. You went out to Vietnam when? And you were there from when to when?

THOMSEN: I went back to Vietnam from February '73 to July '73.

Q: Okay, and we'll pick it up at that point.

Today is the 12th of November 1996. Sam, you have written some notes so I'll start this off and ask you a question or two and then you may revert to reading from notes, and I may interrupt you from these which were taken from what, a diary?

THOMSEN: A diary.

Q: But I want to get what you were doing in some detail because I think it's important. You got to Saigon, was there any briefing, and what sort of things were you told you were supposed to do? Or what did you understand you were supposed to do, and how did you get assigned?

THOMSEN: I was assigned because I was in a pool of officers who had served in Vietnam and

had Vietnamese language skills. Not all of them had Vietnamese language skills, but almost all of them had served in Vietnam. Some staff supporters, I have Jean Ronchetti was a GS and she came as a secretary. Other than that we were officers who had served previously in Vietnam, and were just pulled from wherever we were.

Q: *What were your marching orders?*

THOMSEN: Our marching orders were that we were going to establish four consulates general and report on the post cease fire in great detail. In the absence of the MACV, which was phasing out, we would become the primary source of information about what was going on in the countryside. Subsequently the defense attaché office was established to take on some of the MACV responsibilities and by about halfway through the six month TDY had a small office in the consulate general and were doing their own political-military reporting, and, of course, CAS was doing its own political reporting.

Q: *CAS was CIA.*

THOMSEN: Right.

Q: *As you went out there, and when you first arrived, what were you getting from your colleagues when you're talking about whither South Vietnam at this point?*

THOMSEN: We just didn't have any idea. Most of us had been away. Those who had been there were not any more familiar with what was expected than we were. The Kissinger negotiations in Paris, which had resulted in late January in the signing of the Paris Accords, didn't know the parameters. In fact, just doing a review for this interview, clearly no one except Henry Kissinger had any idea what was expected, and even Henry didn't really know what would come out of it except that it would put an end to the fighting, and we would have an opportunity to withdraw the last 20,000 American troops.

Q: *Was there any of the feeling that what you were doing was sort of a fig leaf or bugout?*

THOMSEN: Not at all. Of course, domestic politics played an important role in this, and Watergate later on, clearly had a decisive role in the final outcome. But at the time of the Accords there was a substantial hope that something could be pulled off. In fact, a lot of our reporting...we were there from February to July, toward the middle of the period, we started looking at what looked like a "third Vietnam" being formed in the west in the mountainous area. At the end of my tour Don Colin who was head of the reporting unit in Saigon, actually put together a substantial airgram which drew on reporting from all the consulates general, which was called the "third Vietnam," and was to hypothesize that the Viet Cong, the PRG, the People's Revolutionary Government, might establish itself in a political competition in the west in the mountainous area. That wasn't to be ultimately but certainly that thread was going through, and we were seeing ourselves as watching something that was not a foregone conclusion.

Q: *Well then if you want to...I'm going to turn you loose. I may stop you from time to time, but if you want to use the notes that you've made from your diaries, and expand and go along with*

them, and then if you have any questions to me. Expansion is the preferable term.

THOMSEN: One of the reasons I'm going to do it this way is because there are a lot of names that I think are worth putting on paper for future reference.

The Accords had been signed finally on the 27th of January, and on the 28th of January the cease fire began at 8:00 in the morning, local time in Saigon. I and elements that were ultimately 50 other Foreign Service officers arrived in Saigon on the 2nd of February on very short notice. Almost immediately were taken into a briefing which started with administrative in processing, then with political section briefings, calls on Joe Bennett who was the political counselor and on Ambassador Whitehouse who was the deputy ambassador, the title unusual they were still using in Vietnam. In the afternoon we were briefed by CORDS, that was the civilian, I don't even recall what the acronym stands for. Do you recall, Stu?

Q: No...civilian something revolutionary development.

THOMSEN: Essentially it was an amalgamation of CIA and AID stuff, and I think some military put in to provide province by province support for Vietnamese. It had been established just as I was leaving in '66 so I really didn't get to know it very well. The major in-country field operations coordinator, Jake Jacobson, was responsible for it and he briefed us in the afternoon. He, I think, expected that he would have a major role in the management of the Consulates general. He became established in the bureaucratic issues as to who ConGens reported to. Our purpose in Vietnam, as I indicated, was to observe the post cease fire situation, and we learned more about what that meant later on. We did meet Ambassador Bunker that afternoon as well.

Q: How did Ambassador Bunker strike you at that point. How did he look upon this? Positive, or neutral...

THOMSEN: ...conservatively optimistic, of course. He said that our purpose in being there was to get information one way or the other and to "call them like you saw them" because there was no other way to get a good judgment. If we came out as optimists, or came out as pessimists, we would not be doing our job properly. That was his approach, and it was kind of balanced. As you know he was very patrician, and very urbane, and very low key but that was the approach.

The next day was awakened. We met old friends. John Helble who had been my predecessor as consul in Hue back in '64, Tom Conlon, Shep Lowman, folks that had been involved before. That afternoon had a lunch with Steve Winship who was the political-military counselor, whom I had not known previously. That evening I saw Bob Shaplen whom I had known previously. Bob Shaplen was the well-reputed correspondent for the New Yorker magazine. His long, long thoughtful pieces during the '60s were some of the best reporting out of Vietnam. I don't know if I mentioned it earlier but Bob would come up to Da Nang, or to Hue in 1955-66, and share his information with me as much as I shared with him. I did everything with him off the record but he was always very helpful to me. Bob was unexpectedly optimistic about the possibilities, and knowing Bob I thought that was a very, very positive sign because he tended to be very skeptical. One of the rumors was that his chief stringer was in fact a senior Viet Cong official. I actually got a few insights that might not otherwise have been available from him, and some of

what he had to say in retrospect suggested that he had some access to information not otherwise available.

On the 6th of February, I flew to Da Nang. We were still in the dark regarding most of the arrangements. We had no idea, for example, who was going to do our ERs...

Q: *Efficiency Reports.*

THOMSEN: ...what our per diem was going to be, how we were going to be maintained, all this was still being looked at. We were just kind of flung out into the outer darkness to make our way. In Da Nang we were met. I argued successfully for being given the titles of consuls (detached) rather than simply as political reporting officers. We needed some sort of if not diplomatic, at least consular titles even on a short term basis, and that we were finally given.

Q: *That reflects a little bit when I was consul general in Saigon, Terry MacNamara head of the consulate there, which was considered a detachment from the consulate general in Saigon. It was sort of peculiar, sort of a Vietnam response.*

THOMSEN: Maybe that was right, I didn't understand it but I felt that was a fine approach but that we needed something. That is, we couldn't just be up there as civilians. Those who came with me to I Corps were Hal Colbaugh who had been with me in '66. Hal was a superb language officer and had been sent to Da Nang in the spring of '66 by political counselor Phil Habib to help me out because of an incredible amount of political activity which in addition to being political advisor to the Marines I was trying to cover. Lee Graham, Bob Carroll, George Moose who has gone on to bigger and better things. Together we were supposed to organize ourselves to cover what was called I Corps, the first military region which consisted of Quang Tri to the far north, Thua Thien province which held the former imperial capital of Hue. Quang Nam province. Da Nang city. Quang Tin province, and Quang Ngai. My first impressions of Da Nang were of the many refugees there. Da Nang was a frenetic place, my notes say that thoughts of an end of an empire. The Marine construction that had occurred while I was there in '65-'66 was beginning already to deteriorate, and of course the American military was almost vanished. On the other hand the Vietnamese I met seemed much more self-assured and competent, better trained than they had been back in the mid-'60s. It was an interesting change in that respect.

One of the implications of turning the consulate into a Consulate General where John Wolf had been the vice consul, and Craig Dunkerley had been the third officer as a political-economic officer. Now it had exploded because Fred was the consul general and instead of being a small consular office it was now the principal U.S. installation in central Vietnam. So Fred as consul general was now going to be supervising an FSR-2 AID officer who had been the senior person in that region as the head of CORDS. That was a very painful change. All of a sudden seven new officers were involved to try to do the political reporting, and Craig Dunkerley, who had been the political officer, was now a part of a large section that included Hal Colbaugh was going to be the head of the section in Da Nang. I was going to go to Hue, along with Bob Carroll. George Moose went to Quang Ngai, and Lee Graham went to Quang Tin. This was an incredible shift, and the small side street French bungalow that had been the consulate was now out of the way, and Fred moved into the biggest office in what was called the White Elephant right on the Strand

on the river, taking the office of the CORDS director. A lot of drastic actions were taking place. A lot of feelings were hurt but there was no way around that.

In my own case I felt a little out of place. I had been the principal American in central Vietnam as a consul, as an FSO-5. And I was returning to Hue in a subordinate position. Gary Matthews who had been the PSA (I think that's provincial senior adviser) and an FSO-4 or 5 now, later became head of the Senior Seminar. Gary was to be in charge of our operation until his departure which was not far away. And then subsequently Phil Cook an FSO-3 came in. Phil had not been in the initial levy, but he showed up, he was an FSO-3. So we had Sam Thomsen, an FSO-4, the former principal officer and Consul, with Gary Matthews, an FSO-4 or 5 in charge, and Phil Cook, an FSO-3 not very happy with the anomalous situation he was in. Part of my problem was that a lot of people remembered me and paid their respects to me as the consul at the same time I was trying to position myself appropriately among my colleagues. However, that whole process didn't last all that long.

The PSA was established in what had been the AID director's residence, and across the street was a huge warehouse and a new lodging for TDY folks. But I walked to the what had been the consul's residence which is now the USIS building. I went there to recall memories. My older son Sam was born there, and a lot of happy memories for my family were in that building. I was seeing old friends from the various parties and the religious groups, people who I had worked with before were making their way to say hello. One of the things, for example that happened was that the senior Buddhist from the Tri Quang faction, the faction of "radical Buddhists" as they are called who helped overthrow Diem, made a special point to see me and spend some time to assure me that his group was very much in support of the government, were very hopeful for the success of the cease fire. So I was beginning to get this kind of feedback which was very, very useful.

Another couple of things. The old consulate, which had not been destroyed, was now the city hall. And the residence of the vice consul had become the provincial council headquarters. As I said, the consul's residence had become the USIA, and the bedroom where my son was born was now the USIS library. So things had changed in Hue.

Among the good things that we saw were boy scouts cleaning up. The boy scouts were Buddhists, interestingly enough, as well as Catholic. And there was quite a movement to kind of restore order, and allow peace to return to Hue. We were very struck by that.

One of the former consulate employees, Joe Nghia, had been drafted into the military, was now a senior corporal, and a TV producer of all things. And just to bring the story up to date, we believe that he's still doing TV productions under the new government in Hue. And I certainly wish him well in that.

One of my responsibilities in Hue was to be as principal liaison with the Joint Military Commission--which was the North Vietnamese-South Vietnamese; PRG, the old Viet Cong, and the United States Army. I was also to be a liaison with the ICCS, the International Commission of Control and Supervision, made up of Canadians, Indonesians, Poles and Hungarians, which was to be the guarantor of the cease fire.

On the 14th of February, this is now almost three weeks after the cease fire, the province chiefs hosted a dinner and the North Vietnamese showed up. The North Vietnamese had arrived to be a part of the joint military commission, but PRC had not arrived, and in fact would not arrive for some time. On the same day, on the 14th of February, 175 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong prisoners of war were released in Quang Tri, the province next to the DMZ, and allowed to go across the river.

We were still having to make our own way as far as lodgings were concerned. I, for example, contracted with the former Vietnamese information officer to lodge in his home. We essentially took over his residence, and he moved over to a cousin's. But we were doing kind of our own contracting ad hoc. We didn't have FBO around, or anyone else to help out.

On the 19th of February, that's just less than a month after we arrived, Gary Matthews left. Phil Cook was then put in charge of the three of us, Phil Cook, Bob Carroll and myself. Bob was doing reporting on the Quang Tri situation, I was doing the ICCS and the political situation in Hue, and Phil was supervising us and doing refugees. That was how that little unit was working out.

Q: Let's stop here. You'd been there about a month. What were you getting? What you were finding now at this initial stage what the ICCS was?

THOMSEN: First of all, the Joint Military Commission was not working. The PRG, the Viet Cong, were simply not being helpful. And we'll see a little later on, they actually shot down an ICCS helicopter. So there was really a lot of resentment toward the PRG. The resentment was widespread in all parts. The ARVN and the government of Vietnam, couldn't stand the idea of allowing the Viet Cong to be free in the city. So they kept them under very close restriction, which of course was counter to the agreement. But finally a modus vivendi was worked out where they could go certain places, but they had to have escorts.

Q: Were the government of Vietnam able to send their observers into where the Viet Cong were?

THOMSEN: No. That did not happen. That was not a part of the agreement. It's an interesting question to look back on it, but everything that was going on was going on in what was government controlled territory.

Q: That sounds like a recipe for disaster.

THOMSEN: Well, eventually it was, yes. But the ICCS with Canadians and Indonesians, Hungarians and Poles, was also not working very well. It was clear that the Poles and Hungarians were both given instructions not to be cooperative. Their practice was to go to where there was a purported incident. They would be asked to go and observe it, and to identify that the cease fire had been broken at point A or point B. Now the Viet Cong were never going to call on the ICCS to come to their territory. That just didn't happen. But when the GVN called for them the Canadians would be willing to go, and the Indonesians would be willing to go, but the Hungarians particularly would find a reason for not going. And normally, the way the Canadians

explained it to me, they would just get into a long discussion of procedures. They wouldn't say, no, we won't go, but they would talk about what vehicles to take, and who would ride in which vehicles, and how long they'd be gone, and what the limitations would be. And they'd finally talk themselves out of going. That really almost was the uniform practice all the way through. Later on I'll get into one incident where the Canadians essentially tricked the other two parties into accompanying them on an observation of an incident. But by and large there were just so many problems in trying to get the ICCS to work. As I say, the Joint Military Commission just never operated.

Q: I assume this was all being reported that it wasn't going anywhere. Was this having any affect on sort of the spirit of the work by the Vietnamese, and by you all?

THOMSEN: Well, we kept trying to find ways to make it work, and I think probably that goes way beyond where we were. But my guess is that we were making representations in the capitals of the various governments concerned. We were still expecting that we could find a way to make the ICCS work. What was really going on, and the important thing in responding to the question that you asked, the public opinion in Hue, which is a pretty good bell wether, because there were a lot of oppositionists in the government there. There were a whole range of attitudes which I guess we could say was a positive thing. There were those who were very optimistic, and there were those who were very pessimistic, and there were those who had a wait and see attitude. But it wasn't entirely pessimistic which was a good thing. There was a lot of skepticism, and particularly a lot of skepticism about North Vietnamese ultimate intentions. How long they would go along with the game, and at what point they would return to the battlefield, which is ultimately what did happen.

In the meantime...I've got a little note here. Hue had been restored to the '64-'65 period. A lot of what had been destroyed during Tet '68 had been rebuilt by 1973. For example, the Citadel, which had been almost totally destroyed during house to house firing had occurred, much of it had been restored. The bridge that had been dropped, as they say, had been rebuilt. A new hospital had been built. It was much more modern than the one that I had known. Hue was again an attractive city. Now I understand that today it's even more attractive.

Q: You say you were in Da Nang, but Hue. Were you really working out of..

THOMSEN: I'm in Hue now. Canadians begin forcing the ICCS to operate. The U.S. still has enough military in place to support efforts to move people around.

A Buddhist Bonze visited and provided assurances that Buddhists were not communists. He also recalled helping to hide the Bullingtons during the Tet '68. Jim Bullington, who was my vice consul in '65 and '66 and stayed on, and married my senior local, Thuy Cam, who came from a prominent Hue family. During Tet '68 Jim hid in the rafters of the home during the entire occupation. Now Jim weighed about 200 pounds, was about 6 feet 2. Jim has written this up I think either in the Foreign Service Journal or in State's magazine of about five or six years ago, it was a fascinating story. This Buddhist was a member of the group that had opposed the government during the mid-'60s, and helped bring down Diem, coming to volunteer the assurances that the Buddhists are very much in favor of what's going on in supporting the

government. I was surprised at that, because they were never willing to put themselves on the record in the '60s.

On the 23rd of February I was called to Da Nang to replace Hal Colbaugh who had been in Haiphong. I would stay in Da Nang and take over the political reporting. That would allow Phil Cook to be in charge in Hue. I mentioned already that Da Nang was reorganizing. The AID/CORDS compound, which was big enough to be an embassy, was now under Fred Brown's control and responsibility. The compound contained apartments, a club, a swimming pool, a commissary. When I had been there previously there was no American civilian presence visible at all.

We're beginning to do extensive sitrep reporting, and I was responsible for...

Q: *Sitrep, means situation report.*

THOMSEN: Officers from all over I Corps would send in reports on different days; we'd be able to edit them and on a weekly basis, on Monday, we'd send in a comprehensive report. My responsibilities were to be the head of the political section, to be the principal ICCS liaison for I Corps, and to be in touch with the political activities within the city of Da Nang. Fred was still fighting with AID as to whether he was really in charge or not, or whether they were going to be a separate entity. Finally it was agreed that the AID director would be the deputy consul general for reconstruction and resettlement, and I was the deputy consul general for political and consular affairs. As I mentioned earlier, the AID director was very upset, very put out by all of this.

But what was interesting and I'll just make a very general statement on this is that most of his AID subordinates were delighted at having Fred take charge, and it created a different atmosphere for a lot of them because they felt that they were going to have a little more freedom of action.

A number of Vietnamese with whom I was beginning to meet had been very young officers in the '60s, now in the early '70s they were in positions of lieutenant colonel and major and colonel, and were becoming province chiefs, and were very impressive. Most of these people now were fluent in English, where before it was necessary to use either French or Vietnamese. They had been to various senior military schools in the United States and they were coming back. This is the cadre, or the core of the Vietnamese military that many people have commented on as having made an almost...almost made the necessary reforms to become a very effective fighting force.

John Helble came up in early March from Saigon. I was with him as he went to the ICCS. John was responsible in the embassy for liaison with ICCS. So his coming up gave him a chance to give them strong assurances of U.S. support. They gave him complaints ranging from communication problems to lack of a beach, everything from the ridiculous to the sublime. I urged Fred, and we gave them access to the American club at the consulate general and that helped with some of their morale problems.

James Jones, who wrote *From Here to Eternity* was at a party at Fred's, so we are getting a

variety of visitors now coming through, unofficial as well as official.

Q: With the ICCS, I assume you were able to sit down and talk to the Canadians. Did you make contacts and have dealings with the Indonesians, the Poles and Hungarians?

THOMSEN: Yes, I did. In fact, I may just make reference to a few of the various social events, but I was in touch with all of them on a regular basis. And the Poles, although they wouldn't admit explicitly that they were under a tight rein, the relationship developed to the point where they at least be able to give me some innuendos, or some implicit comments that indicated that they were not free to be as cooperative as they might like to be. The Canadian, Ernest Ab was a Foreign Service officer and who we later ran into him in other countries. He was a very fine officer, and he was able to give us a lot of insights into what was going on within the ICCS. He was a little bit more pro-active than one might have expected in trying to get the ICCS to do certain kinds of things, and he was very critical of the Poles and Hungarians for not being as active as he'd like them to be. The Indonesian was willing to go along with whatever the Canadian wanted to do. He had no particular certain restriction of what he could do. He was not very pro-active but understood whose side he was on, so to speak, and was willing to do what he could to encourage the Poles and Hungarians to go along and be as helpful as they could.

At this time I had begun attending the I Corps military briefings. The U.S. military is still there, they wouldn't leave until the end of March, and AID was there in its own right. But I was beginning to assume the role of a kind of principal observer of the military scene, and sitting at the head table at the briefings. The briefings were very interesting. We were trying to get a sense of how much information was accurate. As far as we can tell the incidents were beginning slowly to decline in the I Corps area although the I Corps apparently had the highest level of incidents in the country.

Q: When you say incidents, could you...

THOMSEN: Well, actually both ways. First of all firing of artillery going back and forth, no military contact, but firing from one area to the other. And secondly, from time to time actual attacks by either the North Vietnamese against a friendly unit or the other way around. They didn't want to admit to us attacks by friendlies against the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong. The I Corps was probably the most active Corps as far as friendlies regaining territory after the cease fire, and that was illegal. It was not supposed to be done.

Q: Were you getting any intelligence of what was going on on the other side?

THOMSEN: The intelligence we got was mainly aerial. We'd get a few reports from the Vietnamese and from CIA, with on the ground observations. Francis Fitzgerald who wrote *Fire in the Lake*, one of the kind of anti-policy folks, we thought, and still do think, she sneaked into Viet Cong territory and stayed with them for several days, and wrote a number of articles. She reported on life in Quang Ngai in the west, VC controlled area. She and a couple of others, all said that the Viet Cong propaganda in the villages was their intention to fight a political battle, and to put down their arms for at least the time being. That there appeared to be a good deal of relief that the war was over, at least for the present. That peace was peaceful. The implication

being that they were preparing to deal in the political level, rather than back to the military.

Q: You keep referring to the Viet Cong. What about the North Vietnamese army?

THOMSEN: Well, the North Vietnamese army was still present. In fact, they had reinforced in I Corps. And apparently half of the North Vietnamese military in the south were in the first military region, some 80,000 was the order of battle that they gave. They're still there in their areas in the mountainous areas, but the areas that Francis was in had some of the so-called cadre who were from the north. She felt her Vietnamese was good enough so she could detect a northern accent in some of those who were so-called political educators. But they are ostensibly South Vietnamese.

I've indicated that we are now beginning to do a lot of political reporting, a lot of military reporting. I'm bringing back information from each of the morning briefings. The rate of incidents is going down, but I Corps still has the highest level of incidents in the country. The area north and west of Hue, and the area of Quang Tri near the DMZ are areas of fairly high activity which is indicative that the North Vietnamese are still moving troops south, and are still active militarily in the south.

In the middle of March NVA pressed hard against the airborne division in Thua thien, west of Hue. The NVA developed a salient between the Airborne and First Divisions south of Hue. In the area west of Da Nang itself, and south, ARVN were pushing out beyond the cease fire line and reclaiming territory that they felt was wrongly taken from them. The far west area of Quang Nam was extremely active. In Quang Ngai the enemy was seen improving roads in the west, strengthening supply lines and manpower against a widely dispersed Second Division. This is where George Moose was reporting.

A very critical area was Sa Huynh on the Quang Ngai - Binh Dinh border, and that was an area where the North Vietnamese came in just before the cease fire, and occupied an area down to the water's edge. If they had been allowed to retain that territory they would have had water access to their territory. But either at, or just before, or just after the cease fire, the South Vietnamese regained the community of Sa Huynh. This was one of the few incidents which the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong claimed was a government violation and asked for an ICCS intervention. Actually as I said, the entire Lao border in the area from DMZ was being improved. Triple A was being installed, that was anti-aircraft was being installed along the border in the west and south Vietnam. I visited Sa Huynh and the town was totally devastated but the damage looked like post cease fire, that is, like more recent battles. It looked like the North Vietnamese had captured the town which would have given them sea access. Some days later the ARVN retook it. People had come back and were rebuilding. This opened Route I all the way from Saigon to Hue.

I drove from Da Nang to Sa Huynh which was probably 100 miles south. I noticed the countryside bustling with activity, small shops with everything from tennis shoes to Coca-cola.

Q: What were you getting from the people who came from Saigon about how the central government and the opinion of the analysts, and political reporters who were dealing with this

sort of at the center of the thing, how things were going? This is March-April?

THOMSEN: This is towards the end of March of '73.

Q: What were the people coming up there saying?

THOMSEN: The sense in Saigon was that the Thieu government was taking hold in the peace time era. There was criticism of Thieu. Thieu began forming a party called the Democracy Party. He tried to outlaw other parties, and was getting from my contacts in Da Nang and Hue that the old VNQDD, and the Dai Viet, these were the old non-communist nationalist parties, their old diehard leadership is absolutely refusing to go out of existence to allow the Thieu party sole possession of the right. But in spite of that, they were trying to maintain their identify and to retain their support for Thieu, and the government. They were in an anomolous situation. But from Saigon we were getting, I think general supportive sounds about Thieu. I think the embassy's marching orders were to support the government. And, although our friends were skeptical, or a little cynical, they were generally hopeful that the government is succeeding in establishing its authority. The military is holding its own pretty much countrywide. There was more pressure in I Corps, than in other parts of the country.

Q: What were you getting in Da Nang? I don't know, maybe this is after the fact, but I kept hearing reports in other interviews about whether it was General Lam, who was the I Corps commander...

THOMSEN: Oh, he was long gone.

Q: Because he was considered a crook. A crook is the only term for it.

THOMSEN: He'd been the Second Division commander in the '60s when I was there, and I read of his exploits from Laos as he became Corps commander. He was quite a clever politician and he clearly took advantage of his senior position to be ruthlessly self-aggrandizing.

Q: A plunder practically. Was there military corruption when you were there?

THOMSEN: Well, maybe we ought to do is drop this and go into your questions because I find myself being bogged down a little bit. The Corps commander, General Truong, had been First Division commander, and was regarded by most Americans as the finest general in the South Vietnamese army. I was just glancing at Westmoreland's book before coming here, Westmoreland says there are American military officers who said that Truong was the only Vietnamese military officer who they would have entrusted with an American division. He had a tremendous reputation which was never sullied, even to the end. And Truong was responsible in '75. He was still I Corps commander, and he was the one who was whiplashed by Thieu and contradictory orders that caused the loss of Hue, Da Nang which began the roll-up from north to south. And Truong is in this country now, he's a computer programmer or something. Truong was an honest man in everyone's eyes. He was a total 180 degrees from Lam.

Now I got to know Truong fairly well. I had not known him before. He was probably only a

lieutenant colonel when I was there in '66. Fred Brown the consul general who had been there longer and knew him better, had the same feeling. Truong was imposing a level of honesty that had not previously existed. In fact, there are a couple of incidents in which province chiefs were relieved during our stay for so-called corruption, or even the hint of corruption.

In one case there was as much evidence in one province that he was not corrupt, as that he was, but Truong relieved him because he had to be cleaner than he was. So I Corps was much better off that way than it had been under Lam in the late '60s. Truong was a man who was not suspected by Americans of that kind of thing at all. It was really a much different situation.

At the end of March, which was so-called 60 days after on the 29th, X plus 60 as they call it. The last military departed Da Nang...

Q: You're talking about the American military.

THOMSEN: The last American military departed Da Nang that day. An American Marine colonel, Homer Walker, was the commander of the last plane to leave Da Nang, on 29th of March. The last American POWs were scheduled to leave Hanoi. Colonel Walker was waiting for word that they had departed. And then he would board his DC-8 and fly out. The PRG, the DRV, the Poles, Hungarians, and Canadians were all standing on the tarmac waiting for the last American military to leave. Fred and I popped a bottle of champagne at the foot of the stairs leading up to the aircraft. We had a toast with Colonel Walker. And I remember the story if you recall it in August of 1964 my meeting the first young Marine captain intelligence officer who flew in a helicopter from Task Force 77 in the Gulf of Tonkin to ask me where the safe secure area would be for an American military installation. I hoisted my glass to say goodbye to the last American Military to leave.

Q: Did you notice any disquiet when the Americans pulled out among the South Vietnamese whom you were dealing with?

THOMSEN: It's a very complicated question. There was a lot of self-confidence on the part of the Vietnamese that they could carry their own weight. But at the same time there was a feeling, especially on the part of some of them, that the departure of the Americans meant not just the departure of the military, but the departure of American support which they knew was absolutely critical to their survival. Here I'll tell a story that I don't know fits exactly here.

But it helps answer your question but I was now going to the I Corps daily briefings as one of two or three Americans.

Q: I Corps being, of course, Vietnamese now.

THOMSEN: It always was the Vietnamese I Corps, but in the mid-'60s there would be as many American military in the briefing room as there were Vietnamese, and the briefings were all in English. Now the briefings were in Vietnamese and it was a Vietnamese briefing with a couple of Americans watching. But Colonel Dang, who had been the First Division Chief of Staff when I was there in the mid-'60s, would only speak French or Vietnamese to me in that earlier period.

He almost typified the xenophobic attitude that some attribute to the Vietnamese. He was cold and distant, and not very cooperative in terms of giving information. Then in 1973 it was entirely different I was the last American left briefings. Colonel Dang now the I Corps Chief of Staff, he takes me aside and in fluent English says, "what is Watergate?" And I tell him that Watergate is a function of the American political system. Colonel Dang who by then had a son getting his Ph.D. at MIT, and clearly had a total change of attitude, says to me, "I predict that Watergate will be the death of Vietnam." This was in the middle of my six month tour around mid-April 1973. We were all looking toward a bright future and this colonel who has changed from a xenophobic Francophile to an American slang-speaking officer with a son in school in the United States, was telling me a truly prophetic statement. I believe today the he was absolutely correct. Watergate was a critical component of the final act in Vietnam. So I would say there were some mixed feelings on the part of the Vietnamese, and some real confusion as to what our ability would be, or our intentions were to stay the course with them. I think that anecdote probably is a powerful statement of the complexities of what had happened over the previous years, and was going to be happening.

In a similar vein, Bob Shaplen and his stringer, whose name was Buong, came to Da Nang and took me to dinner. Now, Shaplen had a totally different perspective by now. Buong, his stringer, was saying the VC were stronger than ever and that if we suspect, what I had mentioned earlier to be true, he was probably speaking with some good knowledge. He claimed that they would win a political struggle, and that there might on the other hand Shaplen felt be a major military attack in the near future. This was mid-'73. That did not transpire that early. It was clear that Shaplen's views had changed much since February.

I have now been given authority to brief the Indonesians and the Canadians on certain situations, and I did brief them on a weekly basis. When I was briefing the Indonesian Colonel Wardinan, he fed back to me that the Indonesians in Saigon were very pessimistic about the situation. At the same time the Canadians were beginning to talk about pulling out but they stayed as long as I was there although they left later. But they were beginning to talk about the ICCS being so ineffective that they didn't feel that their presence there was useful.

I've already mentioned that Francis Fitzgerald had been in Viet Cong hands in Quang Ngai. That incident created quite a political flap. It suggested that the PRG did intend to contest in the political arena.

I had lunch with three young Vietnamese administrators, deputy province chiefs from Quang Ngai and Quang Tin, and the deputy mayor of Da Nang, all bright, competent. These were all young military officers. They were very cynical about the formation of the Democratic Party, the Thieu party that they were supposed to be giving that their full attention, and they were being very unenthusiastic about it. In other words, the mid-level of the Vietnamese bureaucracy was not fanatically supporting the Thieu efforts.

On the 7th of April the PRG/VC shot down an ICCS helicopter near the Lao border in northern Quang Tri, and after a long toing and froing it became clear that the chopper was off course and that the PRG/Viet Cong, shot it down. The PRG were by this time in town. They were now participating in an inspection to a site to a distant observation post. The consulate general

became a kind of a coordinator to help with the rescue mission. There were two helicopters flying in tandem, one was shot down, the other one landed to try to rescue the others and was captured by the PRG. This is in the far distant west, and these are people who are out of touch.

Q: *Were you having any contact with the North Vietnamese...*

THOMSEN: Very little. They were keeping very much to themselves, and they were very hard to get to see. They came out once in a while to either a Joint Military Committee meeting, or a diplomatic reception, and you could try to talk to them but they were not communicative at all. Hal Colbaugh was telling us what was going on in Hanoi where they were, I won't say effusive, but very interested and approachable

Q: *...impression of the caliber of the Polish and Hungarian representatives.*

THOMSEN: They were older, mediocre officers. They were certainly not sending their best and brightest achievers to be a part of this. My feeling was that they were reluctantly participating. They were not eager to make any mistakes that could cause them irritation. Their personalities as well as particular instructions might have been responsible for this.

Q: *Sort of mid-level communist apparatchiks of the military types.*

THOMSEN: Yes, majors and lieutenant colonels. They were not young spitfires who wanted to make something happen. I don't know whether this is deliberate personnel policy on assignments, or whether it was the caliber that was generally available to them.

About this time General Truong was generally upbeat. He was more than content with the refugee resettlement in Quang Tri and he was happy with the way the Buddhists were cooperating with the government. He was giving me a general appraisal which was positive enough so that he could point to specific problems, and also point to real successes. He felt reasonably good about the situation in what is probably the most active military corps in the country. So things looked pretty good. It was about this time that the concept of a "third Vietnam," or the Viet Cong government in the west was beginning to take shape.

Q: *Up in the highlands?*

THOMSEN: The highlands and the high Piedmont, and in one conversation some of the Vietnamese are concerned that the "third Vietnam" might start encompassing part of Cambodia. In other words, they might really kind of carve out a larger communist entity in the southern part of Indochinese peninsula that would include part of Cambodia. The Vietnamese themselves were beginning to discuss this possibility, and it suggested that there was a kind of upbeat expectation that there might be a reasonable outcome to the conflict.

In the middle of May there was a consuls general meeting in Saigon. Fred was on leave, and I went there and gave a briefing on the I Corps situation which, as I said, indicated more military activity than in other parts of the country, and as a severe refugee problem as anywhere. Rice prices and inflation were beginning to be felt, this became a problem, at least later on even after I

left.

Buddha's birthday, the 17th of May was celebrated with a lot of festivities. Again, there was a sense of some relaxation. The government forces had established a good level of security. There was little immediate concern about VC activity in the populated areas.

At this time, Hal Colebaugh returned to Thailand from where he'd been called. The political section was beginning to be a little short staffed. We were starting to lose people unexpectedly.

Q: I was just going to say, here you're reporting on this, and we've been used to having very good coverage of Vietnam, of any country in the world. Yet, at the same time did you feel that you report and the State Department gets it, and they know, and in a way, so what? Did you think Congress has the power and this is being fought on other fronts. Did you have any of that feeling?

THOMSEN: Lately in '73, when I had the Lao desk, the Vietnam working group was right next door and Watergate had completely incapacitated the department on the Vietnam issue. It was tragic to watch the desperate efforts on our part to get Congress to approve anything. The two links, I think, of the tragedy of Vietnam were Watergate and the oil embargo which doubled the price of petroleum products. Together, our inability to meet our commitments coupled with Vietnamese paranoia about us in the first place which was not inactive. Created an atmosphere where Thieu made very conservative decisions regarding his POL (petroleum-oil-lubricants) and ammunition.

Q: The oil embargo came after the '73 war between Egypt, Syria and Israel.

THOMSEN: And doubled the price of oil. It meant that all of the money allocated to Vietnam, which was for POL and if you look at the budget, again my friends next door later on were able to show this to me in detail. It destroyed our ability to give them a level of support that they needed. That's afterward at the moment we were still marching ahead. The Viet Cong was acting in its own area as if it might intend to stay there. We were seeing school buildings, hospitals, and what looked like airstrips being built. We were seeing movement during the day which didn't occur during the combat period. We were seeing things that looked like there had been an attempt to return to normalcy in the occupied areas. So, we were reporting in that way with a lot of detail. There was no grand overview that we were to give Saigon or Washington that the situation was improved. We were trying to make the point that the local situation was pretty stable. I think that would be a very shorthand way of saying it.

Q: The critical element in this became Congress in a way. Were you getting Congressional visitors, and could you tell us about the ones that you...

THOMSEN: The one I recall is one of Senator Kennedy's staffers.

Q: In other words, Vietnam disappeared from the Congressional radar in a way.

THOMSEN: Well, maybe they didn't want to have a report on the record on the way things were

going. Journalists were present regularly, from Time magazine, from the Baltimore Sun, the Washington Post came through and were perceptive, and thoughtful, and maybe critical or skeptical, but they were basically balanced.

Q: But you were also getting professional people as opposed to the youngsters in Vietnam during the height of the war. I mean, there were an awful lot of very naive young people going out to win their fame being war correspondents.

THOMSEN: I had lunch with a Hungarian colonel, who was even more hardline than the Poles. At this time a critical area between Hue and Da Nang was in friendly hands. This situation goes back to '64; in July '64 when I first arrived in Hue an anthropologist from Cornell was there and gave me a first hand report on a major NVA attack on a Special Forces camp there. Now in '73 the friendlies had just taken Bachieu, this 4,000 foot hill, back from the North Vietnamese, having lost it a few days earlier. The I Corps chief of staff, Colonel Dang, was sending his twelve year old to Virginia to Annandale. Dang is the one who had earlier referred to Watergate as the "death of Vietnam."

I called on the Polish colonel, who made it clear that his instructions remained to prevent full effectiveness on investigations. Now what he meant by that was not absolutely clear, but essentially I think what he said to me was that he's been told that "every i must be dotted and every t must be crossed" on all the procedures before they're allowed to accept an investigation.

May 26th, had the lowest military activity since the cease fire. The ICCS was not moving in spite of a new Polish head looked like he might be more interested in doing something. The GVN was reforming its province level forces, the traditional parties were refusing to go out of existence. Al Francis arrived. Al had been my successor as political advisor to the Marines in 1966. Hewas assigned to Saigon as political internal chief. He revived the political reporting system.

A lot of activity was now going on in the development area. The new head of the Agency for the Development of the Danang area was trying to upgrade the Danang infrastructure. In spite of the rice shortages, in spite of refugees there was a kind of economic rebirth going on. Not just in the countryside, but in the cities too.

Al Francis was able to drive to Nha Trang, I don't know what it was like in the late '60s, but in the mid-'60s you couldn't drive anywhere. In the same time frame a young officer drove from Saigon all the way to Da Nang. So security had really improved.

On the 2nd of June I helped inaugurate a spur track through the main trunk between Saigon and Hanoi. A trip to Hue was 25 cents. The line to Saigon was not yet fully repaired but would be very shortly.

Q: You were saying that the Lao desk was next door to the Vietnam Working Group.

THOMSEN: It was a super office . A large part of their time was spent on the Hill, which responds to your question about congressional interest. They were up on the Hill almost every day fighting for support.

Q: Were they talking about lack of support from congress and did they see it at that time.

THOMSEN: Right. They were concerned that...I'm trying to get my chronology right. It was during this period when the oil embargo affects hit hardest, when the price of oil...

Q: We're talking about the oil embargo which was a result of the '73 war between Egypt, Syria and Israel.

THOMSEN: Right, and the outcome of that was that OPEC, the oil consortium raised the price of oil substantially. I'm not sure whether or not they also restricted the production of oil. It meant essentially that that portion of our aid, military assistance to Vietnam, which was devoted to POL...

Q: The petroleum, oil and lubricants.

THOMSEN: Right...was cut in half. The value of that money was cut in half, and that made a significant difference in terms of our support, and they were trying to get the difference back. Trying to convince congress that to maintain the level of support we had committed ourselves to, we needed more money, and congress was very uninterested in that approach.

Q: Who was your boss at this time?

THOMSEN: Mike Reeves, M. Lloyd Reeves, but Mike...

Q: I've interviewed Mike. And the head of Far Eastern Affairs?

THOMSEN: I don't recall who was the Assistant Secretary. Monty Stearns was the DAS, the Deputy Assistant Secretary, who I spent a lot of time with. Monty had been the DCM in Laos while I was there so we were very much in sync on a lot of the issues that I was dealing with, and a lot of times Mike would simply send me to see Monty on various issues. I know Mac Godley was supposed to take the Assistant Secretaryship but I think he got dumped. ...a Japan expert and I rarely saw him.

Q: This was Robert Ingersoll.

THOMSEN: Right, a political appointee.

Q: So he just didn't hit your radar very well.

THOMSEN: That's right. Monty was really on top of the Southeast Asia issues. That makes sense to me now.

Q: Were there any major incidents or problems other than what you've mentioned dealing with Laos in this period?

THOMSEN: No, it was just a matter of continually working to prevent Defense from seeking reductions in critical supplies like 75 mm howitzer ammunition. Fascinating small things ways in which they were trying to do what they thought they were being instructed to do. I would use every bureaucratic trick in the book to keep their feet to the fire. Used to call out to Vientiane to generate cables that would tell us one thing or another and would force DOD to respond.

Q: It was sort of an interesting interplay that often gets lost in somebody looking at the record, and that is the desk officer, particularly the telephone now, calling up the embassy and saying, look, if I get a cable such and such I can wave this in front of the Pentagon, or wherever in any case. But anyway, the solicitation of reporting from the field that often gets lost when one looks at how the foreign affairs system works.

THOMSEN: And today, of course, its even more dramatic. The use of E-mail to solicit responses is something that I'm not even fully cognizant of. I just imagine how valuable it is because essentially I can see the desk E-mailing out a full text of an message they want sent in. I know this is what is happening now. It's the way the bureaucracy operates at its best. The only other thing of any significance is that we did have, and I can't remember what the acronym stands for, WASG, Washington Action Group, did a study on the future of Indochina for which I was the rapporteur. That too took a lot of time mainly with CIA, AID and Defense. I kept the same theme that we better maintain our support strongly in Laos if we were going to have any chance at all of pulling it off, particularly in Vietnam. And we did prevail in the study.

MARSHALL BREMENT
Public Affairs Officer
Saigon (1973-1974)

Ambassador Marshall Brement was born in New York in 1932. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956, studied Chinese, served in Asia, the Soviet Union, and Spain and was ambassador to Iceland. He was Public Affairs Officer in Saigon (1973-1974). He was interviewed in 1990 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Then it fell your due at some point to go where our main problem was at the time. You served in Vietnam in Saigon from '73 to '74. How did this appointment come about?

BREMENT: I was a Public Affairs Officer, one of the USIA's key public affairs officers in East Asia. And my predecessor in Saigon, Bob Lincoln, decided that he wanted to pack it in. He had been there a year or so, and so they needed somebody to replace him and they couldn't think of a USIA officer that they could send, or who wanted to go there. Anyway, they thought of me as the right person for the job, partly because of my Soviet and China background, partly because one of the things the director for East Asia, a fellow named Kent Crane, was very interested in was the psychological program directed against North Vietnam. He thought I would be good at that. You would have to ask him why he thought I was the right person, but he certainly did. He twisted my arm.

Q: What was the situation in Vietnam at the time as you saw it?

BREMENT: I got there on what they called x plus 60, March 29, 1973, which was the day that supposedly all North Vietnamese troops got out of the South as part of the Paris agreements. And indeed peace was supposed to descend on Vietnam at that point. The government of Vietnam was treated by the embassy as a government that was going to be maintained forever and ever. It received major economic and other aid from the U.S. And when I got there the supposition was that it was going to endure.

Q: Was it the feeling that this was a pretty good peace accord? Were we getting what we wanted? or was it a matter of buying time?

BREMENT: I think everybody knew that it wasn't an ideal peace accord, and everybody doubted whether the Vietnamese would live with it. And of course there were carrots and sticks in there for the North Vietnamese. Their invasion of 1972 had been brutally beaten back with lots and lots of casualties. I really didn't know what I was going to find when I got there.

When I got there I certainly wasn't an expert on Vietnam. I was an expert on the international ramifications of the Vietnam situation. But I had never focused on the internal situation in Vietnam, except for a couple of relatively brief trips in 1969 and 1971. As I say, I didn't know much about the country. So I approached it with an open mind, with no preconceptions. I wouldn't say I was optimistic when I arrived, but I would say I was open-minded. I knew what the embassy line was -- that this was a viable, going concern, that indeed if you counted up all the people in South Vietnam who were anti-communist, anti-North, starting with 800 thousand refugees from the North, one million school teachers and others who worked for the government, and then added the one million in the army, and you added all their dependents and so forth, you got a very heavy percentage of the population that was anti-communist. There is no question about that. That was true. But the question was whether a majority of the population being anti-communist was enough, when you are up against an army that is going to attack you.

As I looked around as a political observer, I quickly reached the conclusion that all Vietnamese, of whatever political persuasion, were convinced that the Vietnam situation was not going to be settled in Saigon or Hanoi. It was going to be settled in Washington, or perhaps in Paris. Indeed that seemed like a reasonable assessment to me. And as long as the U.S. government was committed to keeping a government in Saigon, I thought there was at least a chance, good chance, that the government in Saigon could be maintained. In retrospect, I would probably say that I was wildly optimistic, but not because of the situation in Vietnam. It was Washington I misjudged.

Q: Of course Watergate had not happened.

BREMENT: I was just about to say that. In fact, I can remember very well a luncheon with Huang Duc Nghia, who was their Minister of Information, and Thieu's cousin, and his most trusted advisor in some respects, and Tom Polgar, who was the station chief for CIA. Watergate was just happening, and I remember Polgar saying to Nghia, "look, in the United States in 1923 we had the Teapot Dome scandal, and in 1924 we elected a Republican. And the Teapot Dome

scandal was the worst political scandal we have ever had. So this is important, but it will blow away. It's not going to have any influence on Vietnam at all." I sort of looked at everyone to see if Polgar meant it and if Nghia accepted it. I kept quiet, but I was thinking at the time that this was a good line to take but who is kidding whom? Watergate was the death-knell of South Vietnam, it seemed perfectly apparent to me. And indeed, when I went home to get married, we had a conference with several people, including I remember, Scoop Jackson, who...

Q: Senator from Washington...

BREMENT: Senator from Washington and certainly in foreign affairs a staunch pro-defense, anti-Soviet figure for years and years. And he said to us, South Vietnam is doomed. No matter what happens, the United States government is not going to do anything about it. At that point I thought, well, it looks pretty bad.

Q: Well, what sort of activities were you carrying on then?

BREMENT: We had enormous USIA activities. I had 170 local employees and 35 American officers. We had a cultural center in Saigon with 20,000 students and a couple of thousand teachers. We had libraries. We had four cultural centers throughout the country, and libraries throughout the country. We had a big publications program, we had an enormous educational exchange program, and a big information program. That is what I was personally doing more than anything else. I was on the information side. There was also a press attaché who functioned as part of the embassy. He wasn't really under me, but he was a USIA officer, and sort of contributed. So we did everything in the whole information and cultural area -- lots to do.

Q: Looking at it in retrospect, did it really make any difference what we did, as long as there isn't an army to back it up?

BREMENT: Well, I think there are probably an awful lot of Vietnamese in this country who got a good education in English from us, to start with. I think, yes, you have a certain effect, but you are not going to change the world by teaching people English, or by educating them, or by giving them the right information on a given subject. If you are dealing with a military threat you have to handle it militarily. Once you get enough people who are willing to carry guns and shoot you, there is only one answer, and that is you have to defend yourself with other people who have guns who are willing to shoot them back. And if you don't do that you are going to give up your liberty.

But there was always a chance, anyway throughout the entire period I was in Vietnam, which was only 15 months. I left in June '74. I remember at my departure there were lots of farewell dinners with various correspondents, very good American correspondents and other correspondents, who were much more skeptical than I was about the future of South Vietnam. Nobody was saying things were inevitable. But it did look bad. Things were getting pretty somber at that point. It did look like it wasn't going to last, not necessarily because of what was going on in South Vietnam. But the country was so dependent on the United States, not only for its economic wherewithal, but also in its military operations. I mean we had unfortunately, I think, in retrospect, taught them how to fight our way. Fighting our way meant you had an awful

lot of ammunition that you used. Firepower was our God of war. And if you are going to all of a sudden take away ammunition, therefore you don't have firepower and have a lot of army officers who don't know how to fight under those conditions. All these tactics, all the way that they had been taught how to fight, was no longer any good. And that is indeed what happened. They simply got rolled up. But I left. I left in June of '74.

In January of '75 when I was in Moscow and I read that a remote provincial capital had been taken over by the North Vietnamese and there was just no reaction from Washington whatsoever, then I knew that it was finished. It was just a question of time. I was surprised that it went as quickly as it did, but it was just a question of time. Once the South Vietnamese realized that the Americans weren't coming to their aid, as they had in a similar situation in 1972, it was all over.

JOHN N. IRWIN, II
Ambassador to France, Paris Peace Talks
France (1973-1974)

John N. Irwin, II was born in 1913 in Iowa. He was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Eisenhower administration, Under Secretary of State in the Nixon administration and ambassador to France. He was interviewed by Gordon Evans in 1991.

IRWIN: In the negotiations to end the Vietnamese war France was very helpful. Most of the negotiations took place in France, secretly by Secretary Kissinger himself dealing with the Vietnamese representatives in France. The embassy had practically nothing to do with that as it was directly out of Kissinger's office when he was National Security Advisor and later, of course, when he was Secretary of State. Again the duality of the French views came forth, some circles in France were happy to see the United States humiliated in Vietnam, others were concerned because they knew that it was essential for a strong Europe to have strong outward looking America who would be willing to cooperate with Europe and not retreat into isolationism, which Europe remembers as a former strong feeling in the United States, certainly at the beginning of World War II.

I spoke earlier about President Giscard D'Estaing's approach being less ideological, but even there he had certain inhibitions because Jacques Chirac was a strong Gaullist and he was his prime minister. All of that limited to some degree Giscard's ability to move away from the Gaullist doctrine although he and his foreign minister, Saviat, became the architects of what could be termed a more benign foreign policy towards the United States and towards the world and accordingly our relations improved.

The embassy in other contexts continued to work with France, criticized French views but presented French views to the United States in a way we could understand the French point of view and not just as a confrontational issue. We tried to oppose voices in Washington that appeared to be confrontational and looked at French views of the French government primarily with pretension and ambition other than trying to get a working agreement together. We tried to

point out to both sides that we were in favor of a strong France, economically and militarily, because it would complement the United States' power, not only in NATO and Europe, but throughout the world. That was the approach that Giscard and the U.S. administrations following the time I was in Paris really adopted and worked quite well together with.

HUGH BURLESON
Program Officer, USIS
Saigon (1973-1975)

Q: Then, where did you go after that?

BURLESON: I went to Vietnam. One of the reasons that I had opted for War College rather than CAO Jakarta in 1972, was that in 1970, I had been on an inspection team that went down to Jakarta, and the PAO there was a State Department officer on loan to USIA, Marshall Brement.

Q: Oh, yes, I knew Marshall Brement quite well!

BURLESON: I wasn't particularly enamored of his style of operation, and felt that I wouldn't be too happy working under him. That's another reason that I went to the War College instead. Then, when I got to Vietnam, the PAO was Marshall Brement. So, I got him anyway.

Q: How long were you there?

BURLESON: Vietnam from July 14, 1973 until about April 15, 16 of 1975.

Q: You had gotten out just before the great departure from the roof of the Embassy.

BURLESON: Yes, I flew out on one of the last commercial flights.

Q: Graham Martin was your Ambassador at that time?

BURLESON: Right, and that's one more interesting story.

Q: I would like that story a little bit. I knew him a bit.

BURLESON: Right. Well, this was, of course, the so-called armistice period and we were supposed to, I mean, the so-called JUSPAO Operation had been deactivated and transformed magically into an ordinary USIS-type of program.

Q: Was Lincoln your PAO?

BURLESON: No, Lincoln had left before I arrived. I think he left in Spring or something, in

March. Marshall Bremont hadn't yet arrived. We had an acting PAO, Bryan Battey. But he was having some problems. I don't know what the pressure was about, but he was medevaced for mental strain, or whatever it was, perhaps.

Q: He was a very brilliant officer.

BURLESON: Yes. He was a great guy but...

Q: He did have these periods in which he exhibited some mental disorientation?

BURLESON: More like severe depression. He was separated from his wife. It may have been something that could easily be treated now by medication, but at that time it really inactivated him and apparently was getting very bad. So, for a time, we had just the DPAO. I was in the Policy Officer job there for the first few months; but things were still fairly unsettled, partly because of the lack of a PAO.

Just about the time Marshall Bremont arrived, which was I guess, August/September 1973 the Program Officer (in charge of all the program planning) left. Bremont asked me to switch to the Program Officer job. So, I was then in the position under the DPAO and PAO, helping to plan programs nationwide -- whatever there was of a nation there in Vietnam.

We had a whole series of American speakers coming out and trying to address issues that the Vietnamese were interested in. They were obviously still distracted by the instabilities in the whole country. One of the big assets we had, of course, was the Vietnamese-American Center there, our main program base in Saigon.

We had occasional smaller cultural presentations, but the one big thing in that 22 months that I was there was that the Martha Graham Dance Company came out (December 1974). Because of the staff situation at the time, I got the job basically of being producer for that whole operation. It actually worked out quite well. It was well received. The two performances were the cultural event of the year in Saigon.

So, there was a lot of USIS work to be done. Yet, we were dealing with a very thin remnant of intellectuals. Obviously, leaders in the society -- their main concern was survival, and trying to avoid letting the situation deteriorate due to the Viet Cong (VC). But from October 1974 it was essentially downhill -- all was shaking apart. There was a big Viet Cong raid on the oil tank farm just down the river from Saigon. It burned for four or five days, with a big pall of smoke billowing and rising above the city. That kind of set the mood for what was to happen in the next six months. That summer, too, Congress had banned any more arms for the Vietnamese Army.

Q: Did you have any feeling that Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were beginning to close in on you?

BURLESON: Well, yeah, later on. Whenever we were going out of the city, we always checked with Embassy security about conditions, whether there might be incidents in the direction we were going. More and more we got warnings, whether we were going there or not, of there being

raids or VC sightings just outside the city and so on. We felt the tension; a sense of instability was rife.

Q: You mentioned earlier about a large number of people coming in from the United States, speakers and various people in the cultural and intellectual fields giving lectures. To what extent did those have to be interpreted to the Vietnamese listeners?

BURLESON: Not much. Not very much because we were dealing with elites in Saigon. Elsewhere in the nation, they did interpret some programs; but it was not done with the elaborate conference interpreting set-up that we had already been using in Japan for quite a while. A lot of the Vietnamese from, I guess, the 1950s onward had been involved with our military, many had been to the States to study, so that the ones we most wanted to deal with had enough English ability that interpreting wasn't that essential.

Q: You left in '74 or '75?

BURLESON: I left in April of '75.

Q: How many months was that ahead of the rapid evacuation?

BURLESON: Just a couple of weeks. By March, we were already shipping people out, early. I was scheduled to leave in July. Because of the deteriorating situation, we were getting advance transfer orders for people. I already had my transfer orders and could leave any time. My wife went in early April. There was the disgruntled Vietnamese Air Force officer who flew a bombing raid on the Presidential Palace just a mile from our house. My wife had gone through bombing in Yokohama in 1945. We arranged to transfer her out to Singapore where she then waited for me. I had to finish getting our things packed up. So I left about 7-8 days after she did.

Q: It was really a couple of weeks before the great debacle.

BURLESON: That's right; I went on a commercial flight. At that time, I guess, at least a third of the other USIS officers had already left.

THERESA A. TULL
Deputy Principal Officer
Da Nang (1973-1975)

Theresa A. Tull was born in New Jersey in 1936. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland in 1972. Her career included positions in Brussels, Vietnam, Washington D.C., Philippines, Laos, and ambassadorships to Guyana and Brunei. Ambassador Tull was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 2004.

Q: Okay, today is the 31st of January, 2005. Terry, Da Nang, you were there '73, in the first place

how long were you there?

TULL: From '73, August '73 to the collapse in '75.

Q: What were you doing in Da Nang?

TULL: I was the deputy principal officer at the consulate general there.

Q: Who was the principal officer?

TULL: Initially Paul Pople.

Q: When you got there in '73, what was the situation in Da Nang?

TULL: It didn't seem to be too hairy. Of course, the peace agreement had gone into effect. We had some people in country who were monitoring the peace accord that had been reached in January in Paris of that year, 1973. It was a little iffy. There was a not strong feeling that the accord was going to hold, it was well worth a try. Our military was gone, except that under the terms of the peace agreement the U.S. had been allocated 50 slots for military personnel for logistics work. They were under the DOD office in Saigon, but each of the consulates general had a little DOD office, too. We had a small group in Da Nang. It was headed by a sergeant; he might have been a retired sergeant. There were two or three people in his office. I don't remember initially that the military situation was particularly horrendous. Around the edges there were problems.

One of the things that made my tour extremely interesting is that Paul Pople was determined, because of the fact that we were into a new phase of our situation in Vietnam, to reduce the high profile American involvement in the activities of the region. Whereas in the past the consul general had attended the I Corps commander's daily military briefing at I Corps headquarters every day. Pople decided that I would do this Sunday through Friday. On Saturday he would attend the briefing and would have a meeting afterwards with the I Corps commander.

Q: Now the I Corps commander at this point was a Vietnamese?

TULL: Oh, yes, definitely. He was a three star Vietnamese general, a superb officer named Ngo Quang Truong. I was introduced to him and he agreed that I would attend his military briefing every day. Every morning I would begin my work day at 8:00 at I Corps headquarters and go in and listen, sit right next to the three star general while he received his briefing from the staff, the military activities that had occurred during the night. I was really quite impressed by his acceptance of this change, to have this relatively young American woman sitting there as the senior American presence at his briefing. I wasn't quite sure how to play it initially. I thought I am not going to pretend to be something I'm not. I'm not going to try to put up a masculine front and wear khakis and slacks and all that routine. I wasn't sure what the correct approach was, so I just decided I would dress as I would for the office and I would wear dresses suitable to the Southeast Asia situation, frequently a light colored flower dress. I thought that's the way I am, guys. I'm not a military officer and I'm not going to try to be the Sally of the Jungle or anything,

I would just go as myself. That seemed to work nicely. It took a little while for the other officers to figure out who was I, what was I doing, but the fact that General Truong had me sit at his right hand and the fact that I deferred to him, I always made certain that I got there before he did and when the officers rose upon his entrance I also rose, and I gradually developed a very good relationship with him and with the officers at I Corps headquarters. I would go back to the consulate general and report on what had happened in the region overnight. If there were particular serious military developments I would certainly pass those on. I would maybe seek additional information. I would consult, maybe, or pass additional information on or check with our CIA personnel there who also were following a military situation. A key element of my work in Da Nang was attending that briefing every day. I gradually developed as I say some pretty good working relationships with the Vietnamese officers at I Corps Headquarters.

Q: To get the timing, there had been a major North Vietnamese offensive against Quang Tri. Had that happened before your time?

TULL: April '72.

Q: So, this was before your time?

TULL: Before my spell there yes.

Q: How had the effects of this impacted on all of you? I mean I think they had, they had taken Quang Tri and eventually pulled out again?

TULL: They were pushed back out of Quang Tri, but not all the way. General Truong and his people took back, definitely took back, the capital of Quang Tri and pushed the North Vietnamese back. It's been so long, but I think there was a river and I think the North Vietnamese had been pushed north of this river. They had not ceded all the land that they took, but the provincial capital, the northernmost provincial capital of Quang Tri had been retaken in some miserable difficult fighting principally led by General Truong. Now, I don't know whether at that time he was I Corps commander or the commander of the First Infantry Division. I believe he was I Corps commander and supervised all of that. That was a year before I had arrived. The peace talks were going on and it was in January of '73 that this so-called peace agreement was concluded in Paris. Eventually, as you know, Henry Kissinger and his North Vietnamese counterpart shared a Noble Peace Prize.

Q: For non-peace.

TULL: For that non-peace. Right. There was continual sniping around the edges of I Corps, which I could see, every day in terms of North Vietnamese incursions. The fighting continued around the edges, it definitely did. It was a difficult situation.

Q: Were you worried about Viet Cong I mean in other words, insurgent forces within or was the problem one of organized North Vietnamese troops in the South?

TULL: From my perspective, it was North Vietnamese organized units. The map in I Corps

showed their locations with the name of their divisions and units and things like that on it. They slipped back and forth into Laos, using Laos for safe haven. They were definitely still a presence and it was rather iffy, more than rather iffy, that this peace, the cease-fire arrangement would hold. The effort was definitely being made I think on the part of the South Vietnamese, but the North Vietnamese only viewed it as a temporary stepping stone towards the ultimate effort to take over the South.

Q: How, when you first got there, what were you all seeing as far as the rule of Saigon up in I Corps and in Da Nang?

TULL: Well, I Corps was very fortunate. You are going to find me a very prejudiced observer in favor of General Ngo Quang Truong, who was the finest corps commander the Vietnamese had and one of the finest if not the very finest general that they had. He was not a corrupt person. He was a fine military tactician and he just did an extremely good job there. He was well liked by the people of I Corps. How could I find this out? Well, by talking with opinion makers, some of the politicians. I remember having a conversation with the archbishop at one point, the Catholic Archbishop who was just praising General Truong to the skies as a fine moral man; he said it was too bad he's not the president. Truong was apolitical. He never had a political bone in his body. He was very loyal to the government in Saigon. Saigon was represented in I Corps by him and he was not a political general. He gave good service. I remember he cared not only of course about the military situation, but he was responsible for the economy and dealing with natural disasters and things of this nature.

I remember feeling that I had been fully accepted by him when I had been there a few months and at the I Corps briefing, we were briefed on a really serious flood that had occurred in Quang Ngai Province. General Truong decided he would go down and check it out and as I was leaving the briefing he stopped me and said, "Do you want to go down to Quang Ngai and check out the flood?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Okay, be back in half an hour." I scooted on back to the office and told the consul general that I had been invited to go and he thought it was a great opportunity. Now, I didn't have time to go home and change. That's a time when I would have slipped on some slacks or something, but I'm there in this light blue flowered dress. I remember that. I beat it on back to I Corps and we flew down. The general was piloting the helicopter. When we got to Quang Ngai we flew over the areas that were heavily flooded and then stopped in one of the villages. The military brought up a tank -- it wasn't an APC, an APC might have been too low -- for us to ride on. The general helped me up on the tank and I was with him side by side standing on this tank and bracing myself as we went down the rutted, water logged road. The villagers and the farmers were just astounded. They recognized the general right away and they were waving and smiling and looking kind of astonished. Who was this white woman in a blue dress with him? It definitely showed his concern and care for the people there in that situation.

Q: Well, did you get down to the embassy much or not?

TULL: Not too often. I don't know, yes, I don't know whether we had a pouch run. I don't recall whether we had to carry a pouch down or what was what. I got down occasionally, yes, I got down a few times, but not that much.

Q: A different atmosphere down there?

TULL: Very different. One thing that I remember distinctly and was astounded by at the consulate general was the total control of Graham Martin, who was ambassador.

Q: You mean at the embassy.

TULL: No, the consulate general. At the embassy, the ambassador exercised total control over constituent posts. We could not send any cables directly to Washington. They all had to go to Saigon and then be sent on or not sent on as the embassy decided. Airgrams, everything had to be sent down there and cleared, too. You couldn't just do a normal cable and send it out, as in most posts. Everything had to go and get cleared by the embassy. Paul Popple was the consul general and he believed in I think in being as straight a shooter as he could with regard to the situation. I think he had worked with Graham Martin before. I don't want to say he was a dissenter, but I think Martin was interested in having him there as kind of a fresh set of eyes, but then they gave us a hard time about getting our reporting out. It was a little frustrating as well. At that time most of what we did was cleared and processed through Al Francis who was the political/military counselor in Saigon and he had been very close to Graham Martin. I would occasionally get a phone call from Al asking a question about a cable or whatever. The feeling was that he was the sort of a temple dog for Martin that if it got past Al, fine, but if not, that was the end of it.

I remember one key piece. Popple was there. I got there in August of '73. Around Tet of '74 Paul wanted to have us prepare a really big comprehensive overview of the situation in I Corps with a view to determining whether the cease-fire was working? Was there viability for the whole process? How was the situation going economically, commercially, in agriculture, militarily, morale, regarding local dissidents, things of that nature? I should probably amplify this to say that during the bulk of our time in Vietnam we had large CORDS offices, provincial offices staffed largely by AID personnel. With the cease-fire, the peace agreement, those offices were trimmed down considerably, but we still had an office in each of our province capitals. It was a difficult transition for some of the AID people to switch over from what had been their traditional AID and military monitoring roles into an observer role. Paul Popple wanted them to start viewing themselves as ConGen officers looking at the overall situation. We weren't giving out new aid and we weren't running the show, we were not the hand-in-hand advisors to the Vietnamese provincial officials any more. We were more of an observer and reporting force you might say. That had changed and this didn't sit too well with some of the AID personnel. It was a transition that was difficult for these folks to make particularly since Paul said I was the deputy principal officer and they would report through me. Well, this was a little difficult for some of the folks who were older than I, higher in their personal rank, than I. Anyway, we gradually worked it out. His plan was that I would supervise putting together this really comprehensive look at what the situation was in I Corps. I would draw on reports from all of our provincial offices which were in Quang Ngai, Quang Nam, and Hue. I called our provincial officers in and we had a brainstorming session, to determine what should we look for, what were the indicators that would most suggest how things were going in various fields, and we developed an outline. I drew very heavily on their input because these folks had been working in the provinces for quite

a while. We put together this outline and then I asked them with Popple's authority, of course, to put together a draft report for me about what was happening in their area, following this outline. I met with them once or twice more. All of their drafts came into me.

I remember it was shortly before Tet of '74. I then used the Tet holiday, we had three days, the ConGen was closed plus the weekend and I worked and worked on these reports trying to put them together coherently and come up with conclusions and summaries and where did we stand and actually came up with I thought it was pretty thoughtful airgram. I was not a, let's say, a bomb thrower, but I was a political officer and proud of it and you assess the situation and if something isn't going well, you say it isn't going well or something is not going too badly, you say that. I put together this report, but on balance the conclusion of the report was that this was really not going to be viable situation in the longer run. This was a very iffy, difficult situation and it did not look good. Paul approved this and as he's approving it he says, something along these lines, "It's a fine job, Terry, really a very good job. It will never get out of Saigon, but I'll sign it off and send it down" which he did.

He was right. It didn't get out of Saigon. He was told about it on his next trip to Saigon that no way could something like that be sent onto Washington. It was too negative, etc. Now, Popple wasn't the type to send it backchannel, so that was the end of that, all that work. Nor would I bootleg it to friends in the Department. We had put together what I thought was a pretty sensible piece. But it went nowhere.

Now, that was '74. By the time the airgram was finished it was probably mid-February in '74. Vietnam fell the following year. In January or so of '75 I remember the director of the Vietnam working group Jim Bullington came to Da Nang. He was checking out our files and he came across my airgram and he said, "Why didn't this go in?" I said, "You'll have to ask Saigon about that." He said, "This is exactly what we should have had." I said, "Well, we did it here. We all have bosses."

Q: You know in a way its remarkable that it didn't go in because usually somebody somewhere who will take something like this and mail it personally.

TULL: Yes, but I wouldn't do it. Maybe I should have. I just wasn't the type. I thought, well, I've done what I'm supposed to do here. Jim thought it would have been very helpful to have had it. It didn't happen.

Q: What were you getting from the political leaders of your area during the time before all hell broke loose?

TULL: This was so heavily a military environment that I don't have a strong recollection of say political party people. We had a very good Vietnamese local national employee at the ConGen who did have contact with some political party people and with the Buddhists. The Buddhists were very politically active as you know in Vietnam as a whole. I guess that type of opinion was also folded into this message that I did.

Q: At that time where was the feeling? Was it just that we didn't have the military force to hold

them back or that the will wasn't there or what?

TULL: The feeling that permeated, I think, was that the U.S. had quit. The U.S., by pulling out all our military despite our pledges that we would continue aid, was the handwriting on the wall. I think that the Vietnamese felt that the North Vietnamese would not be deterred except by a U.S. presence. Since the U.S. presence was gone it was just a matter of time before the North Vietnamese despite their commitments under the Paris agreement, launched a major invasion to finish their takeover. I think it was the fact that the U.S. had pulled out. Basically pulled out, pulled the rug out, that convinced the North to continue their attack. Also the U.S. reneged on our aid commitments to the South Vietnamese military.

Q: How long, did Popple stay the whole time you were there?

TULL: No. I'm trying to remember when he left. I got there in August and he hadn't been there very long himself at that time of August of '73. I don't think he was there more than a year.

Q: What was his background?

TULL: A Europeanist I think. He had an Italian wife. He had served in Italy.

Q: It's probably where he ran across Martin.

TULL: I think so, maybe in Rome. He was a very intelligent man. I ended up with a mixed opinion of him. The man is dead now. He was very bright. Initially I was quite impressed.

Q: Vietnamese, the Vietnamese context is not the Italian context. Did he seem to understand sort of the culture and what worked and what didn't work?

TULL: I think he was a pretty smooth diplomat in that sense. He was a small man and I think that helped, although I was a tall woman and I had no difficulty. He had a good relationship with General Truong, treated him with respect and liked him, generally liked him. I don't know that he had a great deal of contact outside of the military establishment.

Q: Yes. Well, when Popple left, who replaced him?

TULL: Well, interestingly enough it was Al Francis who came up from Saigon. He had been political/military counselor and was very close to Graham Martin. I thought, we're going to see how we get along. He was dispatched I think because I suspect Martin didn't like the tone of the reporting that was coming down from I Corps and he wanted someone who was gung ho with the policy there. But, I don't know. I always took the attitude that I had to get along with the person who was sent to be the boss and also that I had to give them the benefit of my very sincere honest opinions on things. I definitely made an effort to get along with Al and yet I told him what I thought about things. Al had served in I Corps on a previous tour in Vietnam. He knew the commander of the third infantry division, General Hinh, and he told me that he wanted to pay a call on General Hinh. I told him that he should call on General Lam, the deputy commander at I Corps who outranked Hinh, first. (He had already called on General Truong, the commander.)

Al insisted that he and General Hinh were friends. I said, “Yes, but there’s protocol here. You really should see General Lam first.” He insisted that he would see Hinh first. I said something like, “You can see whomever you wish, but I’m telling you you’re making a mistake. You really need to call on the two star deputy commander first.” But he didn’t, he went to see General Hinh first, and, of course, the two star was upset. To Al’s credit after a few weeks he came back to me and said something like, “Well, you know, General Lam has been really cool towards me. You were actually right to recommend that I call on him first. I’ll have to make an effort to make it up with him.”

We got along and in fact he hadn’t been there too long when (we can put this on the tape and then we can decide later whether it can stay or not) Al decided he was going to go to Hue for the weekend. It was a Saturday. I was to be in charge for the weekend. Saturday morning we got a frantic phone call from one of our airbases in Thailand that one of our reconnaissance planes, I used to think it was a U2, but I really think it was an SR71.

Q: The blackbird.

TULL: It was a blackbird. It was having engine trouble and had to make an emergency landing in Da Nang. This was, of course, against the peace agreement, it was definitely a no-no that we would have this happen, but by the same token, we weren’t going to let the plane crash.

Q: Let me just stop here.

TULL: So, Al and I went out to the airport. We first notified some Vietnamese. The head of the Vietnamese Air Force called Truong and told him what was happening and then we raced out to the airport and saw this plane coming down. It was noontime, the time when the flights to Saigon were loading up. This plane comes in and it definitely needed some help, needed some work done. What I appreciated about Al was that he met the pilot and introduced him to me and said, “Now, I have to go to Hue and I want you to understand that Terry is in charge here and whatever she says goes.” In the meantime the pilot had gotten in touch with our base in Thailand, and they sent over another plane, again against the cease-fire, a plane with a repair crew and replacement parts. Al proceeded to go to Hue, which I thought was a note of confidence in me. I had quite an interesting 24 hours babysitting that airplane.

Q: Those things are odd looking, you know, we’ve all seen the things and it’s a most impressive plane and it certainly isn’t the run of the mill. It’s not tiny.

TULL: Well, fortunately here’s where your longstanding relationships work out. I had become a good friend of General Khanh who was the head of the Vietnamese air force in I Corps. I knew him quite well from briefings and social events. He was quite upset. I said we have to get a hanger quickly. He came to the airport right away and we got the plane into a hanger. They emptied the Vietnamese aircraft out of the hanger and got it into a hanger. Of course he was anxious, and I don’t blame him. He said, “We’ve got to get it out of here.” I said, “We will, there’s a plane coming over with a crew. Yes, they’re bringing the parts. They’ll be here. I won’t let them off the base. Don’t you worry. They’re going to be here in that hanger working on this plane.”

At this time they were having a shortage of automobile fuel in town and I said, "There's one problem now. I've got to have gas for my car for the ConGen vehicle. Do you know any place I can get gas?" He said, "I'll take care of it." He ended up getting some gas for my car.

We had a couple of political officers, good young fellows, David Harr and Gerald Scott. The three of us were there and in comes the other airplane with the crew and their attitude was hey, isn't this exciting? We're in Vietnam now. Isn't this nifty? I hustled them all together and I said, "You do not leave this hanger, I don't want any uniforms seen out on that tarmac. You must stay in this hanger working on that airplane. This is a serious violation of the cease-fire. It's necessary. I'm glad to do it. We'll do whatever we can to facilitate your stay, but you must stay in here."

They were not too happy about that. I ended up having one of the fellows go out and get them supper. We got sandwiches and sodas for them. I said, "Look, we'll even get you some souvenirs. Would you be interested in maybe having some carvings from Marble Mountain?" "Could we?" I sent another one of the men down, to the market and he came back with miscellaneous souvenirs, which the airmen paid for. They worked all night on the plane.

Meanwhile, I've got the two pilots, one who had brought the plane in and the other fresh one from Thailand. They're in these bright orange jumpsuits and they were estimating to me that it looked like the way the work was going that they would be ready for a dawn takeoff, but in the meantime they had to have some sleep. I decided to take them to my home for a meal and a night's sleep. I left the two political officers with the airplane. I asked the pilots to lie down on the floor in the back because I didn't want these two orange-suited American pilots to be seen riding in the consulate general vehicle. They understood completely. When I got to my residence I got them inside and I woke my cook up and she fixed them a nice dinner and then they went to bed and got some sleep. About 5:30 a.m. I guess we got back in the car, same procedure, and went out to the airport again. By that time the plane was repaired and they thought they would be able to take off safely, which they did. I've never seen anything like it, to see that airplane take off. It practically goes straight up in the air. It was incredible.

Q: It must have woken up everybody in Da Nang up.

TULL: It had a nice little kick to it. I knew the planes existed, but I'd never seen one, these huge black wings, but then when it started up, as you know it looked like it went a few feet and then went almost straight up into the air. It was incredible. A few days later, a funny note to this, I went out for supper with a friend to a restaurant along the river in Da Nang and they had, I guess you would call him a deaf mute, who helped direct parking at this place. He knew who I was. He sees me and oh, oh.

Q: You're motioning with your hand going straight up.

TULL: The deaf mute was mimicking the take off of the airplane. What was interesting, I knew at the time that members of the International Control Commission, which at that time was Polish, Iranian, I think Canadian, were at the airport Saturday noontime getting ready to go down to

Saigon. That was when the plane first came in so they must have seen the plane arrive. But nothing ever came of it. Never saw a word about it. I told my ConGen staff, my staff, don't ever say a word about this. I don't know whether this is still classified or not. Thirty years ago. That's how I babysat the Blackbird.

Q: How did sort of the collapse come about from your perspective? This would be in '75, really it happened and it started in the highlands, but very quickly hit Da Nang.

TULL: Well, the very first indication and again I'd have to go back and read the history books, but the first indication I got that it was really going to be over was there was a provincial capital in IV Corps in the Delta that was captured by the North Vietnamese and no effort was made to take it back. When I saw that I thought, oh boy, you know, here we go. Of course I knew about all the North Vietnamese divisions that were in I Corps. I'd known that from the first briefing I went to.

Q: You're talking about the North Vietnamese.

TULL: The North Vietnamese divisions were in the western region of I Corps. Then as you mentioned in the mountainous areas of II Corps, collapse was beginning around the edges there. I was due to leave Da Nang the end of February 1975. Shortly before my departure Al Francis, who was the consul general, got gravely ill and he was hesitant to go to the States or whatever was required and I said, "Al, I'll stay as long as I have to, you go. You have to go take care of yourself. If necessary I'll delay my departure until you are able to come back." That's what worked out. He was medically evacuated to the States and I was in charge of the post. In the meantime the arrangements were continuing for my departure. I was home packing out and it was early in the morning and it was the day that the movers were there to pack up my personal things and I got a phone call from the chief of staff at I Corps headquarters asking if General Truong could borrow our airplane to go to Saigon. He had to see President Thieu. I said as far as I knew it would work, but let me just double check because the myth was it was our airplane, but it was really CIA's so I checked with the station chief and I said, "Truong wants to go to Saigon. Any other uses for the plane?" He says, "No. Let him have it. No problem." I called back and said yes we'd be happy to have him use the plane. It was a very nice little Lear jet or some little executive jet.

The station chief asked to see me when I went into the ConGen. I went in and the station chief came to my office. He had a draft report they were just about to send out, reporting that President Thieu (President Nguyen Van Thieu) had gotten in touch with General Truong and had ordered him to send some of the forces in I Corps to Saigon. Thieu wanted to pull the Marine Division to Saigon, and perhaps, I think, the Airborne as well, and pull back elements of the First ARVN division, pull them back closer into Da Nang.

Q: These were the top units.

TULL: Absolutely. Just about the top in the whole military establishment in Vietnam. The Marines had been north; they had been in Quang Tri. The Airborne was based outside Da Nang, in the Da Nang area. The First Division and the Marines were north of the Hai Van Pass, near

Hue and Quang Tri. Basically, as I read this message, what Thieu was planning was to develop enclaves near Saigon and protect these enclaves, and he wanted to have these military units from I Corps to do it. But to me, as I read that, Thieu was basically writing off I Corps. So that's why General Truong wanted to go down to Saigon and argue face to face with Thieu to see if he could get him to change his mind or at least to change part of his plan and leave some of the units in I Corps. That's why he went down.

Okay, so, I figured that's it, I'm sitting there in Da Nang and I figured its over. There's no way I Corps can hold if this plan goes into effect. I Corps is going to fall even if you do leave some elements in place. The Third Division which was not very good, that was going to be left in place and maybe one element of the Airborne, maybe one of the First Division. So, basically the Thieu plan was saying everything north of the Hai Van Pass is written off. I thought if that happens it's chaos, there is no way it is going to hold.

I learned either that night or the next morning from our CIA team that Thieu had refused Truong's request for reconsideration of the withdrawal. I decided that we had to develop a plan to evacuate our staff and their families from Da Nang. Step one, I pulled out the mission's emergency evacuation plan which was, as I read it, totally worthless. It had no provision for a phased collapse of the country. It had no provision for doing anything for our Vietnamese employees. It was all geared, as I recall to a one fell swoop evacuation of the country of Americans only, and I thought we cannot do that to these people who worked for us. I got all our heads of section together, consular, the AID leader, our political officers, a representative from the CIA to discuss our approach. Going into the meeting to be quite frank I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to do, but I thought let's talk it through here and let this come up from everybody. What emerged was a consensus that we had to put the existing plan aside and forget about it. We had as a matter of conscience to do something for our Vietnamese employees. Given the huge size of Vietnamese extended families we decided that what we could do would be to take our employees, their spouses and their children and try to get them at least to Saigon, and then, from there, see what would happen. We couldn't take brothers and sisters or parents. I mean it was going to be harsh and awful, but as it was it was going to be massive. Everybody agreed with this approach, which was what I went into this meeting thinking was all we could reasonably do.

Then, with this general agreement I drafted -- I'll never forget this. I'm sitting in the consul general's office, which was a nice office. It was a beautiful day and the sun was dappling on the river outside, the city was peaceful -- and I drafted a telegram which I basically said that if the plan President Thieu has adopted pulling out these units from I Corps is accepted and followed through on there's no way that I Corps can hold, it's going to collapse, and therefore, I want authorization to begin a phased evacuation from the region. I said I want to gradually pull in my Americans from their offices at night in the provinces, bring them in at night to Da Nang and let them go back in the morning again, to avoid panicking the Vietnamese as long as possible. I needed aircraft to move our families and our Vietnamese employees and their families down to Saigon. I got it all drafted, showed it to section chiefs, and took it over to the Station Chief who was a good guy, we got along very well. His people had been in the meetings. I showed him the cable and I said, "What do you think of this? Do you think this makes sense?" He read it and he says, "Yes, and if you want you can put a sentence in there saying the Station Chief concurs." I

said, "Thank you, I will do that just so there will be no doubt in anybody's mind." I sent the message to Saigon

Well, the break that we had was that Graham Martin, the ambassador, was in Washington getting dental work and I imagine he also was trying to shore up some support for help for the aid that we had promised the Vietnamese but that congress had decided we weren't going to give. He wasn't in country so the charge d'affaires was Wolf Lehman. I sent this cable off and what was really strange, I had just drafted it and my secretary had typed it up and I signed it and I said, "Okay, here we go. Either they give me what I'm asking for or there's going to be a demand that I leave post immediately and I'll be back to Washington with my career in shambles." There's a knock on the door and who comes by but Al Francis' darling wife. She was so sweet, Mary Francis, and she had planned to have a coffee that afternoon for the women of the post. Al was gone. Al was in Washington and of course I couldn't go and neither could my secretary as it developed. So, very sweetly she came by and said, "You two need a break. I've brought you some fortune cookies. You just relax and have these and I won't hang around" and she left. I sat down and my secretary brought us both coffee and we both sat there. I opened up the fortune cookie and the fortune said "You've come a long way baby." We both laughed at the appropriateness of those words.

In this cable I had also said, I figured if I'm going to get thrown out I might as well go out for the whole hog, I said I recommend that we start repositioning units from the Seventh Fleet in the Pacific to the waters near Vietnam because there will be a massive evacuation from the country and at least we could get our people out of Saigon. I got a phone call just a couple of hours later from Wolf Lehman saying you'll get what you need. We'll send the first plane out tomorrow. He approved with no questions, nothing. We started ferrying our people out. The first thing I did was go over and meet with General Truong and tell him what I was doing because we thought there was a possibility at the time that if the Vietnamese citizens saw that we were cutting and running, there could at a certain point be a backlash against us. I also had been asked by our provincial office people if I could get General Truong's approval that the Vietnamese military personnel who worked with our provincial people as translators could also be evacuated with their families or would he expect them to go back to their Vietnamese army units? They were viewed as very close to the Americans. I explained to General Truong what I was doing regarding a phased evacuation. He thought it was a very wise move, which confirmed me into thinking that a) he had failed to get what he wanted from Thieu, and b) that I was right in thinking the whole thing was collapsing. I explained our thinking with regard to the Vietnamese military who worked with us in the provinces. He agreed that he would not be an obstacle, he would authorize them to be evacuated with our consulate general office staff, and so that's what was done.

Q: How about the civilians involved in this because anyone who is watching this from the States eventually was seeing what I think was the head of the airline or something who is loading people on and all. I mean American civilians, not directly connected to the consulate general. Were you telling them to get out, too?

TULL: As I recall, there were very few American citizens in I Corps who were not affiliated with the ConGen or the U.S. government. The scene you recall came much later in the process,

and involved Vietnamese not Americans. We got the Americans out on the aircraft provided by the Embassy and via Air America.

Let's move on a little more. I remember before we get to that point I was concerned about the members of the International Control Commission who had offices in Hue as well as Da Nang. I don't think they were in other places, but I remember talking with Wolf Lehman about that and asking what should we do about the ICC? Should we get them down to Saigon, too? He said, no don't worry about them. That's not our concern. It wasn't nasty or anything, he just meant we didn't have to devote our resources to them. There will be other ways for them to deal with that.

That was quite a time. Not all elements of the U.S. mission in Saigon grasped what was going on. There was a lot going on elsewhere, but I Corps was going to go down fast once the troop transfer occurred. Wolf Lehman understood this. I developed tremendous respect for him. He understood completely and he didn't second-guess me. He supported me. Other elements in the embassy just didn't get the picture. I remember at a time when we were using our helicopters to bring our staff and the Vietnamese staff and families from our office in Hue to Da Nang to get them on an aircraft and send them down to Saigon, I got a phone call from the head of USIS in Saigon. I forget what his name was, but I had no respect for his comprehension. He calls and says, "Terry, I've just been talking with the Director of the Imperial Palace Museum in Hue and he wants to get the imperial treasures, the porcelains and things of that nature, and jades down to Saigon. I told him you would take care of that. Just get them on a helicopter and get them out." I said, "No, I'm using my air assets for people. They are not going to be used for museum pieces. I can't do it, it's more important to get the people out." He was outraged. "Well, I don't know about that" etc. His personal rank was far senior to me, but I was the senior American in I Corps at that point. I said, "No, the decision is, it's more important to save the people. I don't have the assets. If I had an abundance of air assets, yes, but I said, no it's more important to get the people." Well, he was huffing and puffing, "I will see about that. I'll talk to Wolf Lehman." That was an indication he didn't quite understand what was going on. Of course, I was not overruled on this.

Shortly thereafter, I got through the military a request from a colonel, who was visiting from Washington who wanted to come up to I Corps. His trip had been in the works a month or two and he had made it to Saigon and he wanted to come to Da Nang and check out the scene. I told the folks in Saigon, "I don't have any air assets for him. There's no reason for him to come. He can read our cable traffic and find out what's going on, but gradually the whole region is imploding so there's no reason for him to come." Well, apparently he had some clout in the Pentagon or something so I get another phone call, "Terry, couldn't he please just come up to Da Nang? Won't you authorize him to at least come to Da Nang? He knows he can't get out of the city. That you don't have any air assets for him or anything of that nature, but if you can get him to Da Nang and see the city?" I said, "All right, but make sure he understands he doesn't get out of Da Nang. I don't have a car for him. I don't have an aircraft, I don't have helicopters." I had been provided with aircraft, but it was for the purpose of getting people to Saigon.

Okay, the next day I get a frantic call from one of my staff who is at the airport, one of the former USAID guys, a good guy and he's saying, "Terry, there's this colonel here and he's insisting that we have to give him our helicopter because he wants to fly to Quang Ngai and he

wants to fly here and there and I told him that we can't do it and he's just being really obnoxious." He gave me the name and I said, "You're doing exactly the right thing. He cannot have that chopper. You just hold that line. You use it for what we're using it for which is to evacuate our staff." He said, "Well, this guy, he's just so obnoxious. I told him that Miss Tull said we can't do it and he said, 'Who is this Miss Tull?' We made sure because I just wanted to be sure because he's really throwing his weight around." I said, "No, you're right, you cannot give him anything." And we didn't. There was another indication you see that we're supposed to stop evacuating our personnel so this guy can tell his children, oh I went down to Quang Ngai a couple days before it collapsed. I don't understand that. So, anyway, he didn't come in to see me, I'll say that. Apparently he cooled his heels and took a plane, one of the Air America flights, back to Saigon. I never heard another word about it. I was very pleased that the staff didn't allow themselves to be intimidated.

Q: This is, well, what was happening up in Quang Tri and all? Was there heavy fighting going on?

TULL: Yes, the fighting had started. The fighting had started. As soon as the Vietnamese units were pulled out and sent south then an element of chaos set in. General Truong whom I dearly loved made what some military people think was a mistake in that he told the soldiers of the First Division up there that they could get together with their families and could move south with the families and apparently that broke down unit discipline. He recognized that no more fighting could take place. It couldn't happen. That's all there was to it. So, that was north of the Hai Van Pass. So, that kind of confusion was starting to seep down, but I am very proud of the work of our Consulate General. We got the support we needed out of Saigon, thanks to the fact that the ambassador wasn't there and our good staff really rallied together: The young officers who worked with me at the Consulate General and the former AID people who had worked in the provinces. They were frisky from time to time before the crisis, but they were just as supportive and capable as can be regarding the evacuation, really good. So we got our Vietnamese employees, their spouses and their children down to Saigon and I believe most if not all of them eventually got evacuated to the States.

Now, a couple of days before the final collapse Al Francis who was still very sick came back to Da Nang. It was killing him to be in the States and be sick and see what was happening. He came back, and now I fought Al a little bit. I mean it was very brave of him to come back, but he came back and he wanted to undo some of the things that I had started. For example, I was bringing our people in from the provincial offices. I was having them come in and stay and sleep in Da Nang at night and go out by chopper to their offices in the morning because I was afraid of what was going to happen. He came back and the first night he's there he tells them they can stay overnight. Well, apparently there was some pretty nasty fighting near one of the offices and he only did that the one night. He realized that he couldn't be there. Then he wanted me to leave which was okay. I knew it was getting very close to the end and technically my replacement had arrived.

Q: Who was that?

TULL: Another protégé of Graham Martin. Oh, in later years he became ambassador to Haiti,

tall, thin fellow whose first name starts with a Brunson McKinley. Anyway, he had been cooling his heels in Saigon and then I told the embassy, if you want to send him on up you can. He can help us out in Da Nang. Al's view then was well, he's here and you might as well go. I left Da Nang. To my knowledge I was on the last regularly scheduled Air America flight from Da Nang to Saigon. When I got to Saigon II Corps I think had collapsed. We were in the midst of the collapse in I Corps. I ended up spending a couple of nights sleeping in the ambassador's office because George Jacobsen who was Mission Coordinator at the time, was scrambling to try to get air assets to Da Nang and to the other posts and I ended up kind of being the go-between between him and Al Frances. Al got extremely exhausted and I was the one who would talk to him on the phone and say all right, we're trying to get that for you. We'll see what we can do, but then they would ask me in Saigon where can we land this particular aircraft? Where's the helicopter pad, things of that nature. I was there as I said literally sleeping on the ambassador's sofa and I think this was Easter weekend, I'm not sure. It was the last weekend in March; it might have been Easter. It was wild, but Al was so tired that it was useful I think for him to be talking to someone who knew him and he was very brave, I'm not knocking that. He eventually left Da Nang on a boat. In the meantime, we were trying to discourage independent non-governmental types from getting involved, such as sending in the aircraft you just mentioned. I believe it was from World Airways I thought Ross Perot was involved, but I may be mistaken. Anyway they wanted to send a plane up and we told him not to do it. We said it's too late. There's no control. Its over as far as taking a large airplane into Da Nang. But of course they did it anyway against our instructions and that's where you saw the picture of people clinging to the struts of the airplane and yes, it was just a nasty sight, probably several people were killed in the process of that aircraft taking off. No, that was terrible, but we knew it was finished by then. We could not safely put an airplane in. I saw something recently on television I think a television reporter was on that plane and it might have been someone who just recently died, but they reshewed the film which I had never seen. Apparently the plan was to be a flight to take women and children, but when the plane landed the soldiers just apparently knocked the women and children down and forced their way on the plane. We had told them not to go at all because we knew it wasn't safe. This was another example really of how out of touch or how unwilling to accept reality some elements of the embassy and public were.

After Ambassador Graham Martin came back from the States, I found out that he had been saying in Washington, that I had obviously overreacted and when he got back he would square it away. Really weird. So, who do I meet outside Martin's office one day shortly after Martin's return but the official White House photographer whose name escapes me and he blithely tells me, "Oh, its good to see you. I'm going up to Da Nang. I want to take some pictures." I remember telling him, "Da Nang doesn't exist as a U.S. post anymore. It's finished." "Oh, no, well I want to go up there and see it and the ambassador is going to make a plane available." I said, "You can't land a plane at that airport. The North Vietnamese have taken it over, okay? You cannot go, its over." He looked at me like I was crazy and he ended up flying over to Cambodia which I think gave him a couple days of taking pictures before it collapsed." That was another problem we had, getting the assets we needed in terms of aircraft and in terms of shipping to pick up the refugees because Cambodia was collapsing around the same time. It was really bad.

Q: Yes. Well, what was even before, let's say you're still in Da Nang, but things are beginning to

happen, what was the impression that you had and maybe others in our establishment up there had of Graham Martin because you get the feeling that he was trying to either, either he was trying to keep some wishful thinking or he just felt well, if he did something it would pull the plug and everything would happen.

TULL: I never had a particularly high opinion of Graham Martin. I think he was unrealistic in his expectations for what was going to happen in Vietnam. I felt that the fact that we were so muzzled in the Consulate General that we couldn't send a cable to Washington without having it cleared first through Saigon showed an excess of control or concern that, good grief, what do those people know and I will control the information flow. That concerned me. I also wondered if the fact that his own son had been killed in Vietnam had perhaps made him determined that this was not going to be a failure, that we were going to stick it out and that somehow it would work out because he wouldn't have wanted his son to die in a vain enterprise. I don't know. I think he wasn't liked by the American staff. But he was in Never Never land.

Q: Towards the end I mean from your perspective of almost dismissal of this man, you know, of his judgments? He had power, but he was considered a bit off the wall.

TULL: To me the fact that he allegedly went to Washington for dental work at a time that was critical was bizarre so I suspect he was doing more than that. At this point our pledges of aid were unraveling and maybe he was actually trying to talk to Congress to have them give the aid that we had promised at the time we made the commitments there in January of '73 in the peace negotiations. Toward the end the feeling was he wasn't getting it and I know when I went, when I got to Saigon the political counselor was Josiah Bennett who was a good guy and was with the program and the whole thing, but of course this is a month before Saigon fell. I went to see Joe and I was practically afraid to say what I believe, you know, but I say, "Joe, it's over. This place can't last. Vietnam cannot, South Vietnam can't, hold with I Corps gone. The imperial city is Hue. If you take I Corps out it's gone. Then you see it's crumbling around the edges. I don't give it 30 days." I thought here we go. He looks at me and says, "I'm afraid you're right." But whether anybody was saying that to Graham Martin I don't know.

I got to see Martin because when the end was approaching in Da Nang, I was due to leave, my tour was coming to an end anyway, so there were certain farewell events, farewell parties given by officials for me, and one of them was a dinner offered by General Truong. This was at a time when it looked very bad in Hue and I remember I had my radio with me and I was occasionally having to talk on the radio to our people in Hue, I wanted to be sure that they got out for the night. It was very bad. At any rate General Truong's wife asked me in Vietnamese, not in front of her husband, "If the country falls to the Communists, will you take our children?" I said, "Yes, I would." Later at the dinner table our station chief was sitting on one side of the general and I was sitting next to the general. I said in Vietnamese which was deliberate because our station chief didn't speak Vietnamese, "You know, your wife has asked me if the Communists take the country will I take your children to the United States." He looked at me. I said, "I have told her that I will." He said slowly, "Thank you very much." This was all the confirmation I needed that everything I had been saying about this country is falling and I Corps can't hold was absolutely right. When everything collapsed and Truong made it down eventually to Saigon on a boat I wanted to see him to work out the details to get his children out of the country. The word

from Martin was that nobody could see any Vietnamese officers from their previous posts without checking with him first. So, I asked to see Graham Martin to get that permission. He said, "Well, you know, this is a problem, Terry. There's rumors that General Truong, that people want General Truong to replace General Thieu to be president of South Vietnam. There are rumors of a coup that would put him in Thieu's place." I said, "Unfortunately, Ambassador Martin, he's not the type." That was the phrase I used: Unfortunately, he's not the type. He looked at me. I said, "I am taking his children out of the country and I would like your permission to go see him in the hospital." "Yes, all right. You can go see him." I went to see General Truong and eventually got three of his children out of the country. They became my kids for a few years. We are still very close.

I'll back up a little bit. Toward the very end there in Da Nang, this was something I think worth mentioning. As I say at the time of the peace agreements in January of '73 the U.S. I learned made substantial promises of aid that, although we would withdraw our military, we would continue substantial military and economic assistance. But as time went on Congress decided they weren't going to appropriate that money. Within the last two weeks of I Corps existence, and Al Francis was in the States, we had three congressional delegations come to I Corps. Two with congressmen and one with staffers, but they were all kind of high-powered folks. I remember this one day I was at the I Corps briefing and there was all sorts of fighting going on around the edges and even closer in to the city than it had been and they reported one of the South Vietnamese helicopters had been shot down in a certain spot and the VC were still in the area. General Truong was going to take me and the congressmen that I put up in the Consul General's residence out because they wanted to see what was happening in the region. General Truong pilots this helicopter and I'm with him and the congressmen were there and I know where we're flying. We're flying right over to the area where they were fighting four or five hours before. At a certain point I looked out, and we were right over that helicopter that had been shot down. I've got a helicopter full of congressmen and I called up to General Truong. I said, "General, I know where we are." He started laughing. Then we flew over other areas and I remember this one congressman who had been a marine in I Corps several years before and he was astounded by what he saw, how peaceful certain areas looked because when he was there, there were no rice paddies in certain areas. There was much more land under cultivation. It just looked so good. He couldn't believe all the improvements that had taken place since he had been there before and I said, "Is that an indication then that maybe we're entitled to the aid that we promised?" He said, "It's too late. The American people won't stand for it." He was quite impressed with what he'd seen. (Note: This Congressman was Mr. Murtha of Pennsylvania. End note)

Q: Terry, how did you get out and how did you get the kids out?

TULL: Well, as I say I got to Saigon on the last regularly scheduled Air America flight and the children were down there. They had already gone down with their mother. They had a home in Saigon as well as in Da Nang. I had met these children at the general's home. I can't say I had actually met them. I had gone there for dinner once and at a certain point after dinner, the little girl, the tiniest little thing, cutest little thing, came out and played some Beethoven to knock your socks off on the piano which was wonderful, and then the older girl played something nicely, too. I had seen them, let's put it this way. I should also add that it was not uncommon at that time

to take children out of the collapsing country. In this case I agreed to take these children because I never in my wildest dreams thought that General Truong would get out of the country. I thought that he would go down with the ship. When I agreed to take these children it was forever. I mean it was adoption, ultimately. Other people came to me and all of a sudden asked could you take my child, just get them out of the country and I had to say I couldn't, that I was already committed. I didn't say for whom. I was already committed.

At any rate I'm in Saigon and at a certain point Ambassador Martin decided we had to thin out the ranks and get people out because I think even he was maybe starting to see the handwriting, although I doubt it because the word that came to me was that he was finding it a negative impact on staff morale to have the shell shocked officers and staff from Da Nang and II Corps wandering the corridors looking for something to do to help out. At any rate, I left, but in the meantime it had been arranged then that I was to have the three children who were 9, 11, and 15, two girls and a boy. When I went to see General Truong at the hospital, he said he had met with President Thieu. I guess Thieu had come to see him in the hospital and wanted to know if there was anything he could do for him and Truong said yes, give me passports for my children. I mean I knew in the background from what I'd heard from Graham Martin that Thieu was fearful of a coup and some people wanted Truong to replace him. He got passports for his children without jumping through multiple hoops. I took those passports in to see the Consul General in Saigon, a nice guy. I went in to see him and I had these passports and I said I have these three children whom I'm going to take to the States and they're going to live with me. If the situation here stabilizes, they'll come back. If it doesn't, they'll stay with me. I said I will support them. There will be no problem with that. I need visas. He looks at me and looks at the passports and says, "Yes, sounds like a B2 to me."

Q: I had that job, you know, when you say, oh well, what the hell.

TULL: Right. Sounds like a B2, you know. Anyway I got the visas for the kids and then I went to see the kids at their home and that's when I actually met them and shook their hand and learned their names and all that. I made arrangements because at this time the ambassador is saying get out of country and I had already, I had long made plans for a long vacation trip with a friend who had been with AID and retired and came back to Saigon and we were going to travel for about two months. When this happened I was going to get the kids I figured well, I'll just cancel that, but I had to leave the country before the kids did. I sent a cable to my brother on the West Coast. He lives in Washington State and he and his wife were just super people. He's a retired naval officer and they had a large family. They had a huge house and just a couple of kids were left at home. One of the things they had done because they were that type is that they had taken in a Colombian girl under the Rotary Club live abroad type thing, whatever it was. I knew it would be no problem, so I just sent them a cable saying I have to leave Saigon. I have acquired three Vietnamese children ages 9, 11 and 15, may I send them to you? I got an answer back right away, yes of course, by all means send them to us so that's what I did. I typed basically a statement for General Truong and his wife to say, I, so and so hereby give control or whatever of my children so and so to Theresa Tull and blah, blah. Then I gave them a letter saying this is the person they're going to go with, my brother in Washington State near Seattle, and then I had to leave the country. My brother by the way insisted I take the vacation because by this time we had gotten through on the phone and he called me in Saigon and I said, I'm going to cancel my trip.

He says, no, your life is changing; you don't know how much your life is changing. You take that vacation; you'll need every minute of it, particularly to recover from what you're going through. You get the children to us. We'll take care of them. It will be no problem. Anyway, that's what I did. It did work out. I left nervous as a cat, when were the kids getting out? I went to Bangkok and on down to Pattaya and I just chilled for a few days. I kept calling home to find out what was what. The children did get safely to my brother. I had them for two years. They're just the greatest kids. They're my family. They're wonderful.

Q: Terry, this is a good place to stop and we'll pick this up, I mean your adoptive three children have arrived in Washington State with your brother. You have left. This was in?

TULL: Its April of '75.

Q: April of '75 and we'll pick it up at that point.

TULL: Okay.

Q: Today is March 31st, 2005. This is one day after the was it the 30th anniversary of the fall of Da Nang.

TULL: I think it was.

Q: Not a date we want to particularly over remember.

TULL: Yes, that's right.

Q: Anyway, so you went to Bangkok. Then what happens? I mean we're talking about April of 1975.

TULL: I was pretty shaken up as you can imagine and I had made plans, long-standing plans with a friend that at the conclusion of my tour in Da Nang I was going to take a really long leave. I had leave built up for a long time and we were going to in effect take a trip around the world. Of course all of this happened before I acquired the three children. I told my brother who had agreed to receive them that I would cancel that trip and come home and he said no. You do the trip, your life is changing because when I took the children the idea was they'd be mine forever if that's the way it was going to work out. One didn't know. Everything was uncertain, but they were given to me forever, if necessary. He insisted no, take the trip. I went down to Pattaya and just mourned for a few days just tried to get over things. I'm not over it even now. Then my friend joined me in Bangkok and we then proceeded to have a most interesting trip. At each stop we made I would communicate with the Department to try to find out what was happening with my children and found out that they had gotten out and I got in touch with my brother and yes, he had received them. Then I remember being in Nairobi and I submitted an offer to sponsor the children's father and mother so that they could get out. I did that at various stops along the way, checking to see what was what. Anyway, I got myself back to the States. It was a fascinating trip. We spent a week on a houseboat in Kashmir. When I think of all the troubles in Kashmir in recent years! This was like being taken from hell and placed in heaven, in a Shangri-La type

situation. We did a photo safari in Africa, in Kenya and Tanzania, so we had quite a trip. By coming back that way and through Europe it concluded the trip around the world for me because I had gone out via the Pacific route when I went to Vietnam. So, I got back in the States and then discovered that thank God against all the odds really in my view the children's father and mother had gotten out of the country. Apparently Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky had gone to the Vietnamese military headquarters where General Truong had become by default by the departure of other senior officers the senior official in the military. He was acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was going to go down with the ship, I knew this, this is why I got the kids out. On the very last day, however, Vice President Ky went out to the headquarters and told General Truong he had a spot on his helicopter for him. He told him the U.S. Ambassador had left, and he in effect ordered General Truong to leave with him and gave him a spot on his helicopter. They flew out to the Blue Ridge; a U.S. ship called the Blue Ridge.

Q: The Blue Ridge was a command ship, yes.

TULL: Yes. They flew out there. They ended up in Guam initially.

Q: How about his wife?

TULL: She had gotten out a few days before. She didn't want to go. I learned that they had five children. I took the three middle children. I didn't even know there was an older boy who was a teenager, I guess he was maybe 17 and he was in school in Saigon and they didn't tell me about him or I would have taken him. Apparently later his father said, no, he felt that the boy should stay and fight like he intended to do. He didn't get out right away. Then there was a three-year-old whom I had offered to take, but the mother could not bear to be parted with the three-year-old. I think they were being practical, too, figuring I was going to work and these three kids would be in school. If I had a three-year-old it would be a little difficult.

As the situation deteriorated they did take me up on my offer and they sent that little boy to my brother, but they sent him with a non-American employee of the embassy. It might have been someone who worked with the CIA, I don't know. But the way it developed from my point of view, and I may be being totally unfair, I had the feeling that that person viewed that little boy as his ticket out and his ticket into a better situation because he was able to persuade the authorities not to release that boy to my brother. That little boy ended up having a very traumatic experience in a refugee camp instead of being taken immediately up to where he had a sponsor and to join his brother and sisters. He spent several weeks in a refugee camp with this older man who thought hey, I've got the general's kid, I'm going to get out of this camp. That's me being a little cynical, maybe that happened, maybe it didn't, but I know that child did not join my brother.

Then a few days before the final collapse, the general agreed with others who were saying, look get your wife and boy out of here, the older boy. The defense attaché's office in Saigon was running some flights and Mrs. Truong and the teenaged boy, they were flown to Guam. They got out, so the only one out left in country was the children's father.

My brother and his wife told me that about 2:00 a.m. in the morning one day they got a phone call, and it was the children's mother calling from Guam and they said it was Christmas and

Halloween and Easter and Tet. Those kids were so excited that their mother had gotten out of country.

At any rate, there we were. I got back to the States and discovered that other U.S. officials including some high ranking military officers had also been lining up offering to sponsor General Truong, as I had. So the person who actually did succeed in getting him out of the refugee camp was Lieutenant General Cushman, John Cushman. At that point Cushman was the commandant of the Commanding General Staff College at Leavenworth, Kansas. I was told this so I got in touch with him. My thought was, okay, he wants to sponsor the whole family and I have three of them sitting out in Washington State. Obviously this man's a three star general, I'm not even a mid-ranking officer -- let's say mid-ranking to put a bright light on it -- but I mean financially and everything else he had much more to offer. I called him, a very nice man.

Q: I knew him in Korea.

TULL: Yes. A good man. We were talking and I said, "Well, I guess you want to make arrangements to take the children. I have three of them. They're with my brother in Washington State." He says, "Now, wait a minute. The general is very fond of you and just so impressed with the fact that you have his children. I have seven children. A couple of them, two or three in college and coming up the line. I want to help as much as I can, but" He, in effect basically said it would be really helpful if I would keep those three children, and the general wants it that way, too. By this time he had gotten the general and his wife out of the camps and the two boys, the oldest child and the youngest child. I said, "Well, you know, I'm just a low ranking State Department officer" but I didn't even know the kids. I had seen them, but I was all prepared to love them. I loved them instantly because I had taken them on, but I said, "I would be happy to do it, this is what I was going to do, but are you sure it is best for the children?" He said, "Well, I would think so. Why don't you come see us all and we can talk it over with the general, but I know he wants you to have those children because he was so impressed and so fond of you." He wasn't putting this on. You had to see it in the context of the times.

In the meantime, my brother, God bless him, he and his wife, they were so wonderful to these kids and, one of their daughters, Suzy, was getting married. Of course, I'm in the States and I got in touch with them. I said, "I'll come get the children and bring them back." They said, "Theresa, they're really looking forward to Suzy's wedding." They had really gotten integrated with the family; they'd been with them at this point for about two months. "They're really eager for the wedding. Why don't you take your time in getting yourself set up in Washington and then when you come out for the wedding we can talk about when you take them to DC." I agreed. I stopped and spent a couple of days in Leavenworth at General Cushman's residence on my way out to the West Coast for the wedding. The Truongs and I had a bittersweet reunion. It was quite clear to me that the general really wanted me to have those children.

Q: General Truong.

TULL: General Truong. That was fine with me. This was the commitment that I had made. He was every bit as honest as we always said he was. He got out with absolutely nothing and was just one wonderful person. His wife was going along with it, too because I think the way it

worked out was General Cushman, I think he kept the oldest boy, Diep, kept him with him for a year or two and then another General Hal Cooksie, was back in Washington and both of these men were trying to get General Truong work. Well, what ultimately evolved was the Department of the Army established a historical project where they engaged some of these generals to write their impressions of the war -- particular aspects of strategy and tactics and the like -- and that gave them some employment and got them back to the Washington area. So, General Cooksie and his wife were very helpful, too. I think Cooksie, between them Cooksie and Cushman, they got Truong into this project and befriended them, and helped in various ways. In fact when they came back to Washington initially they stayed for a few days with Cooksie who at that time had a beautiful house on the National War College grounds. I went over and visited them there, visited the Truongs. Then he helped them find a little place. Well, they ended up renting a very modest little apartment in Falls Church and I rented a house for me and the children.

At that point I owned a one bedroom apartment, the one we're sitting in here now in Foggy Bottom, Washington, but I rented a big old house on Ellicott Street, N.W. This apartment was rented. I had a good renter at the time when I was overseas. He was with the International Monetary Fund, so I just kept it rented and I found this big house that I could afford and it was right off of Wisconsin Avenue so transportation was good. I got my things out of storage and moved it in and got ready for the kids.

I had been wiped out in Vietnam. Anything I had in Vietnam was gone. All my linens. Oh, it was a mess. Linens, cutlery, private pictures, the whole thing. So, I'm here, I've got three kids and I don't have a sheet or a towel to my name. I don't have a cup or saucer. I had to start from scratch and get the place squared away. Get it ready to receive the kids. I got the sequence wrong. I didn't do the renting of the house until after the wedding, after I had visited in Leavenworth and was convinced that this was what the general wanted. Then I went to Washington State. Then I came back and did all this so they could stay there and have a wonderful time with my brother. I mean he and his wife had a big house and they only had two of their nine children left at home and there was a horse and they just had a wonderful time. This wedding was something they really wanted to be a part of. I went out and that's when I got to know the children, when I went out there for this wedding. They were just the greatest kids. They were so good. It was quite an experience and, we had a good time with the wedding. I remember the boy who was 11 at the time, very serious looking. In a picture you never see him smile. He's always very serious. He came over. I could play the piano a little, not much. The two girls were wonderful. They could play beautifully. I could play a little, so I was playing my brother's piano and he came over with his book of music that his sister had and he turned to this page and pointed to this particular piece and I said I don't know if I can do that, so I tried that and he liked that and he said his uncle used to play that in Vietnam. I said okay. Then the next thing I know he's come downstairs and he has two shirts in his hand and he wants to know which shirt should he wear to the wedding. I thought well, I've made it with this boy. He's accepting my role, so the two of us talked about the shirt. It was great. The girls were much more outgoing and forthcoming and smiling.

I'll bore you with one little anecdote my brother told me when I was out there. It occurred when I was there, but the youngest girl was nine and she looked to be about six. She was very small. On the day before the wedding, most of my brother's kids had come from parts of the country.

They're all zipping around having a good time. They've got to hop into a car and drive into town and check out something. They all hop into the car and there's no room for little Tram, and she was heartbroken and she stands there. This whole group of lively girls is going to go off to town and she starts crying. Well, my brother stops the car. He had been a pretty strict person. He says, "What's going on?" "Well, we don't have room." "Take another car and take Tram. This child has been with us for two months going through everything she's been through and she's never shed a tear. I'm not going to have her crying because you're going off to town without her." "Oh, okay." I thought that was sweet. They had a good time. Anyway, I came back to DC and that's when I rented the house and got everything squared away for them. One of the benefits of all of this which I had not realized at the time was a benefit was I had been assigned to the Southeast Asia unit in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research which I did not want. I did not want INR under any circumstances, but as it turned out it worked out well for me personally because it was a routine job. You know what I mean? The other jobs I'd had at State, I never knew when I was leaving. When I was on the Vietnam Working Group, 7:00 p.m., 8:00 p.m., whatever, but this was a routine job in terms of hours and it proved to be much more interesting than I had expected. I enjoyed it. Enjoy is maybe the wrong word. I think I learned a lot from it by stepping back from the action oriented things, doing the longer think pieces. It was useful.

FRED CHARLES THOMAS, JR
ICCS Liaison Office
Saigon (1973-1975)

Fred Charles Thomas Jr. was born in Arizona in 1927. He served overseas with the Army for two years before graduating from Bucknell University in 1951. He has served at overseas posts in Korea, Pakistan, Germany, Vietnam, and India, as well as the Office of Strategic Research in Washington DC. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1995.

Q: You served in Vietnam from when to when?

THOMAS: From '73 to '75. I got there, and I was, first of all...

Q: When did you get there in '73?

THOMAS: Spring of '73. They not only sent me to learn French, but they also sent me to the consular course here in the Department. I was to be the supervising consul in Saigon. I didn't look forward to that.

Q: You're talking to the man who was the consul general in Saigon.

THOMAS: Is that right?

Q: Yes. I was there '69-'70.

THOMAS: Is that right? I was to go there at that time. It was a "rule or law based" job, and I didn't want it. Then suddenly it was changed to my being one of a group of officers to replace those assigned to the ICCS liaison office. They'd had a group in there on TDY, four officers, to handle this function, and the last of them was leaving just as I got there. He was the only one left. I got there and had a week's overlap with him.

Q: Could you explain what the ICCS is.

THOMAS: The ICCS was set up by the Paris conference in February of that year to oversee the keeping of the peace. It had four member states in it, each headed by an ambassador, with a general officer. Each delegation consisted of about 200-250 people. We're talking about 1,000 people in total. It started out with the Canadians and the Indonesians being the Western representatives, and the Hungarians and the Poles being the Communist representatives in this organization. You know, Communist. The guy I was replacing, he wasn't much help to me. He was too busy going to parties in his honor and leaving. I was not to be the boss man. The boss I awaited was a man named Pratt Byrd. I don't know if you know Pratt.

Q: Yes, I do.

THOMAS: Well, Pratt was to be boss; there was also to be a junior officer assigned, total of three people and a secretary. Pratt was leaving his wife in the States. I'd left my wife here. On the way out there, I had heard that there had been one officer in the political section, who was a Chinese linguist, who was leaving just as I was arriving, who had been allowed to keep his family on Taiwan. But Taiwan was a place where only AID people were generally kept. State people were kept in Bangkok. I wanted to keep mine, for Chinese-language reasons, on Taiwan. If I was going to run back and forth, it'd help my Chinese. My wife spoke Chinese. It'd be just more pleasant. On the way out, I stopped at the embassy there in Taiwan and went to the AID people and tried to talk them into letting me be there. They didn't want to do it. The embassy in Taiwan wasn't much help.

I arrived in Saigon. We had an acting ambassador at the time. He was leaving, and our new ambassador hadn't arrived yet; everything was in limbo until Martin arrived.

Q: Graham Martin.

THOMAS: I went to see him about trying to put my family in Taiwan, and ask for his help. He said, "Well, wouldn't you like to bring your family here?"

No families with school age children had been allowed.

I said, "Why sure."

He said, "If you can get your kids in this local school, I'll let you bring your family."

This was a breakthrough.

I went around to see the Phoenix school people. It was a little school run by the missionaries, and they agreed to let my kids in. The minute I got there, they said, "We can't handle very many, but we'll let your children in." I got a piece of paper from them saying so.

Thus the ambassador authorized the Department to cut orders for my wife and children to come to Saigon. I went to Hong Kong to meet them on their way out.

In the meantime, Pratt Byrd arrived. But he wasn't bringing his wife; she was going to stay in the States. We were just starting to roll.

First of all, you have to understand that the ICCS office there was not popular. We were given what had been the administrative counselor's office, on the first floor of the embassy because we had to have access to these four delegations. Also, they didn't want them to go where there was anything classified. So the first-floor big office suite for the administrative counselor was turned over to us. Pratt and I shared those quarters. There were four offices: three smaller offices and the big office, which was also a conference room. The secretary had the office between mine and Pratt's, the junior officer had the office behind mine and Pratt had the big one, the conference room.

We stocked the refrigerator with booze. It was a different type operation than you usually have because the Hungarians and Poles drink in the middle of the day.

We decided to throw a party. Pratt asked me if I could finance it. At the time, I thought I could, until we got paid off by the embassy. He said, "But if we go ask permission, they're not going to give it to us because you know what they think about us."

First of all, the ambassador didn't like the ICCS; he made it very clear. He didn't like the concept of the ICCS; he didn't like these Communists who were there. It was that type situation. He had arrived subsequent to the arrival of each of the ambassadors who headed each of the ICCS delegations. According to protocol, he's to call on them; they're not to call on him. He was damned if he was going to call on any of them. You can understand the problems, from a diplomatic standpoint.

Q: Oh, yes.

THOMAS: And then you had four generals.

We had a military attaché, Colonel Charles Wahle. I got to know him well, and we became good friends. The air attaché, Colonel Garvin McCurdy, and I became friends.

At the first party we held, we invited the diplomatic corps, the press corps, or a big percentage of it. We invited every officer from the ICCS, both military and civilian, that was available, and all their female clerks. We invited a smattering of people from various sections of the embassy. And, of course, other diplomats from all the embassies. We borrowed the military attaché's house, which had been Westmoreland's mansion. If you know Saigon, you know that big mansion Westmoreland had.

Q: I never went there.

THOMAS: You know it sat on a... It had a porte-cochère and big rooms, and it was great for throwing parties. We borrowed it to throw this party. We hired a dance orchestra that played Myer Davis... style music. I enlisted the guy that ran the ICCS club to cater it, on the basis there was not to be any profit. I'd help him, look after him, but no profit. He agreed to this. You didn't take a loss, but no profit. In the end, I think it cost about \$1,250 for this party of about 300 people.

I submitted the bill, but nobody was willing to pay it. They gave us \$200. I was out \$1,000 at this point. You know, I just sat there on this \$1,000. I said to Pratt, "You got any money?"

He said, "No. You know, I've got kids in college."

I said, "Well, maybe I've got to swallow this one."

In the meantime, the party was a real success.

As a matter of fact, the New York Times correspondent who was there made the crack to Pratt Byrd that he never saw so many spooks dancing with so many spooks in all his life. You know, the place was just loaded with all these people spying on each other.

Then the chief of station came around and wanted to know when we were going to throw another party like that one. So did the Colonel Wahle the senior military attaché, come around. I said, "I can't afford to throw parties like that. Nobody's paying for it."

Our boss was Joe Bennett, and Bennett said, "Well, I can get you \$200." But, what's \$200 to \$1,250? Joe was the minister for political affairs.

It was interesting, in the end, the military attaché tried throwing a similar party, and none of these people would come to his party. We're talking ICCS Communists.

The CIA station chief tried to throw a similar party; none of these people would come to his party. I mean a few, but just the top. And they wanted more than the top.

When they had their parties they fell on their faces. They made it so obvious that they were targeting the communist delegations... nobody came except the usual senior types.

So then they came to us, both of them, with a chunk of money, and said, "Here's your \$1,000. When are you going to have another party?"

I said, "I want it up front."

During our tour there until the fall of Saigon, we threw, I think, two or three of those big parties, which got people together that you couldn't get out of the woodwork otherwise. You never

would have met them.

Q: What was your impression? Here was this outfit, the ICCS, which was supposed to make sure that the truce held and that...

THOMAS: Oh, it was a spying mission for the Communists. In the end, the Canadians backed out, and the Iranians came in and took their place.

I had to travel frequently, going around to all these different bases. Out of this, I received quite an education as to what was really going on in Vietnam. In the evening, when I'd be out at these various places all over the country, I would go to the local American sponsored bar where the young men (because everybody was there alone pretty much) hung out, these State, AID, and CIA people all there, and talk to them about what they were doing and what was happening out there. You know, things weren't going well; it was pretty obvious, talking to these young people.

For the record, there was one major incident which fully illustrates the extremes we were willing to go to kid ourselves about the truth of the situation in Vietnam. There was a report of a mortar shelling of a grammar school yard full of playing children down in the Canto area. The South Vietnamese government blamed the communists. The ICCS investigated and said it was the South Vietnamese Army which had been responsible. The embassy took the position that these children' deaths were due to the communists. The pressure was on our office to give the ICCS hell. Pratt was drafting a memo to that effect. In Germany my wife and I had become friends with a couple who worked for the CIA through my wife's involvement with the local women's club. This CIA officer was by then in Saigon. Because his wife wasn't there, we would invite him to our home for diner occasionally. We were working late the evening that all of this was happening when he dropped by my office. Off the record, he told me he had just been with a high ranking Vietnamese agent who had told him that the mortar shell had been fired by mistake by the South Vietnamese Army. None of this ever came out at the country team meeting. The embassy continued to insist that the communists were responsible. Pratt Byrd and I shut up on that topic fast. We quit blaming the communists.

We paid all the bills for the ICCS through our embassy liaison office. These countries weren't paying for this; this was part of the agreement. Other people were supposed to kick in money, but nobody was but us. Since it was Kissinger's idea, we, in the end, put up all the money. We contracted for more airplanes from Air America than CIA did. I think about two-thirds of Air America was under contract to ICCS.

Q: Air America was renowned as being a CIA operation, although it was a commercial operation.

THOMAS: But we leased and had the ICCS insignia on these airplanes. More of their airplanes were flying missions for ICCS than were flying for AID; they also flew for AID. There was an AID office responsible for air operations, and the same for CIA. But we had most of them.

Q: But, as a practical matter, the North Vietnamese knew what was going on in South Vietnam. Obviously, they were getting good information.

THOMAS: Yet they were using these Communists delegations for quick passage of information.

Q: But I'm just trying to figure out what a Pole or a Hungarian could really contribute.

THOMAS: Communication facility. Speedy communication. That was really what they were contributing. Admittedly, they didn't know. They were like a lot of Americans. But they could move information (because they had the right to move information) much faster. It'd go to Europe and come right back.

In time, we had a situation grow up there in which the ambassador's daughter became a close friend or knew... Well, let's put it this way, the Iranian ambassador, an older man in his '50s, had married a younger woman, a British young woman, who had been working for the British Embassy in Rome where they met. She was a pretty blonde; she was his third wife, I think. Martin had, I think, been posted to Rome.

Q: He'd been ambassador to Rome, and, I think, had also been administrative officer in Rome. So he was an old Roman hand.

THOMAS: That's right. Well, his daughter had become a close friend of this young woman when she worked for the British Embassy in Rome while they were there. And she had been working for MI6 in Rome.

Q: Which is...

THOMAS: British secret intelligence. She then married this Iranian ambassador who was sent out to be ambassador to the ICCS for the Iranians. Here she was running around with the ambassador's daughter in Saigon. The Iranian ambassador wanted to socialize with our ambassador, but our ambassador refused. He didn't want to set a precedent, because he didn't want to do any business with any of these other ambassadors, especially the two Communist ambassadors.

An Indonesian ambassador, who'd been there since the beginning, wanted to socialize with our ambassador. He couldn't call on him, because for protocol reasons, he couldn't do that. He made it pretty obvious to me that he felt that this was wrong. He wanted to have a party in the ambassador's honor and have me and Pratt Byrd there.

First of all, the word got around through the ICCS that Pratt (whose wife wasn't there; he was running back to the States regularly to see his family; he spoke both Hungarian and Indonesian) was a spook. Therefore, people were more willing to deal with me, in terms of the diplomatic problems, than they were with Pratt. He was in and out of there, and so I was in charge a for extended periods regularly.

Q: One of the big problems in Vietnam was the fact that we had these R&R trips out, and people's tours were relatively short, so it was a little hard to keep a contact with anybody there.

THOMAS: That's right. I was there, and I was doing all the entertaining for the office in my home, the dinner parties and all that stuff. The ambassador wasn't entertaining any of these people. Any entertaining of their ambassadors, we did.

Q: Moving away from the social side...

THOMAS: But it made a difference in terms of who got to know what and who got to hear what. In the end, the social thing made for who was telling who what, and who was learning what was going on, and what, in the end, happened as we got further into the problem of the ICCS; what it ended up being able to do for us, which was never clearly understood by the ambassador or by the embassy as a whole. The communist delegations were there doing what you could expect them to do, from the Communist side. They were acting as a communication link for their espionage systems back to Saigon, and a very good one.

In the meantime, one learned a lot about these Communist people, and you learned many of them weren't very happy with the Russians. If you got to be friendly with some of them, got to know some of them, they could be helpful to us, in an informal, but very important, way. And that's, in essence, what happened in the end.

But I was starting to tell this story because the social things that occurred caused many problems, and it had an effect on my relationship with various people in that embassy.

Consequently, I sat down and wrote a memo. Pratt was out of the country. The Indonesian ambassador was pushing me for this dinner party for our ambassador. Our ambassador sent word back to me that, no, just have him come in and call on me. Well, I knew I couldn't say that, because you just couldn't do that. It was against protocol. Anybody doing the calling would be our ambassador. I wrote a memo explaining all this to our ambassador, and sent it through Joe Bennett, and a drop copy to the then deputy chief of mission, who was a quiet sort of man who didn't like rocking the boat. He was Wolf Lehmann's predecessor.

Then the ambassador decided he wanted to have a meeting. Pratt got back, and he wanted to have a meeting with the two of us. Since Pratt didn't know about my memo, the ambassador asked me, about the word he sent down to me "What about this meeting that I suggested you have him come in and call on me?"

I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, didn't you get my memo?"

He said, "What memo?"

I looked at the DCM and the chief of the political section, "Didn't you give him my memo?" Never got past them. They were scared to send it to him.

I explained what was in it.

It became obvious that I couldn't go through these guys and get anything done because they were scared of the ambassador.

Q: He was an interesting person, let's put it this way. A very difficult person.

THOMAS: He turned to me and said, "You're right. I can't do that."

When I explained what was in the memo, he agreed with me.

Nothing came of it all. But because of his daughter's relationship with the Iranian ambassador's wife he started seeing the Iranian ambassador on the q.t. This caused all type problems for us with the Indonesian ambassador. But he'd only see him once in a while, because he said this was going to cause too many problems.

Most of the information that we were getting about what was happening in the ICCS came from the Iranian ambassador who was a smart cookie. At the same time, through contracts the ICCS had, its own communications net, a telephone system that was separate from both the military and Vietnamese civil systems, both micro wave and regular land lines had been installed by a contractor. ICCS had its own logistics system and its own air system. It gave our office a great deal of independence. It was all connected into and coming through our office, as was the money for support of the ICCS coming through our office. That meant we had a lot of leverage. But we had very little leverage with the front office in the embassy. This become clearer all the time to all of us. We were frustrated because we weren't getting any moral support. The money was there, and we were paying it out. We could do anything we wanted on our own. I saw advantages, not just disadvantages, in this situation.

At the same time, I got to know many of these Communists. One of them was a Pole. We had him for dinner, just alone, one night at my home. He became tight not drunk. He started talking about his youth and how the Nazis had killed his whole family. He then became a Communist. But became fed up with the Jews, because, in Poland, the Jewish Communists were just looking after other Jews. You couldn't get into a university if you weren't Jewish. It was a special game for them. He went on a lot about that. It turned out he was a very devout Catholic. I listened to all this. Over time, we got to be closer and more friendly; he'd tell me pretty much anything I'd ask for.

In the meantime, Pratt was home on leave. A young man, who was a West Pointer, had been brought out there by the ambassador, whose son roomed with this West Pointer while taking a Master's Degree here at Georgetown. This young man, named Ken Moorefield, met the ambassador through the ambassador's son.

Q: He was killed in Vietnam.

THOMAS: Moorefield had been decorated in Vietnam. He'd become a captain, had left the Army, and was looking around for something to do. The ambassador offered him a job, to come out to Vietnam as his personal aide. Ambassadors can do this. Ken Moorefield ended up in the ambassador's office, and got bored stiff up there. It was over-staffed with people; I think two or three secretaries. He just sort of ran around... We met, got to kidding each other; although, I was older, he liked me. He said he'd like to come to work as the junior officer in the section which he

did. Pratt was away, and he and I got to discussing my frustration with the damned system, that nobody was paying attention to us, we were just third wheels there, and yet this was a function that had to be done.

He said, "What the hell. You know, you've got to make a political play sometimes. Why don't you just go and walk into the goddamned country team meeting and sit down?"

I said, "You know, I think I've got a good mind that I'll just do that."

They had a country team meeting once a week. When the country team meeting came up, I walk in and sat down. Joe Bennett looked at me with a stare of astonishment. But I just smiled at him and nodded. Nobody there knew whether the ambassador had invited me.

Q: Of course, you've got to take into context that the ambassador was known by some as almost a spider king. He played things very close to his chest, so you never knew what the ambassador had in mind.

THOMAS: That's right. I had this in mind when I did it, because the ambassador had seen me say, "You didn't send my memo?" So the next time Pratt was out of the country, I made this move. The ambassador greeted me pleasantly that morning. It soon became obvious, because I kept going to these meetings, that there were three people in the room that he treated with respect. I mean, he didn't cuss them out. Because he'd just cuss people out in front of each other. He'd give the AID director hell or the director of USIS. All these people had worked for him before. They'd all been brought there by him. They all sort of cowered in front of him. The only people he didn't pick on were Tom Polgar, who was the CIA station chief; Colonel Wahle, who was the senior military attaché there, who was the true military... (we had a general out there, for logistics reasons, but he wasn't running the intelligence side of it); and me. He treated us well. But the rest of the people got treated pretty badly in those meetings.

Out of going to those meetings, I started listening to all this stuff going on, from this fellow who was a friend of Moorefield's, Frank Snapp.

Q: He wrote a book, Decent Interval, which was very controversial.

THOMAS: Snapp was the briefer for CIA. And listening to these briefings once a week, I thought, Christ, this is 180 degrees out of phase with everything I hear when I go on these trips. If they believe this stuff, everything was fine; everything was rosy out there in the provinces. It was just the opposite, when you went out there and talked to the junior officers doing the reporting.

Q: When you arrived there in the spring of '73, how did you see the situation? What was going on in Vietnam?

THOMAS: My first trip out to the provinces didn't come until late summer of '73 because I was waiting for Pratt to arrive. We had to divide up the functions. He said, "I'm going to be traveling a lot, going to the States to see my family. I'll sit here in the office. You travel and come back

and tell me what the hell's going on."

So I did an awful lot of traveling out to Hue, to Canto, and to all these different places where they had these stations for the ICCS. I got to know all the ex-master sergeants that had been hired to manage these places. I came to understand the communications net they had. I had a telephone installed in my office that was right on that communications net so that I could pick it up and be into that net immediately. I had one put into my home, separate from the regular telephone system, so that I could talk and be in communication with these various bases and the Americans that were hired there, on my own, and find out from them what was going on. In essence, I had a chain of information that was separate from the embassy's. I had a transportation system, with the Air America bit, that was separate from the embassy's. I could move around without having to bother the embassy much. Since they were treating us pretty much as separate anyway, until I got myself going to the country team meetings, why...

Because ICCS controlled so much of Air America, we were on the evacuation committee. In other words, there was an evacuation committee that had been set up as part of the standard embassy, with the air attaché being the chairman of it, and the administrative counselor, the military attaché and myself being on it. This comes in later in the story.

From the time I got there, things were not going too badly, in the fall of '73. You didn't find the negative aspects of the reporting that I was getting later on. But, at that time, I wasn't going to country team meetings; so I didn't know what was being said there. But things weren't so bad out in the provinces. There had been a lull in the fighting. There seemed to be plenty of munitions arriving. Everywhere I went were big ammunition dumps full of stuff for our side. Everywhere. You'd go up near Pleiku, and there were just fields of supplies and munitions. You found, let's say, up through '73, things seemed to be going all right, relatively.

But, as we got into '74, I was going to the country team meetings. Let's say early spring '74, things were starting to turn around, and they didn't look as good, in terms of the pressure being put on. Not that they were losing any ground at that point, but there was more pressure, more fighting. From what I gathered at the time... we were reporting, and I was reporting back with all I was learning... One of the problems was that much of what I reported back I reported to Pratt, and then he would write it up in cables. Well, we made an agreement that, if the cable never got out of there (in many cases, it never did; it never saw the light of day), we would keep the unsent cable form on file in the chron file...

Q: You're talking about from the top. Graham Martin kept a very tight lid on what went in and out.

THOMAS: I kept saying that this stuff should be going to Moscow, because Moscow was as responsible for everything going on there as anybody. He wouldn't let us send a drop copy of anything to Moscow.

Q: Our embassy in Moscow.

THOMAS: Our embassy in Moscow. He wouldn't let us write anything to Moscow. I felt that

this was wrong. I believed that Kissinger's detente policy with the Soviets was being falsely oversold as a part of a strategy to help Nixon who was under attack over Watergate. Thus, nothing could be said that might indicate that the Soviets were blatantly undermining the Paris Accords which they were doing.

When I first got there, only two members of the political section were what you'd call liberal in political thinking (we're talking American politics), and that was Pratt Byrd and me. There were 30-some officers in the political section. That's a pretty big political section.

Q: Oh, yes, biggest in the world, at that time.

THOMAS: I remember this was the fall of '73 and winter. They had a party for the total political section that was hosted by the chief, Joe Bennett. I'd gotten to be friendly with his wife, because she's Chinese and we talked Chinese. My wife did too, because they took Taiji together. Joe liked me, but he was a milquetoast, if you know Joe.

Q: I don't.

THOMAS: Well, he was a very milquetoast fellow. Anyway, everybody was standing around at this Christmas party, and, about this time, the whole Nixon thing was the rage.

Q: We're talking about Watergate.

THOMAS: Watergate was the rage topic. I made a bet with Joe Bennett in front of everybody that Nixon would be out of office by the end of the next July. Everybody there was for Nixon -- oh, he was a great guy.

A flashback comes to me re Vietnam; if I've told this story, stop me. The flashback came right now that's important in all this, in terms of my approach to Vietnam, in being there and having talked about it.

At the time of the Geneva Conference in '54, there were certain people in the embassy wanting to send me to Geneva, to be there for the... because Korea was part of the...

Q: I think you did mention this.

THOMAS: All right. When I went off to language school and learned Korean at the Army Language School, right after I got home from there, in '54, I met some of my classmates from West Point, who had been in the Army and had been captains. We'd sit around and drink at the officers' club (they were bachelors), in the evening, and I'd preach the concept that, in Vietnam, we need special forces. We need, not regular Army, we need support for them. But they've got to fight their own war. We can't fight that. This is too nationalistic. It's not going to work, etc.

The thing that hit me, when I got to thinking about what they said, these young captains said, "Look, Fred, what you say I think is true. But it'll never happen, because of the military/industrial complex..." (You've got to remember, this is the Eisenhower period.) "The

military/industrial complex is too important in our country. They will never let this happen, an American war will be fought American style, with big tanks and all of that. The concept of special forces and what you're talking about will never fly. It will always be American style, because you can't sell big tanks to special-forces outfits."

Here we were, we got into Vietnam, and we were in the same old thing, but this time, we were trying to teach them, much too late, to fight their own war. And they weren't doing so well at it. The real trouble was that the leadership were creatures of French colonialism and lacked the will to fight; they were too corrupt.

The thing I wanted to say was all the cables that we didn't get to send were filed in with the cables we did. They were never torn up or thrown away. And this was an agreement Pratt and I had. So that when we boxed everything up to be shipped out of there, there was no time to go through anything. I didn't want to go through anything. I wanted everything saved, just the way it was. So we boxed it all up, at the end, and shipped it out. All that stuff was shipped. If historians are interested, what we wanted to say, but never got out of there, might be somewhere in archives.

Well, I'm trying to think of where we left off here. By the next spring...

Q: So we're talking about '74.

THOMAS: Through early '74, things were not as bad as they became in '75. But, in going into the fall of '74, you could see things turning downward.

Q: When you say "things," what are you talking about?

THOMAS: When you went out to the provinces and you got to talking to the junior officers, they would say, well...

Q: These were Vietnamese junior officers.

THOMAS: I didn't deal with Vietnamese junior officers, because, the Vietnamese wouldn't have anything to do with me. The only Vietnamese who were allowed to deal with me were General Hiep and a small group of people that were supposed to deal with the Communists. They were allowed to deal with the North Vietnamese, and they were allowed to deal with these delegations. But we were sort of pariahs, because we supported the ICCS which was not popular with the South Vietnamese government.

Q: So the officers you were talking to were American observers.

THOMAS: Observers who were at the grassroots level.

Q: With our consulates general as part of this.

THOMAS: Sometimes I would go to places where there weren't consulates general, but there

might be an AID guy out there, or there might be a CIA guy out there. I'd just hook up with anybody that was there, that spoke English, that was around. Usually I'd find a place to stay; maybe it'd be a local hotel, whatever. But, generally speaking, I'd stay right on the ICCS base. The sergeant in charge would have a place for me to stay. They had these little bases they'd built out there for the ICCS, and you had four different groups there.

Out of this, it was kept running, kept reporting. But it was frustrating, because, as you say, Martin didn't tell anybody anything. You had to guess at what was going on.

I feel, from being there at the time, that he himself was partially responsible for the speed with which Vietnam fell. However, as I said before, the basic fault was with the Vietnamese leadership, their corruption and lack of will to fight. As for Martin's responsibility, a lot of people didn't understand this, but a lot has to do with psychology. He understood a lot about psychology; therefore, he refused to request orders for people to get them out of there because he didn't want to scare the Vietnamese. That was his argument for not getting orders for the wives and families.

Even before he did that, he made a major error. The major error came when he returned to the States to lobby for more armament for South Vietnam.

There was so much armament (and I knew this from reading stuff and talking to the military attachés, because I'd become very close, socially, with them), tremendous amounts of military supplies in the pipeline, and there was so much money sitting around waiting and stuff to be shipped, that even if they cut off the budget to nothing immediately, it would take two to three years to finish off all this stuff. Talking about where they were going to cut the budget for the South Vietnamese army this year wasn't going to have any immediate effect. It was academic, really.

But Martin was back here, making this big fight in front of Congress, publicly, which was being read in South Vietnam, talking about giving up on our Vietnamese friends. Of course, he was hoping to get the Americans involved, but that wasn't going to happen, but it had its effect on Thieu.

Q: President Thieu.

THOMAS: By the winter of '74, things had gotten much worse. I felt that everything I was hearing up at the country team was all pipe dreams.

Q: I sort of keep coming back to this, but you keep saying things were getting much worse. Can you be specific? What are you talking about?

THOMAS: There was much more pressure, and the Vietnamese weren't handling it as well.

Q: When you talking about pressure...

THOMAS: Military pressure.

Q: In other words, were the places...

THOMAS: Little places were starting to fall. Little places. People were starting to pull back. Not in a big way, but in little ways. The North Vietnamese were getting much more aggressive in the way they were handling things; you saw this aggressiveness.

Around the first of the year, '75, a province north of Saigon, Phuoc Long that was up next to the border, fell. Anyway, the first real move came up there, on the part of the Communists, I think it was in early January, and the Communists took over that area. But everyone said, it's not too important; it's not like a major victory. Everybody was down-playing it.

Right after it happened, I walked three French nuns to see me. They said that in the past, during the Tet Offensive (and I'd been out there at Tet in '68, on a TDY), their people had been shot and killed in this town, and they didn't want a repeat of this. They'd had two nuns who'd been captured by the Communists up there, and was there anything I could do to help them?

I thought a minute, and I said, "Yes, I think so. Just let me make a phone call."

I called the Pole who I'd gotten to know personally, and who was said to be, by our intelligence people, the chief of what is the equivalent of the Polish KGB in Saigon. I explained what was going on to him about these French nuns, and would he be willing to help them?

He said, "Yes, send them over right away."

I sent them over to see him.

I guess it was maybe two or three weeks later, in came the French nuns, with two more, and an American with them, to thank me.

I said, "Well, you don't need to thank me. You've got to thank that Pole."

They said, "We wanted to thank you first."

The Pole, I remember, was a good Catholic. These two French nuns spoke fluent Vietnamese. They said they'd been terribly treated by the Vietnamese. Suddenly everything changed. They overheard one of the guard saying that some orders came out of Warsaw that they were to be given the VIP treatment. Everything changed, and suddenly they were infiltrated back through the lines and let go. But it was all due to this Pole.

I thanked the Pole, and they thanked the Pole. It showed you some things can be done in those situations, if one has made the right personal connection.

That was the first evidence that things were not going well, in a big way.

Q: Was the ICCS doing what it was supposed to be doing in this thing?

THOMAS: Our side was reporting back to their own governments, etc. For instance, in the fall, before the Iranian ambassador left, he predicted the fall of Vietnam by the summer of '75, and explained why and what was going on, from his own observations with his own people there. I wrote this all up for our ambassador. It was a big long report, concerning his own observations.

Ban-me-thuot was the next place to have trouble.

Q: Which was a major military center.

THOMAS: Up in the mountains, the south end of the defense of the central highlands. It was easier to attack than Pleiku and Kontum to its north and much less fortified. It had been the center of the area where the U.S. special forces had worked with the Montagnard tribe to defend the area. When it fell, a delegation of American missionaries called on me and asked for help. They had a group of medical missionaries there. At the time of Tet in '68, all of their staff there had been machine gunned by the communists. I immediately got in touch with this same Pole; he made sure no Americans were killed. He gave me periodic oral reports on what was happening to them. He told me they were being moved out of the area of combat for their safety.

The first thing that happened after the fall of Ban Me Thuot and during the time Martin was back in the States... It was on a Saturday morning.

Q: When are we talking about?

THOMAS: March, I think. Maybe mid-March.

Q: March '75.

THOMAS: (It was 15th March) I got a call from this retired master sergeant up at Pleiku, on this direct line I'd had put into my own home, on a Saturday morning at about lunch time, saying, "What do I do? I've got all these Poles and Hungarians and everybody here in this base. The senior American here is an AID official. He's quietly come around and told me and all the Americans to come with him and get the hell out of there, and to tell only the Indonesians and the Iranians that they were leaving, but not to tell the Communists, that there's a pullback out of Pleiku."

I said, "No, don't do that. You stay there with those people. Your orders are to stay there. Don't leave. And don't tell anybody anything at this point. I want to know about what's going on. We're not going to play favorites in this situation." (The retired American sergeant later was given a decoration by the Hungarians for remaining there.)

I knew the thing was getting hairy. Ban-me-thuot had fallen. The military attaché said, "We haven't got long here. This thing doesn't look good." It had to do with the Vietnamese leadership's lack of will to do anything. They didn't want to fight. At Ban-me-thuot, our own military said, "No reason for this, except they just didn't have the guts to fight."

I went immediately to the embassy. Wolf Lehmann, who was...

Q: Who was chargé at the time.

THOMAS: I went into Wolf's office and said, "What in the hell is going on up at Pleiku?"

He said, "I just found out. Yesterday or the day before, President Thieu went up to..." What was that place on the coast there? You know, the place that had the naval base.

Q: Oh, yes. Cam Ranh.

THOMAS: Cam Ranh Bay, that area there. He'd gone up there and called the CG of the Second Corps. The Second Corps headquarters was at Pleiku. First Corps was up at Hue, up in that area, but Second Corps headquarters was at Pleiku. He called the commanding general down there, from that Corps Hq., and told him he wanted him to make a strategic retreat out of Pleiku-Kontum and bring all his troops back to the coast with an ultimate objective of protecting Saigon. He hadn't consulted with the embassy. He hadn't consulted with anybody. But he'd been listening to Martin back in the States scream about cutting aid, and he got cold feet. There was ammunition galore up there; there was plenty of stuff to fight a war with. But he ordered this, and this rout had started before we even knew it was happening.

The embassy got a message from Pleiku, from this AID official, who said he'd been told by the general that he's pulling out and told them they should get out. And then he went to the ICCS guy, who called me. This was how this whole episode started.

When this happened in this way, I told my people to stay, for the time being. The others were all pulling out, and had pulled out. The rout was on. They walked away from the big ammunition dump full of stuff up there in the highlands, and moved back towards the coast, starting that morning, without our even knowing it was going to happen. All because Thieu lost his nerve.

In the meantime, we received orders to call, and only call, the Indonesians and Iranians. This was Wolf Lehmann giving me these direct orders, in his office. Kinsolving, the other ICCS liaison officer, was there, too. He was departing that afternoon for a family visit and would be gone for several weeks. We were not allowed to call anybody else.

I said, "Christ, this thing is falling. These Communists, I've made connections with them, and they can be of help in this situation in terms of saving American lives. The American Marine Corps is not going to come in here and save lives. We have Americans spread out all over this country."

Wolf Lehmann was going to be a tough guy. Of course, like in the Army, you say, "Yes, sir."

I wasn't about to give up yet. I went down the hall (this was on the top floor) to the other end, to see the chief of station. I said, "This can't be. You've got to go in there and talk him out of this idea. You've got some connections in the Hungarian Mission."

Q: Was it Shepley then?

THOMAS: No, it was Tom Polgar, a Hungarian Jew who spoke Hungarian. He said, "I know the orders. I got the same orders."

I said, "Will you go in and ask him for permission for you to tell the Communists that this is happening, so that we get some leverage with them out of this goddamned situation."

Q: You're not going to hide it.

THOMAS: I said, "First of all, you're not going to get the Communists to attack the Poles and the Hungarians. They're not going to get hurt. The only people, out of playing this little game, that have any chance of getting hurt are the other two sides, plus the Americans. These people are the friends of the Communists. What's the sense in this? This is just stupidity." Polgar tried but was turned down.

I heard later, through the grapevine, that my whole arguments were not just played out in that office; they were sent to Washington, via back channels, saying, you know, I don't agree with this either, but here's what my orders are, and here's what I... What happened to this argument was this ICCS liaison officer suggesting this same thing. Polgar was told again by Lehmann that he couldn't tell them.

That night, I got a call from the Hungarian, who was a real Commie son of a bitch of a young man, accusing me of just what Wolf Lehmann was trying to cause happen, get them killed.

I said, "What do you mean? I notified the Indonesian ambassador, who was chairman..." They had a chairman for the month, every month, and it changed every month. That month, it happened to be the Indonesian. I said, "He didn't tell you? Why, I took for granted he'd tell you." I shifted the whole goddamned blame, right then and there. Of course, I didn't tell him not to tell anybody, but it was taken for granted he wouldn't, and he didn't. So I shifted the blame, because I wanted to have access to these people.

From then on, I never went back to see Wolf Lehmann again, ever. I never went near his office. I started doing my own thing.

Moorefield and I started a pool betting on what day the place was going to fall.

Frankly, the ICCS people were out of Da-nang a week before our embassy started to pull the consulate general out of Da-nang. Da-nang had to go out by sea, and people nearly got killed there. It was so bad that, when I was getting the ICCS out of there a week earlier, I was on a phone directly to the Air America people who were landing planes at Da-nang to get them out. They didn't dare stop the airplane. You had to be loaded on the run, because this plane would be swamped with people. The planes would go down the runway, and we'd pick them up out of Jeeps. I was on the phone, talking to the pilots when all this was going on. We were getting people out of places when that's as bad as it is, while the embassy hadn't done a damn thing at this point about getting anybody out.

Because we got all these people out and nobody was hurt, I was somewhat of a hero to the ICCS people. But I hadn't brought a damn word up to Wolf Lehmann or anybody else. I just did my own thing.

Moorefield was close with Snepp and a fellow named Don Hays. Hays was a young officer in the Foreign Service who had done some duty temporarily as third man in our office. He'd been rotated through there. These young guys came to me, and said, "Look, you're the only senior officer in this whole embassy who seems to realize this place is falling."

That was in early March. By mid March, towns had fallen. From the fall at Pleiku in March up until nearly the end of March, my time was spent getting ICCS people out and worrying about that, paying bills, and just doing my own thing, and not talking to anybody else about it. I figured this would be useful.

In the meantime, the Pole was looking after and keeping me informed of what was happening to the Americans the Viet Cong had captured in various points around the country, this the chief of Polish intelligence, who was very helpful.

It was the last week in March. I was embassy duty officer starting at noon on a Thursday 27 March.. That gave me certain power in the embassy because you see everything that's coming in, and you've got the right to originate cables and send stuff out. The air attaché called a meeting of the evacuation committee, as chairman of it for Friday afternoon the 28th. Martin had arrived back early that morning at about 3:00 am. Martin was "playing it cool" and paying no attention to reality, he was just off in his own dream world, he refused to admit that this place was falling around him. I arrived at the Air Attaché's office expecting to find the whole contingent of persons present who were listed as members of the evacuation committee. I was by far one of the lesser lights on the committee. Only three people were there: the Air attaché Garvin McCurdy, the military attaché Chuck Wahle and me. Missing were the Administrative Counselor, the Embassy Security officer, the Admin officers for USAID and for USIS, no one from CIA and forgotten others. McCurdy asked if I had been able to get up to the Ambassador's office. It seemed that the two attachés had tried to see the ambassador but had been stalled. I'd been up there; it was unreal. I said that it was my opinion that the only hope for a successful evacuation to come off at all was to do it without waiting for the embassy and the ambassador. I suggested we confer with General Smith at Thon Sonuit Air Base. Col Wahle called the General and we were on our way. General Smith heard my views on the situation in the embassy; his response was supportive and positive. It was agreed that they would begin bringing in military flights which would take any unofficial Americans and their dependents out as soon as possible. The flight that crashed with the orphans was scheduled at that time. The action officer was Smith's deputy an Air Force BG, Richard Baughn. This was being done strictly through military channels. The flights were sent to Clark Air Base in the Philippines without U.S. Embassy, Manila clearance. Our ambassador in Manila, Sullivan was livid. General Baughn took the fall for this end run and was sent home because of Sullivan's raising hell. This, however, was the beginning of the evacuation of Vietnam - despite Martin's views.

The coming Sunday was Easter, 30 March. My wife, our children and I had invited the army

attaché, Chuck Wahle and his wife to our home for Easter dinner. I was still the duty officer, as I say, duty officer. I said something about the situation to Chuck who said, "Get your wife and children out of here as fast as you can. This thing is not going to last much longer."

I said, "Yes, I think you're right. Everything's falling." We had already shipped our dog, a black Labrador to my sister and her husband in California. I noted that I would probably have to pay the fare for my family to leave because the ambassador wasn't willing to send them out on government orders. Wahle said do it.

It was then a matter of gambling on the day that it was actually going to fall. Monday morning arrived and I got a call from the code room, my orders had come in from the Department. We were leaving early. I started to think about all those security clearances I carried from my earlier assignment. They weren't taking any chances of my being captured. The packers came in on Tuesday. My 15 year old son who loved to go to the air base to play basket ball came home early that day and said he wanted to leave. He sensed the danger. I knew these younger fellows Moorefield, Hays and Snepp wanted me to stay on; after conferring with my wife, I went to Joe Bennett and volunteered to remain. Joe said "No, I have four consuls generals walking the halls now with no assignments - forget it." The ambassador said leave but tell no one you are leaving.

Q: How about these country team meetings? Was it still a rosy picture?

THOMAS: By then, no. As a matter of fact, by then, I don't think they even had them. There was too much pressure for that type stuff. You know, that was over with.

I said, "There's no reality to what's going on."

All these young officers knew it, including Snepp, as did the chief of station. But you couldn't convince Martin. He was going to save the day. They were going to stop before they took Saigon. They wouldn't want to give up American aid, and all that sort of... It was not believable.

My duty officer stint was up on Thursday noon; I was scheduled to depart on Friday 4 April by commercial aircraft. I turned over my personal car for shipment on Thursday.

Since I was ordered not to tell anybody I was leaving, any Vietnamese. General Hiep, who was the ICCS general, was suddenly going to be made transportation minister, under a temporary government. He came to me and asked me if I'd be his unofficial advisor; I didn't dare tell him I was leaving. However, there was one hold on my departure, I had to await the return of Kinsolving from family visit to take over the ICCS function. During this period after all of the ICCS personnel had been pulled back into Saigon, it was necessary for me to reassure the American contractor who ran their mess that he would be paid - just feed them now. This was all done orally. No paper work. I didn't have time to tell Kinsolving of my oral commitment. Later, in Washington I had to go to bat for this man in order for him to be paid.

The fall came, as you know, suddenly. By then, we had a pool going as to what day the place was going to fall, and I think I was off by three days. The evacuation of Saigon started early enough, and that's why we didn't have more Americans caught there, but it was done without

Martin's permission.

Q: I have a long interview that I did with Terry McNamara, who was the consul general in Can-tho, and essentially he was left alone. The CIA took care of their own and left, and he more or less had to line up things. So he got out on his own.

THOMAS: I'll tell you why. I was at the embassy at the time; I pulled the ICCS out of Can-tho long before... The only reason they didn't want to pull anybody out was because it would look like the place was falling. This was Martin's own doing, so he insisted everybody stay in place. You couldn't even ship your wife out unless you did it with your own money. The place was seething with anger because people wanted their wives and children out of there. Mine were the first to come in, but then they allowed others in. It was a terrible situation.

Q: You left when, and when did it fall?

THOMAS: I left on April 4th, and it fell on the 28th.

Q: Where did you go?

THOMAS: I flew to Hong Kong and stayed in Hong Kong a while. I was so worried about friends there and people there, you know, Americans and other people, that I just didn't want to leave. But I'd been ordered to go. I even volunteered to stay, but wasn't allowed to. Hong Kong was a little too expensive, so we then went on to Taiwan, and stayed there for a while. Nobody was pushing to get me back to the States.

Q: They had too many people.

THOMAS: Laos had already fallen, and there were all these people out of Laos. I stayed in Taiwan for a while. I think we spent three weeks in Asia, until the fall. I saw some friends, I think, in Tokyo, who had gotten out as it fell. Then we came on back to the States and stayed for a while on the West Coast with my brother-in-law and sister. I talked to people who got out right at the end, but it didn't get any better. The realism.

Thank God for a few people there like Snepp, Moorefield, Hays and Lacy Wright. I think they received some medals out of it. They deserved them because they were the ones who really organized to get things moving.

Our effort was the first, the attachés and my meeting with General Smith started the airlift that moved non-official Americans. Without that early start many Americans would have been endangered. But, there were still a lot of people left behind, who paid the price for our inept policies.

CHARLES LAHIGUERA
Peace Accord Monitor

Bien Hoa (1973-1975)

Mr. Lahiguera was born and raised in New York. After graduating from Georgetown University and serving in the US Navy, he entered the Foreign Service in 1963. Though he served outside the South East Asia, his primary duties concerned the Vietnam War and its aftermath, particularly refugees. His overseas posts include Germany, Curacao, Vietnam, France, Hong Kong, Thailand and Swaziland, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission. Mr. Lahiguera was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: Then you're saying towards the end of this, by '73 it's getting a little bit boring? So, what did you do?

LAHIGUERA: Yes. Well, at that time when we signed the agreement, the peace accords, they were looking for officers to monitor the transition. I happened to talk to personnel on the phone and said that I wasn't going to volunteer because that would cause some problems at home and in the delegation perhaps, but if I were drafted I wouldn't oppose going. So, not surprisingly, we got a telegram asking that I be transferred back to Vietnam.

Q: Okay, back to Vietnam. You went where and you were there for how long?

LAHIGUERA: Yes. Well, I returned in the summer of '73. I was initially assigned on temporary duty for six months with the task of monitoring the peace accords. I was assigned back to the third corps. I asked to be assigned back to the third corps because I knew that area and I'd wanted to see how things had gone since my departure and that's where most of my Vietnamese contacts were. Political officers don't have friends, they have contacts. Anyhow, they were very good about assigning me there. CORDS, the development program had been abolished and had been replaced by a consulate general, four consulates general and I was assigned to a consulate general in Bien Hoa.

Q: Who was the consul general there?

LAHIGUERA: Walt Crenshaw. He was a labor specialist. He was there I guess for about six months. My TDY more or less coincided with that period. Just an amusing point: when I arrived at the Bien Hoa airport, they forgot to send somebody to get me. So, I had to hitchhike. There was no transportation from the airport in any commercial vehicle, so I had to hitchhike to the embassy. I got a ride by some army chaplain who happened to be traveling by. When I got to the embassy they were very red-faced. There was an administrative officer by the name of Bob McCallum who had been assigned to take care of me. Mr. McCallum had the misfortune of then being assigned to me later on and I have never let him forget that.

Q: Well, then you were in Vietnam in Bien Hoa for half of '73 to when?

LAHIGUERA: Yes, well, then after my TDY assignment, they made me political officer in effect the deputy consul general.

Q: In Bien Hoa?

LAHIGUERA: In Bien Hoa. So, I went on home leave because I hadn't taken home leave yet. Then when I came back I came back as a permanent officer.

Q: So you were in Bien Hoa from '73 to when?

LAHIGUERA: To the end.

Q: To '75?

LAHIGUERA: To '75. I left off the roof of the embassy the evening of April 29th.

Q: Well, when you got there what was the situation in the third corps?

LAHIGUERA: There was sporadic fighting still in almost all the provinces. We had skirmishes. My principal job was preparing a daily situation summary that we sent in as did all the consulates general saying what had happened in the last 24 hours. We sent this in everyday. The first task I had in the morning to put this thing together. I was just one of the five persons who did this. We went out to the different provinces. In the third corps there were about 10 or 12 provinces. We had AID officers. We had a presence in every province. So, we would talk to them on the radio or on the telephone if there was such a thing. We then would put together where the attacks were through this day, how many hand grenades were thrown and how many casualties and just monitoring the behavior. We tracked the continued violations by the communist forces of the peace agreement. That's what we did for six months. I traveled all over. I saw all the provinces. I saw old friends and majors who had become colonels and that kind of thing.

Q: Was there a great degree of cynicism among you all or during the monitoring of this?

LAHIGUERA: Yes, well it was very clear that the communist had no intention whatsoever of maintaining any kind of cease-fire. So, we tried to support the local people, the local forces and hoped that they were able to consolidate their position. We didn't have any military of course. Our teams were changed. We couldn't rely on any American forces. The military presence was just the defense attaché's office, which was engaged principally in Saigon in logistics support. But each consulate general had a defense attaché office. They had hired contractors to run their offices and these were military intelligence collection operations. I personally felt they were somewhat amateurish. We also had the CIA present and they had about four or five officers in Bien Hoa. They had what was called a base chief at the consulate general. There was a gentleman by the name of Orrin DeForest who was the CIA operative there who has written a book called Slow Burn so I'm not saying anything that isn't already published. We also had another CIA officer who wrote critical articles for the Post. So all that was far more documented than what I am going to describe.

Q: Well, what was the Republic of Vietnam, South Vietnamese government. How were they responding to these attacks?

LAHIGUERA: They would try to consolidate their position. They would try to build up their strength and the training of their forces. They would try to protect the communities. There wasn't any major offensive of any kind, it was trying to consolidate and improve what you had. I thought they had for the most part very good officers. I met all the province chiefs in the third corps. They had meetings every Monday with the commanding general of the third corps and his staff. He had two deputies, two brigadiers I guess. They were very professional. I was very impressed by the quality of the officers that they had.

Q: Were we making any attempt to stop the South Vietnamese to responding to attacks by the North Vietnamese?

LAHIGUERA: Well, certainly if the North Vietnamese initiated any actions in the third corps the southern forces were free to get rid of them. They weren't supposed to be there. I can't speak about anything outside the third corps.

Q: Well, what was happening in Phuoc Long?

LAHIGUERA: Phuoc Long. My friend, the district chief, Major Yen, had become the province chief. He was then a colonel. Unfortunately one still had to fly to Phuoc Long. The road was still very dangerous to drive though I understood they did start some sort of bus operation. I did go up there. I used to stay there overnight. I loved the place. I didn't want to convey the impression before that it was a place where I didn't want to be in. It was beautiful. The country itself was beautiful. Southeast Asia in general is more beautiful in the countryside than it is in the cities. Phuoc Long really was a collection of refugee villages. The Montagnards grew highland rice and they lived on it. There wasn't a great deal of industry. They cut bamboo shoots into other things, but it wasn't rattan. They didn't have a lot of things. We had helped build a Montagnard training center, sort of an orphanage. I used to go up and bring them powdered milk for baby formula. There were some nuns up there that helped train Montagnards to do things, teach them handiwork and sewing and that kind of stuff. So, Phuoc Long was at that time when I returned in '73 was reasonably stable and seemed to be getting along without the presence of the American military. We hadn't lost any of the district capitals and I felt very secure in Song Be itself.

Q: Well, now I assume one of your jobs in the military, I mean this whole intelligence apparatus sounds like they, everybody must have been almost tripping over each other on this, but one of the things you'd be doing would be monitoring the spirit of the ARV. How is the, what was your impression when you got down to the change of the South Vietnamese army?

LAHIGUERA: As far as tripping over each other, we had lots of jurisdictional problems with the CIA and the defense attaché people. But, as far as the ARV was concerned, well we had regular forces. We had regional forces, RF they were called. PF popular forces something like a militia. Initially when I was there the morale was pretty good. They had a lot of support logistically. There was some optimism, but there was certainly an awareness that support for the war was eroding in the United States. That was a concern by everybody including the ambassador. Our ambassador was Graham Martin at the time. I must say that the entire time I was in Bien Hoa in the third corps, I'm not aware that the ambassador ever entered our consular district. His wife

came for lunch once, but he never came. We had a very fine leadership in the third corps on the Vietnamese side. We had three major divisions in the northeast we had the 18th division, which was ably commanded. He was an extraordinary officer, very impressive. He used to entertain his troops, he'd play the electric guitar and sing rock and roll. Oh, he could do everything. He was a very dynamic, charismatic figure and proved to be so until the very end. He was in the area of Xuan Loc, which is route one going northeast, and then directly north of us we had another division. I think it was the seventh. That was a difficult area. Loc Binh was there on route 13. That command seemed to be well run. Then we had another division, the 25th division, on route one going toward Cambodia. The 25th division commander, General Ba, who was one of the biggest Vietnamese I ever saw. He was certainly over six feet and also a very inspiring guy. I think they all had a very positive attitude.

One of the cynical observations I had heard while I was there was that well you know these generals who run Saigon have to be selected for political loyalty rather than for their competence as commanding generals. I certainly didn't find that to be the case. They may well have been loyal to President Thieu, but they were certainly competent commanders. My impression was that they were highly respected by their fellow officers, by their staff, and by the province chiefs who were all military officers. So, I thought we had a very good team and I had a very good relationship with them.

Q: How did things start to go downhill? I mean what were you seeing when you talk about that?

LAHIGUERA: Well, I think as things progressed there was an erosion of our support. This led to questioning about how long we were going to give them stuff and how much we would give them, arguments over the budget and all this kind of thing. It projected the idea that we wanted to get out and then we had the unfortunate Watergate business, which I think really hurt us. This distracted the nation. I think it was a big problem for Vietnam. There was corruption in the military. My friend, Colonel Yen used to tell me about this. He eventually became province chief of Bien Hoa so I saw him quite a bit since we lived in the same town. He would tell me about the problems with what we called ghost soldiers and flower soldiers and units. In these units if a man was dead or gone that they continued to collect his pay and rations and not replace him. Flower soldiers were enlisted and were actually members of a unit, but were allowed to go home. They collected their pay and rations as well. Colonel Yen used to tell me about surprise inspections on weekends. How in the boondocks they would muster and count everybody and call to account why people were missing. He wanted to see the paperwork. So, undoubtedly there were problems and everyone admitted that, but certainly not any worse than things I've seen in other parts of the world including the United States. I felt that the Vietnamese forces had competence as long they felt they could count on our support. Over the two years I was there they started to doubt whether they could rely on us anymore.

Q: What were developments that you were seeing towards the end in '75? I mean were you seeing, was there a steady decline or was it rather fast?

LAHIGUERA: The skirmishes, the incursions increased. Particularly the North Vietnamese came in the area around route 13 to the north of Saigon and there was quite a bit of fighting there. The North Vietnamese must have taken a lot of casualties there, but they hung on and they

kept some enclaves. The real test was ironically over my old province Phuoc Long. In January of '75 they mounted a major operation against Phuoc Long.

Six months into my job Walter Shaw left and Richard Peters who had been the political military chief in Saigon became the consul general. I was in effect his deputy. He was on leave at this point. I can recall there was a lot of pressure on Phuoc Long. I can remember going to the weekly meeting of the full commander and I knew we were in trouble when he felt like he was being overwhelmed in Song Be. He turned to me and said, "What should we do?" I had this terrible feeling that if he was asking me what to do then we didn't have a very good chance. I felt and I wrote that I felt that this was a test. They were going to take Phuoc Long and if they could get away with that and if there would be no American reaction that they knew they could do what they wished. In fact that's what happened. In fact, after the war, the general who commanded the invasion wrote an article in the Vietnamese press saying that that was the case. So, I felt quite vindicated on that. Song Be was the first capital to fall and they were able to take it. After that we were very concerned and then the activities started in the second corps which really caused the unraveling of everything.

Q: This is in the highlands up around Pleiku?

LAHIGUERA: Yes. We, as far as I understand, we didn't understand that they were going to attack. They moved some divisions and we were tracking them with signal intelligence according to what's been published. They were smart enough to know that we were doing that and so they didn't move their radios, they just moved their army. We had human intelligence saying there was going to be an attack, which we ignored and the signal intelligence showed that they hadn't moved. They attacked. The roads became flooded with refugees fleeing and the whole second corps caved in.

Q: When this was happening, what were you all doing?

LAHIGUERA: Well, we were just monitoring events in our own area. We were very concerned about any assaults that might take place. We were certainly looking at our evacuation plans and we weren't very optimistic about it. After Song Be fell I thought we were going to lose.

I remember General Weyand and some fact finding group came in. Ken Quinn, who was later our ambassador to Cambodia, was with them. I told them that I thought we would collapse by August. I was wrong, I didn't realize how much of a botch they would make out of the first corps. Things were really very bad there. We had troops moving both up and down the road at the same time. It was just a terrible mess. When the first corps fell we managed to evacuate the marines. The marines were evacuated and the families were left under the communists, which was a terrible situation. I was very concerned because they brought those marines into our corps and they were placed under the 18th division under General Dao and I didn't regard them as very reliable. Da Nang falling was a big shock for us. We had scenes of people desperate to get out of Da Nang and people forcing their way onto aircraft or helicopters at gunpoint and fleeing by sea. There was a lot of violence. We saw that and that impacted on our evacuation plan. We were very concerned that if we had to evacuate the Bien Hoa area we would have encountered the same kind of problems where people, armed units would try to take over the means of

transportation. As a matter of fact that never happened. What we didn't understand, was that in Da Nang people were fleeing from the first corps to try to get down to Saigon and what was left of Vietnam. Most of the people in Vietnam when the end came, weren't that interested in leaving.

We had these evacuation planning sessions called by the security officer, a gentleman named Mark Garrett who was really a fine officer, a very capable guy and the backbone to the whole security business. I must say he kept his focus while everybody else and many other people were running around in circles. We discussed these problems. We were very concerned if we started initiating an evacuation that the army units could turn on us. There was this feeling that we might be in the ironic position of having to rely on communist troops to protect us against our former allies. Da Nang inspired this kind of thinking. We were particularly concerned about this marine regiment that was under the 18th, that was very close to the consulate general in Bien Hoa. When things went downhill, the first corps had to really decide about what we were going to do. The ambassador was just dead-set against any discussion publicly or any indication that we might leave.

Q: Was the attitude of the ambassador pretty well known? Was it talked about that he was out of touch?

LAHIGUERA: Well, I wouldn't use the word out of touch. My impression was that the attitude of the ambassador was that he wanted to hang on, that he didn't want to cause panic. I don't know if he imagined that we were going to have some sort of a commendation or that he was going to get the government, the American government, to finally support him. I think he was unrealistic. I think it was a hopeless case. I thought they had passed that stage. There just didn't seem to be any reason to believe that there would be much forthcoming from the United States. I think a feeling developed among the South Vietnamese forces that they didn't want to be the last soldier to die in a hopeless war. Once you get that feeling, it's very serious. The communist forces started coming down out of route 20, down from the Xuan Loc area and Major General Le Minh Dao was there to meet them. He was courageous. He decimated many of their people at the cost of at least a third of the division. He held for a long time. All of these divisions, all the generals had helicopters.

The evacuation finally took place on the 28th or 29th of April. They could have easily have gone out to the Blue Ridge or to any of the ships there at sea. None of them did. They all stayed. So much for the feeling that they weren't going to fight. The three army divisions fought. General Dao and General Ba were captured and the division commander of the staff swore that he would fight to the last minute. They didn't surrender. They were captured. I saw an article written by Dao later in the communist press, which were very cleverly written saying how he was disappointed at the United States. I said to myself, I'm sure you would have appreciated the return of the U.S. army. Nothing he said changed my view of him. I had met him several months before the end. He had a very bad eye problem which was threatening his sight. I think he had a detached retina. Anyhow we had him looked at and it was agreed that he could be evacuated to Hawaii for medical treatment. But when things deteriorated he gave up leaving and wanted to fight with his division. So he was captured. I don't know if he is still alive today, but he could have spent all that time in Hawaii if he chose to. [ed note. Le Minh Dao spent 17 years in a re-

education camp. After his release, he received political asylum in the United States.] So, obviously these people, the South Vietnamese forces that did most of the dying in the war were in the end really quite courageous. They never were given the credit that they deserved.

Let me cite Frank Snepp's book, A Decent Interval. There are all kinds of imaginings in his account of these chaotic events. He has the details wrong. Everything that he said about the third corps was wrong. He claimed that when we left Bien Hoa that the South Vietnamese army fired on us, which was absolutely untrue. I was there and it never happened. He claimed that we had asked for helicopter gunships, hundreds. We never did such a thing. We never even considered such a thing. I was concerned that if we withdrew from Bien Hoa that they may have indeed fired on us if we had asked for such support. In fact they never did and we never asked them for support. When it looked bad the embassy arranged that we had these landing crafts sent to Bien Hoa up the Dong Nai River.

Snepp, in his book, described that the CIA was somehow involved in arranging for these landing crafts and that's completely untrue. I was personally responsible for them. I arranged for the landing craft to be anchored at a naval station on the Dong Nai River. I told that to the Vietnamese naval commander there. In fact I met him in the refugee camp later and he reminded me how cooperative he had been with us on the barge issue. We kept these barges and they would have certainly been enough to take our staff and our dependents including the Vietnamese. We had ten of them and they were huge. Anyhow, eventually we were instructed by Saigon to release the barges and that if we were going to have an evacuation that we would go by air. At this stage the 18th corps was still stopping the advance of the main enemy force. The forces were coming down from the northeast. Every time the road was closed, the 25th division under General Ba reopened it which I thought was amazing. I was impressed by this tremendously. We had a break in coordination. Typically we had a lot of AID officers under the consulate general. The AID director in Saigon started giving instructions to our AID people. So we had our AID officers being told at one stage that they were going to be taken out by boat and then I was given orders to move the staff to Saigon. I sent word to them and said, no, that's the wrong place. We'd move to a building called USAID 2 and we'll meet there and we will arrange for an air evacuation. Let me back track. The moment all of this was happening, DAO, the defense attaché's office, was Homer Smith who was in Saigon. He was the senior military officer there. They quietly closed and they withdrew from the provinces. What we didn't know, they never told us. I thought they were all going into Saigon. We arranged unilaterally to have aircraft take the defense attachés back, including the Vietnamese and their dependents, to the Philippines. We did this without the ambassador's authorization or without the permission of the Philippine government or as far as I know without the permission of the Defense Department. What they did was they would draw out their staff piecemeal. They had all of these big containers from the commissary in Saigon. Our political staff people loaded the people into these containers. Then they put the containers on a truck and they shut them and put them in an Air Force cargo plane. They got most of their staff out that way without anybody including the ambassador knowing about it. I understand finally some Vietnamese secretary managed to get to a phone and called her mother somehow. She got through to her mother and said, "Guess what? We're now in the Philippines and all you have to do is go down to the commissary and get yourself in a container." Anyhow, the word spread quickly, that all these Vietnamese were in the Philippines. I understand that the ambassador was quite upset. I don't have any personal witness

to that but Homer Smith was fired after that. We had to explain to the Philippine government how we had brought many thousands of Vietnamese into the Philippines without the agreement of the Philippine government. That was an event. Anyhow in the meantime I was very concerned about getting the American community out. Then our staff which had worked for us for many years and their dependents.

Q: You're talking about Vietnamese staff?

LAHIGUERA: The Vietnamese staff. As regards the American community, I'd had a consular officer go around to all the American civilians we knew were there and notified them to please leave. The Americans had no problem leaving if they wished. We were running flights out of Bien Hoa and they could go with their dependents. We arranged for passports and visas for dependents, wives and children of the Americans. In the third corps absolutely anybody who stayed in the third corps after the first of April was there because they wanted to be there regardless of what they said after. We had one fellow who was working in a Vietnamese mental hospital and he elected to stay and the Vietnamese eventually threw him out. Then we had some contractors who just couldn't give up the good life. The contractors maintained aircraft and that kind of thing. We did ship home a few wives and children who were basically Vietnamese. Sometimes the Americans were already gone, but we had the weddings recorded in the consular section and we had documented the children. On a couple of occasions the wives and children went to the States to meet the husband and his American wife and children, but that wasn't my problem. That happened, too. So, on the evacuation front, the Americans weren't a major problem. But what was a problem was what we were going to do about the Vietnamese staff and their families. The ambassador seemed very, very hesitant to make a decision and then he was obsessed with this idea of peace. I was very upset about this whole issue. Finally we were given permission to start moving the Vietnamese staff. We all met in this building in Saigon. We were told to pass the word to the staff in Bien Hoa, both provinces came down. They were in Bien Hoa and they all moved to Saigon.

Q: How did you go, by helicopter?

LAHIGUERA: No. When we left Bien Hoa we drove in a convoy, but the Vietnamese made it whatever way they could into Saigon because they were coming from Phuoc Long. The staff that had been in Phuoc Long were already there in Bien Hoa from the various provinces around Saigon. There was a coordinating group there. A USAID officer named Anderson was given the job of coordinating the evacuation of the Vietnamese staff. Each one of us represented our corps. We'd get space, each corps was given so much space and then they were asked to allot their space to designate who was going to be on that aircraft. I called the Vietnamese staff of the first corps together and I told them that I was going to evacuate people based on who had been in the most dangerous places and who politically were the most liable to be dealt with harshly by the communists. I asked if anybody had any objections or any other ideas. They all seemed to accept my approach. Our policy was that staff members and their families could go and children under the age of 18. You couldn't take out boys of military age. That was the rule. You could take out their mothers and fathers. So, we started moving them and taking them out to the airport. We had to load them aboard. I had a lot of difficulty at one point. My admin officer fled. He was an American. He got on the airplane without telling me. From what I understand he got his wife on

the airplane and she wouldn't leave without him, so he felt he had to go. I didn't have his records. I didn't know the pay situation and I didn't even know whether he was dead or alive. He could have been captured. So I was worried about this. He certainly didn't help any. He got out. The CIA base chief went as well and he left his staff hanging in the forest. His associates did very well and they stayed in Bien Hoa. I understand his excuse was that he was afraid that his wife would have a nervous breakdown. She was in Bangkok, so he had to leave. He was later made the head of some important industry somewhere.

It was interesting to see how people behave in this situation. Anyhow, back in USAID 2, we were trying to divvy up the evacuees. Things came to a sudden stop. I had all my guards show up. We had about 100 guards and they were armed with clubs. These fellows didn't want us to leave. They wanted to get paid. The administrative officer took care of all this. We had bags of piasters. I'd been given a suitcase full of piasters when we rode on buses and when we came to roadblocks we had these piasters to give to police at the roadblocks so they wouldn't harass us and we'd get to go through. So, a fellow representing the first corps, a fellow called Paul Dailey, tried to figure out how much he thought the guards were getting. They had two months back pay. We came up with a number and I had all the guards line up. We had a big list made out with all the names on it and each man marched up. We gave the first two or three thousands of piasters and they all smiled. So, we knew that the amount was okay, that we were obviously overpaying them and so we managed to pay off all these guards with the bribe money and get them out of our way. Then we could go back to arranging the evacuation. One lesson I learned from the first flight: we were allotted seats and I was given something like 11 seats for one family. The family didn't show up. What happened was the grandmother decided she couldn't leave without her sister and she didn't want to leave without her mother, whatever. So, one wouldn't go and then everyone else wouldn't go and then nobody went. They all just stayed behind. So, I developed a system of backups where we would either say okay, you are going to meet at a certain place and each person was told who was going to be there and from that location you would be loaded on a bus and taken to the airport. Then we had x number of backups. The backups had to understand that they would only get a seat if somebody else didn't show up. That system actually worked out very well and so I didn't lose anymore seats. Thank God. We were able to ship out a fair number of the staff and their families. I only had, I suppose, about 60 people who wanted to leave. Some of them had families and some of them didn't. I guess about half of them out. Then the communist forces started the rocketing of Bien Hoa and some marines were killed. So we had to close the airbase, the airport. It was too risky. So, we decided to go back to the barges to evacuate the people. On the 29th I finally got word that we were going to move them. It was difficult to get the word out to them but we got the word to as many of them as we could find. They all went down on this pier. There were probably several thousand people. We were loading them into barges. I can remember there was a Vietnamese military police officer. They have this emblem PC which is their MP. This was a huge guy, I think he was a captain. He had medals down to his belt and he was directing traffic. It just struck me how people did what they were supposed to do regardless of how hopeless things were. The police were still functioning on the streets; the traffic police. Things were reasonably orderly. We had this big mob down at the pier. Then we were loading them onto the barges. I can remember one very good province chief and his wife was there. He had two or three children, but he was in uniform. He's one that I really admired, very solid and he came up to me and asked if it was possible for him to get on the barge. He reached up and he ripped the insignias off his uniform, dropping them over the side.

That really struck me. Then there was one of my local employees. After he got done loading, I turned to him and said are you going to get on? He said, no, I don't want to get on. I want to stay here. I took a key from one of our staff vehicles and said, you can take that vehicle over there, it's yours, good luck. He got in the vehicle and drove off. Then there was another little militia fellow. He had a rifle and just standing there keeping order. We were just about finished and we didn't have anyone else who wanted to get on the barge. I said do you want to get on the barge and he just looked up at me and said, no, this is my country, I'm staying here. It was very interesting and a horrible experience. Obviously I was disappointed that some local employees didn't get the word and didn't get down to the pier. We could have gotten everybody out. Anyhow, at that point I went back to the embassy with this fellow Paul Dailey from the first corps. The embassy, the streets were very quiet and very orderly and the police were still functioning. There was a quietness about the place and I didn't feel the hostility. But around the embassy there were a couple of thousand people. We had these big iron gates. The marines had been flown in I think from Okinawa. The marines made me more nervous than anybody else because the crowds was yelling. The marines didn't know whether they were going to get popped. I was afraid one of them was going to shoot somebody. Anyhow, we got back into the embassy. We got word that the president had ordered us to leave, everybody out by a certain time on the morning of the 30th. So, there were to be no Americans by 6:00 on April 30th. That came from the president. Graham Martin had asked whether people would be willing to stay. I had volunteered to stay with other members of the staff, but that present direction canceled that idea. A general, Big Minh, had taken over as president. He was the third president in a week. I think we had conveyed the message to him that we were willing to leave a skeleton staff at the embassy to negotiate some sort of relationship or whatever. The communist authorities got word back to him that we were to all leave. After that we closed the operation. I never felt threatened by the communists. It was clear to me that they were going to allow us to get out. I think that they didn't want to give any cause for us not to move our forces out.. So, they had halted on the outskirts, but they weren't pushing in. They were going to let us get out. It was just obvious. So, I remember coming up to the gate and there was this huge mob surrounding it. The only place that there was any activity. We had to figure out how to get in. We had a couple of locals with us. We got the attention of the marines, hey, you know, we're Americans, we're on the staff. Okay, come around the gate on the side and we're going to open that gate up and we're going to let you in. So, we went around to that gate. We thought at the time that we might be able to get more people in, but we didn't. I can remember there was a huge marine sergeant, staff sergeant or a master sergeant, he had a lot of stripes and he was a big guy. They had this little side gate and he said to the Vietnamese employees, you tell all the people around there that I'm going to open this gate and I'm going to put my fist out and the first person to step through this gate that I don't authorize is going to get this fist down his throat. He's standing there with his fist drawn and we four marched in and he slammed the gate shut and nobody moved near that gate. That's how we got back into the compound and we went back to reporting. At this point, Mark Garrett, the security officer finally struck and, without the ambassador's authorization, cut down this damn tree.

Q: That tree, I know the tree.

LAHIGUERA: Yes. We got rid of this tree. They brought in this large helicopter to land. The Americans were being evacuated off the top of the roof. But the Vietnamese were being

evacuated by these large aircraft on the ground. I went to the back of the compound with Dailey. We got up on the wall and we had all these marine guards on the wall. They were just kids and looking very nervous and making me nervous. We looked over the wall. There was this mass of Vietnamese people screaming and waving. In the crowd we recognized some of our staff. So, we pulled some of them up over the wall. We told the marine guards these were our employees. Then we went back and forth. We got several of them over the wall. Then finally the order came down that we had to leave. There was going to be a lot of turmoil. They forced us away from the wall. We went in and then that's when I was told I had to leave. I really felt shitty. I felt we were running away from a third rate government, a communist force. That was just something I never thought I'd see in my life. So, I stayed there until they finally told me I should get on a helicopter. I had some sort of a weapon. The drill was to throw your weapon on a pile before you got on the helicopter. I had an automatic revolver. I wasn't going to go anywhere without that thing, without some sort of protection. You didn't know whether the helicopter was going to be shot down. So we got onto the helicopter and I remember flying off, it was late on the 29th. I remember landing on the Blue Ridge.

Q: This is a command check spot off the coast of South Vietnam?

LAHIGUERA: Yes. I can still remember the flight. We went over the logistics centers near Bien Hoa. They were all burning. You could see the fires for miles. It was very awesome. When we got out to the ship. I only had the clothes I was wearing. I didn't have my passport. I didn't have any money. I had my ID card and my State Department ID card and a few dollars. Just the suit I was wearing. I remember they searched me when I stepped off. They extracted my automatic revolver. They said I had to register it with them and could come and get it some other time. I never did. I'd brought flags out from Bien Hoa. I also had some piasters. I was carrying them in case we had to bribe police to let our staff go. I still had the flags. I had four flags. I had them in a little cellophane bag. I have them at home now and the piasters. I still have them stuck somewhere at home. I went down to the war room and I saw General Ky. That really upset and infuriated me. I have nothing against any Vietnamese getting out, but he had been on the radio a couple of nights before calling on every loyal red-blooded Vietnamese to fight the communists invaders down to the last man. That no true Vietnamese would desert his country in its hour of need. I wondered how many poor kids listened to this bloke out followed his advice. Then he got on that helicopter and fled. I was pretty unhappy with him. On board the ship I was bunked with Tom Polgar who was the CIA chief and with this woman, Burke, who was the consul general in Saigon. We were all sort of stuck together in this room. I was exhausted. I remember somebody shaking me and saying the ambassador is flying aboard, would you like to come up on the deck? I asked him sarcastically, is it washed? I still remember when the ambassador came on board. He had his valet and his damn dog. Here I had lost a lot of my employees because he never got around to being able to decide when to get the staff out, but he could get his dog out. I tell you if I had half a chance to throw that dog over the side, I would have done it. I was pretty unhappy about his dog getting on and members of my staff didn't.

I remember eating dinner that first night. We were eating spaghetti. I had an AID officer with me, Joe Deveier, a very dedicated officer who was with the third corps. Mr. Polgar joined us and he was rather bald. Polgar started to tell us about the problems of this friendly police commander of the Vietnamese police force. This poor police commander had left and he hadn't gotten his art

collection out. I had visions of spaghetti dripping down that bald head. I put my arm on my friend Deveier's leg to restrain him. We quickly concluded dinner and walked away. Here we had just left staff behind and this guy's worrying about some guy who didn't get his art collection out. This was part of the difference between the fellows in Saigon and the people out in the field. I didn't feel they had proper concerns for the Vietnamese staff. I remember I had one previous encounter with personnel about evacuating people. I spoke to the personnel officer at the embassy before we started the evacuation. I met this woman and I told her how many people we had. She said, "Oh no, you only have two regular employees, regular staffers, all the rest of those people are just contract." I said, to her, "You know the communists aren't going to ask about whether they were contract or not before they execute them." This sort of distinction just boggled me.

JAMES R. BULLINGTON
Vietnam Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1973-1975)

Ambassador James R. Bullington was born in Tennessee in 1940, and received his BA from Auburn University in 1962, when he entered the Foreign Service. His assignments abroad include Hue, Saigon, Quang Tri, Chiang Mai, Mandalay, Rangoon, N'Djamena and Contonou, with an ambassadorship to Burundi. In 2001 Ambassador Bullington was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

BULLINGTON: Back to the Vietnam business. This was 1973, with the Paris Agreement. They needed lots of people with Vietnam experience to work both in Vietnam and on Vietnamese affairs in Washington. I ended up in the latter category, on the Vietnam desk in the State Department.

Q: Sort of like the tar baby, you couldn't get away from it.

BULLINGTON: Yes. After learning Thai and two years in Chiang-Mai, the idea was that I would move to the Embassy for the next two years. But that didn't happen because they decided they needed people with Vietnam experience and I was tapped.

Q: Now you were there from '73 to?

BULLINGTON: Through the fall of Vietnam, '73 to '75. It was called the Vietnam Working Group, basically the Vietnam desk in the State Department.

Q: Who was in charge of the group?

BULLINGTON: Bob Wenzel was the director. Ammon Bartley was the deputy director. There were seven, eight officers and three secretaries.

Q: What were you doing?

BULLINGTON: I was the internal political officer, looking at internal political affairs in South Vietnam. Elections, political parties, those sorts of things. We had an economics guy, an external political guy, a political-military officer, a few others.

Q: What was happening internally?

BULLINGTON: The main focus was on the evolution of the situation under the peace agreement. There was supposed to be a cease-fire, but neither side observed it very well, and each was trying to consolidate its hold wherever there was gray area, disputed area. We dealt a lot with Congress, the public and the anti-war movement. I spent a lot of time writing responses to Congressional committees. I wrote speeches for Ellsworth Bunker. We were also focused on the continuing negotiations in Paris, and supported the delegation over there. A lot of our analyses were about whether the South Vietnamese were going to be able to continue to resist in the situation that was brought about by the Paris Agreement.

Q: As you went in there and started looking at that, what was your impression of the strength or lack thereof of the South Vietnamese?

BULLINGTON: I had no strong opinions on it one way or another at first. I'd been off in Chiang Mai for a couple of years, and in Thai language training before that. I'd read the newspapers, but I'd really lost touch with what was going on in Vietnam. So I really hadn't focused on Vietnam for three years, and things had changed dramatically. I came to believe after a few months that the South Vietnamese could have held on and eventually a Korea type solution might have emerged; but as time went on and U.S. support declined they were getting weaker rather than stronger, and the enemy was getting stronger rather than weaker. Pretty soon the balance tilted, and it was clear that the North Vietnamese were not willing to settle for less than the whole of Vietnam. It also became apparent, particularly for someone in Washington working on Vietnamese affairs, twenty hours a day it seemed like, that the United States was no longer politically willing or able to sustain South Vietnam. That's eventually what happened. We assured their defeat by cutting our military and economic support to insufficient levels. I made a couple of trips back to look at the situation on the ground, one in December of '73, the other and more important one in December of '74, and again I spent a lot of time in northern South Vietnam where I had worked, but also in some other places including Saigon and the Mekong Delta. Putting together what I had learned in Washington with what I saw was going on in Vietnam, it became evident to me that the end was nigh. The Embassy would not admit that. Graham Martin was the Ambassador then, and was in my view out of touch with reality, both in the United States and in Vietnam. There was no indication that the Embassy realized the gravity of the situation and how near we were already to the total loss of South Vietnam, or the political impossibility of a U.S. rescue. I still can't understand why they didn't see it, why everybody didn't see it. It was clear if you looked at just the logistics picture. I got the figures from the Pentagon, of how much ammunition and spare parts and POL and everything necessary to fight a war, how much of it we were sending into South Vietnam, and how much they were using up, and it didn't balance. Even at the level of warfare that was going on in December of '74, the South Vietnamese were using it up at such a rate that you could see the end. Probably before late '75, or certainly by early '76, they would run out of bullets, quite literally. And if - as I saw to be

almost a certainty - the North Vietnamese launched a major offensive as soon as they perceived this growing South Vietnamese weakness, then the end would come a lot quicker than that. The evidence of this was everywhere when I visited Vietnam in December '74. The artillery tubes that were limited to one or two rounds a night because they didn't have enough ammunition, the soldiers that went out on patrol with only one hand grenade because there weren't enough to issue them more. VNAF, the Vietnamese Air Force, was essentially grounded for lack of spare parts and POL. I put that together with the economic troubles and declining morale. And no army, no army fights to the last bullet, literally. The South Vietnamese officers that I talked to clearly saw what was happening. They said 'You, our allies, are not giving us the support we must have to handle the situation that we are facing. And if the North Vietnamese attack, we won't be able to contain them.' So what happens in such a situation is that morale collapses before they literally get down to the last bullet. That's what did happen shortly thereafter, in the spring of 1975, when the NVA launched a major offensive and the South Vietnamese army basically collapsed. I wrote a paper when I got back from that trip, this would have been the final days of December or the first few days of January in '75, and gave it to Phil Habib, who was Assistant Secretary for East Asia. Although I didn't know it at the time, he gave it to Kissinger, and Kissinger read it and apparently thought it meritorious, because in his memoirs published four or five years ago, the volume of his memoirs on his service under the Ford Administration, he quoted my memo at some length. I was proud of that. I was the only career FSO, I think, to have a paper quoted in that volume of his memoirs. He said something to the effect that at least a few people recognized what was coming and warned that South Vietnam was about to fall, and one of them was Jim Bullington. Then he quoted the memo. I was pleased that somebody heard my warning; but it didn't make any difference in the end.

Q: Were you working on this when Vietnam collapsed?

BULLINGTON: Yes.

Q: What were you all doing?

BULLINGTON: The main thing I was personally concerned about was trying to get the Embassy and others to take action to save the South Vietnamese for whom I felt we were responsible, especially the Foreign Service National employees. There were three or four of us mid-level officers, Lionel Rosenblatt was one of them, I guess he was in INR at the time, and somebody else, I can't think of his name, but this guy went to Vietnam with Lionel.

Q: Yes.

BULLINGTON: You know who I'm talking about.

Q: Oh, yes, I do.

BULLINGTON: Yes. He was in the Executive Secretariat, I think. Anyway, the three of us and maybe there was one or two others involved, but basically the three of us formed a sort of cabal, trying to get the U.S. government to do the right thing by the South Vietnamese to whom we had special obligations. We really worked on that as much as we could. Lionel and this other guy

ended up just taking off and going back to Vietnam without authorization and trying to save our Vietnamese friends on a retail basis, one by one. I didn't feel like I could do that, but I did everything I possibly could to move the Department, to move the Embassy and Graham Martin, to get them to take action on evacuating these people. And it was like moving a mountain, I'll tell you. Graham Martin did not want to be moved.

Q: Was there any talk that you heard of getting them out of there?

BULLINGTON: We certainly talked about it. We literally thought that he had lost touch with reality. Not that he was insane, but what he said and what the Embassy was reporting was so different from our perception of what was actually going on, we seriously discussed whether or not he had lost touch with reality. We told that to a lot of people, and we worked with Phil Habib and other senior officers, trying to convince them of that. But of course they felt like they had to listen to their representative on the spot, as opposed to these midlevel officers in Washington. So I don't think our view ever prevailed, but we may have affected the situation a little bit at the margins.

Q: Was there an apparatus set before the final collapse as they were going to have a hell of a lot of people coming, are we going to do something about it.

BULLINGTON: I called for it in memos; I even came up with some numbers. A million people or more would be in immediate and grave danger with the collapse of the South Vietnamese government, people to whom we had a moral obligation. There was just a total resistance in the Embassy and the Department to, number one, accepting that it was going to happen. They would not believe that South Vietnam was about to fall. And number two, that we were obliged to do anything about these people even if it did. So that was a very, very uphill struggle. We left lots of good people behind, and we were slow in preparing to assist those who did get out, mostly on their own and with no help from us.

Q: This is one of the things that really struck me about all the touchy-feely who were concerned about our involvement in the war and all the people there, and all of a sudden when there was a real crisis, they washed their hands and went away, they washed their hands even before because once we stopped drafting college kids, the protests went down.

BULLINGTON: Absolutely. They didn't care about the South Vietnamese people. They were not their friends. I expected that of the anti-war movement. But I didn't expect it of the State Department and the Ford Administration, but that's basically the policy we got at first. Eventually they came around.

Q: Did you get involved? When the collapse came was there a moment when everybody says "It's gone?" I mean like when Da Nang fell or something like that?

BULLINGTON: Well, I had predicted in December it was coming. And so as it started, when the first province capital fell, I guess that was in February, and the South Vietnamese couldn't take it back, this to me just confirmed what I had said in my December memo, and I wrote that at the time. When Quang Tri and Hue fell, and the best South Vietnamese units, the Marines and a big

part of the Airborne and the First Division, fell along with them, that should have made it as clear as it could be to anybody knowledgeable about Vietnam that the end was at hand. But Graham Martin kept talking about how they would draw a perimeter around Saigon and the Mekong Delta and defend that and hold on. That seemed to me totally out of touch with reality.

Q: Did you get any feel for how Kissinger responded to this?

BULLINGTON: No, I never did. I never talked to him personally during that period, and I didn't know what his real feelings were. I hoped that he could see what was happening, but I just didn't know. Of course they had to deal with Congress at that level. They were getting a lot of pressure from the Congress not to do anything, to even suggest that we were going back in to save the situation.

Q: Was there, I mean was anybody passing out in the State Department at some point an alert and say 'Here it comes. It's going down the tubes and we're going to have refugees, and we're going to have this and that.' I'm talking about sort of official..

BULLINGTON: Not beyond me and Lionel and a couple of others at lower levels. There was a guy in the Agency in Saigon named Frank Snepp who was giving some of those kinds of warnings as well. But at the senior level, no. Nothing. At least that I was aware of.

Q: Craig Johnstone is the other guy. Well, when the thing collapsed, what did your working group do?

BULLINGTON: We were just trying to focus on issues like setting up the refugee camps and moving the refugees off the boats to Guam, what would happen to the Vietnamese Embassy here, the government's assets, just sweeping up the mess basically.

Q: Did you get any particular part of it?

BULLINGTON: I worked on setting up some of the refugee camps, but I was approaching the end of my tour, and that summer, a couple of months after Saigon fell on April 30th, 1975, I left.

WOLFGANG J. LEHMANN
Consul General
Can Tho (1973-1974)

Deputy Chief of Mission
Saigon (1974-1975)

Wolfgang J. Lehmann was born in Germany in 1921. He joined the Department of State in 1949 and served in Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Robert Martens in 1988.

Q: Wolf Lehmann went to Vietnam in June 1973, initially as Consul General in the city of Can Tho, which is located in the Mekong Delta. He then went to Saigon in March 1974 as Deputy Chief of Mission to Ambassador Graham Martin. For frequent periods he was Charge d' Affaires during that 13 months or so prior to the final fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

This period from the time that Mr. Lehmann arrived in Vietnam was one in which support for the war in the United States was declining. We were getting into the beginning of the second Nixon Administration. Watergate was opening severe wounds in the American body politic.

As time went on and as public support for the war declined, the difficulty of gaining material support from Congress for the South Vietnamese Government was increasing drastically, as well. This was a time, of course, when there were no American military forces in the country. These had long been withdrawn. This was a period when it was still hoped that somehow the South Vietnamese Government would be able to maintain its independence from the communist North Vietnam.

With that background, I believe we are in a position to begin the interview.

There were many opinions as to why South Vietnam -- that is, the Republic of Vietnam -- ceased to exist at the end of April 1975. Some people claim that the fate of Vietnam was sealed from the very moment that the Paris agreements were signed in December 1972 over the strong objections of President Thieu, and that all that really remained was the so-called decent interval before the end. Do you agree with that view?

LEHMANN: I think the Paris accords were severely deficient in several respects, but I don't agree that with the signing of the accords the end was preordained to be what it eventually came to be at the end of April 1975.

The agreement was, indeed, deficient, in certainly two major respects, the most important of which was that it allowed the North Vietnamese Army to remain in South Vietnam.

Another deficiency was the fiction that there existed something called the PRG, the People's Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, and that we accepted the notion that this fictitious entity was a legitimate party to the Paris agreements. That, incidentally, is why we at the embassy, whenever we had to refer to the PRG, we always put it in quotes. We never let it stand on its own as we would for the DRV, which was the formal official title of North Vietnam.

Hanoi certainly considered the Paris accords to be a victory for them and publicly said so after the fall of South Vietnam. Nevertheless, I don't believe that the end was inevitable. Everything depended on whether the United States and South Vietnam were able and willing -- and I want to underscore "willing" -- and primarily the United States, would insist that the agreement be carried out as written.

It was particularly important that the United States show willingness to back up that insistence with some sort of force if that should become necessary. That would not necessarily have meant the re-introduction of American ground forces, but certainly the possible reintroduction of

American air power was a factor in the background. Of course, that did not come to be.

Immediately after the Paris agreements went into effect, Congress, at the initiative of Senator Church, prohibited the reintroduction of U.S. combat forces into Vietnam. That bit of Congressional myopia -- or worse -- left us very little leverage to insist that Hanoi honor the terms of the agreement. In fact, our aid to the Republic of Vietnam, both military and economic, was progressively reduced very soon after the agreements came into effect, and U.S. intervention, of course, became increasingly remote as a political crisis developed in Washington, a crisis that eventually led to the Nixon resignation.

Q: I believe that, on the other hand, Soviet and Chinese aid was continuing, or at least Soviet aid. Could you comment on the extent of that support and the contrast between that flow of communist aid to North Vietnam and the decrease in aid by the United States to the Republic of South Vietnam?

LEHMANN: Both Soviet and Chinese, especially Soviet aid, was continuing at a very heavy pace. The agreement had a provision in it that both sides could replace military items -- ammunition, hardware etc. -- on a one-for-one basis in South Vietnam. We never did that, because we never had adequate budgetary facilities to actually replace military items lost by the South Vietnamese during that sort of lower-intensity period of conflict that went on in 1973 and 1974. Moreover, the restriction did not apply to North Vietnam.

There was absolutely no way of ensuring the other side's compliance with that particular provision. It was simply disregarded. Hanoi did not permit the ICCS -- the International Commission for Control and Supervision -- to exercise its authority in that regard even if it had wanted to. Hanoi did not agree to the requirement, also stipulated in the Paris agreements, that there should be established certain entry points through which this one-for-one replacement of ammunition and other military items would be monitored. So these were never established, except on our side.

Q: There may well have been two or three times as much as the authorized one-for-one level coming in, for all anyone knows, at least more than the mere replacement flow of materiel.

LEHMANN: Oh, it was far more than that. The magnitude of the amount of ammunition, military equipment, trucks and weapons was even alluded to by General Van Tien Dung, who was the North Vietnamese commander who eventually conquered the South. When you read his account, which was first published in Nhan Dan, the Hanoi newspaper, in serial fashion and later as a book, when you read his account, he speaks of thousands of trucks and guns being moved to the South on the Ho Chi Minh Trail Network. No, it was never honored at all by them.

Q: Going back to the broader course of the war and the situation in both Washington and Asia, you've been quoted as saying that the reason why the war ended in a North Vietnamese military victory at the time it did -- that is in April 1975 -- was Watergate. Would you comment further on that?

LEHMANN: Hanoi, of course, had never given up the idea of eventually conquering the South.

As far as they were concerned, it was a question as to when and how. We knew there were differences of opinion in the Hanoi leadership during the period of 1973 and well into 1974 as to what should be given priority. The question that was facing them at the time -- and we had a fairly good reading on that from our admittedly fragmentary intelligence, but a fairly good capacity for making an accurate estimate -- the question facing them was whether they should divert resources to deal with their serious, domestic internal problems, and put eventual unification of the country under their control on a longer term basis -- Asiatics think in long terms, very long terms -- or whether they should go for broke quickly and force an early solution. They had quite an argument about that.

President Nixon resigned in early August of 1974. That was followed within a week by a drastic reduction of U.S. military assistance to South Vietnam, mandated by Congress. In fact, the vote that reduced the amount down to \$700 million, which was less than half of what we had been using earlier, and much of that \$700 million wasn't really available, a point I will elaborate on later on, that vote was preceded by a vote on a resolution that all military aid to South Vietnam should be cut off. And 26 members of the United States Senate voted to cut off all aid immediately. These were the facts that led to a decision by the Hanoi leadership to undertake a large-scale massive offensive operation in 1975 in an effort to end the war on their terms.

Q: And take advantage of this situation?

LEHMANN: Hanoi's decision was based on its evaluation of the political situation in the United States. They concluded, that given the political situation in Washington resulting from the Watergate crisis, the United States would not effectively intervene. At the embassy in Saigon, in a message that I sent to Washington as Charge at the time, on August 13, 1974, we said that what had been happening in Washington -- primarily in the form of the drastic reduction of military assistance to South Vietnam -- would lead to a political decision by Hanoi to make an all out military effort to conquer the South. And we were quite correct in that estimate.

Q: You certainly were.

LEHMANN: As far as we were able to ascertain, the decision must have been made in early September of 1974. Subsequently, General Dung, in his account called The Great Spring Victory, confirmed publicly after the end of the war that the decision was made about that time and was ratified by a meeting of the Political Bureau and the Central Military Party Committee in North Vietnam in early October. So the full scenario which led to the political decision by Hanoi in early fall 1974 to make an all out military effort in early 1975 was precipitated by the political crisis in the United States in the summer of 1974.

Q: Was there any reaction to your message?

LEHMANN: No, nor, being cynical did I really expect any. Our message began with a summarized assessment of the military situation we were in because of the reduction in the DAV Program. General John Murray, who was the Defense Attaché at the time, worked out that part for me and sent it in in greater detail to the Pentagon. On the technical side there were some interesting points, including the fact that we thought the Vietnam program was being double

charged for the procurement of F-5 aircraft for the Vietnamese Air Force and that the American military services had a habit of charging large amounts of the appropriation to overhead costs, usually designated as PCH and T -- which stands for packing, crating, handling and transportation -- leaving little for guns, bullets and training. But, the really important part of the message was that what Congress was doing was to signal to Hanoi that it could proceed with a military option to win the war and that the United States did not have the will to stand in its way.

Q: You mentioned that there was a conference in Hanoi during which the decision was ratified to enter into an all-out offensive against the South and try to complete the conquest. Did you find any further confirmation of that as time went on?

LEHMANN: We did, but only after General Dung published the piece I referred to before. That account includes a very interesting statement on how important Hanoi's appraisal of the political situation in Washington was in its decision-making process. It's a very revealing statement. He says, "The internal contradictions of the U.S. administration and among political parties had intensified. The Watergate scandal had seriously affected the entire United States and precipitated the resignation of an extremely reactionary President -- Nixon. The United States faced economic recession, mounting inflation, serious unemployment and an oil crisis. Also, the U.S. allies were not on good terms with the United States. U.S. AID to the Saigon puppet administration was decreasing." Then he goes on to say -- and quotes from the resolution that was adopted by that particular conference, which says, "Having already withdrawn from the South, the United States could hardly jump back in, and no matter how it might intervene, it would be unable to save the Saigon administration from collapse."

There are numerous other references in this account illustrating just how decisively the political crisis in the U.S. figured in the North Vietnamese decision-making process.

Q: Are you saying, in effect, then, that if it had not been for Watergate, the South Vietnamese regime would have survived, and South Vietnam would exist today as an independent country?

LEHMANN: Not necessarily. What I'm saying is the outcome would not have been what it was at the time that it took place. Certainly, that South Vietnam would have survived as an independent entity is within the realm of possibility, but no more than that. So all I'm really saying is you would not have seen that particular outcome at that particular time at the end of April 1975 that we did see. It would have been something different.

Q: You mentioned earlier that the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, I suppose, China was continuing to supply the North Vietnamese forces at a very high rate, in spite of the fall-off in support by the United States. Can you talk a little bit about the Soviet role more generally, in addition to the supply issue? Did the Soviet Union have an effect on the North Vietnamese decision-making process, for example?

LEHMANN: Oh, it certainly did. I don't think there is any question about that. There was historical precedent for that. In the spring of 1972, about a week before the North Vietnamese Easter Offensive kicked off in an earlier phase of the war, a large Soviet mission, headed by the then-Soviet Deputy Defense Minister, Mr. Vapiski, visited Hanoi. They played a role in the

decision on that particular operation. There was a repeat of that in 1974, when the Soviet Deputy Chief of Staff, General Kulikov, who later became the Warsaw Pact commander in Europe headed a very large mission to Hanoi about a week or so before Christmas 1974. That followed an earlier trip by a big North Vietnamese military delegation to Moscow in November. Now, Kulikov didn't come to Hanoi to sing Christmas carols in the streets of the city, a phrase, incidentally, I put into a cable I sent at the time on that particular event. It was obvious that Kulikov came to Hanoi with that delegation to wrap up final details regarding the decision to proceed with the offensive which had reached the point of no return, and to wrap up arrangements for Soviet military assistance and support of the operation.

It is ironical that these events should be taking place at about the very time that President Ford and Secretary Kissinger met with the Russians at Vladivostok, in November, at about the time when the North Vietnamese military delegation visited Moscow and about a month before Kulikov reciprocated the visit with his delegation to Hanoi. One of the things that has always troubled me is that the word "Vietnam" was not mentioned by anybody at the Vladivostok summit meeting.

Q: You discussed the Soviet role. The Chinese role was less important, obviously. But I recall from my own time in INR a few years earlier that the Chinese, during the height of the Cultural Revolution, had interfered with the transit of Soviet supplies by rail overland to Vietnam. Can you comment on the way in which the Chinese were trying to counter Soviet influence by providing supplies of their own, the extent to which they might have been hindering the Soviets, and the degree to which the Soviets were bringing in supplies both overland and by other means, say by ship, to Haiphong or by air?

LEHMANN: Most military and other AID reached North Vietnam by ship and air, rather than overland. As near as we could tell, the Chinese were in somewhat of a quandary. On one hand, as you remarked, they wanted to preserve influence in Hanoi. On the other hand, they were quite disturbed by the situation. I believe, but do not recall for certain, that some Soviet items reached North Vietnam overland, but only after much delay. In the middle of 1974 the Chinese suddenly grabbed the South Vietnamese claimed Paracel Islands. That did not sit well either in Hanoi or Saigon.

Q: They were very much preoccupied with the Soviet threat on their northern border.

LEHMANN: That's correct. As to Vietnam, ideology said they should help the Socialist brethren but reality and history said the Vietnamese would be a problem. So, they decided to take advantage of the situation and enforce their claim to the Paracels.

Q: At one point you mentioned the International Commission for Control and Supervision, that is, the ICCS, and alluded to the fact that even if it had wanted to do something in regard to Soviet supplies, it probably couldn't, but the implication was that the ICCS probably didn't want to anyway. Do you want to comment a little bit further on the role of the ICCS? Mention what it is first. Some listeners might not realize its composition.

LEHMANN: The ICCS, the International Commission for Control and Supervision, was part of

the Paris agreements. It was the kind of thing that Americans are generally fond of as a solution to problems. It had been tried in Indochina at an earlier stage. It hadn't worked then and didn't work in 1973 to 1975. It was composed originally of Canada, Indonesia, Poland, and Hungary.

The Canadians gave up when they saw that it couldn't work, that the North Vietnamese, the Poles and Hungarians wouldn't allow it to work. The Canadians left it in the fall of 1973. I was sorry to see them go, but I certainly didn't blame them for concluding that they would not be part of a farce.

In addition to being ineffective as a mechanism to enforce compliance with the Paris accords, the Hungarians and Poles - especially the Hungarians - played an intelligence role on behalf of North Vietnam. Regardless of whatever differences exist between the Hungarians and Poles on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other, there is very little doubt that their intelligence and security services cooperate very closely with the Soviet intelligence and security services - they are almost part of it - and by extension, in this case, with North Vietnam.

One of the most embarrassing things I had to go through repeatedly was to urge the government of South Vietnam to pay its contribution to support the ICCS. It was ridiculous, but I suppose one of the things that the people in our business are called upon to do from time to time.

Q: Do you think there might be some lessons in this experience in regard to other places in the world, maybe Central America?

LEHMANN: I think if there's any lesson in it, the one I would immediately urge is, "Don't do it unless you are reasonably confident that the parties really wish to observe the terms of whatever they agreed to." If there's no political will to abide by an agreement, a mechanism of this type cannot substitute for the absence of that will.

Q: Up to now, we've discussed the ending of the Vietnam War largely in terms of the lack of will in the United States, the effect of Watergate, and the subsequent changes in North Vietnamese strategies as Hanoi became more optimistic regarding the much lower degree of support that would be available to the South. Perhaps it's now time to shift to what the situation on the ground was within South Vietnam. And perhaps an area on which to begin would be the economic situation in the South.

LEHMANN: The economic situation in the South in the last two and some years, 1973-74 and early '75, and especially in the beginning, was certainly difficult, but also one in which the Vietnamese demonstrated extraordinary resilience. In 1973, the first year when the Paris agreements were in effect, the Vietnamese economy was hit by three developments. First, there were the economic repercussions of the withdrawal of all American forces from Vietnam. Those forces had, in a sense, been a boost to the economy by virtue of the money that the people spent in the country. It was largely eliminated by late 1972 and nonexistent from 1973 on. Second, there was the world-wide inflation, which drove up prices for the Vietnamese and cut down the purchasing value of every dollar of U.S. economic assistance and the smaller non-American aid projects being carried out in the country.

Finally, there was the 1973 oil crisis and oil shock which brought sharp increases in petroleum prices. That, in turn, had effects on agriculture, on transportation, on such other industries like fishing, where you use motorboats. It also substantially reduced the value of every United States military assistance dollar that went into POL for the South Vietnamese forces.

By the end of 1973 and January 1974, the South Vietnamese economy had hit bottom. The curve began to flatten out early in 1974. There were dire predictions at one point that there would be a rice crisis in Saigon in late 1973 and 1974, which would lead to riots in the streets. That did not come off. The government managed the rice supply situation rather well, with some advice and assistance from us, but they managed it quite well.

By the fall of 1974, the agribusiness and rural credit system, which had been developed particularly in the Mekong Delta was operating very well. There was indeed a good prospect that Vietnam would regain self-sufficiency in rice in 1975, and certainly in 1976. In early 1975, just as full scale North Vietnamese military operations began to get under way, we could look forward to a small rice export surplus for South Vietnam, had it not been for the military situation.

Along with that, there were other developments. There was exploratory offshore drilling for oil, starting in early 1974, which rapidly showed that the prospects for commercially exploitable petroleum were very good indeed. In fact, those operations had progressed to the point where in January and February 1975 the major companies involved in those exploratory projects wanted to discuss production arrangements with the South Vietnamese Government. Of course, all of that came to nothing because of the military situation.

Q: We've talked about the internal economic situation in South Vietnam. Why don't we continue now to discuss the internal political situation.

LEHMANN: The government of President Thieu was politically quite stable. Compared to some previous experiences during earlier periods in Vietnam, including earlier periods of our involvement -especially after the U.S. supported 1962 coup against Ngo Diem - it was a model of stability. The picture created and systematically fostered by the well-organized and well-financed anti-Vietnam lobby in the United States was that of a despotic regime which brutally suppressed all legitimate political opposition and the press and engaged in wholesale arrests and detentions of what were alleged to be tens and hundreds of thousands of political prisoners. But of course, this was not true at all.

Certainly Vietnam, nor any other Asian country, can be expected to run a kind of New England-style town meeting democracy - especially in war time - which is what a lot of Americans think foreigners ought to do. What existed in South Vietnam at that time was a rather free-wheeling, open society, complete with good points and some that were not so good. For example, there were 26 newspapers in Saigon being published at that time -- 26 -- most of them utterly irresponsible. That was reduced to one after April 30, 1975, and it indeed was fully responsible and was printing only what it was told to print.

Q: Yes.

LEHMANN: Of course, there were people who didn't like President Thieu. There were dissidents whose importance in the South Vietnamese political picture was vastly exaggerated by their American supporters. The groups with some real political underpinnings were largely sectarian, and they supported the government in some ways and opposed or pressed their sectarian interests in others. They were groups like the Cao Dai, the Dai Viet, the Hoa Hao and various Buddhists. The other so called "dissidents" of whom American liberals were so fond, and in whom they professed to see hope for "reconciliation" with the North, were usually people without any political base whatever. In some cases they were North Vietnamese or Viet Cong agents.

Q: Beyond the discussion of Thieu's position and stability, a lot of comments have been made in this country about the degree of corruption in South Vietnam. Was corruption as manifest as has been stated, and was it a factor that so severely weakened the South Vietnamese cause that there was not much hope for their being able to forestall the North Vietnamese?

LEHMANN: The answer to that, in short, is yes, there was some corruption in South Vietnam. There is corruption in many other countries. There is corruption in Vietnam today. Sometimes what we, according to our rules, call corruption is an accepted practice in Asia or other parts of the world where it doesn't necessarily go under that heading.

A wartime situation always exacerbates corruption to a certain extent. It did so in the United States in World War II. In Italy during World War II - I served there - truck loads, even convoy loads of military supplies such as food and gasoline disappeared into the black market at times.

In Vietnam, the fact that you had a war going on, even a relatively low intensity conflict in 1973 and most of 1974, didn't help the situation. But the notion that "corruption" in the South was the reason for North Vietnam's victory, or even a significant contributing factor, is sheer nonsense.

Q: Why don't we turn now to the South Vietnamese military. There is a picture in some quarters in this country that the South Vietnamese Army was really not very good. Corruption again is mentioned in this respect. It certainly did not have the reputation that the South Korean military had. The picture, if one goes back far enough, is of American troops having to do the whole thing in the days when we were involved, the South Vietnamese weren't so good.

On the other hand, there have been other reports to the contrary, that the South Vietnamese had built up their military, that they did have some very good troops.

What if the ammunition problem and the resupply problem had not been so difficult? What if the South Vietnamese had indeed been getting a steady stream of equipment and ammunition and supplies from the United States? Would they have been capable of sustaining themselves against the awesome North Vietnamese Army?

LEHMANN: The bottom line on that one is that the ARVN, as well as the Vietnamese Air Force and Navy, performed just about like other military forces including, incidentally, the ROKs during the Korean war. Some times the performance was very good, at times not so good and at

others average. That, by the way is also the judgement of General Bruce Palmer in his book, "The 25 Year War." The most professional, authoritative account of the military action from January 1973 to the end on April 30, 1975, including the ARVN's performance is contained in a publication of the U.S. Army's Center of Military History entitled "Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation" written by former Colonel Bill Le Gro who was with us in Vietnam during my entire tour there.

Over the years of "Vietnamization", the South Vietnamese military had become increasingly capable of doing the job for themselves and confident of their ability to do so.

I go back now to the North Vietnamese Spring Offensive, the so-called Easter Offensive, in 1972, the one I referred to earlier when talking about the Soviet role. There was very severe fighting in Military Region I, up around Quang Tri. Initially, the South Vietnamese were indeed driven back and defeated, but they managed to recover the position eventually. Admittedly, they did so with substantial American air support, but it was only American air support. The ground fighting was done by the South Vietnamese.

From that time on until the Paris agreements came into effect eight months later, virtually all the fighting, again with the occasional exception of U.S. air support, was done by the South Vietnamese and very effectively.

When the Paris agreements were about to come into effect in January of 1973, the North Vietnamese attempted a major land grabbing operation in an effort to get control of as much key territory as possible. A major event took place in the northern part of the Mekong Delta, when the North Vietnamese attacked and briefly occupied the town of Tan Chau, which is an active agricultural rural and commercial center close to the Cambodian border in the northern part of the Delta. Well, that effort was dealt with entirely by the South Vietnamese, who defeated the North Vietnamese and reoccupied all South Vietnamese territory in that area.

After the Paris agreements came into effect, in that period of low intensity conflict throughout 1973 and at least for the first nine months of 1974, the ARVN basically contained the enemy, which -in theory anyway - was all they were permitted to do. Occasionally the North Vietnamese would make a little headway and occasionally the South Vietnamese would make a little headway. One place, for example, that I'm personally very familiar with were the Seven Mountains, an area very close to the Cambodian border in the Delta where the North Vietnamese had garrisoned a fairly substantial force in very rough mountainous terrain honeycombed with caves. Well, eventually, the South Vietnamese Rangers just about completely destroyed them, taking quite heavy casualties themselves. There are many other examples of that kind.

Later on, when the full scale North Vietnamese offensive finally began, there were repeated instances, all the way close towards the end in late April 1975, notably at Xuan Loc, where the South Vietnamese Army fought with splendid courage and determination.

The North Vietnamese militarily defeated the South in 1975, not because the South Vietnamese were unable or unwilling to fight, but because Hanoi disposed overwhelming military force, equipped with a panoply of modern weapons and transport, skillfully led with the aid of

sophisticated command and control facilities and amply resupplied, in good part through Cambodia by courtesy of the U.S. Congress. In addition, the North Vietnamese had the advantage of the initiative. They could pick and choose and concentrate forces, while the South was forced to scatter its forces throughout the difficult topography from Quang Tri in the north to Ca Mau 800 miles to the south. Last, and by no means least, as the realization set in that they were being abandoned by the United States, the South Vietnamese military became increasingly demoralized.

Q: Because they were getting no support and were undercut by the United States?

LEHMANN: We shipped in a few artillery pieces and unloaded them with much publicity, but that was all too transparent as a ploy and made no impression at all on Hanoi. The all too evident reality was that Saigon was being undercut by the United States. There were certain things that happened at that late period that increased demoralization in the South by orders of magnitude. For example, sometime in March 1975, Senator Mathias brought in a resolution in the United States Senate calling for an immediate end to all further assistance of any kind to South Vietnam. That had a devastating psychological effect at a very late stage in the game. The Vietnamese, like many other foreigners, have some difficulty understanding our political system. All they could see was a Republican senator, allegedly on the side of the administration, bringing in that kind of resolution and coming at the very moment when the South Vietnamese were making their last attempt to try and save a truncated Republic of Vietnam. The Mathias Resolution was psychologically devastating.

Q: This interview is being conducted to interview Wolf Lehmann concerning the last few months of the American presence in South Vietnam. Mr. Lehmann was deputy chief of mission during this period, as well, of course, as chargé d'affaires during the absences of Ambassador Graham Martin. An earlier interview with Mr. Lehmann covered a longer period dating back to Mr. Lehmann's arrival in Vietnam in June of 1973 and was more of a broad perspective concerning his and the embassy's views of that entire period including analysis of the chain of events and policies that lead to the fall of South Vietnam. This interview, by contrast, covers the last month or two and focuses on the disaster itself and on the evacuation of Americans and others. The focus is on Mr. Lehmann's role and activities both as chargé and as deputy to the ambassador.

Before beginning my questions, let me state several major background facts against which this interview plays. As for Mr. Lehmann himself, he was initial consul general in Can Tho from June of 1973 to March of 1974, and DCM from March of 1974 until his evacuation from the embassy roof on April 30, 1975. The other facts briefly are: the fall of Ban Me Thuot in the highlands on March 12; the beginning of the chain of North Vietnamese victories in the rapid, final intensive; retreat of the ARVN from the highlands over the next two weeks; the fall of Da Nang on the coast on March 30; rapid NVA advanced south; President Ky's resignation on April 22; encirclement and attacks on Saigon's perimeter on April 28-29; and completion of the U.S. evacuation on the morning of April 30. Other dates and events can be cited, but the above skeleton is stated as a guide to the listener in following this final story. It is a period of only six or seven weeks.

Mr. Lehmann, you were a chargé from March 2 until March 28, a period that coincides with the successful North Vietnamese offensive in the highlands. Why was Ambassador Martin away at this time?

LEHMANN: As you mentioned briefly, we had had a very large-scale and extensive visit by the large congressional delegation beginning about February 24 with Congressman McCloskey and Bartlett. This was followed by a delegation headed by Congressman Flynn which included about half a dozen others including such luminaries as Bella Abzug and Congressman Fraser, who is the present mayor of Minneapolis. That delegation, which was a sort of last effort to secure some congressional support for what the President and the Executive Branch wanted to do, left late on the evening of Sunday, March 2, and Ambassador Martin left along with them to return to Washington. His main purpose in going back to Washington was to do what he possibly could in a last effort to try and salvage something out of the Vietnam situation.

Q: How unexpected was the fall of Ban Me Thuot and also President Ky's quick decision after that to withdraw from the highlands?

LEHMANN: First, it is significant to note that, while the congressional delegation that I mentioned was in the country, the North Vietnamese had in fact stood down their offensive operations. The military situation during the entire stay of that delegation was quiescent. The North Vietnamese offensive operations resumed two days after the congressional delegation left on March 4, 1975. The main effort of the new NVA offensive was in the central highlands. It involved not only Ban Me Thuot incidentally, but also Pleiku and Kontum which are somewhat farther north than the highlands.

As far as the operation towards Ban Me Thuot was concerned, it was extremely competently done by the North Vietnamese. Their security was excellent and the sudden attack on Ban Me Thuot itself came as a considerable surprise, especially as to the force behind the attack to both the Vietnamese and ourselves.

Q: Were any Americans or foreigners in Ban Me Thuot when this attack came?

LEHMANN: Yes. We had our provincial representative, an AID officer named Struharag [Phonetic], in Ban Me Thuot at the time. There were also a few other foreigners. I believe there were one or two Canadians and perhaps an Australian in addition, incidentally, to the ICCS detachment which consisted solely of a Hungarian and a Pole and none of the others. As I mentioned, the rapidity with which the attack on Ban Me Thuot itself took place did take everybody by some surprise, and the people I mentioned, including Struharag, were captured by the North Vietnamese. It took us several weeks, but the ICCS eventually effected the return of Struharag as well as the other foreigners there. What happened to the Pole and Hungarian I don't know. I presume they joined their friends.

Q: You mentioned that there were also North Vietnamese attacks on places further north in the highlands, notably Pleiku and Kontum. What was happening there?

LEHMANN: The North Vietnamese operations of that area were also within days after the

congressional delegation left. Pleiku and Kontum -- places where we had Americans -- were, of course, increasingly in danger. We, for our part, did not want to take precipitant action, however, in moving both our American employees and our Vietnamese employees that we had there out too early because we did not want to be responsible for setting off panic and a change of events that would no longer be controlled. However, on Saturday, March 15, within about thirty minutes after I had returned from a meeting with President Ky at the palace, it became obvious from reports that I had from Consul General Monty Spear in Nha Trang and other information that we had at the embassy that we needed to get our people out of Pleiku and Kontum. Therefore, that morning I instructed Jacobson, our special assistant for field operations, and Spear in Nha Trang to remove our people immediately from both places, and that operation was completed before the day was out.

Incidentally, as far as Washington was concerned, all I did is inform Washington that I had directed the evacuation and it would be completed before the end of a day. I did not ask them for any permission.

Q: Did they comment?

LEHMANN: They made no comment.

Q: Wasn't there an ICCS group somewhere in the area as well? Did he take any action regarding them?

LEHMANN: Yes. There was an ICCS group. It consisted at that time only of Hungarians and Poles. It did not have any Indonesians or Iranian representatives in that particular location. The question of whether we should warn the ICCS group or not was raised in the embassy with me. After giving it some thought, I decided that no warning to the Hungarians and Poles was indicated, to just let them sit there and do the best they can when their friends would arrive.

Q: They presumably were getting better information than you were anyway, maybe.

LEHMANN: Perhaps they were.

Q: I understand that, on the basis of the sudden North Vietnamese successes in the highlands, particularly at Ban Me Thuot, President Thieu decided as early as Friday, March 14, that a total retreat out of the highlands would be necessary in order to shorten lines, particularly in view of the fact that American material and ammunition was no longer forthcoming. That was on March 14. You just mentioned that you met with President Thieu on the morning of Saturday, March 15, at nine o'clock. Did President Thieu say anything to you at that time concerning this decision?

LEHMANN: That's quite correct. The decision to withdraw from the highlands -- in fact, the decision to withdraw from most of the northern part of the Republic of Vietnam -- was made by Thieu and conveyed to his corps commander on Friday at a meeting in Nha Trang on March 14. When I met with President Thieu at nine o'clock the following Saturday morning, he did not directly inform me of that decision, but he hinted that a major decision was in the process of being made and that it had been a rather difficult one. I could not draw him out on the details.

However, what he did say set a slight alarm bell ringing in my head as I left the palace and returned to the embassy. It was on my return that I was informed by Consul General Spear in Nha Trang that Two Corps [Phonetic] had decided to evacuate its forward headquarters at Pleiku and at Kontum. That, in turn, precipitated my decision then to immediately evacuate the Americans and Vietnamese employees that we had in the area.

Q: Did you assume that the word from Consul General Spear connected with the incident President Thieu had just given?

LEHMANN: Yes, I did. I might ask something here. The question is sometimes raised whether that was a proper way for a president to deal with us and whether I was not considerably annoyed by the fact that he had not directly and clearly conveyed this decision to me that Saturday morning. My feeling about that is that, in light of the fact that we were letting the whole side down, he had a right to make his own decisions. Since we were nevertheless able to do what we had to do with regard to our own people and our own employees, there was no cause for me to be particularly resentful by that particular mission on the part of the president.

Q: There have been criticisms of the Thieu decision to withdraw. I won't go into that in any detail since we have covered that in our earlier interview -- covered that as the South Vietnamese belief that it cannot hold all of South Vietnam given the cutoff of United States material and ammunition. But, there have also been many criticisms of a more tactical nature on the disastrous retreat from Pleiku down to the coast and the alleged incompetence and irresponsibilities of Vietnamese generals. Do you believe that better preparation, including perhaps better briefing by President Thieu of his generals, would have made a significant difference?

LEHMANN: It might and might not have. There is no doubt about the fact that the decision was made very rapidly and implemented without any adequate preparation. On the other hand, if Thieu had left more preparation time between decision day and implementation day, there was a very, very strong chance, if not a likelihood, that all of this would have leaked promptly to the North Vietnamese through their very extensive intelligence apparatus that they maintained. I do not know the answer to the question of whether better preparations would have resulted in a more effective operation or not.

As it was, and as you said, there was little if any preparation. The whole move was set in motion literally from one day to the next almost from hour to hour. It involved not only the withdrawal of South Vietnamese troops but in many cases their families and, of course, endless numbers of other civilian refugees who also clogged the very limited roads and highways that led from the highlands down to the coast. So that was one of the elements that made it a very difficult operation.

The second element that made it a disaster or a near disaster was the inadequate state of the single road, Route 7B, that led to the coast and along which the withdrawal took place. The road was in bad shape. It was inadequate. There were places where ridges were missing and had to be reconstructed by engineers all of which took time. Meanwhile, all this traffic consisting of masses of withdrawing troop as well as masses of refugees was backed up. Clearly, had there

been good plans and preparations, it would have included getting that road in shape and getting it secured.

Then there was a third element and that was the very highly sophisticated and excellent command control and intelligence system over which the North Vietnamese disposed in their attack. Contrary to popular impressions in this country, this was not a guerilla war. This was a main force war in which the North Vietnamese not only had excellent intelligence but excellent command and control communications. So they were able to observe all this, come to very rapid conclusions as to the state of the South Vietnamese forces, and take very effective military action in order to largely destroy those forces as they were deploying to the coast.

Q: We cannot affect the issue from the standpoint of material and U. S. assistance since that had already been denied from Washington. Was there anything we did not do that we might have done to influence South Vietnamese decision making? I'm thinking here not so much of Washington but U. N. Ambassador Martin primarily. Would Thieu have listened to you?

LEHMANN: I think the first answer to that question is that we were certainly in no position whatsoever to advise Thieu to make another decision rather than the one that he did make to in effect evacuate the entire northern part of the Republic of South Vietnam and attempt to hold a truncated South Vietnam along the line running roughly from Da Lat to the coast in the east. Would he have listened to us had we done so? I rather doubt it, but as I say we were in no position to give any advice.

There is one other point that ought to be made. The concept of trying to hold militarily a truncated South Vietnam along the line that I just mentioned from Da Lat to the coast was not one that was invented at that particular moment. That idea had been raised years earlier and it had occasionally been pressed by an Australian advisor to President Thieu.

Q: I think I know who that was.

LEHMANN: Yes. Desmond. So it was not a totally new thing.

Q: Let's switch now to embassy evacuation planning, organization, and morale. How good was the basic embassy E & E plan and also the plans of the four consulate generals? To what degree had they been updated to take into account the possibility of a sudden South Vietnamese collapse? It must have appeared increasingly likely as the perceived U. S. abandonment of its ally became clear. I am referring not just to the detailed written plan but to the very consultations between you and respective consul generals and also with the leading embassy players.

LEHMANN: I think the basic embassy evacuation plans were sound, in effect, in fact. We'll get to that later with the final helicopter rotary wing lift out of Saigon was option four on the embassy's evacuation plan. Other options in the plan were in general outline a while earlier. The evacuation plans are, of course, normally kept under more or less constant review. That review was intensified in our case early in 1975. As early as February 20, we had a couple of Marine colonels come in from the military side which was to support the evacuation in order to review

the details for evacuation planning right on the ground and make any necessary adjustments that might be made. Of course, at that stage of the game, we kept this very, very quiet. We did not tell anybody -- didn't want to tell anybody -- for reasons which are obvious. We can get into them --

Q: And you didn't want to demoralize the South Vietnamese government.

LEHMANN: Into them later on. As I said, as early as latter part of February, the military began to review their role in the plans right on the ground.

With regard to the consulates, yes, the plans were also constantly reviewed. In one case, that of the consulate general in Can Tho, the plan was rather drastically changed.

Q: That's in the south.

LEHMANN: Yes, in the Delta where I had been previously to coming to Saigon as deputy ambassador. As a result of one of the reviews, Terry McNamara, who had replaced me, came up to Saigon at one point in March with a recommendation that in Can Tho in the Delta we switched from an air evacuation plan to a boat evacuation plan from Can Tho down the Bassac River into the South China Sea. After a review by us at the embassy, that change was approved and that is the way it eventually went, as a matter of fact, in April when Can Tho had to be evacuated.

Q: I assume also that at the same time you were in steady consultation with the other major section heads and other players in the embassy that were involved in emergency planning.

LEHMANN: Yes, of course we were. I was constantly talking to them. The situation we faced beginning with the resumption of large-scale North Vietnamese operations had, of course, several components. One of these was evacuation planning for Americans. A related one was evacuation planning for some third country nationals whose potential evacuation would support. A third element was our role in dealing with the massive refugee situation that was created by the resumption of North Vietnamese military operations.

Basically, I organized the embassy in the following way. I designated the deputy AID director, John Bennett [Phonetic], to be the principal focal point in the embassy for supporting Vietnamese efforts to deal with the refugee situation. I designated George Jacobson, who is well known to Vietnam hands and whose title was special assistant for field operations, to be the principal focal point for supporting evacuation planning by the consulates in our field operations. I designated the defense attaché, General Homer Smith, to begin planning for the control of overall evacuation from Vietnam, to begin planning support operations for an eventual overall evacuation of South Vietnam. That was done by establishing an evacuation control center in the defense attaché compound out at Tan Salute [Phonetic]. We ostensibly set up that control center initially to support the Vietnamese refugee problem, but we did it with full knowledge and intent that that control center would be immediately convertible into a center for controlling the evacuation of Americans and others from the country as a whole.

Q: Did you find the date?

LEHMANN: Yes. It was on April 1 that we activated the evacuation control center at the defense attaché compound.

Q: As we move through the latter part of March and into April and through April, the North Vietnamese forces are, of course, pursuing the demoralized South Vietnamese as they retreat out of the highlands to the coast -- not only eastward but southward. Could you describe the evacuations of the three consulate generals as they began to take place, starting with Da Nang and moving on through Nha Trang, etc. What happened at each and when did it happen? I remember descriptions of great chaos -- and also further north at Hue and Da Nang -- and considerable heroism as well on the part of a number of the Americans involved.

LEHMANN: To set the stage, on March 16 the ARVN evacuated Quang Tri in the far north. We had no one in Quang Tri. Immediately after the evacuation of Quang Tri, of course, the situation became critical in Hue, just a little bit to the south. At that time, Theresa Tull was acting principal officer in Da Nang and Francis was just about to return to his post. The initial step we took in Hue is that we removed our people overnight only and brought them back into Hue during the daytime. We did that for several days until the situation had clearly reached the point where we could no longer do that if we didn't want to risk them. Therefore, on March 18 I instructed Tull to move the people completely out of Hue and keep them in Da Nang.

Q: Were there many involved in this?

LEHMANN: No. There were not many involved in this. There were only a few Americans and maybe a small number of Vietnamese employees. In that little short interim period, in order to keep up appearance, we would bring them in in the morning, go to their offices, bring them back to Da Nang by helicopter at night -- until March 18.

On March 20 the ARVN organized their perimeter defense of Da Nang. The situation in Da Nang was, undoubtedly, the most critical one in this entire story. The ARVN on their part made a strong effort to evacuate the most effective combat units by sea down to the south and the Saigon area so that the units could be employed elsewhere in the war. As usual, the situation was complicated by, of course, the presence of large numbers of families that were simply part of the picture of the Vietnamese military. Then, of course, it was complicated by massive flows of panicky civilian refugees.

So the situation in Da Nang rather quickly got out of hand. The Vietnamese military lost control of the Da Nang airfield which was simply overrun by refugees and by some troops that had left their units. That, of course, eventually complicated our own evacuation problem. Bear in mind now, overland evacuation to the south was no longer feasible. It either had to be by air or by sea.

I considered in consultation with Francis, with whom I continued to have good communications until the very last moment and with whom I was regularly on the phone during the day and late into the night, the possibility of asking for support from the American military to assist us in evacuation of not only Americans and American employees but others from Da Nang. The specific proposal we had in mind was for the Pacific command to furnish helicopters to be based at Cam Ranh Bay for supplying and to, in effect, assist with a rotary airlift from the Da Nang

area. I raised that with the Pacific command and it was turned down. The reason cited why they could not help with the operation was that all their assets were standing by and had to stand by for the evacuation of Phnom Penh -- "Operation Eagle Pull" as it was called -- and they could not divert it to assist us in our problem in Da Nang. So that was abandoned.

Q: They did not have the resources for both.

LEHMANN: That's correct. They said they could not do both and they could not divert anything from "Eagle Pull" as the Cambodian evacuation was called. So that one fell by the wayside.

We had earlier augmented the consulate general in Da Nang with several younger active officers to help Francis and the whole operation to our taking out of Da Nang, of course, the supernumeraries and others who could not be immediately employed in the immediate problem. By the evening of March 26 and early March 27, the situation was pretty well out of hand in Da Nang. The airfield was no longer operational because it was just overrun by mobs. On the evening of Thursday, March 27, I met with the prime minister regarding the situation. He communicated with General Trung [Phonetic] in my presence -- although it was in Vietnamese and I did not follow it -- to explore the possibility of using what remained of functioning military units, primarily ranger battalions, up in Da Nang to reassert control of the airfield so that some sort of airlift out of Vietnam could be continued. It became evident during the night and in the early morning that that could not be done.

My situation was further complicated that, during the night of March 27 to 28, Ambassador Martin returned along with General Wyatt [Phonetic]. They were supposed to arrive early in the evening of the 27th. Due to technical problems with the aircraft, they didn't arrive until three o'clock in the morning of Friday, March 28. I met them there. I had an early morning conference at four in the morning with Ambassador Martin to brief him on the situation, returned directly from there to the embassy with the situation in Da Nang completely out of hand.

Q: It must have been pretty exhausting as well.

LEHMANN: Yes, somewhat. I was running on adrenalin at that point. Up in Da Nang, meanwhile, while we knew where the few remaining Americans and some more Vietnamese employees were, we had lost track of Francis, the consul general. Sometime during that Friday morning or midday, I found out through Vietnamese channels that Francis, who had gone off to one part of the Da Nang perimeter, was apparently on board a Vietnamese naval ship -- a frigate or something of that kind that was also loaded with soldiers and refugees -- but no longer in touch with the rest of his people who, at this point, were on a barge in Da Nang harbor. This was the remainder of our staff and Vietnamese.

Q: That includes Terry Tull, I presume.

LEHMANN: No. Terry Tull had gone for some time. The fellow on the barge in charge was Brunson McKinley. Our communicators were able to patch me through to Brunson McKinley on the barge. Now, McKinley didn't know where Francis was and wanted to wait and get hold of Francis to get him back. I, knowing more about Francis' whereabouts, instructed McKinley at

that time that, if he had all the rest of the people, to get out of there and leave. That was the end of the evacuation of Da Nang on Friday afternoon, March 28.

Q: What happened to Francis now that he's on this other ship?

LEHMANN: He stayed on that other ship which eventually came down to the south either to Saigon or Vung Tau. The people on the barge also made it out and came down, a few of them with nothing more than the shirts on their backs.

Q: What about Nha Trang which came next? That's where Monty Spear was as consul general.

LEHMANN: Yes. Nha Trang was, of course, the next place to be threatened. It was farther south, just midway down the coast between Quang Tri and the so called DMZ and Saigon. Again, in Nha Trang it was question of moving in time but not before time in order not to aggravate the situation and make it even worse. At one point around March 27, the station chief came to me with what he said was very hard intelligence that Nha Trang had, in fact, been surrounded and that we had to move out of there immediately. That was not confirmable by any other information that we had through other channels. So late one evening I had Spear fly down from Nha Trang to discuss the situation with me very quickly. Although the station insisted that its intelligence was correct, I came to the conclusion that it was incorrect. I turned out to be right because a little bit later I had a somewhat red-faced station chief come in to tell me that apparently they had been had on something.

However, within days thereafter the situation had reached the point where Nha Trang had to be evacuated and the evacuation was, in fact, carried out and completed on April 1 both by helicopter lift and some assistance from a Philippine ship offshore that took off some refugees.

Q: You said a helicopter lift. Was the Pacific command involved in this?

LEHMANN: No. All this time the only air assets that we had available and were used were our own Air America, both the small fixed-wing aircraft and the helicopters that we had. There were no U. S. military involved in any of these operations.

Q: How large a group of aircraft did you have?

LEHMANN: I don't remember exactly how many aircraft we had. We had both helicopters, Hueys, and some fixed-wing aircraft, porters. We had about 30 aircraft available to us in Air America. Of course, under the arrangement that I described earlier, George Jacobson was the one with overall supervisory responsibility for allocating those aircraft when we needed them to support the evacuation operations as well as other ongoing operations at the time.

Q: Of course, that is two of the consulates. Bien Hoa, which is not very far north of Saigon, would come up next as we see the North Vietnamese forces moving further south and threatening Saigon.

LEHMANN: Bien Hoa evacuation was basically handled through Saigon because Bien Hoa was

rather close to Saigon. At some point in the game -- it was rather late [and] must have been around April 19, -- we had, in effect, closed down the Bien Hoa consulate and moved the people to be evacuated into Saigon and had them evacuated through the Saigon operation which was already in progress at the time.

Q: Who was the consul general there?

LEHMANN: The consul general was Dick Peters and I do not recall exactly when we had Dick actually leave. But, we designated Dick to go to Guam to assist in Guam with the handling of the Vietnamese evacuees, many of whom we were temporarily parking in Guam. We didn't have any authority to move them to the United States.

Q: Then there was Can Tho, of course, in the south and presumably less immediately threatened by the broad offensive but also vulnerable by the general collapse.

LEHMANN: It is important to note here that the ARVN and the Vietnamese governmental structure kept control of the delta right to the end. So the evacuation of Can Tho took place concurrently with the evacuation of the embassy in Saigon. They were given the word early on April 29 when we began execution of option four of Frequent Winds to complete their evacuation. Now, it is true that we had previously thinned out the staff in Can Tho already during the preceding weeks.

Q: And, as I recall from what you had said earlier, that evacuation was carried out by sea.

LEHMANN: The remainder of the evacuation was carried out by sea with the remainder of the staff -- Americans and Vietnamese remaining, going down the Bassac River and out into the South China Sea where they were picked up by the Navy.

Q: You mentioned Dick Peters having been sent to Guam to supervise the flow of Vietnamese refugees out of Vietnam already. Could you discuss a bit the degree to which this was taking place, the numbers involved, the pressures involved, and some of the issues that may have come up? Why were they going to Guam? Were they staying there and was there any prospect of their going on?

LEHMANN: We had, of course, various categories of Vietnamese whose evacuation we wanted to support. In some cases we were obligated to support. The principal categories were: our employees; people who had worked closely with us; people who were at very high risk if they were captured by the Vietnamese; and the large numbers of Vietnamese who had established -- with the many years of our involvement -- some sort of relationship with Americans, either through marriage legalized by civil authority or clergy, or through common law relationships. The Vietnamese extended family system -- that sort of thing translates immediately into fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and cousins. So there was a massive potential problem here of evacuating Vietnamese.

At the same time, we had a situation where our authority to formally admit people to the United States was extremely limited and subject to the normal kind of consular procedures. We did not

receive formal authority to exceed those normal procedures and, in fact, evacuate Vietnamese to the United States under the Attorney General's parole program until April 26, three days before the final evacuation. Yet, we had these other problems on our hands.

On April 17, for example, we already evacuated all Vietnamese employees of the defense-attaché system who were in sensitive jobs and who had to be gotten out. There were other folks in those categories. One of the main problems, of course, was where do you put some of these people that you had no authority for sending to the United States. Guam was, of course, a territory and so Guam was used extensively as a temporary holding area while Washington sorted out some of the legal and political problems that were involved. Shortly after we began really evacuating large numbers of people largely by C-130 aircraft from the military to Guam, it turned out that some of them wanted to come back because they had left their families behind.

Q: I might interject here that I was on a visit to Guam a couple of months after this with a large congressional delegation headed by Congressman Lester Wolf, and we visited the camps there. There were huge numbers. One thing that really struck me was that, in addition to those that were clamoring to go to the United States, there was also a sizable group that was clamoring to return to Vietnam in order to ingratiate themselves with the new authorities. The new Communist authorities were putting up slogans and making all kinds of anti-American statements in order to try to prove that they had credentials to get back and would not be treated harshly when they did return. It was a mess.

LEHMANN: Yes. I can imagine it was. At the time, somewhat earlier when we were still in Saigon and those last remaining ten days or so, the guidance that we gave to our people in Guam was, "If any Vietnamese wanted to go back, make that a matter of record and back-load them on the empty C-130s that were going back to Vietnam to pick up more."

Q: Talking particularly about Saigon but also the overall evacuation of Vietnam, I know there were considerable inhibitions in carrying out the evacuation because, in particular, there was the strong possibility that the South Vietnamese might look on this as the desertion of an ally and who knows what their reaction might be. Could you discuss these inhibitions as well as the degree to which they seemed justified in retrospect in the light of experience and the passage of time?

LEHMANN: I think there were basically three factors in considering the final evacuation and the process of getting ready for the final evacuation. The first was that we had to avoid at all costs a repetition on a much larger scale by orders of magnitude of the kind of mob panic that we had in Da Nang under much more serious and much more complicated circumstances which would have been the ones in the Saigon area. We were able to extract all our people out of Da Nang in the end including our Vietnamese employees because it was important that we were able to get them off on the ships, on the barges. We couldn't have done that in Saigon. We couldn't have gotten them on the ships down the Saigon River. In fact, we looked at that option in some detail. Hank Woodrow, an administrative counselor, and I went over that possible option in considerable detail including surveying an area at Newport in Saigon as a possible holding area right next to the port. We dismissed that one as not being practical. We had to avoid a mass panic in the city of Saigon because a mass panic in the city of Saigon would have made shambles out

of the whole process and would have made it impossible to do what we finally did when we put into effect option four of Frequent Winds which was the final helicopter airlift out of the city and nearby area.

Secondly and related to the first consideration was the fact that we had some intelligence indicating that there were at least some senior ARVN people who were seriously considering taking action to prevent us from evacuating, thus having us go down with them. I do have one specifically in mind and I'm not going to mention him because I know where he is.

Q: Is he in this country now?

LEHMANN: He was at one point. He was a senior officer who seriously considered interfering with the American evacuation on the theory that, "If we're going to go down, you are going to go down with us."

Having this whole American experience in Vietnam end in some sort of a violent conflict between us and the South Vietnamese was, frankly, just too horrible a thing to contemplate. The most serious consideration was the one of things simply getting out of hand in Saigon.

The third consideration was a political one. We did want to keep open, as long as we possible could, the option of retaining some sort of official presence in the area in the event there would be some sort of negotiated settlement involving the North Vietnamese. This was a possibility that would have served the North Vietnamese interests very well had they decided to go through with it because it would have set up tremendous pressures in the United States to make good on what they've always alleged were commitments that Nixon and Kissinger made to them for assistance to Vietnam.

Q: Incidentally, Phil Habib and Bob Miller in that period asked me to write up a feasibility paper. I did that but I didn't think much of it. It was kind of hard. I really didn't know enough about it for one thing. I remember mulling over that a couple of days.

LEHMANN: Well, that's an interesting note, Bob, and to expand a little bit on that -- it was not only our own thought that this was an option, we had guidance from the Department to maintain that as an option including the possibility of a very small skeleton staff at the embassy which, had that ever come about, incidentally, would have probably been myself with about three or four other people.

Q: You'd be sticking your neck out, of course.

LEHMANN: That's right. It was just not our own thing. In the press and some political circles, a good deal was made of this particular consideration later on in a very distorted way. We were accused of dragging our feet and having illusions, etc. This is all nonsense. In any event, that thing never, never governed our evacuation operations at all.

Q: We knew in Washington that this was a far out option. We just wanted to be sure we looked at everything.

LEHMANN: It didn't drive our evacuation effort. That proceeded on its own. These were the three main factors that we had to contend with, all of which, of course, drove us to make what planning and preparations we had very quietly, often pretending we were doing something else and not doing what we were really doing. The trouble with this, of course, was that this exposed us to a lot of criticism from the press and some politicians. Oddly enough, usually the politicians were largely at fault, in any event, of getting us to the point at which we were. [Laughter]

Q: Perhaps it would be best now if you told in your own words the phases, more or less, by which people left -- a lot of voluntary departures, I suppose, exiting of dependents, phasing down. How practical was that in light of the posturing you needed to convey to the Vietnamese as well as the willingness, I gather, of many Americans, especially unofficial Americans, to leave.

LEHMANN: As I mentioned, on the first of April we activated the evacuation control center at the defense attaché compound, ostensibly at the time to monitor the refugee flow situation. But, it was in full recognition and with the intention of getting this facility ready to control the evacuation of Americans and Vietnamese in the end. We began to draw down people in the first two weeks of April by encouraging contractors to depart by sending out a number of dependents, family members, and some nonessential personal under various pretexts of one sort or another. In fact, we began in a sense ordering the evacuation on about April 3 or 4. One of the things that was done -- it was not the only one -- was that we had the so called orphan lift beginning at that time. We designated large numbers of especially women and others -- not only women but other nonessential personnel -- as escorts for the orphans, far in excess of what was really needed but that was just a subterfuge to get them out. Of course, one of the great tragedies of that particular situation was that one of the very first flight [Inaudible Portion] crashed on April 4, 1975, with substantial casualties of both the orphans and the so called escorts. It was a very sad thing and one of the saddest moments of my life.

With regard to official American personnel, I had already requested earlier in March two things from the Department. One was not to have any additional family members come into the country of people being transferred into the country. You must remember that we had an American staff country-wide of all U. S. agencies of about 2,000 people. That was granted, incidentally. That was approved and there was no trouble on that one. But, the other authority asked for was authority for us in Saigon to determine who should go out immediately without further reference to Washington. I never got that. That apparently doesn't fit the bureaucratic system, but it was the kind of leeway that we needed. In Washington they kept insisting they had to approve each thing which was a nuisance to put it mildly.

However, to get back to the main point. We used the subterfuges such as I've mentioned. We tried to encourage people to leave and reduce the number of Americans in the country. On April 15 our evacuee holding facility at the defense attaché compound went operational. As I mentioned earlier, on April 17 a number of sensitive local employees -- most of those with intelligence agencies and related operations including the defense attaché -- were evacuated. On April 21 we began around-the-clock C-141 and C-130 flights in and out of Tan Son Nhut going mostly to the Philippines and to some other destinations. Between April 4 and April 27 about 27,000 people were actually moved out of Vietnam. Most of these were moved by military MAC

flights to either Guam or the Philippines.

Q: These were mostly Vietnamese.

LEHMANN: These were a mixture of Americans and Vietnamese and this is an important point. One of the greatest difficulties that we had was the considerable reluctance of many Americans to leave, especially American contractor personnel. There were a lot of military retirees who had settled down with Vietnamese "families" over the years. All of these people were extremely reluctant to leave without their families. Now, in many cases these family relationships were not legally blessed. They were simply common law relationships but still very strong. But, there was no legal authority under which we could evacuate or take these people into the United States. Moreover, the family relationships were extended ones because they not only involved the common law wife and the common law children but also the mother, the father, the brothers, the sisters, and often cousins. Nobody wanted to leave without the other. Yet, we had no way by which we had any authority to bring these people into the United States and, of course, none to bring them into the Philippines who happened to have an independent government. This was the kind of problem that we were faced with. When we're talking about an average family here, we're probably talking of a family of at least a dozen and sometimes more.

That was only part of the problem. The additional problem was that, while we wanted to send Americans out, Americans kept coming in and there was no way to stop them. Americans kept coming in including, incidentally, some official Americans and some Foreign Service officers. They kept coming in and looking for their friends and acquaintances or their relations. In many of these cases they had North Vietnamese wives and now they were coming in because they wanted to do something to get their wives' parents, brothers, sisters, etc., out under some sort of expedited procedures. So we were having a situation where we were keeping track of the number of Americans in country and we were moving out Americans, but the total number at any given day wouldn't really go down because others would come in. This was a situation which is probably of somewhat unparalleled difficulty. At least, I don't know the precedent for it.

Q: There's probably no country where we've been so closely involved over such a long period of time where the numbers of Americans were so great. Therefore, the number of involvements were so great. You didn't have this in the Iranian evacuation, for example. They were limited. This is a kind of unique experience. In fact, you didn't have this in Cambodia. It is totally different.

LEHMANN: That's right. The Cambodian evacuation, I think, consisted of less than 400 people.

Q: Yes. You knew it was a much cleaner kind of thing.

LEHMANN: Yes. Possibly.

Q: Incidentally, what was happening with various third country nationals? There must have been a lot of South Koreans, Japanese, British, French, etc. Were they making arrangements for themselves or were they asking us for help, and to what degree could we help them?

LEHMANN: Most of them were making arrangements for themselves. However, they were in

very close touch with us daily during those last weeks and last month and a half. I had either DCMs or chargés or ambassadors contact me wanting to know what our view was and getting our appraisal so that they could decide what they would do. The British moved out on their own at the time. So did the Australians as well as the Israelis, the Belgians, the Dutch representatives and the Germans. They moved out on their own.

There were a few left that we took out with us on the last day including the Italian ambassador, a very fine fellow. We were good friends. We brought him out along with some U. N. people and a couple of other third nationals. Just who they were escapes me. The Japanese made a decision to remain although they cut their staff down very much. They remained which turned out to be rather helpful. The Chinese -- that's the Taiwan Chinese -- left on their own. The Koreans left, and it was a problem because there were a number of South Koreans that were left in the country on April 29. We evacuated some of them. Unfortunately, a number of Koreans were in that very last batch of evacuees along with some Vietnamese that we had in the embassy compound when it was shut down and they remained behind. That is always something that made me feel very badly, but we were simply told that we had no more and that was it. Eventually, that problem was solved with the help of the Japanese who had remained. The French also remained.

There was one amusing incident with regard to third country nationals, incidentally. I believe it was in the early afternoon of April 29 when we were already in the process of executing the final evacuation. I had a call from the Polish ICCS representative in Saigon who was very concerned about his situation and asked if we might do something to help him. I was sorely tempted at the time -- like an attractive auction -- but there was real difficulty which was due to the fact that he was located some distance away from Tan Son Nhut and the embassy. At that particular time the situation in the city was beginning to get chaotic. I would have had to tell General Smith to dispatch some sort of detail, including some Marines and some transportation, to go and pick him up. That was too much of a risk under the existing situation. So I told him there was nothing I could do for him. He'd just have to stay where he was and await the arrival of the North Vietnamese.

Q: Before the final evacuation on April 29 and 30, were there any significant problems between the mission in Saigon and Washington or other agencies in Washington and the field?

LEHMANN: There were a number of problems that arose. Some were of lesser significance than others. One of the early problems that arose was when, on March 25, I requested authority from Washington to move dependents to safe-havens in Manila, Bangkok, and other places on our own authority as I saw fit in Saigon. Well, that was never granted. The Department insisted on bureaucratic review back in Washington. That kind of thing is not suitable to this sort of situation. However, we managed to live with it.

I suppose a more serious problem arose during the latter part of April because of tremendous pressures, political pressures in Washington for us to speed things up and to do things which we on the ground knew would have catastrophic results if we did so. Obviously, the Department and the rest of the Executive Branch was under considerable pressure from politicians up on the hill and others. We felt that pressure, but we just simply had to resist it. But, that was a rather serious problem.

A third problem, of course, was one I mentioned earlier regarding the evacuation of Vietnamese. We did not receive authority to move any Vietnamese under extraordinary procedures to the United States until April 25 or 26. Up until that time we were theoretically constrained to those who were eligible for visas which, of course, was wives and children of American citizens and that was all.

Another category of problems arose on a couple of occasions when there was a need for urgent action -- really urgent action. The main problem that arose in that connection was when sometime in early or mid April -- and I cannot remember when -- the FAA regional office in Honolulu, without a word to anybody, suddenly declared Tan Son Nhut airport no longer safe for American commercial aircraft. This came just at a time when I was still heavily engaged in trying to hold Pan Am's feet to the fire to keep flying. It was also quite unjustified because, when that was done, the situation in the general area of the airfield had not changed from what it had been for a couple of year before that. Apparently, the FAA decision was based on some questionable intelligence assessment which they received from PACAF, Pacific U. S. Air Force Command, in Honolulu. This was just the kind of thing, the moment it became public, that would set off a panic. If I had called the State Department, a committee would have met the next morning and started discussing this. So I just simply bypassed it. I called the NSC staff in the White House directly and demanded the rescission within hours, and I got it. There were a couple of instances of that kind.

In connection with other agencies, I mentioned that Pan Am, fairly early in the game, wanted to discontinue their operations and Hank Woodrow and I had to put a good deal of pressure on the airline to have them continue. I admit they had a real problem because they would be way overbooked on their daily flights out of Saigon. Then, when flight time came, there would be a lot of empty spaces because there were simply no shuttles, or people were booking seats on the airplane that didn't have the exit documentation. Nevertheless, it was important to keep them flying.

I had a similar problem with Flying Tigers whom we also had to pressure to keep flying. They did not respond and stopped when they decided they had to.

One last problem, not a significant one, that arose was with the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital. That hospital provided basically medical support for the whole American community. I was told at some point -- I think it was again around mid April -- that they wanted to pull out. So I along with Woodrow and Dustin who was our medical officer went out to see the Seventh Day Adventists and persuaded them to remain. That was very important to us because there was in the background, of course, always the possibility of casualties and that was our medical support. But, that problem was resolved satisfactorily.

Q: They stayed right up to the end?

LEHMANN: They remained very close to the end, and even on the last day they were still functional, although largely with a small Vietnamese skeleton staff.

Q: This was obviously a time of considerable distress on the staff. How did the staff perform as a whole? Were there any particular problems that arose?

LEHMANN: Let me say first of all that the overall performance of the staff was great. It was just terrific. Everybody worked hard, long hours under great personal stress and did a great job. We tried to recognize that in an awards program that, in fact, was not completed until early 1976. I think we generally managed to do so. One omission about that program that bothers me to this day is that after I, acting as chairman of an awards board here in Washington -- I came back from Frankfurt for that purpose with several others -- had completed the program, I gave to Director General Carol Laise a well-considered, small list of senior staff officers who had not been included in the program. They had, along with me, constituted the board. I pointed out in that note that I gave her that any omissions on that list were quite deliberate but that I thought the performance of these other officers -- I had them by name across the mission, not just State -- ought to be recognized. That was never done. I was told later on that someone else took it up with the director general and was told that considering awards for those senior staff officers would raise the questions of the ambassador, the DCM, and that those were political issues. So that never took place.

As regards to the staff performance as a whole, whenever you have a tremendously large number of Americans on the staff as we had in Vietnam under conditions like that you are bound to have an occasional problem. We did have to rather promptly relieve one fairly senior military officer and had him depart because he jumped the gun and disobeyed instructions. We had problems with two or three other people throughout this very large staff. That's very minor, really -- one or two who simply couldn't take it and had to be ordered out.

We had one problem with one member of the senior staff who had been a disruptive influence in the mission for some time before that. I will not go much farther than that. In retrospect, we should have sent the gentleman on back to the United States some months before that since he was the subject of complaints to me of virtually every other member of the senior staff at various points. But, we did not do that. That, I think, is a lesson for the future. If anybody is ever in a situation of that kind, he should identify personnel problems of that nature early in the stage and, no matter how tough it is, take action.

Q: Were these substantive points of difference or were they related to rough personal relationships to people?

LEHMANN: They were partly substantive in nature and they were in large measure related to ways of operating and running the mission.

Q: Before we continue with discussing the evacuation, it might be useful to record just what happened to President Thieu. When did he resign? What was our role? What did we do?

LEHMANN: After some exchanges of communications between ourselves and Washington, Ambassador Martin went to see Thieu on April 20. The details of that conversation are recorded in the traffic and I don't know to what extent that traffic has been released or not. However, in general I can say that what he told Thieu was that the decision as to what to do was, of course,

entirely up to him. But, if he should decide to resign, we would assist him and get him, his family, and a small number of his close assistants into a safe-haven. Thieu resigned on April 22, two days later announcing that resignation in a very bitter speech. I do not blame him for being bitter, incidentally. He had a right to be. He resigned that day. Two days later on April 24 we had arranged for a special U. S. aircraft at the airport to take him and his family and a few assistants to Taipei.

Q: We discussed the situation regarding the evacuation of people -- American, Vietnamese, and third country nationals. What was done with regard to sensitive materials -- classified records, etc.? I understand there also was a problem regarding the nuclear research reactor at Da Lat.

LEHMANN: We began packing and sending out embassy files and records at the beginning of April or maybe it was even early March. This was the kind of thing that we could do quietly. Nobody would see that. Things could be packed up in the communications room and shipped out.

Q: They were going all the way back to the United States?

LEHMANN: They were going all the way back to the United States. We also, for example, had the bubble that had to be gotten out. That's a rather large and unwieldy thing and, of course, that was a visible act. Most people really don't know when they see big pieces of plastic lying around in the courtyard, so that was sent out. Whatever documents that were not sent out at the time or taken out by us individually along in our briefcases towards the end were destroyed, including some during the night of April 29 to April 30. In any event, everything was either sent out or destroyed. Nothing fell into anybody's hands. This was not a Tehran situation. [Laughter] I get rather upset every once in a while when I still read stories about the situation in Tehran having the greatest intelligence loss since the evacuation of the embassy in Saigon. We didn't lose anything.

Q: Was there anything lost in the consulate generals?

LEHMANN: No. Also the same applies to the consulate generals. The consulates had either sent back or, in their cases, mostly destroyed all their files and records. That's true for all four of them.

Q: And then Da Lat?

LEHMANN: There was a research reactor in Da Lat, so called Triga reactor that had been part of the USAID program many years before. After Tet 1968, there was some nervousness in certain circles in Washington about fuel elements of that reactor. I recall distinctly then when I was director of the office of atomic energy as well as others in the State Department being approached by the Atomic Energy Commission to get those fuel elements out of at the time. Ambassador Bunker quite correctly just ignored that nonsense. In any event, we did want to get the fuel out in April of 1975. Again, it was one of those things where we wanted to act in time but not before time.

For about a week before we finally decided -- and I did -- to move those fuel elements, there were a couple of special C-130 aircraft standing by at Clarke Field in the Philippines with technicians and the equipment necessary to pull the fuel elements out of that small reactor. I finally permitted them to come in and go ahead with that. I believe it must have been around mid April. Then we did preserve the proper forms in all of this as much as I asked the Vietnamese government to give me a formal letter requesting that we remove the fuel elements, and they did so. It was a slightly hectic operation. The NVA was beginning to approach the area. This was in the highlands, of course. It took all night, but it was done and properly done.

Q: We are now coming down to the final period before the evacuation and, particularly, to that last weekend. This is the period of Friday, April 25, to Monday, April 28. How did the situation evolve during those days, and what were you doing?

LEHMANN: First of all, let's keep in mind that at this point we had been operating around the clock C-141 and C-130 flights from the airport since Monday, April 21. In the middle of that week and the latter part of that week a kind of a lull set in on the battlefield. There wasn't much by way of North Vietnamese offensive action.

Q: They were close to Saigon.

LEHMANN: But, they were beginning to approach Saigon. It was shortly after that a rather tough battle at Swan Loc [Phonetic] where the ARVN had really distinguished themselves and fought very well, indeed. At that time there was, of course, some speculation as to the reason for that lull. There are two possibilities. One was that it reflected a political decision in Hanoi to have the whole business end in some form as an ostensible government of national reconciliation which they always said they had wanted. This would have been, of course, a complete farce --

Q: With the idea of negotiating with people who were neutral or had that reputation.

LEHMANN: With the idea of negotiating with Minh who had replaced Thieu. He was, therefore, from their standpoint the ideal candidate with whom to negotiate this charade or farce.

The other possibility, of course, was that, having conducted extensive offensive operations, they simply had a logistical problem and needed to regroup and reorganize. There is still a third possibility that it was a combination of both of those things. In any event, the first option I mentioned, if it was ever considered, was dismissed. In retrospect it is probably evident that the lull was due to a need to regroup, reorganize and look after their logistics.

Q: If they had had some resistance from the ARVN elements that had fought a bit more than people thought, perhaps.

LEHMANN: Yes. That certainly is so. However, none of this affected our evacuation operations which, as I said, continued. On Thursday I decided that the time had come for us to evacuate the last of the wives which were simply the wives of a senior officers including my own, Hank Woodrow's wife, Nancy Bennett, the wife of the political counselor, and one other lady and two children which we still had. They were the children of the divorced consular officer, Peter Orr,

whom we had to retain because we needed him in our operation. I also had Mrs. Martin on that list but her name was deleted by the ambassador. In order to do this we had the Army send in a U-21 from Thailand because we didn't want to have the departure of the senior wives noted out where most of the evacuation was taking place. We also needed to maintain the fiction that they were simply going to Bangkok for an extended weekend. That was done on Friday, April 25.

The lull, as I mentioned, did continue through Sunday, April 27. Beginning on Monday morning, April 28, it became quite clear early on that the North Vietnamese were actively resuming their offensive operations. At about six o'clock in the late afternoon on Monday, April 28, a number of A-37 aircraft, obviously manned either by North Vietnamese or defecting South Vietnamese pilots, attacked the flight lines at the Tan Son Nhut airport.

At the time that occurred, I had just gone out of my office and gone out into the second courtyard of the embassy in the area where the swimming pool and the snack bar was located. I had gone there to straighten out the problem that was reported to me about having buses with evacuees leave from there to go to the airport. This was an area where we were assembling evacuees to bus them to the airport. I was told there was a problem of a delay and I had gone out to look after that just at the time that that air strike in Tan Son Nhut took place. Now, there have been some rather lurid accounts of that particular event. When the strike took place, it precipitated a certain amount of quite unnecessary rushing around and a bit of upset. I might note parenthetically here that, being a veteran of the Italian campaign of World War II including the Casino Line, the Anzio Beachhead and quite a few other events, I can differentiate between the difference of unfriendly high explosives coming down in your immediate vicinity in which case you would have a very strong, direct personal interest, and something that is happening a mile or two away. In that case you can afford to take a detached professional interest in what is going on. This strike out at Tan Son Nhut, lurid descriptions in some books to the contrary, was in the latter category. It was quite a distance away. There was no immediate danger to the embassy or anybody in the embassy. This did not prevent our very solicitous, protective Marines from immediately surrounding the minister with weapons drawn in order to protect him. This was very touching but it was somewhat overdone.

Q: This brings us to a side question of what was the system on assembly areas and movement to the Tan San Nhut airport for final evacuation? Obviously, you've indicated that the chancery itself was an assembly area and that buses were picking up people there. Were there other assembly areas and what was the plan of movement?

LEHMANN: On April 15, sometime earlier, we had activated an evacuee holding facility out at the DAO compound. The system was that anybody being evacuated by fixed-wing aircraft -- which, as I mentioned, were operating around the clock beginning April 21 -- would come out there or be bussed out there either from the embassy itself or from some other designated locations in town, notably staff housing areas.

Q: That system was still continuing at this late date?

LEHMANN: That was continuing at that late date until the air strike on the flight line at Tan Son Nhut on Monday evening. The attack on the flight line in which at least one C-130 was destroyed

in effect ended the fixed-wing airlift.

Q: *This was about what time?*

LEHMANN: The air strike took place at six o'clock in the evening. After we had rather quickly assessed the situation and in the course of the next hour, a decision was made that it would be too risky to continue fixed-wing operations out of Tan Son Nhut because of the danger that we might lose an aircraft full of people.

Q: *Were people then brought back into the housing areas that were already out there assembling?*

LEHMANN: The people that were out at the DAO compound remained there. The people that were in the embassy at the time remained there for the time being. After we had made the decision to discontinue fixed-wing operations, the rest of the evening was taken up with reviewing the final plans for the increasing likelihood but not yet a decision that we would have to go to a helicopter evacuation -- which is technically known as option four of Frequent Winds" -- the following day.

That went on throughout the early evening. Shortly after midnight -- the night from Monday to Tuesday morning -- the ambassador decided that he and I should return to our residences and try to get some rest in view of the likelihood that a lot of major and crucial decisions had to be made the next day. I got back to my house between one o'clock and two o'clock in the morning. I tried to get some sleep.

Q: *As you know, I'm involved in going to embassies on crisis management exercises. One of the things that I've stressed is -- and this comes up in the exercises -- the extreme importance of fatigue in desperate situations or critical situations and the need for people to consciously put aside time to recharge their batteries no matter how the man is. This is reflected in the last point that you were making about the ambassador's decision that you and he needed to get some sleep and for some of the others, too. I know earlier, too, at one point you mentioned having been awake for some huge number of hours. It must be all through this that there must have been the question of physical exhaustion confronting quite a number of people but particularly the senior staff that were so heavily engaged in the operation. Do you have any comments on what was done?*

LEHMANN: I quite agree. That's important for all concerned to get some sort of rest. Otherwise, they become useless. With regard to most of the staff, we had earlier worked out a shift system. Because we had designated certain elements of the mission to worry about various categories of potential evacuees -- the defense attaché to worry about the Vietnamese military, the political section to worry about politicians, and other people to worry about relatives of Americans, etc. These things had gone on a shift basis somewhat earlier so that nobody would work more than about twelve hours or so. That was the attempt that was made.

For the absolute senior staff, it was on a more irregular basis. You got what rest whenever you could.

Q: *This was an attempt to get it.*

LEHMANN: Yes.

Q: *There was a good deal written at various times about the large banyan tree that was located in the embassy courtyard and which became a symbol of what was to be done. There had been a number of rather lurid press accounts, for example, on the refusal of Ambassador Martin to agree to the removal of that large tree. It indicated to some that the embassy was out of touch with the realities of the situation, that the refusal to take down the tree meant that they did not understand the evacuation might have to occur and, obviously, the tree would have to come down if the helicopters were to come in. The situation would be amenable to evacuation. What was the real story?*

LEHMANN: The helicopter evacuation plan called for some of the helicopters to land on the roof helipad and others -- notably the rather heavy CA-53s that the roof pad could not support -- land in the courtyard of the embassy where this famous, beautiful banyan tree was located. It always was obvious that, when push came to shove, the tree would have to come down. One of the problems here, however, was that the tree was not only large but it was also very visible from the street. The streets were getting increasingly crowded as panic was beginning to slowly develop in the city of Saigon. The removal of the tree would be a visible act that would undoubtedly spread like wild fire throughout the city.

As I was returning from the outer courtyard and surrounded by my solicitous Marines to go back to my office to assess the situation and try to find out just what had happened out at Tan Son Nhut, I was passing the tree. As I was passing the tree, one of our Seabees was vigorously but somewhat ineffectually chopping away at the tree with an axe in what was quite clearly a self-initiated attempt to clear the area for use as a helicopter landing zone. As I entered the embassy chancery building, I billed the security officer [Inaudible Portion] to promptly have the Seabee cease and desist from the rather ineffectual and somewhat premature efforts, to bring in some power tools such as chain saws, etc., have them ready, but not to take any action regarding the tree until instructed and until the time was right. I then forgot about the tree and turned on to other things that we discussed in response to an earlier question.

As a matter of fact, I'm not sure that Graham Martin ever knew anything about the tree.
[Laughter]

Q: *You've had your sleep now and are fairly rested. We're brought up now to the early morning hours of Tuesday, April 29. What took place then? When and how were the crucial decisions made?*

LEHMANN: I didn't really get any sleep. I got to bed between one and two and dozed off for a while. At about 4:15 A. M. I was roused from my dozing by a series of explosions out in the direction of the Tan Son Nhut airfield and the defense attaché compound. About ten minutes later at about 4:30 A. M. the phone rang and the report -- I don't recall now whether it was directly from the defense attaché or from an officer at the embassy chancery -- was that there had

been a rocket attack on the DAO compound and that two of the embassy Marine security guards out there had been killed.

That, of course, ended the rest period. I got up, showered, went down, and Mr. Tooee, my major domo and butler, gave me some breakfast. I packed some extra underwear, an extra pair of socks and a couple of little things in my briefcase. I had a last conversation with my butler who had previously told me that he did not want to leave and wanted to remain. He was an elderly man. I made some final arrangements with him to get some money to him in addition to money he had already been given -- that's dollars, not piasters. That money, incidentally, was delivered later by Brunson McKinley and Bob Martin to him. After having a little breakfast, I went back to the chancery. Ambassador Martin arrived from his residence just a little bit later on. We jointly began to review the situation, getting reports from General Smith out at Tan Son Nhut as to the details of the rocket attack which intermittently continued throughout the area.

Q: Did they seem to be targeting the American compound there or was this a general attack on the airport?

LEHMANN: Other facilities were also being spotted, but it was the first time at a little after four that morning that an attack appeared to be targeted specifically on an American installation. The cause of the death of the two Marines was a direct hit on the sandbag emplacement in which they were. It was just one of those things.

Ambassador Martin decided to go out to Tan Son Nhut and review the situation out there personally with General Smith. While out there, he had a telephone conversation with General Scowcroft back here in Washington which, however, did not result as yet in a definite conclusion on whether or not we would continue fixed-wing airlift rather than go to option four of the evacuation plan.

Q: He was with the NSC?

LEHMANN: Yes. Fred Scowcroft. Ambassador Martin then returned to the embassy. Meanwhile, it became very clear that damage to runways at the airfield and other things made it quite impossible to continue a fixed-wing airlift. Ambassador Martin then got on the telephone again, this time from the chancery, with General Scowcroft. A decision to go to option four of Frequent Winds, the helicopter airlift was made between 10:30 and 10:40 on Tuesday morning.

The initial moves by helicopter directly out to the fleet were by Air America helicopter. We were using Air America, our own helicopters, first in the morning to move people from the assembly areas either to the embassy or to the DAO holding facilities out at the airfield. Later on, we initially were using the Air America helicopters to move evacuees directly out to the fleet. The plan called for the Marine ground security force to arrive at the DAO compound at Tan Son Nhut -- which had priority on the evacuation under our plan -- one hour after the option four execute order was given. To illustrate that plans would go wrong, the ground security force arrived three hours later and not one hour later. Of course, the first helicopter evacuees, using fleet and Marine Corps helicopters, were those same choppers that brought in the security force and then would lift evacuees back out.

Q: This was sometime in the afternoon.

LEHMANN: This was between one and two in the afternoon. That delay cost us something at the end of the whole operation. I found out much later that the reason for that delay was that there had to be some cross-loading out at the fleet to marry the Marines that were supposed to come in to secure both the DAO compound and the embassy compound and were not the same ships as the helicopters were. They had to move people around.

By early or mid-afternoon, the embassy was surrounded by masses of people -- mobs. The security situation became increasingly risky. It was only with some difficulty that we managed to get into the compound. Some people for whose evacuation we had really special responsibilities -- for example, Trang Kon Gu, the leader of the Vietnamese Labor Federation, and his people; Mu Vien, the minister of the interior; Tran Van Lam, the former foreign minister who had signed the Paris agreement. Nonetheless, all this was accomplished, but the security situation was really getting touchy. I, therefore, telephoned the General who was out at the DAO compound and told him that we urgently needed about a platoon of additional Marines in addition to our embassy guards in the compound in order to maintain the security. These arrived about an hour later. The famous tree, incidentally, had been removed and gotten out of the way well ahead of time.

I was not in Ambassador Martin's office when he had the conversation with Washington which resulted in the decision to execute the helicopter lift, but several of the other senior staff people were. I was busy in my own office doing various other things on the telephone. After the decision was made, Hank Woodrow walked over into my office, told me the decision was made, and I went back to see Graham Martin to have it confirmed to me directly. I then walked out and told the security officer now to chop down that tree. The tree was chopped down long before anybody was ready to arrive by helicopter in the embassy courtyard. Timing was, indeed, quite adequate.

Q: Incidentally, now that we're at the point where the mobs are outside and the additional Marines are being brought or had just been brought in from Tan Son Nhut, what was the situation in regard to the dispositions of the American community? Were they all in the embassy compound? Were some in the compound, some at Tan Son Nhut, and some in the housing compounds, or what?

LEHMANN: By the time we're talking about, all Americans still in the area were either at the DAO compound or in the embassy compound. A little bit earlier some of the last ones, including some journalists, had arrived at the compound and gotten through into the compound only with some difficulty to get through the crowds. I should be quite accurate here. All those who wanted to leave -- there was one fellow, a contractor who turned out later on to somehow not get the word. It was his own fault. He was left behind. Then, of course, there were a couple of journalists who stayed on deliberately.

Q: By this time now we are getting the helicopter airlift going. As I understand it, the people were being removed by helicopter to two locations, both at Tan Son Nhut and from the embassy compound. Presumably, in the latter, since the banyan tree was cut down, you would have the

larger helicopters landing in the courtyard and the smaller types landing on the embassy roof. Is that correct?

LEHMANN: The priority was evacuation from the DAO compound at Tan Son Nhut. So most of the initial lift by helicopter went out of the DAO compound. That operation was completed by 2000, 8:00 in the evening on Tuesday. On its completion, General Smith and the few remaining DAO staff left a few minutes after eight that evening. That ended that phase of the operation.

Up until that time, we had relatively little lift out of the embassy compound. It is correct, of course, that that lift -- which was really only beginning in the mid-afternoon out of the embassy compound -- did involve the lighter helicopters, the CH-46s -- from the roof. The heavy ones, the CH-53s, were from the courtyard where the famous banyan tree had previously been. We were putting as many as 70 people into a CH-53 which was overloading it somewhat. Since many of them were Vietnamese, they were rather small --

Q: Given the fact that you had these crowds -- mobs, even -- outside the embassy gates and a great deal of pandemonium and confusion going on, was there any effort by the mobs or people in them to interfere with the landing of the CH-53 aircraft into the compound?

LEHMANN: Not in any significant way. All these poor people were desperately trying to do was to try to get into the compound with the hope that somehow they might be taken out. There was an occasional shot fired from outside the compound, but we could not really determine whether that was directed at an incoming helicopter or not. In any event, it did not in any way interfere with the operation. At this point, we did have enough Marines to secure both the inner and the outer embassy compound, although occasionally someone might have slipped in who shouldn't have. It did not affect anything.

In the course of the evening -- and I can't remember exactly when it was, but I suspect it was around 8:30 or 9:00 in the evening -- the military suggested that we suspend further helicopter operations for the time being and resume them at first light the next morning. The ambassador and I vetoed that very promptly and insisted that we would have to continue the operation throughout the night. That insistence was based on both what the intelligence were still able to gather about the North Vietnamese -- and there were some that were still available to us -- and on a judgement that the situation around the embassy, even with the larger Marine detachment was becoming increasingly untenable.

At that point we may have had somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 people in the compound, both American and Vietnamese with a heavy preponderance of Vietnamese. During the night, therefore, the lift continued although at times there would be long intervals which, in our view, were excessively long intervals between arriving helicopters from the fleet. I understand, and I think we understood then, that there were deep problems of refueling, fatigue of the crews, etc. But it was clear that the operation definitely had to continue and could not be stopped and resumed the next morning.

Q: Were you able to set up lights so they could see their way in?

LEHMANN: There was no problem about that. They could see their way in. The situation in the courtyard was dealt with by having embassy cars parked around the perimeter of the courtyard with the headlights on. That illuminated the courtyard situation which was a tricky thing for the pilots. It was very tricky because of walls and antennas and other mass nearby that they had to get over before they could clear the courtyard with their heavy loads.

One of the things that became a matter of some concern is that sometime during the time around midnight or a little bit later it began to rain just very lightly. Remember, we were now in April and now at the beginning of the monsoon. It began to rain very lightly, and the mere fact of water on the hulls of the helicopters added to their weight. So we had one very critical moment where a pilot with a load full of people tried to lift out of the courtyard and could not get enough altitude. He had to put back down and they had to unload some people off before he could get out.

Q: They probably didn't want to get off.

LEHMANN: No. They did not want to get off. So that was a moment of great concern because, if we had an accident in the courtyard with a broken helicopter, that would have finished the lift out of the courtyard and we would have had to rely entirely on the smaller choppers coming in on the roof.

Q: How many could they take out? Was there quite a difference?

LEHMANN: There was quite a difference. As I said, we could put as many as 70 people in the CH-53s, and I think the maximum number of CH-46s might have been about 40.

Q: That was about a two-to-one difference.

LEHMANN: Close to two-to-one difference. At the same time, we were also destroying a few last documents by burning up on the rooftop.

Q: We continue on with this process. I guess the only thing to ask before we get into the final last withdrawal is were you getting any panic among the Vietnamese and also the Americans -- all the people that were still waiting their turn to leave as time went on? Were there priorities among them? Were they waiting orderly, particularly since I know that some people were left behind at the end? In other words, was this anticipated by some of them?

LEHMANN: No. There was no panic among any of the people. We had people waiting in the courtyard. We had people waiting in the stairwell of the chancery building to go up to the rooftop, but there was no panic. At one point, when we had reduced the number still waiting to a more manageable proportion, we abandoned the outer embassy courtyard -- the area where the swimming pool, the snack bar and the administrative section was -- and removed everybody into the inner courtyard which gave us also a smaller perimeter to protect against the crowd outside.

As to priorities, well, you know, your priorities as far as we were concerned -- the first obligations, of course, to Americans. Certainly, the second was to any high-risk Vietnamese, to

our employees. But, we did not have a priority question as such arise. The small group that in the end was left behind that I mentioned earlier, largely due to the fact that the entire lift operation began about two to three hours later than it should have, was a mix of Vietnamese and Koreans.

Q: Let's get down to the final hours and deep into the night. I guess the final pull-out you mentioned was about six o'clock in the morning. I recall that Ambassador Graham Martin went out before you, apparently because of a direct order from the President to do so. Can you get into the last few loads, you might say?

LEHMANN: At about four o'clock in the morning, the ambassador and I went to the remaining communications setup, the last one. We sent our final message. The date-time group of that message was 291215 Zulu which, of course, is Greenwich time. The message said, "Plan to close mission about 0430, 30 April local time. This is the last message from Embassy Saigon."

After that message was sent, the communicator disabled the communications setup. He did whatever he had to do to protect the remaining [Inaudible Portion]. He got in line to leave. We were not, however, out of communications because we still had a link all the way back to Washington through the MACPAC radio of a Marine with the Marine security force and the major commanding that force. After we sent the message, there was really nothing much else for us to do. We waited while the operation was continuing to try to get as many people out of the courtyard as possible.

At some time a little later -- it might have been around 4:30 -- a very peremptory message did come through direct from the White House where they were monitoring the situation directing the ambassador and the remaining staff to leave by the next helicopter. We considered that for a while and let the operation continue still for a while longer. Finally, after some consultation between myself and the Marine major, decided that the time had come for the ambassador and the rest of us to leave. Initially, through an error we all went downstairs rather than upstairs because the thought was we were going to leave on one of the bigger helicopters. But, that was not to be. The ambassador and remaining staff trooped on up to the rooftop where one CH-46 was just landing and another one was hovering not far away. As the CH-46 landed, Ambassador Martin along with George Jacobson, Tom Holgar, and a few others started walking towards the helicopter. Some of the rest of us began to follow, but that crew chief knew when he had his man. What his orders were, as soon as he got the ambassador on board, all the people who have to be right along next to him. He waved the rest of us back and the helicopter took off.

Q: Not full, I gather.

LEHMANN: Not entirely full. It had some other people on it. It had some remaining mission warden guards on it who helped the control of all of this and a few other people, but it was not entirely full. Shortly thereafter, the next CH-46 put down on the rooftop, and the rest of us -- which included Hank Woodrow, Joe Bennett, Brunson McKinley, Jim Devine, an officer named Jay Blowers, and the last mission warden guards boarded that helicopter which became really very jammed and crowded. We stayed up on the rooftop for about twenty to twenty-five minutes because the Marine major, who was doing a very competent job of running things out in the courtyard, was using the helicopter's radio to firm up his final plans for extracting the Marine

detachment which was the final step, of course. So we sat there for about twenty minutes while he was working that out over the radio. We lifted off according to my records at 5:20 in the morning.

Q: You don't know the Marine officer's name by any chance, do you?

LEHMANN: Sorry. I should, but I don't.

Q: How long did it take to get out to the fleet and what happened when you arrived?

LEHMANN: It took about a half an hour or a little bit more -- maybe about 45 minutes. As we were leaving the Saigon area, I could look out the helicopter and I could see the approaching North Vietnamese columns with their headlights out and beginning to enter the outskirts of the city. Our exit was covered by armed aircraft from the fleet. That had been the case throughout this whole thing.

Q: But, there was no interference from the North Vietnamese?

LEHMANN: There was no interference. There was no attempt to interfere. I think that was probably intentional. It took about 45 minutes to get out to the fleet. Our helicopter landed on the Denver, which was an LPD, a landing platform dock. It had Marines on it and assault boats and helicopters. The ambassador and those with him, meanwhile, had gone out to the Blueridge, so we were separated at this point. Arriving at the Denver, the first thing that the Navy made sure of was that nobody had any weapons on them. I was deprived of one little mace thing that I had with me. I think Woodrow was deprived of a revolver he had which I'm not sure he ever recovered. Except for that, they were very solicitous and gave us a lot of food to eat. They gave us an initially rather crowded place to sleep, but that was sorted out later on.

Q: You stayed on the ship until it got to the Philippines?

LEHMANN: The fleet stayed out. After the evacuation was completed -- the Marines, incidentally, were extracted from the compound by about seven o'clock in the morning or a little bit before, perhaps, moving up through the building gradually and abandoning the courtyard which was immediately taken over by the crowds. They took away typewriters and anything else they could find.

Q: There were no incidents in the Marine departure?

LEHMANN: There were no incidents, and there were no casualties of any kind throughout except the two Marines that were killed early on in the day by that direct hit which, I think, was quite an accomplishment.

The fleet did not move out. The fleet remained on station, anchored out in the South China Sea about 25 miles offshore or something like that for a number of days. They picked up additional people -- Vietnamese -- coming out on boats and barges. All toll, about another 60,000 people came out on boats and barges while the fleet stayed out there. They were largely put on some

MSTS transports that were with the fleet. I have forgotten just how long we stayed out there. I think it was about three or four days before we sailed into Subic Bay.

Q: Wolf, I believe we've covered the entire sequence from the beginning, over a period of a month and a half to two months, up until the final arrival of yourself and Ambassador Martin and the others at the fleet. Probably, we've forgotten a few things here and there. One thing I remember, for example, that I wanted to cover and didn't and that we might clean up is how the warden system worked. We might also have another final point on the total number of people that were involved in the evacuation.

LEHMANN: The mission warden system worked pretty well. During the evacuation period, we used the Americans in the mission warden system, largely either to drive or escort buses -- often to escort buses -- that were bringing people from assembly points either to the embassy or to the DAO holding facilities. At the end, I mentioned earlier, at the end among the last to be evacuated were most of these American mission warden guards. Of course, the warden system also had a lot of Vietnamese guards that were under contract which, for example, provided the guards at my house, etc. On the whole it worked well. There was a fatigue factor at one point with the American mission warden guards. In fact, that played a role on the problem that arose with moving the people from the embassy to the DAO compound on Monday afternoon just before the 8:37 attack.

Q: What kind of people were these wardens? One thing that I found in a somewhat similar situation was -- and I always raise this in the exercise that we hold -- the importance of insuring that the wrong people were not made wardens. In other words, you have to be very careful that senior staff are not named wardens, people that would be occupied with other things. So you are trying to get people that have good heads, are stable, are not too emotional on the one hand but on the other hand also will have the time to do this and not be pulled off to do other essential jobs that are their primary responsibility.

LEHMANN: Yes, I see what you mean. Of course, the thing that I was talking about is a little bit different because these were full-time hired wardens that I was talking about. As far as the people detailed from the normal mission stand as wardens were concerned, we had that also, of course. We didn't encounter any particular difficulties on that score, but perhaps that was so in our case because it was a very large mission with an awful lot of people. We could insure that the right people were selected and there weren't these overlaps. The same kind of thing may not be true for an embassy or a mission of a much smaller size [as it was for] the immense mission that we had in Saigon.

Q: Why don't we go on now to the number of people that were involved.

LEHMANN: As to the number, we started with 5,886 U. S. Government personnel, U. S. contractors, and dependents at about the first of March of 1975. Between April 4 and April 24, we evacuated by commercial or military means a total of 27,000 people of all kinds -- Vietnamese and third country nationals. Between the April 25 and early on April 29 -- the crucial day -- in those four days we evacuated about another 27,000, mostly by military fixed-wing airlift -- by far the largest number. The helicopter lifts on the April 29 and into April 30 lifted

about 7,500 out of the Saigon area. After that, another 14,000 -- almost all Vietnamese with a few Americans -- came out to the fleet by boats and barges generally in conformity with the plans for the use of boats and barges.

Q: *Were these to a great extent out of MR-4?*

LEHMANN: These were both MR-4 and MR-3, some from the nearby Saigon area. That made a total of 75,500 approximately evacuated under the plan, either by air or surface. In addition to those, another 60,000 Vietnamese came out to the fleet in the course of the 29th and a few days thereafter that the fleet remained anchored offshore. Those were largely by some form of surface transport -- a boat or a phalange, etc. Included in that number is a relatively small number, largely of Vietnamese military who came out with their own helicopters.

Q: *Of course, we all know that in the years to follow enormous numbers came later, but that was a different situation. That was not a part of this final evacuation, but it was the escape after the North Vietnamese takeover had been completed.*

LEHMANN: Yes, that was a completely different thing.

MONCRIEFF J. SPEAR
Consul General
Nha Trang (1973-1975)

Moncrieff J. Spear served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, and finished his degree at Cornell University when the war was over. Mr. Spear was accepted into the Foreign Service in 1950 and subsequently served in Germany, the Philippines, Yugoslavia, Thailand, the Bahamas, Vietnam, as well as several Washington, DC posts in the European Bureau, Country Director for Thailand-Burma Affairs, the OES and the Human Rights Commission in the House of Representatives. Mr. Spear was interviewed by Thomas J. Dunnigan in 1993.

Q: *How did your role as consul general change when independence came to the Bahamas?*

SPEAR: Well, I was chargé d'affaires there for a brief period, until Ron Spiers came down as Ambassador. Our main activity was trying to arrange negotiations on the military bases, most of which were left over from the World War II period, when they had been part of the old [1940] destroyers-for-bases agreement, which President Roosevelt concluded with Prime Minister Churchill. The Bahamian Government would be taking over a lot of these bases, and there were very few of them that we wanted to continue to use. So we had teams down from Washington and were carrying on very active negotiations right up until independence, when we were able to get these matters worked out -- or at least the ones we were most interested in -- and arrange for subsequent negotiations on the rest.

We certainly had a very active social life there, too. Prince Charles had come to represent Queen

Elizabeth, as they used to say in those days "giving small islands away." What used to be known at Government House as the "flotsam and jetsam of Empire," which Britain was still trying to shed. We arranged to have the U. S. Navy "Blue Angels" [aerial acrobatics team] do an aerial demonstration for the independence celebration.

I was only there for a few days before the pressure began to mount to get on to my next assignment in Vietnam. Ambassador Martin, who was now our new Ambassador, had asked me to come and join his staff there.

Q: I see. And what position did you occupy on the staff in Vietnam?

SPEAR: Well, I moved on to another, larger Consulate General. This was the one at Nha Trang, on the coast in Vietnam, about half way between Saigon and Da Nang. It covered all of the Central Highlands area, the most mountainous areas of Central Vietnam. In fact, our consular district comprised almost 50% of the land area of South Vietnam.

Q: That was to be my question. Why would we have a post at a place like Nha Trang?

SPEAR: Because the Embassy and the four Consulates General set up there, one in each of the major regions of [South] Vietnam, really had inherited most of the enormous military assistance, economic assistance, public affairs programs, and all of the other things that were being carried on there to support the South Vietnamese Government and its forces, following the withdrawal of American military forces.

Q: Well, now, of course, when you were there, direct American participation in the fighting in Vietnam had ended, and troops had been withdrawn.

SPEAR: That's right.

Q: But that hadn't ended the North Vietnamese aggression.

SPEAR: No, indeed. The Paris Accords [of 1973] had been signed. The original idea when we went out there was that we were going to be monitoring the implementation of the Paris Accords. So we really went out there as a sort of peacekeeping force, working with the ICCS, the International Control Commission, which had been set up with the Canadians, the Indonesians, the Hungarians, [the Indians, and later the Iranians, who replaced the Canadians] to monitor the accords. My staff helped to arrange an exchange of prisoners of war between the Vietnamese sides. But the pressure which had forced me to break off from the Bahamas and get out to Vietnam right away was that a pitched battle was forming up there in the highlands around Kontum. That battle had ended just about the time I got there, but there was continuing fighting that went on during all of the 18 months I was there, from September 1973 until the evacuation in April, 1975. There was heavy fighting between division-sized forces of the South Vietnamese Army with North Vietnamese divisions which had moved into South Vietnam.

I should explain that these were really pitched battles between regular forces. This was no longer an insurgency.

Q: In other words, they had artillery, tanks, and all of the panoply of modern warfare?

SPEAR: Exactly, yes. The one thing that the South Vietnamese forces had which the North Vietnamese forces did not have was a modest Air Force.

I had people on my staff from the Defense Attaché's office [in the Embassy in Saigon], which took over some of the functions of the old MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam], a military assistance headquarters, handling all manner of military supplies to the South Vietnamese Army, Navy, and Air Force. I had about 100 Americans on my staff and about 700 Vietnamese. I had province representatives in each of the 12 provinces which comprised the consular area. In these offices would be a staff of anywhere from two or three to a half dozen Americans -- agricultural experts, community development advisers, highway engineers, the whole panoply of economic assistance there. Then we had USIA officers in the field of public affairs, carrying on the business of telling the American story abroad but also assisting the Vietnamese in some of their efforts, doing similar things to what we had been doing out in Thailand, trying to assist the government to win the hearts and minds of its own people.

Q: How many of you on the Nha Trang staff were actually Foreign Service Officers?

SPEAR: I don't think that there were more than a half dozen of us. Most of the people assigned to the Consulate General in Nha Trang were AID [Agency for International Development] personnel. The Defense Attaché people, of course, were civilian employees of DOD [Department of Defense]. We didn't have any regular military officers attached to the staff. They used to come up on temporary duty from Saigon. We actually had a small "air force" attached to the staff. We had an old DC-3, which I used to do a regular courier run around the 12 provinces, every other day or so. We had a fleet of about a half dozen helicopters and a couple of fast, propeller-driven, passenger aircraft to get around in. So it was a very substantial establishment there.

Q: These province reps you mentioned. Were they Foreign Service Officers?

SPEAR: No, most of those were AID people, though there were one or two Foreign Service Officers who came up on temporary detail and were sent out to the provinces. We used to do a great deal of reporting, including a certain amount of military reporting on the fighting still going on. We did political reporting on developments in the area and tried to keep our finger on the pulse, reporting the progress of various AID development programs as well.

Q: Did we expect the heavy North Vietnamese attack that began in January 1975?

SPEAR: Yes, as a matter of fact our intelligence had been quite good on that, although I must say that the [South] Vietnamese intelligence up in the Central Vietnam highlands left a lot to be desired. In strategic terms, yes, we had gotten from defectors and other sources the outlines of the North Vietnamese plans for the takeover of South Vietnam. It was to be in two stages. It was thought that they would try to break the back of the South Vietnamese forces in 1975. 1976 would be the year when they cleaned up and occupied the entire country.

In the II Corps area [Central Vietnam], which the Consulate General in Nha Trang covered, the

North Vietnamese plans to cut the major highways and to cut the Central Highlands off from the coastal area had been obtained. And the South Vietnamese forces had done quite a good job in getting this intelligence. Then, when the attack actually started, things went exactly according to the [North Vietnamese] plan. But, unfortunately, the South Vietnamese forces were not able to break out and keep these highways open. The communists also did a very effective job of putting in a surprise attack on one of the capitals up in the highlands, Ban Me Thuot. They brought a several-division-sized force in there. They were able, consequently, to break the back and destroy one of the South Vietnamese divisions, as a result of which the military balance tipped very substantially, and the remaining South Vietnamese forces at the [provincial] capital in Pleiku were forced to carry out an evacuation down to the coast. But before this happened, our province representative, Paul Struharik, who had been there in Ban Me Thuot, was cut off from the outside. He and a group of American missionaries and others, about a half dozen of them, were captured by the North Vietnamese forces. It was not until after the fall of Saigon [in April, 1975] that we were finally able to negotiate their release through the International Control Commission.

We had also been asked if we could try to rescue some of the Iranians, Hungarians, and Indonesians [in the International Control Commission] who had some of their people captured at Ban Me Thuot, as well. But we were unable to effect that.

The major point however, was that the South Vietnamese and [their] commanding general in II Corps, went ahead and started evacuating out of Pleiku without informing the Americans. We didn't find out about their efforts to bring a column down to the sea until after the evacuation had started. At that point we became heavily involved, using our fleet of planes and helicopters to get our own people out. What proved to be a much heavier burden was getting our local staff of Vietnamese employees and their numerous family members out of various posts in the highlands which were coming under very heavy attack. A number of our people ran some very serious risks and were very courageous in the face of great danger as they tried to get their Vietnamese employees out. We did succeed in getting a very substantial proportion, a very high percentage of them, down to Nha Trang. But because the communists had cut off the main roads coming down to the coast from the highlands, the [South] Vietnamese forces under General Phu tried to come down over an old road which had been abandoned after the French had left Vietnam [in 1954]. It really was a dirt road trail that led down and then tapered off as it got below the escarpment that dropped off to the sea. So the North Vietnamese forces were able to catch up with the tail of this [South Vietnamese] military column, retreating down this old road. And the column had been followed by thousands and thousands of civilians. The [North Vietnamese] began shelling the end of the column there. And the whole thing became just an utter rout.

Meantime, I remember going up with my own people to where the [South] Vietnamese forces on the coast were trying to fight their way up to this column. And eventually, with some heroic work, [South] Vietnamese engineers bridged a large river that these forces had to get across, a sort of rag tag, bob tail, group was finally able to fight its way down to the coast. But the thing was a horrible tragedy, and thousands and thousands of civilians died of thirst and hunger on this horrible march down to the sea.

Q: By this time you had to be thinking about the danger to Nha Trang and the possibility of

having to close the post there.

SPEAR: That's right. We had been trying to get people out because one of the things that I had learned during all of this was that the more people you got out earlier, the easier it was when push came to shove at the very end. One of the things that we had learned from the evacuation at Pleiku was that one of our greatest dangers was from panic at the airfields and other places involving armed soldiers or armed civilians from units which had completely lost their unit integrity and had become an armed rabble. They would try to seize planes and trucks and any form of transportation to get away. It began reaching the point where there were hundreds of these people. One of my colleagues in Saigon used to refer to them as "rattlesnakes." They were loose there in the town, in Nha Trang. And, of course, these young soldiers hadn't been fed or paid and were really desperate, trying to look after themselves. But, of course, they were prepared to do some of this at gun point, if necessary. It really was a terribly dangerous situation.

Under these circumstances we had been trying to put up a good front and to express our confidence that the [South] Vietnamese would be able to stabilize the military situation and establish an effective front. But in the meantime we were sluicing people out the back door as hard and fast as we could, evacuating them to Saigon. I'm afraid that our effort was so successful that there have been all sorts of charges -- and I've got half a dozen books about the fall of Vietnam up there [on my bookshelves], in which accusations were made that we were doing nothing at all to evacuate people. This simply reflected the success of our efforts to maintain calm and avoid setting off the kind of panic which would have made it impossible for us to get any of these people evacuated. It would have resulted in their falling into North Vietnamese hands.

We had been doing fairly well on this until about Easter time. And over that Easter weekend -- no, it was the weekend after -- we got orders to send all of the planes, which had been handling evacuations out of Nha Trang, up to I Corps, where Al Francis, who was the Consul General [in Da Nang] was in the last and really desperate stages of evacuation. So we had to stop [our evacuation efforts] just as the panic was reaching its height, and the [North] Vietnamese forces were approaching Nha Trang. We lost a whole weekend there by sending the airplanes up to I Corps to evacuate the Consulate General in Da Nang. But given the situation that they were in, they certainly should have had and did have the priority call. This resulted in the fact that on April 1 we finally had to begin evacuating ourselves. The province chief and the [South Vietnamese] Military Police forces lost all control of the city [of Nha Trang], and communist prisoners were released from the jails by communist sympathizers in the city. We started to evacuate people out of the airport. Well, it wasn't long before the situation got so bad, with gunfire around the city, that we had to give up evacuation by bus and by car to the airport, which was about a mile or so from the Consulate General, and start evacuating people by helicopter from its compound. This went on pretty much for the better part of one day, during which we were getting people out. The Consulate General had a fence around it and walls, but we discovered that all sorts of people who shouldn't be there were getting in over the walls. As we were drawing down on the number of Americans, we simply couldn't keep control of the situation there in the compound.

So finally, my deputy, Phil Cook, and I arranged that I would go out to the airport and take

charge of activities out there. My administrative officer had previously been doing this, getting people on the planes. Phil would take the last small group and pull out of the courtyard at the Consulate General, where the helicopters had been landing. When I got out to the airport -- I had this walky-talky radio -- I received a desperate message from Phil that the helicopters were being fired on. At that point I could see that the helicopter going into the compound at the Consulate General was making its final approach. They did get Phil out, but I think that that was one of the worst moments I had during that whole damned evacuation.

Then we continued to get people aboard the planes there [at the airport], but at about 5:00 PM, as dusk was approaching, I got word that we were to pull out the last remaining Americans and get ourselves out of there. We tried to get back word that we still hadn't gotten many of our Vietnamese employees out, but the orders were that we were to go anyhow. At this point I discovered that the local Air America staff [at the airport], who had been handling the ramps and getting people up on the planes, and so forth, were no longer available. We all made a dash for the helicopters and pulled out. It was certainly a bitter blow to have to leave these Vietnamese employees behind.

Q: You spoke of orders coming, Monty. Where did they come from -- the Embassy in Saigon?

SPEAR: They came from the Embassy, from Ambassador Martin, yes. I believe that they reflected orders that may have come out of Washington. As we were leaving, we were able to get word back to the helicopter pilots. There were some American ships and barges that had come down from I Corps and stopped in the harbor at Nha Trang. We told the helicopter pilots that if they could evacuate the employees that we had left behind, without subjecting themselves to fire, they should get them out on the ships and the barges. It's a funny thing. I was convinced that we had not been able to get these people out. It was only when I got back to Washington, two or three months later, that I read a report which indicated that several hundred more had been able to get out onto the barges and ships and went down by sea to Saigon.

We had left a considerable group of [Vietnamese] employees at the airport. One of our senior Vietnamese employees had gone to the commanding general of the [South Vietnamese] Air Force, which was stationed at the air field at Nha Trang. He explained to him that they had been abandoned by the Americans. He prevailed on the general to evacuate a large number of them down to Saigon. A few days later, when I was in Saigon, I got an extremely bitter note from this Vietnamese employee about the way in which the Americans had "used" the Vietnamese and then thrown them aside and abandoned them. I think that that was one of the most painful episodes of the whole experience in Vietnam.

Q: Well, tensions were high, of course, in those days, and anger, fear, and many other emotions obviously were close to the surface.

SPEAR: Yes, of course.

Q: So you were evacuated to Saigon where, presumably, Lois had preceded you. What was her role during this period?

SPEAR: Lois had had all sorts of visitors from the time the offensive first began. The wives of some of the leading [South] Vietnamese officials around town would come around to see whether we were packing up and what we were doing. Lois had been trying to maintain a calm front and give the impression that we had complete confidence in the [South] Vietnamese and that we were not pulling out on them. After a while -- particularly after things got hotter and closer and we had all of these disorganized troops around town -- Lois said that she just couldn't stand it, sitting over there in the house. At this point the Consular Section, which had been registering Americans and getting the evacuation organized, had simply been overwhelmed. So both Lois and the wife of my administrative officer went over there and helped to register people and get the word out to Americans when the planes and flights were ready, how to get their baggage and effects ready to go, and so forth.

Lois had also been working prior to that time, teaching English, because she has a degree in linguistics, at the local community college in Nha Trang. Just before the [North Vietnamese] offensive [began], she had given one of her classes their final exam. We had had some visitors there -- old friends of ours, Al and Jill Stoffel -- who just happened to arrive as visitors just as the offensive kicked off. Lois had agreed to go on down to Saigon to help them get their flight. Then she came back up [to Nha Trang] and by this time had corrected all of the examinations. Again, as part of this business of keeping calm and trying to avoid panic she had gone out to the school and given all of the students their various grades on their examinations. She left [Nha Trang] the day before I did. Unfortunately, she hadn't been able to pack a small suitcase for me. Literally, I walked out of that office [in the Consulate General in Nha Trang] with the clothes on my back. I was very glad that she had been able to get down [to Saigon] the day before and get some things. Ever since I was married I thought that I had married the most wonderful person in the world. By the time that evacuation was over, I was absolutely certain of that.

Q: Well, I subscribe to that, Monty, as you know. Again, Lois is a wonderful example of what a Foreign Service wife can do in a crisis and what she does do. Now, how long did you stay in Saigon?

SPEAR: For a couple of weeks. My staff and I had been manning flights in the high speed, propeller-driven aircraft up over the area, trying to mark the advance of the North Vietnamese forces. I remember that on [April 2], the day after we evacuated [the Consulate General], Nha Trang lay there, more or less an open city, with no forces from either side there. But then, on the following day [April 3], when my deputy [Phil Cook] flew up there, the plane was fired on by anti-aircraft guns. It wasn't hit or anything, but at that point they knew that the North Vietnamese forces were in there. We continued these flights, then, charting the advance of the North Vietnamese forces down the coast, until it became obvious that they had overrun all of II Corps, our consular district.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, one of the things that I discovered was that the more people that you can get out in an evacuation earlier, the less hairy things become for you at the very end. A lot of my staff had been reassigned, trying to get refugees resettled and so forth. But after discussion with Ambassador Martin we agreed that I should set an example and try and get some of my staff, who were no longer being reassigned to other duties [in Vietnam], out of the country. We left [Vietnam] about the middle of April 1975.

Q: And you proceeded where -- back to Washington?

SPEAR: Yes, then I came back to Washington and went immediately to work on a task force which had been set up in the Operations Center to handle the Washington end of the evacuation out of Vietnam. Much of my experience, of course, was put to pretty good use on the Washington end of things.

**FRANK G. WISNER
Deputy Consul General
Can Tho (1973)**

**Vietnam Task Force
Washington, DC (197?-1976)**

Ambassador Frank G. Wisner was born in New York in 1938. He graduated from Princeton University in 1961. He was stationed in Saigon, Dinh Tuong Province, Tuyen Duc Province, Tunis, Algiers, and Dacca. He later served as Ambassador to Zambia, Egypt, the Philippines, and India. Ambassador Wisner was interviewed by Richard L. Jackson on March 22, 1998.

WISNER: Called back to Vietnam twice.

Q: Called back? In that period?

WISNER: In that period. That's right. Once, as I noted earlier, as an inspector to review the performance of Foreign Service Officers in the embassy and in the pacification missions, notably in the southern part of Vietnam. And then my assignment was really effectively curtailed by the Paris Peace Agreement and the need -- as the last American military and pacification officers wound down -- to replace them and allow Washington to monitor the course of the Paris Agreement by building up strong Consulates General in Da Nang and in Nha Trang and in Bien Hoa and in Can Tho. I went out as Deputy Consul General in Can Tho in the fourth region with foreign service officers in the key provinces of the Delta following how the first months of the new post-peace, Paris Peace Agreement, were playing out in Vietnam, and that in effect was an assignment that lasted six months. But it ended my life in Tunisia, and it forced me into a new assignment -- which, as it turned out, I volunteered to look at in a part of the world I'd never seen that I figured by its very weight and substance would make it a player in world affairs and I wanted to understand more about -- took me to South Asia and to the head of the political section in Bangladesh in the time immediately following the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan and the end of the Indian-Pak War over Bangladesh.

Q: Before we get there, there is a book just out by Terry McNamara on his closure of a consulate in Vietnam in that period and a dramatic escape. Did you have any close calls in getting out at that time?

WISNER: No. You see I left well before Terry's period. Terry came at the fall of Vietnam, Terry was our last Consul General in Can Tho and he led a riverine patrol with his staff down the Mekong and out to the sea. I monitored that from my position on the task force in Washington. But I had long since left Vietnam and was on my way to Bangladesh, where I was to serve just under a year and back to Washington and then the collapse of Vietnam which surrounds the events that set the stage for Terry McNamara's story.

Q: This was a transitional period then to the Secretary's Office? Those six months.

WISNER: Well, I was there for about six months and then, as I described earlier, Vietnam began to crumble, and Carol Laise released me to go up and be part of the evacuation effort, so I was really pulled free. By the time I finished that, I was remarried and or getting -- I was courting Christine -- not remarried but had been approached by Joe Sisco to join his office as his senior foreign service staff officer as part of the seventh floor effort. That's how I first appeared on the seventh floor, invited to join Joe Sisco's office, leave the task force, turn it over, and then start to work with Joe.

PARKER W. BORG
Member of Peace Agreement Monitor Team
Pleiku (1974)

Ambassador Borg was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Cornell University. In 1965, after a tour with the Peace Corps in the Philippines, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his career he served in Vietnam and Zaire, and in the State Department in senior positions concerning Vietnam, West Africa and Counter Terrorism. He served as US Ambassador to Mali (1981-1984) and to Iceland from 1993 to 1996. Ambassador Borg was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Well then, off to Vietnam.

BORG: So we go off to Vietnam.

Q: This would be from when to when?

BORG: This was about January of 1974, and I stayed there through May of 1974. There were some 30 or 40 of us who went back. They divided the country up into consulates general and assigned each one of us to a separate province, and we were provincial political reporters. I think the conception was that the peace treaty had been signed - this was certainly the conception that I had - that it was very likely that the North Vietnamese would succeed in taking over the country within a short period of time, and they wanted people on the ground to observe just exactly what

happened and how it happened and what sort of abuses of the treaty might take place. But I don't think there was much optimism that the government of South Vietnam was going to survive for very long with the departure of the American troops.

Q: What was the reading of the government of South Vietnam which you were getting from people at this time?

BORG: I guess I don't really understand.

Q: You'd been in the Director General's office and all. Were you still talking to your colleagues who were coming back from Vietnam and all?

BORG: Well, I was out in Vietnam. I was part of the group that went out...

Q: No, before you went out, or just when you got out there.

BORG: My impression before I got there was that the process of Vietnamization had continued to work quite successfully and that the things which we had put in place before I left were continuing to move ahead, that the Viet Cong was not a serious problem, that it was increasingly peaceful in many, many parts of the country, that there were economic projects and economic development activities going on, and that the problem was a political problem in the United States. I guess I had seen that there were two problems. There was the growing irritation over continuing the prosecution of this military action on the part of the US Congress and there was a disconnect between the senior levels of the South Vietnamese government and what was going on in the provinces, that Thieu and Ky, who were president and vice president, I guess, at about that time, were running things much the way they had before and that things happened in the provinces sort of irrespective of what they might have said and done.

Q: The group that you went out with, I take it this was an ordered group rather than...

BORG: Oh, yes, it was an ordered group. We had some of the best Vietnamese speakers in the country, people who had served in distinguished roles in the embassy or in provincial programs but who generally spoke Vietnamese, people like Frank Wisner, Paul Hare, Dick Teare, a lot of very able Foreign Service Officers.

Q: How about Tony Lake and Richard Holbrook?

BORG: They had been at the National Security Council, and Tony Lake had resigned in '73 over Cambodia and Holbrook may have left at about that time too, so they were no longer in the Foreign Service. They were not part of this.

Q: Did the people, although they were ordered, go...?

BORG: There was no hint that I ever came across of people objecting to this. I think all of us had a tremendous interest in what was going on in Vietnam and had followed the cease-fire talks and the end of the formal war with great interest. We were all genuinely curious about what might

happen next. So I think it was a sense of great adventure for all of us.

Q: So what happened for you?

BORG: I went back. I was assigned to the province of Pleiku, a place I had never set foot in. Pleiku is up in the central highlands on the border with Laos, a largely Montagnard where a large number of foreign military units had been stationed there in the past.

Q: What was the situation there when you got out there?

BORG: I arrived and the American troops were still on the ground. I was there to witness the departure of the American troops. There was an organization called the International Control Commission, ICC. I'll have to check what the exact initials were, ICC something or other. This was an observation group of Canadians, Poles, Indonesians and Hungarians who were going to observe the cease-fire. They had not yet begun arriving. The situation within the province was reasonably peaceful. There was no regular hostility as we had seen throughout the time I was previously in Vietnam.

Q: Your consulate general was where?

BORG: The consulate general at the time was in Nha Trang with James Engle as the Consul General. There were six or seven of us in the different provinces doing periodic reports on what was happening. This was really my first intensive experience at any kind of political reporting. I had never done anything like this before, and suddenly I was supposed to go out and find out what was happening and send in reports.

Q: How did you operate?

BORG: I operated sort of by going out and meeting as many people as I could and talking with them and trying to figure out what the trends might be within any particular community. We went out to villages, kept track of what kind of incidents might have taken place, witnessed the last Americans to depart, saw the reaction to the last Americans departing, witnessed the arrival of the International Control Commission team members. We had one of the regional headquarters up in Pleiku, so I spent a lot of time hanging around with them to try and pick up what they were doing.

Q: What reaction were you getting when the Americans pulled out?

BORG: Again, I didn't have a very comprehensive picture, but from the few people that I talked with, most suspected that Vietnam would collapse right away. They felt that without their presence things would become very dangerous. I did not share that perspective. I had for some time felt that the presence of large numbers of Americans had been an incentive for the Viet Cong to attack in many places and that these people might be surprised when things don't collapse once they're gone.

Q: In your area was there a North Vietnamese military presence?

BORG: Not to our knowledge. There were communities that were supporters of the Viet Cong, and there was for a brief period of time sort of a war of flags after the last American troops had left. You would see Viet Cong flags put up on a tree in a certain area, usually not near anybody's houses, and there were some places along rivers that you could see the Vietnamese flags on one side and Viet Cong flags on the other side. But the idea that there were people who were Viet Cong, they did not emerge. They were not a visible presence.

Q: Was anyone saying the 32nd regiment of North Vietnamese is over there...?

BORG: No, no talk whatsoever. This would be in 1973.

Q: '74.

BORG: '74, sorry. This is early '74, that's right. There was no talk whatsoever of any kind of North Vietnamese presence anywhere in the Second Corps Region. There may have been a presence up in the northern part of the country but not along the Laotian border where I lived.

Q: You had this rather improbable collection of Hungarians and Poles who were part of the Warsaw Pact, the Canadians who were our allies, and Indonesians who were more friendly to us since they'd gotten rid of their own Communists.

BORG: The Canadians and the Indonesians were the two sides that we and the South Vietnamese had agreed upon, and the Poles and the Hungarians were the two that the North Vietnamese had agreed upon. They arrived. The Hungarians' and Poles' leadership were pretty much hard-liners. Their younger people were far more interesting when I became friends with some of the younger members of the group. The Canadians were very sympathetic and passed me a lot of information about what was going on. The Indonesians were incredibly pleasant and supportive of what the Canadians were doing. At least this is the way it was in Pleiku. The group operated far better than one could have anticipated during the Cold War, mainly because there weren't very many incidents that had to be investigated. There weren't that many serious issues that would divide them. They would hold meetings. They would discuss here's what seems to be happening in the different places. There wasn't much happening at this time. There wasn't much that would divide them, and so we frequently went out together. They took over one of the mess halls that was formerly an American mess hall, and they took over one of the American military camps, and I used to go up there and eat lunch every day. I made it a point of going up and eating and just hanging around, and everybody knew why I was hanging around and what I was doing, just to get to know people and talk with them about what was going on. But they went out to a number of ceremonies in which villages would perform dances or whatever it was, and they would all sit around. Everybody was very compatible for these particular occasions.

Q: Did you get any feel for the hand of the South Vietnamese government up in that area. This was mainly Montagnard up there. It was not a place sort of native to the normal South Vietnamese administrator.

BORG: The Province Chief was certainly somebody who was trusted by the leadership in South

Vietnam, but I can't remember whether he was a Thieu person or a Ky person. I think for the most part they participated in ceremonial activities and attempted to direct local government activities to the extent that they could, but I never got the impression that they were either warlords in a classical sense or that they were stooges for authorities in Saigon. I think they shifted around the province chiefs sufficiently that none of them ever really got the handle on a place that they might have otherwise.

Q: Were you seeing, for example, South Vietnamese, particularly from Saigon, coming up and teaching and...?

BORG: No, no. Almost everything that was happening was happening locally, and the idea that people were coming from Saigon or anywhere else to provide some sort of new support now that the fighting had ended. I think the South Vietnamese government was equally stunned that things were reasonably peaceful. There were no efforts at any particular new initiatives. I think security was heightened for the possibility of some kind of attack. There were no particular attacks. There were a couple of skirmishes but nothing significant.

Q: Was there much of a South Vietnamese military presence up there?

BORG: Yes, there was a South Vietnamese military presence. I don't recall what unit, but I do remember approximately where they were. They were defending a perimeter rather than participating in pacification activities or any of these sorts of things.

Q: What sort of reports were you getting from your fellow observers? I assume you all went back...

BORG: We went periodically back to Nha Trang and talked. It seemed to be pretty much the same in all of the other regions. We were all observing a relatively quiet situation. At Easter of that year, one of the other observers and I, Richard Mueller - I don't know if you've talked with him; he was the political reporter in Kon Tum, the province just to the north of mine...

Q: His name's Richard...?

BORG: Richard Mueller, he was consul general in Hong Kong and he's now the headmaster at Northfield Mount Herman School in Massachusetts. Anyway, he was a good friend and we decided why not take a trip by road down to Saigon. Now, this was something that was inconceivable at the time when I was in Vietnam the first time, driving between provinces over a long distance. We drove down through some of the highland areas, not all of them. We went down to Dalat and other places, and then we came up along the coast, so we sort of did an inland route and an exterior route over a long weekend, a five-day weekend or something like that. What astonished both of us was how peaceful it was and the fact that nobody ever warned us that this might be dangerous or this was something we shouldn't do, that there were troops out there. When I had been there before, no one could have imagined a trip like this. So things were generally much more peaceful

Q: Did you get any feel for the Montagnards, how they were or what they were doing?

BORG: Montagnard is a collective term for a large number of different ethnic groups, and each one of these groups had separate experiences and separate relationships with the Vietnamese government. Most of them had a dislike for lowland Vietnamese based upon many, many years of discrimination, and many of them had looked upon the Americans as an element that protected them from the South Vietnamese, who they felt might exploit them. The Montagnards were probably more upset over the departure of the Americans than any of the local people on the Vietnamese side. I visited some communities where things were incredibly peaceful and quiet and everybody was living a very happy Montagnard life unaffected by anybody on either side. This would have been '74. There was certainly no foretelling of any particular doom.

FRANCIS J. TATU
Principal Officer
Chiang Mai (1974)

Francis J. Tatu was born in New York in 1929. He served in the US Navy from 1946-1952. Afterwards, he received his bachelor's degree from University of California in 1955. His career includes positions in Hong Kong, Laos, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Washington D.C., Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Australia. Mr. Tatu was interviewed by Susan Klingaman in October 2000.

Q: Today is Friday, November 10th. After your assignment in Kathmandu, you went as principal officer to the consulate in Chiang Mai. I believe that was in 1974.

TATU: Yes, correct. I went to Chiang Mai in July of 1974, precisely July 4th, leaving Kathmandu and proceeding direct, giving up home leave again for maybe the second or third time in my checkered career. I wanted to tell you one Vietnam anecdote here, a meaningful anecdote, I think, before it's lost. I think this is something that should be recorded in history. I mentioned earlier that when I had been posted in Bangkok one of my responsibilities was following developments in Southeast Asia, and in that capacity I used frequently to go over to Saigon primarily to keep track of the Khmer Krom, who were a Cambodian group, under the direction of CIA actually, conducting cross-border operations. On this particular occasion I proceeded with Ambassador Unger, who had other business, and I went about my own business on the border. That evening dinner was set up for me by a political officer in the Saigon embassy by the name of Andy Antippas had set up a virtual trap for me. It seemed that the Thai troops who were participating as part of the program of bringing in the so-called "Third Flags" were behaving there egregiously. I was quite aware of this from our side that the Thai troops proceeded to Vietnam carrying large amounts of narcotics, illicit narcotics, and in fact on one occasion, cooperation with BNDD, the precursor to DEA, we had sought to stop a shipment of APO mail, Army Post Office. The Thai had access to APO, and we had word that they were shipping heroine in this particular APO.

Q: Why did they have access to the American postal system?

TATU: They had access to everything. This was a payoff for the Thai participating in the Vietnam War. In fact, the word was that any Thai soldier who went was a corporate entity. They had to pay, in terms of about \$5,000, to be able to go and “fight” in Vietnam and, once there, they had not only access to APO, they had access to the PX. The word was that when a shipment of large gear would come into the PX, such as refrigerators, stoves and so forth, the first ones there were the Thai, who arrived with six-by-six trucks. That evening for this dinner there were also present a number of military people up to ranking bird colonels. Their complaint was that the Thai were oppressing the Vietnamese to such an extent. They would come into a village, and our military would come across them coming out with severed heads on the antennae of their personnel carriers. The atrocities on the part of the Thai, according to these guys, were just incredible. There were maybe three or four of these people, and Antippas also was substantiating what they had to say. So I said, “Okay, gentlemen, we’ve heard all the other stuff, the PX and narcotics and so forth, but this is a new one, and you can be assured that I will report this in full detail.” So going back on the plane - we had our own little jet - I began briefing Ambassador Unger on this, and he expressed astonishment and chagrin. The follow-up on this was to find out who was at that dinner. In other words, the military wanted to get these guys who had reported to me. This is all back I feed to me from Antippas. No action was taken against the Thai, but action was taken against the informants, whistle-blowers, so to speak.

Q: Very interesting.

TATU: I think history should be aware of that.

Q: So this was the temper of the times, I guess - win at all costs.

TATU: That’s absolutely right.

Q: How large a post was the consulate at Chiang Mai?

TATU: Chiang Mai had a deputy, Linda Irick, who actually hadn’t arrived yet when I got there. It had an administrative deputy who was an ex-Marine captain by the name of Bruce something-or-other and a CIA guy buried in as a vice consul. The consulate was very curious little outbuilding attached to the residence. Incredibly I walk in there and I find the toilet that’s accessible to visitors is approached by a short hallway in which there is a refrigerator filled with morphine. You will recall that Chiang Mai is the “capital” of the Golden Triangle.

Q: For what?

TATU: For what - and needles, injection needles, piled up on shelves nearby. So I questioned, “What the hell is this?”

Q: This was the restroom in the consulate?

TATU: Yes. “What the hell is this?” There was no residual memory really. The Marine, Bruce, thought that this stuff was stocked because there was a concern that there was a rabies threat, and

this was the way we treat rabies.

Q: Morphine?

TATU: Yes. So I checked this out through channels and found that this morphine, while it could produce some ill effects, had exceeded its shelf life. I then went about destroying it and had a couple of people witness me doing it. There was a DEA station there also, located separately, newly established, with a chief agent in charge and three subordinates. I had the SAIC come over, Special Agent In Charge, and witness me destroying this morphine. He said that, despite the fact that the shelf life had been exceeded, it would be worth about 40,000 bucks on the street. So that says something about something. It says something about the management of the post.

Q: Let me ask you: Who was your predecessor?

TATU: Jim Montgomery. I had known him in Bangkok, in my early Bangkok tour, and considered him to be a friend. At any rate, this later was held against me, the fact that I destroyed this stuff. It was considered to be an irrational act. I think the crunch came when I ran into a windmill here that terminated my tenure at the post, when the SAIC, again the DEA Special Agent In Charge, and wife were out on a motorcycle run, inexplicably on a road that was not open yet to the public, when two assailants stepped out of the bushes and fired a shot at them. She was hit, the wife was hit. The name of this SAIC, by the way, was Bud Shoaf - I don't remember his formal first name. The wife was hospitalized, and from that point on the whole thing became a circus. Everybody was covering up facts, but I was trying to investigate. The question was whether this was narcotics related, whether it was related to the insurgents. In other words, there was a threat to the American community, and that was my responsibility. The administrative counselor then, after I had been at this for several days, sent me a cable in which he ordered me to desist my investigation. Of course, he had no authority over me; I was in my own consular district. So this came down to a conflict, if you will, between me and the counselor with really no backing there in a good part of the embassy.

Q: Now, who was the DCM?

TATU: The DCM was Ed Masters, Edward Masters, who during this period was on home leave.

Q: So you really had no one to turn to, except the ambassador?

TATU: Well, even the ambassador was incommunicative, he was a political appointee. The first time I went to meet him in his office one morning he pulled out a bottle and offered me a drink. What I did - this was surely a mistake and something I may want to write out later - I appealed to the ambassador in Laos.

Q: Who was that?

TATU: Charles Whitehouse, do you know him?

Q: I don't.

TATU: Charlie Whitehouse, former CIA. Bangkok and Vientiane always worked very closely together. I, as you recall, had been stationed in Vientiane and there was some resentment there that Bangkok considered us, Vientiane, as being a kind of younger brother or something that they could order around. But there was close communication, so chance would have it Mrs. Whitehouse was leading a group of ladies down to visit Chiang Mai just as all of this blew up. I thought I could send Charlie a letter with his wife and see if he could be of any help. What he did with my letter was he sent it to Bangkok, so that made me seem insubordinate. As a consequence, I was removed from the post.

Q: I see. Well, it sounds like everything was all tangled up together, insurgency and narcotics and so on, very much like what seems to be going on in some of our posts in Latin America right now. So when actually did you leave your post in Chiang Mai - later in '74, I suppose?

TATU: If you can recall the date on which Nixon left office and Ford took over, it was right about then.

Q: In August of '74.

TATU: There you are.

Q: I remember, because I was on home leave myself.

TATU: And one of my actions, also an eccentric action, was to seek to get photographs of Gerald R. Ford to replace those of Nixon that were in the consulate.

Q: Well, his photograph did in fact go to all consulates when he became President. So that was a very short and difficult post?

TATU: Exactly, but considering my experiences and preferences, Chiang Mai was my dream post, and it broke my heart to have to leave it.

DAVID MICHAEL ADAMSON
Rotational Officer
Nha Trang (1974-1975)

David Michael Adamson was born in Connecticut and educated at Swarthmore College and Tufts University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1974. His career included posts in Nha Trang, Strasbourg, Paris, Panama City, Lisbon and Tegucigalpa. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: So, I suppose you got out toward the end of 1974?

ADAMSON: I got out there about October 1, 1974. I had a brief stay in Saigon to study the

language. I had insisted on this, but the four weeks I was given was insufficient and anyway I did not take to the tonal nature of the language. Then I went to my duty assignment, which was Nha Trang, where I actually filled two positions, one as a consular officer and one as a political officer. It really turned out to be one of the best jobs I ever had in the Foreign Service, and one of the best jobs I could have aspired to as a junior officer. I was then, what was an FSO-7, I guess now that would be a five. Anyway, I went as a seven, and went into an FSO-4, political slot, as well as an FSO-5 or -6 consular slot. I had a Vietnamese translator and military analyst, working for me in the political job. I also had two Vietnamese consular assistants. So, there I was at 24 supervising three people and holding two jobs, and being involved in politico-military reporting from Vietnam, which was very challenging.

Q: So, let's go back. When you arrived out there, what was the situation in South Vietnam?

ADAMSON: The situation was that we were hanging on for dear life. Of course, I was pretty well schooled in Vietnam, because Vietnam was *the* foreign policy issue as I reached maturity in high school and college. I had read quite a few books about Vietnam, and was generally familiar with the history of our presence there. In fact, I was quite familiar, because I had taken courses in graduate school, too. I was very well versed. When I had my pre-departure interviews in Washington, including at INR (the Intelligence Bureau), I found quite a diversity of views. There were the positive thinkers who were on the desk, who were towing the line that somehow we would make it through Vietnam all right, and somehow the two regimes, in Saigon and in Phnom Penh, we supported would hang on - though there was certainly a perception that the regimes were under a great deal of pressure.

The other school of thought was what I heard in INR. A fellow by the last name of "Buck" (Ralph Buck?) briefed me there. He turned out to be prescient. He said that this regime could not hold on for very much longer. That it was an issue of months, not years, and that eventually a push would come from the North Vietnamese. This fellow was able to cite all kinds of weaknesses of the regime, and American assistance was already being attenuated. Watergate was taking place. By August 8, 1974, Nixon was gone. His level of support for the Thieu government could not be expected from Ford. Besides, the presidency had been weakened, and the Congress had passed legislation which basically tied the president's hands, in terms of air support. So, for these kinds of reasons, plus the somewhat putrid nature of the regime in South Vietnam - they did not have the kind of fundamental sources of strength that you would hope for - Buck and others were anticipating the regime would crumble. When I got out there, I got caught up in the "can do," positive thinking environment that Graham Martin was sustaining under the guidance of Secretary of State Kissinger.

Q: You got there when?

ADAMSON: I arrived, roughly October 1, 1974.

Q: You were in Saigon first?

ADAMSON: I was in Saigon for a few weeks for some abbreviated and accelerated language training, which, as I noted earlier, really didn't turn out to be very valuable.

Q: In the political section, were these true believers?

ADAMSON: Some of them were true believers. I recall that Graham Martin was a distant figure, so I didn't have a meeting with him, but I did meet with the DCM, Wolf Lehman, and with the political minister counselor, Josiah Bennett, who just died in the last couple years. He was an old Asia hand - China hand, I think. I think he was a smart guy, but had blinders on like Lehman, like Martin. He only saw what was most positive in the environment, and certainly he was very optimistic about the prospects of the South Vietnamese regime.

Q: When you went out to Nha Trang, what was the situation? Nha Trang was in II Corps, I guess, wasn't it? We no longer called it "corps" over there?

ADAMSON: Well, the South Vietnamese called it "II Corps," so we called it that, or military region II, I think. I might add, parenthetically, that although at the higher levels of the embassy, they were very positive about prospects of the regime, at lower levels, there was certainly greater doubt. I recall being briefed by the CIA's Frank Snepp, who later gained notoriety through his book, *Decent Interval*, and he was predicting that hard times were on their way. He was certainly seeing a lot of the signs that Ralph Buck was seeing. Perhaps Buck was reading Snepp's reports from Saigon. In fact, he must have been. Snepp was certainly dubious about the viability of the regime. When I got to Nha Trang, the consul general, Monty Spear, who I see occasionally at the officer's club at Ft. McNair, had the same Graham Martin/Wolf Lehman mindset of positive thinking. But, if you went under him, closer to the working level, people could see some of the tea leaves.

Q: What area did Nha Trang cover?

ADAMSON: It covered the two corps area. At that point in Vietnam, the U.S. had four consulates, which corresponded to each of the military zones. We had a consulate in Da Nang that covered military region one. In Nha Trang, we covered military region two. Military region IV was covered from Can Tho in the Mekong delta, and III was covered from Bien Hoa.

Q: These consulate generals were established to observe how the truce was going.

ADAMSON: Yes.

Q: Was that still the main job?

ADAMSON: At that point, no one, I don't think, was really thinking in terms of the truce existing. We had had a fairly substantial Foreign Service presence in the first year, I think, after the January 1973 peace accord, to monitor the accord. By the fall of 1974, that heavy Foreign Service presence had disappeared. We really just had a light Foreign Service presence. There were only three FSOs in MR-II. We were really covering the war, not monitoring a peace which didn't exist. Nobody thought of it, as I can recall, as covering a truce. I recall that every week I had to do a situation report that went to the Embassy. I wrote mine on the basis of reports that came from our province reps. We had a U. S. rep in every province. These people may have been

USAID employees, they were not Foreign Service officers. They were sort of the residue of the very heavy presence that we had had in the 1960s and the early 1970s. My report went to the Embassy, which in turn wrote a weekly cable to Washington based on the inputs from the four consulates. One serious flaw in this process was that the weeklies did not look at underlying conditions and trends, only at what had transpired that week, as filtered from South Vietnamese military sources through the province reps and then the consulates and embassy.

Q: Also included in your consulate's area of responsibility, was the central highlands, correct?

ADAMSON: Correct.

Q: Where the whole thing sort of came apart.

ADAMSON: Correct.

Q: Did you travel around?

ADAMSON: Yes. In the end, I was only at that assignment from the 1st of November 1974, until the 1st of April 1975, when Nha Trang fell. In that brief period of time, four or five months, it had been my intention, and had been my marching order, to visit all the provinces. In the first four or five months, I was not able to visit all, but I did visit many. I visited Ban Me Thuot, Kontum, Pleiku, Qui Nhon and, and perhaps a few other province capitals. I visited, at least, the principal provincial capitals. Principal in terms of where Vietnamese military forces were deployed, and in terms of where the fighting was taking place.

Q: Did you get any feel for what was happening?

ADAMSON: Basically, the image that I had was that the South Vietnamese were fully engaged everywhere. They were fully deployed, and had no reserves to speak of, and were fully deployed against North Vietnamese forces that matched them in terms of manpower and strength. At that point, the South Vietnamese seemed to be holding their own, but they didn't have any reserve, they didn't have any residual capacity. So that if they were pushed in one area and succumbed, it's easy to see in retrospect how they could collapse. At the time, we were thinking in terms of a stalemate, rather than a potential collapse. I was caught up in this mentality. As I say, in retrospect, it's easy to see how a collapse could be forthcoming, once they were overcome in one area.

Q: With the Vietnamese that you were coming into contact with, how were they looking at the Americans? Did they feel we were selling them out?

ADAMSON: The South Vietnamese were nervous. You didn't get a sense of much confidence on their part, or for the most part even of much courage on their part. This varied, of course. Sometimes I would visit lower level officers, in the captain to major range, who were out on the front lines, and who clearly were men of great valor, and doing a very hard job, and doing it well. At the higher levels, you didn't get the sense that these were general or colonel officers who had a great deal of confidence, who had a great deal of conviction, who had a great deal of

commitment. That was not encouraging.

Q: There was you and the consul general?

ADAMSON: There were just three of us. There was the consul general, Moncrieff J. Spear. There was the deputy principal officer, Philip Remington Cook, and there was me, filling two positions. Both jobs I was filling really got heavy when the North Vietnamese offensive began in March. So an FSO from Saigon, by the name of Dick Slott, came up and took over the consular job, and I continued with the pol-mil position. There was someone scheduled to come in and take the consular position permanently, but he never arrived, because the country fell before he could arrive. That was Edmund McWilliams, I think.

Q: Well, how did things develop, from your perspective?

ADAMSON: From my perspective, they developed quickly. One South Vietnamese province, Phuoc Binh, fell in January 1975. That was a bellwether. The North Vietnamese took a provincial capital to see what the reaction would be. There was no particular reaction from Saigon or Washington. The South Vietnamese were not able to take it back. The United States did not react strongly. That sort of set up in March 1975, what became the final offense by the North Vietnamese, which we had some inkling of, though we didn't have detailed information that it was coming.

Q: Well, the situation in the highlands, turned out to be one of the... Didn't the whole thing sort of begin to collapse?

ADAMSON: Yes, that is correct. That was where the North Vietnamese offensive started. It started in Ban Me Thuot around March 10, and BMT quickly fell to the North Vietnamese. I remember our province representative, Paul Struharik, was trapped there. The heaviest South Vietnamese troop concentrations, if memory serves, were around Kontum and Pleiku. So, even with Ban Me Thuot falling, there was theoretically some prospect that the South Vietnamese could counterattack. As it happened, in my initial report - of course, I was the politico-military reporting officer - I reported that Ban Me Thuot was falling and I wanted to add the analysis that there was no immediate prospect that the South Vietnamese would take it back. This turned out to be accurate. I guess I had a sense then of the state of morale among the South Vietnamese, that although they did have substantial forces in Kontum and Pleiku, they had no will to fight back. However, my consul general, Monty Spear, crossed out the language that they had no prospect of taking back the city. Instead he wrote something like "the South Vietnamese are clearing," the implication being that they would take it back. As it happened, the commanding general of MR II, Major General Phu, under direct orders from President Thieu, made what was a calamitous error in withdrawing the South Vietnamese divisions, and there were a good number of them, from the central highlands, and bringing them down to the lowlands. This was a grievous mistake, because they were not able to execute a withdrawal in good order and because it set a rout in motion. The withdrawal became a mad, mob race to the sea, in the course of which, even without much harassment from the North Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese lost most of their constituted military capability - not to mention civilian losses. By the time those divisions got to the lowlands, they were no longer militarily capable. The ability of the South Vietnamese to

resist was virtually nil. Thus, we were swept up in a whirlwind, which we really didn't adequately anticipate, but in a matter of days, the region was gone. We evacuated on April 1, 1975. We evacuated after we learned that the South Vietnamese military staff had left. We learned this from the South Vietnamese province chief, who too was in the process of leaving, once he saw that his umbrella, in terms of military forces, had already left.

Q: What were you getting from Saigon? Were they telling you to hang on? Was there any direction there?

ADAMSON: Well, there was some direction, but unfortunately, Saigon was still shaped by the Graham Martin mentality of whatever happens, we're going to hang on to this country. So, we did not adequately prepare to evacuate. Of course, I was kind of raw at that time, inexperienced. I should have known better. I didn't prepare particularly well, either for my personal evacuation, or for getting the people out that we should have tried to get out. Once the South Vietnamese had abandoned ship, as it were, then there was no choice other than to evacuate. We did, quite precipitously, not in good order, and we didn't get all the South Vietnamese we should have tried to get out, out.

Q: How did you get out?

ADAMSON: What we did was, on the 1st of April, we went to work that day with our bags packed, after sleeping in our compounds that night. I remember I had my two male Vietnamese assistants with me that last night (I believe the female had already left, to marry an American I believe). I had a handgun, but there was no trouble that night, before the 1st of April. On April 1 as things deteriorated, we prepared an area for helicopters to land at the Consulate. Helicopters came in. The half a dozen or so marine guards that we had provided protection. At that point, we needed it, because the South Vietnamese were losing their discipline, and there were marauding gangs of South Vietnamese soldiers. In fact, I left my belongings, my suitcase in my car, which was not more than a few meters from the consulate entrance. I foolishly, however, did not take that into my office that day – probably because I didn't fully grasp we would have to leave that day. By the time we evacuated that day, which was some hours after the opening of business, I could no longer leave through the front door. I could no longer even go out in the parking lot. My car was looted and my belongings were taken away. So, I left for Saigon with the clothes that were on my back.

Q: Was there any move toward the sea? I kind of remember Nha Trang being on the sea.

ADAMSON: Nha Trang is on the sea. For the Americans, there were no ships that we evacuated to. We all just evacuated by fixed-wing aircraft, down to Saigon. The airbase in Nha Trang still had security, although I don't think that that security existed much beyond the 1st of April. We choppered to the air base, then went by fixed wing aircraft to Saigon where we were greeted cheerily by Americans from the Embassy who had no comprehension of what we had just been through.

Q: Was there any American liaison or military attaches, or anything like that, in your area?

ADAMSON: Oh, yes. We had a defense attaché office representative at our Consulate. Steven Mayfield was his name; I believe he was retired military. There were a lot of CIA officers. I don't recall what planes evacuated us, but I don't think they were U.S. military aircraft. I'm not aware that they were American military aircraft, perhaps they were "Air America."

Q: When you got to Saigon, what was the situation?

ADAMSON: Well, it was sort of surrealistic, because we were met at the airport by very kind Embassy people. I think they were probably dependents, volunteers, who very kindly took us into their arms, and helped us with whatever we needed help with. We were housed at a U.S.-run hotel, I think. We were treated very well. We were taken to the PX to get clothes, and so on. It was surreal in the sense that they didn't seem to have any sense of the gravity of the situation. I recall that when we got to the embassy, we were all received by Graham Martin, very cordially. He then was talking about Cochinchina as a viable entity, and about how attractive it should be to U.S. investors.

So, it was quite apparent that he was living in a never-never world - that he didn't realize the gravity of the situation. I was invited to stay and work at the Embassy. There certainly was a lot that needed doing, including planning for evacuation, though Graham Martin wasn't talking about evacuating at that point. I could see the handwriting on the wall. I could see that given this guy's mind-set, we were not going to do things the right way. I also was traumatized by the evacuation from Nha Trang. So, I wanted no part of this. I only stayed in Saigon for a week. I bailed out as soon as I could, and left on the 8th of April, on a flight to Japan.

Q: How did you bail out? What did you do?

ADAMSON: I was in cable communication with the Department. I think my counselor was still Gib Lanpher, who had actually assigned me to Vietnam in the first place. He very kindly sent me a telegram indicating various posts where I could potentially serve. Those included Angola and France. I was initially being pushed to Angola, because I had actually picked up Portuguese while I was in college, studying a couple summers in Brazil. My first inclination was to be led in that direction. But, when I got to Washington, I thought better of that, and opted for a calmer post, France; I cashed in my chips, as it were.

Q: When did Saigon actually fall?

ADAMSON: It fell on the 30th of April.

Q: Among the people who were not part of Ambassador Martin's immediate circle, did they understand what was happening?

ADAMSON: I don't recall, at that stage, having a whole lot of conversations with people. I think at some levels there was a very acute understanding. I think people like Frank Snepp, people like Ken Moorefield, who I just see was nominated to an ambassadorship in Africa, now in 2002. He was a young officer at that time. At that level, they understood very well the gravity of the situation.

Q: One hears stories of people plucking at the big tree that grew near the embassy. It should have been cut down in order to allow helicopters to land there.

ADAMSON: According to what I have heard and read, that sort of thing was only done at the very last possible moment, simply because Graham Martin didn't want to give any sign that he thought the Republic of (South) Vietnam was not viable, that he thought this country was going to collapse. Given that mindset, we didn't prepare adequately, obviously, for the evacuation.

RAZVIGOR BAZALA
Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Da Nang (1974-1975)

Mr. Bazala was born in Germany but immigrated to the United States while he was still young. He joined the Foreign Service in 1970 and served in Warsaw, South Vietnam, New Delhi, Belgrade, Jamaica, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Washington, DC including working as a special assistant to the White House for the Iran-Contra Affairs. Mr. Bazala was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in July of 2011.

BAZALA: Serving as a branch public affairs officer (BPAO) was not, in the bureaucratic scheme of things, a bad assignment for a second tour officer. Branch PAOs are, after all, managers of USIS operations. While they report to PAOs at embassies they nonetheless occupy leadership positions in offices in cities in which there are American consulates. Da Nang, however was a hard-to-fill, less-desirable-than-most posting for obvious reasons. The U.S. was still heavily involved in Vietnam in 1974. It was the last place in the world I wanted to be with my family. The Paris peace agreement of January 1973 terminated military hostilities in Vietnam, U.S. armed forces withdrew from the country and a government supported by the U.S. remained in power in the south. Unfortunately the agreement amounted to little more than a temporary ceasefire, but U.S. foreign affairs agencies blithely concluded thereafter that there were no longer reasons dependents could not accompany officers on assignments to Vietnam.

Sylvia, who worked in the Pentagon from 1966 to 1970 where she dealt with Vietnam policy issues daily and had an in-depth knowledge of realities on the ground across South Vietnam, concluded there was very little that made civilian service there safe. We attempted to argue against an assignment to Vietnam, but because I had extended my tour in Warsaw so that an incoming officer could continue language studies in Washington, I was out of the routine overseas assignment cycle.

Desperate to find a qualified candidate for an out of cycle job opening, my personnel officer or career manager (colleagues called them career manglers) insisted that I accept the assignment and told me the Agency would accept my resignation if I did not. The only positive thing about it in my view was that it would provide early experience managing a USIS operation independently and supervising personnel. In the case of Da Nang, the post had a staff of six seasoned

Vietnamese employees. Considering this against a range of other factors, personal safety first and foremost among them, we reluctantly agreed to go to Vietnam.

Before we traveled to Saigon I endured six hours a day of intense Vietnamese language training over the first seven months of 1974. Normally the course for tonal languages, of which Vietnamese is one, is one to two years to provide enough time for the learner to attain minimal professional proficiency. I recall that it took four hours to memorize dialogue number one in the FSI Vietnamese language textbook; there were only about twelve sentences in it. I reviewed it over and over again in my mind as I trudged from my sister-in-law's Georgetown apartment in Washington across Key Bridge to the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia on an icy day in January. Almost 35 years later I can still recite it verbatim. Ironically, there is little else I can say in Vietnamese today.

After we returned from Poland, Sylvia and the children stayed with my parents in New Jersey. Because Sylvia was anxious to get away from my mother, I was under pressure to get the family back together and hastily picked out a townhouse condo that was still under construction in the Washington suburb of Annandale, Virginia. Sylvia hurriedly flew down to check it out and we quickly signed a contract. The only good thing to say about the place was that it was a new home immediately available.

Teaching the southern dialect of Vietnamese to an officer assigned to Da Nang was a mistake. The city was located just 60 miles south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) that then divided North and South Vietnam. Most people in Da Nang, many of whom fled south after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, spoke the northern dialect, almost a different language. I was at a significant disadvantage and a fish out of water from our first day in Da Nang even though I tested out, barely, with a 2/2 rating in Vietnamese. Despite intensive training, I could not readily comprehend the language spoken by the people around me.

To be candid, excellent mimic though I may be, I was unable to master comfortably the tonal structure of a language that gives four different meanings to the syllable 'ba', for example, depending on how it is pronounced. For someone who communicated so well in Polish that proved a real downer. Incidentally my barber in McLean, Virginia who is from Saigon told me that she recently visited Hanoi and could hardly comprehend anything people there were saying, which confirmed what I had discovered much to my dismay 40 years ago.

We arrived in Saigon in September 1974 with nine suitcases, a Siamese cat, and two kids in diapers. We were exhausted after traveling almost 48 hours across the Pacific, including a layover in Tokyo. Fortunately, we were met planeside by an embassy vehicle and driven directly to our temporary apartment. South Vietnamese authorities apparently chose not to exert sovereignty over the arrivals of official Americans. We handed our passports to an embassy staffer who carried them into the terminal to be stamped. Dead tired, we were grateful to be whisked away from Than Son Nhut airport without having to encounter a single Vietnamese border or customs officials on the way out.

A week of orientation at the embassy followed. The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) warned us not to convey a sense of faltering U.S. resolve to government of the Republic of South Vietnam

in contacts with its citizens. The remaining U.S. presence in Vietnam was a stabilizing factor and any expression of negativity would raise doubts about U.S. confidence in the ability of the Vietnamese government to prevail. The administration maintained that the Paris peace agreement was intended to provide enough time to establish equilibrium between North and South Vietnam in order to prevent one side from imposing a military solution over the other. This meant we had to keep South Vietnamese President Thieu strong enough to withstand an invasion from the North.

The administration and the ambassador in particular also, for some reason, presumed that a way could be found to get the Soviets and the Chinese to pressure North Vietnam to reduce Ho Chi Minh's commitment to revolution. Assuming that a continued flow of U.S. military and development assistance would buy enough time for the South to build the strength to survive proved to be a groundless supposition. U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin seemed blind to the reality that these objectives were unachievable. His unwillingness to face this was a major factor that led ultimately to the flawed and chaotic evacuation of the U.S. embassy, unnecessarily risking the lives of several thousand Americans. In addition, more than 100,000 Vietnamese supporters of U.S. policy awaited the assistance of embassy staff members for evacuation but were left behind in Saigon. The Republic of South Vietnam fell on April 28, 1975, and the last helicopters carrying evacuees lifted off the roof of the U.S. embassy.

After our orientation at the embassy in Saigon, we flew to Da Nang on one of the two Vietnam Airlines jet planes that serviced the city. The day before we left, one of the planes was hijacked and exploded after an emergency landing at the airport. It took some courage for us to board our flight but the trip was uneventful. In Da Nang, we found a house with 12 ft ceilings surrounded by a high wall topped with concertina wire. We heard later that it may have once been a brothel. With no screens on the windows, three-inch long flying cockroaches occasionally passed through while I was listening to LPs (long playing 12" vinyl recordings) under headphones in the living room in the evening with the lights turned off. Talk about unpleasant surprises.

At first we slept under mosquito nets, but we later had screens installed. We also lacked a washer and dryer and relied on household help to do the laundry. The small American store supplied by the embassy commissary in Saigon offered almost nothing, nor did the commissary itself when it came to the needs of families with small children (think Pampers). We had to scrounge through local markets for cuts of meat of unknown origin, and Sylvia had to be creative in her cooking, even making mayonnaise.

A nice offset for the substandard food markets were the *pho* vendors who plied the streets of Da Nang nightly. A boy passed through our neighborhood rhythmically clicking sticks a block ahead of a vendor to announce that one was nearby. When we beckoned the boy to the door he took our order for what we soon discovered was a delightful concoction of broth, peanuts, hot peppers, pork, onions, *nuoc mam* (fish sauce) and a variety of other tasty ingredients. He ran back with our order to where the *pho* vendor was ladling out portions to fill a previous order. Minutes later the boy would reappear delivering a large piping hot container of *pho* to our door. It was not pizza, but it was home delivery.

Fortunately fresh seafood was also widely available and good. Single male colleagues did not

have to agonize over menu planning when they hosted dinner parties. They just contacted vendors to line up their carts in the back yard and offer pho and other delicacies to their guests. We enjoyed several wonderful meals at the few such social functions we attended in Da Nang.

In fall 1974, ours was not the only American family at the consulate, and Sylvia quickly formed close bonds with several other unemployed mothers at post. In fact, despite the departure of U.S. armed forces the year before, there were still more than 7,000 Americans in country including civilian government and military personnel attached to the Defense Attaché Office (DAO), contractors, private company employees, and representatives of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); many of them had Vietnamese dependents. The lifestyle at the U.S. mission in South Vietnam back then differed considerably from that of suburban Washington, DC.

The men who dominated the American environment in Vietnam for almost the entire previous decade were generally unaccompanied by spouses who were either left behind in suburban Washington or resided in safer nearby countries. They did not greet the few families that arrived in Vietnam after the Paris peace agreement with the most open of arms. Not surprisingly, many had Vietnamese girlfriends they did not want their wives to learn about through leaks along the social grapevine that new families were now being plugged into. There were awkward moments when we encountered them at movie screenings in the consulate accompanied by their Vietnamese lady friends. They saw us as intruders on their territory.

Some Americans, of course, had married Vietnamese women and started families in Vietnam. As the evacuation approached, they faced real problems scrambling to obtain necessary documentation for their Vietnamese dependents to qualify for entry to the U.S. The ambassador made no move to address that situation until late in the day causing unnecessary stress and tension as people moved with increasing urgency to get out Vietnam.

Our surface shipment of personal effects from the U.S. arrived a couple of months after we did but it was held in Saigon, which, as things turned out, was all to the good. It meant, however, we would have no items to decorate the house for the Christmas holidays. Fortunately the children were still too young to know much about the holiday and Christmas 1974 in the Bazala household was modest indeed. At a small shop catering to Da Nang's Roman Catholic population, Sylvia purchased a shiny somewhat garish four-foot, some-assembly-required, aluminum Christmas tree, the last one in the establishment. We set it up every year for the next two decades as a reminder of our experiences in Da Nang.

One day there was a massive explosion at a major arms depot that caused people to wonder for a while whether the war had resumed. It hadn't, but helicopter gunships flew over the house every night and armed guards patrolled the residences of all U.S. officials 24 hours a day. Da Nang was in the northernmost section of the four tactical zones the U.S. military had divided South Vietnam into. The city was the capital of Military Region (MR) 1 that bordered the DMZ dividing North and South Vietnam. The four military regions (MR 1 through 4) were also known as Corps, cited with roman numerals I through IV (with I being pronounced not as the number one, but as the word eye). Only the U.S. Army can tell you why. Vietnamese forces had begun positioning themselves in the central highlands for an offense planned for 1975 after the rainy

season, but there was no conflict anywhere near Da Nang during the four months we were there.

I had a consular commission for Da Nang even though I knew little about consular work and had performed none in Poland. FSIOs rarely, if ever, performed any consular work whatsoever during their entire careers. The only consular function I performed in my career was in Da Nang. A young American who died in the U.S. specified that he wanted his ashes strewn among banyan trees near a school close to the base where he served while in army in Vietnam. He wrote that the voices of children he heard daily at play there set his mind at ease. Local Vietnamese authorities were sympathetic to his request and prepared to assist in fulfilling it. After all, where you choose to spend eternity is a critical decision. They provided a military helicopter to transport his cremated remains to the site he selected and I, in the absence of any other consular officer in Da Nang that day, accompanied the ashes to witness their release according to his wishes and submitted a report to the State Department confirming the event.

The flight into the central highlands began in a light early morning rain. Two South Vietnamese army machine gunners were positioned at the open doors on both sides of the helicopter with automatic weapons at the ready as we moved over areas of questionable security near the central highlands. The chopper flew at a low altitude that gave me a rare glimpse of rural Vietnam. The rice paddies below resembled an abstract assembly of stained glass windows in varying shades of green spreading out mile after mile. After we landed there was a brief ceremony before the release of the ashes and we flew back to Da Nang before lunch. That brief unique and spectacular experience made an indelible impression.

Sylvia took the Foreign Service entrance exam in Da Nang in early December. It was offered annually at all Foreign Service posts and I urged her to take it knowing that with her academic background and professional work at the Pentagon it was unlikely she would find it at all satisfying remaining a dependent spouse once the children started school. Only two applicants took the exam in Da Nang. Sylvia learned in February 1975 that she passed. Women's lib had come belatedly to the State Department, however; it was only two years earlier that the Department agreed to admit married women into the officer corps. Until then, female Foreign Service officers were compelled to resign when they married.

My role as branch PAO in Da Nang was not much more than babysitting a declining number of USIA information, cultural and exchange programs. My office was in a detached building set back from the street on a nicely landscaped lot only several blocks from the consulate. It contained small book and film libraries and was staffed by six capable, bilingual, experienced Vietnamese employees. I also administered programs for a few academic grantees at Da Nang University. I don't recall any American students there in the fall and winter of 1974, but I believe there were several American professors who passed through on short term research grants.

As BPAO I was also the chairman of the Da Nang branch of the Vietnamese-American Association (VAA), a binational voluntary organization that in Da Nang was primarily engaged in teaching English, mostly to dependents of South Vietnamese military officers. VAA board members coaxed me to become an instructor, something I had absolutely no desire to do, but as nominal VAA leader, what were my options? It turned out not to be all that bad. My class in the evening consisted of youngsters in their mid-teens who were a bit cocky and not very highly

motivated. I had a good text, and running students through drills was not all that unpleasant or demanding a task. I was also getting to know other instructors and the parents of some of the students in my class.

By late 1974, there were few American or foreign journalists passing through Da Nang. Ambassador Martin prevented USIS Saigon PAO Alan Carter and branch PAOs from briefing the press, although were we able to we could have provided them useful background information they would not have gotten from the Ambassador's designated press spokesman. Carter had a real problem in Saigon; he was not a hand-picked Martin man and unlike the Ambassador he did not regard the press as an 'enemy'. On the contrary, it was USIA policy to be open and candid with the media regarding unclassified information. That was an important element of the job, and how effectively PAOs communicated with host-country and U.S. media abroad was a critical factor in performance evaluations. Given the Ambassador's policy of limited interaction with media, I felt USIS Da Nang was cooking on only three burners.

Ultimately there was no way to conceal the decline in American public support for continued involvement with South Vietnam. An early indication of how that was playing out in American politics was a cut in the 1975 USIA budget for Vietnam. To absorb the cut USIS Saigon concluded it would have to close its three branches at consulates and consolidate operations in the capital. Only one Vietnamese employee was to be kept on at each branch to assist with the few programs USIS would continue to conduct outside Saigon, academic and professional exchanges being the most significant. After closing down our posts, the other two BPAOs and I transferred to Saigon.

In January 1975, we left Da Nang for Saigon and the peaceful interlude that began with the Paris Peace Accord almost two years earlier came to a hurried and catastrophic conclusion. Early in the month, we hosted a farewell reception at our home in Da Nang. It was a bittersweet occasion. Our Vietnamese government, media and academic guests regarded the reduction in USIA's footprint in South Vietnam as a bad omen. They viewed the closing of the branch as a decrease in U.S. government confidence in the future of South Vietnam. That was a reality that simply could not be concealed as the second anniversary of the Paris peace agreement approached.

Looking back, however, closing the branches when we did was a good move. The situation in Da Nang began to unravel critically in early March 1975 when the total breakdown of the South Vietnamese military in the northern half of the country generated panic and chaos. Almost two million people fled into the city, an environment simply unable to accommodate them. People acted out of sheer desperation in attempts to get out of town once the embassy authorized the evacuation of the remaining U.S. Da Nang personnel at the end of March.

As Americans in Da Nang packed to go, they were surrounded instantly by throngs of Vietnamese grappling for positions that would enable them to tag along. Lives were lost as they clung to the wings of aircraft; others were crushed to death clinging to landing gear when they were raised after take off from the airport in Da Nang. Barges in Da Nang Harbor also evacuated personnel, and many Vietnamese lost their lives trying to jump aboard after they pulled away from the dock, falling in the water and drowning. We heard horror story after horror story from people we knew in Da Nang after their evacuation to Saigon, some with only the clothes on their

backs. Two colleagues said they had to fire weapons to defend themselves, not knowing what damage they inflicted. One, however, was distraught because he was convinced that a shot he fired had killed someone.

One reason for the breakdown in MR1/I Corps was a decision to reposition South Vietnamese defense forces to the south under the “light at the top, heavy on the bottom” strategy that acknowledged North Vietnamese forces in the central highlands were capable of overcoming South Vietnam’s. Unfortunately Vietnam’s political leaders did not share that strategy widely and military leaders were incapable of implementing the strategy quickly in an orderly fashion. Most officers, many with families living on base, fled in panic when the strategy was announced. The shift in the position of defense forces degenerated into total disorganization. In short, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam disintegrated by the end of March.

More than two years after the Paris peace agreement South Vietnam began to unravel, and only three months later the situation degenerated into a chaotic evacuation of American citizens and their dependents from the country as the government collapsed. The way the Ambassador and the deputy chief of mission coped with events at the end was disastrous and characterized by the absence of transparency and accountability. It threatened the safety of dependants and the lives of hundreds of Vietnamese U.S. government employees and thousands of high value Vietnamese contacts without whose efforts the embassy would have been unable to operate throughout the war.

All this became clear only in retrospect. In January 1975, we were settling into a home in Saigon that was a great improvement over the one in Da Nang. It was a duplex that had an enormous banyan tree in the garden we shared with our neighbors. We received the shipment of personal possessions that had not been delivered to us in Da Nang. Alison entered the international nursery and made new friends quickly. Looking back, Saigon could have become one of our favorite postings were it not for the war. The city had its charms, and much of the French influence in architecture and cuisine remained.

We quickly fell into a routine in Saigon. Following local custom, the work day was 8:00 am to noon and 2:00 to 6:00 pm. The long midday break gave us time to lunch with friends and colleagues, shop, swim at the embassy pool and even take a nap. We visited local markets on Saturday and took the kids to the embassy pool on Sunday mornings followed by hot dogs and burgers at the embassy club where we met up with other families with children and began to make new friends.

I was chief of program development at USIS Saigon. Even at the height of the war we were able to conduct a wide range of substantive activities in the capital. But in the last three months before South Vietnam fell and the embassy was evacuated I had little to do other than provide support to a VAA that was far larger in Saigon than in Da Nang. In addition to a few brave souls who came in as short term guest speakers, the major program in the planning stage was an exhibition of the works of distinguished American artist Alexander Calder, best known for his mobiles, a form of abstract art.

After the fall of Da Nang at the end of March, we knew that circumstances on the ground would

make it impossible to host the exhibition. The ambassador insisted, however, that USIA not cancel it because doing so would indicate to our Vietnamese staff that we no longer considered the environment in country stable or secure enough to mount it. Once they knew, they would leak that information to friends and family and before you knew it everybody else would know what everybody else except the ambassador already knew, namely that the gig was just about up.

As a result we gave the go ahead to have the exhibit shipped to Saigon even after all signs pointed to the eventual evacuation of the embassy. That left USIA holding the bag. At the last moment, the exhibit was diverted to another destination by the shipping line because commercial sea routes into South Vietnam faced closure, and USIA evaded the prospect of losing invaluable art work and having to face the consequences. The damage to the agency's reputation for safe and secure handling of valuable works of art would have limited its ability to present American art programs anywhere abroad in the future.

Against this background of uncertainty and tension, about two months after we arrived in Saigon we took a vacation trip to Thailand between March 9 and 20. We visited both exotic Bangkok and the beachfront resort of Penang where a monkey bit son Alex and he learned how to climb out of his crib. Reading the English language paper published in Thailand, we learned of the fall of Ban Me Thuot, a major city in the center of South Vietnam on March 8 and attacks on other locations in the central highlands about which we knew little because Armed Forces Radio and TV news in Saigon was censored and Saigon's English language paper was sponsored by the CIA.

The attacks, Sylvia knew from her work at the Pentagon, did not fit the usual pattern of enemy activity. She saw them as the final push by the north to take the south, something embassy leadership refused to acknowledge until the bitter end just six weeks later. This head-in-the-sand attitude hampered evacuation planning and endangered the safety and security of Americans in country. When evacuation was finally ordered on April 28 all hell broke loose and thousands of deserving Vietnamese embassy employees and their families were simply abandoned in places American embassy officials told them to gather for evacuation. The Americans waiting with them were summoned to board the last helicopters without any arrangements having been made to ensure the safe departure of the Vietnamese who trusted the good faith of their American supervisors and colleagues to the exclusion of other evacuation options.

During our trip to Bangkok Sylvia and I thought about having her and the children stay on there while I returned to Saigon, but ultimately we all returned to Vietnam together. From then on Sylvia worried endlessly about the safety of our family. The ambassador was simply unconcerned about that except in the most perfunctory manner. He authorized an update to the standard emergency evacuation plan that every embassy is required to prepare, but did so without regard to what was required to implement it on short notice or to ensure the orderly departure of more than 4,000 Americans and their dependents who were still in Vietnam in late April. Nor did he designate personnel to start mapping out a multi-stage process to get them out of the country until just days before the plug was pulled. The U.S. government paid a heavy price for the improvisatory and haphazard nature of the actual evacuation from Vietnam.

Ambassador Martin feared that the leak of any information about the embassy planning for

evacuation would send the message to South Vietnamese leadership that the U.S. resolve to support the government was weakening. Instead he worked unrealistically to find an opportunity for some sort of accommodation that would leave South Vietnam intact. Martin's last weeks as U.S. ambassador to Saigon were a disaster. He simply failed to take responsibility for his most important obligation, the protection and safe departure of all Americans and the orderly evacuation of more than 100,000 Vietnamese who had linked their destinies to U.S. government policy objectives in their country over the past decade.

Since very little information was shared with embassy staff about what was really happening, we relied on rumors and unofficial information in our final weeks in Saigon. Our first clue that official Americans were taking seriously the deteriorating security situation was the absence of our children's playmates and their parents at the embassy swimming pool the Sunday after our return from Thailand. Inquiring as to their whereabouts, we were told they were on R&R (rest and recreation leave) in the Philippines or on a shopping trip to Bangkok. That all of them, mostly families of DAO or intelligence agency employees, split the scene within days of each other seemed an unlikely coincidence. A few days later the international nursery closed, indicating that many families, both American and foreign, were preparing to leave the country.

Our visit to a local veterinarian unexpectedly provided additional information about the approach of the final reckoning. We took our cat in for shots and the Vietnamese veterinarian told us that the wife of DCM Wolfgang Lehman had just stopped by to get certificates of health for their dogs because they planned to ship them out. That jolted us somewhat and maybe the vet as well who obviously hoped to learn more about that from us. It was a clear indication the DCM's family anticipated leaving soon for as attached as they were to their pets it was unlikely they would ship them out unless they also planned to depart. By late March, it was clear that officials at the top of the embassy hierarchy were preparing to pull their staffs out of Vietnam regardless of ambassador Martin's stalling on plans for an evacuation.

Finally, at the end of March, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger ordered the ambassador to authorize the departure of American dependents from Vietnam, but Martin told his section heads they could grant departure orders only for married individuals who requested them on a case by case basis. USIS PAO Alan Carter and heads of other agencies ignored that caveat and announced to their entire staffs that any dependents seeking to depart would be able to do so with embassy travel orders issued not for evacuation but for resettlement in the U.S. under "separate maintenance". Such orders provided for round trip transportation under the assumption that dependents would eventually return to post when circumstances warranted it. Everybody knew, however, that no one would be cashing in those orders for return tickets to Saigon. The authorized departures indicated Washington was aware the days of the U.S. in Saigon were numbered as were those of the government of the Republic of South Vietnam.

Before all this we entertained the notion of Sylvia leaving as an escort on a recently authorized 'Operation Babylift' flight to expedite the transit of more than 2,000 Vietnamese orphans that Americans had expressed interest in adopting. That way she could travel home at no cost to us to take the Foreign Service oral exam. Seats for escorts would enable dozens of female military employees and dependent spouses from other agencies to depart without evacuation orders and lessen the burden to DAO in dealing with remaining dependents. As an escort, she would be

permitted to travel with our children. In the end, she did not take advantage of that option because USIS authorized her separate maintenance orders. She and the kids departed April 4 on one of the last Pan Am flights out of Saigon.

The first Operation Babylift flight departed via a reconfigured Air Force C-5 Galaxy, the largest cargo craft in the world, the same day Sylvia left on Pan Am. A cargo door blew off 12 minutes after take off depressurizing the cabin and severing several flight control cables. The plane crashed short of the runway after the pilot circled back to Saigon's Than Son Nhut airport. Some 138 people were killed including dozens of DAO spouses. Sylvia did not hear anything about the disaster during the four days she spent crossing the Pacific. Equipment failure on the Pan Am plane resulted in a two-day layover in Guam and an overnight layover in Hawaii. She did not want to burden her mother with the problems PanAm was having and therefore made no attempts to contact her en route.

Someone from the State Department, however, called her mother to let her know Sylvia had departed on April 4 without mentioning that she was flying PanAm. Needless to say her mother panicked thinking Sylvia was aboard the Babylift flight. She became frantic when she heard nothing from Sylvia the next day. My father finally called PanAm, got confirmation that she was a passenger and learned of the mechanical difficulties that had held up the flight so long.

Of the 52 pets on board confined to the cargo hold for four days, only two were alive on the baggage carousel in San Francisco, one of them being Princess, the Siamese cat we acquired five years earlier in Warsaw. The others animals died of dehydration because no one paid any attention to their needs during the delays despite assurances from Pan Am personnel. Princess lived with us for 12 more years; she died in 1986.

Knowing that Sylvia and the children were safe in the United States eased my mind considerably, but conditions in Saigon were deteriorating. Things surely would have gotten worse faster had Vietnamese police not been able to enforce limited entry into Saigon to only registered residents. That prevented a reoccurrence of the situation in Da Nang and created a period of relative tranquility that prevailed until just before the final evacuation less than three weeks later.

That tranquility, however, was dramatically shattered on April 8 when at 8:20 am a low flying, fast moving fighter jet roared over USIS headquarters and headed straight for the presidential palace less than a mile away. A minute later it roared over again and a massive explosion seconds later was followed by several rapid bursts of automatic weapon fire. USIS employees hit the floor and crawled under desks. Fortunately no one was injured because the windows had been sealed with Mylar, a synthetic material that prevented the glass from shattering inward. The mission warden closed the gates, and we prepared for the worst. Nothing followed, however. Little more than an hour later, the government announced a curfew. Damage caused by the bomb dropped on the palace was minimal, and no one was injured. President Thieu was elsewhere at the time.

Everybody started scrambling to get home. Traffic immediately became snarled, detours were set up everywhere and the streets were patrolled by soldiers in black jackets. Motor scooters drove

on sidewalks disregarding frazzled pedestrians whose safety they threatened. I had the thankless task of patrolling the USIS annex a block from the embassy. Fortunately a colleague was there, and we chatted until the curfew was lifted at about 3:00 pm after which another colleague dropped by with sandwiches for the three of us.

The bombing hastened the downsizing of the USIS American staff from 16 to five. With no more programs to develop and no farewell functions arranged for my Vietnamese USIS staff or household help, I left April 18 on the last Cathay Pacific flight out of Saigon to Hong Kong with another former BPAO colleague. After decompressing there for three days, I flew to Athens, Georgia where Sylvia and the children were staying with her parents. A fellow faculty member of Sylvia's father at the University of Georgia asked to meet me after I arrived there. Sylvia's mother arranged a lunch for us in her home and I "briefed" professor of law Dean Rusk, who wanted to hear what I knew of developments in Vietnam. He was secretary of state during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and along with Defense Secretary Robert McNamara largely shaped the policies that ultimately required the presence of 400,000 American soldiers in South Vietnam. Our meeting occurred several days after I arrived from Saigon. There was little I could relate to him about events since my departure, but he expressed gratitude for the opportunity to hear from someone who had been on the ground in Saigon so recently; I think our meeting saddened him. Nothing I said offered hope for optimism.

Upon returning to Washington, I worked briefly as a member of the State Department task force assigned to relocate up to 130,000 Vietnamese President Ford authorized to enter the United States in the event of an evacuation. I do not know how many ultimately made it to the U.S. but the numbers were large. The work was fast-paced and stressful as the task force escalated rapidly into a multi-agency operation. I recall lengthy involvement in determining that the National Guard Training Center at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; Eglin Air Force Base in Florida; and Marine Corps Camp Pendleton in California would be the locations for Vietnamese refugee welcome centers. That was followed by exhaustive meetings to mobilize and organize U.S. agencies and NGOs to provide support required there.

I also recall lengthy conversations with a number of mayors from small towns in the Mid- and Northwest who called to say they were prepared to assist with the relocation of refugees. Most touching were their pleas for us to identify Vietnamese physicians who, their residents hoped, would be willing to settle in their out-of-the-way communities to compensate for the glaring lack of medical services around them characteristic of so many American rural areas. My tenure on the Vietnamese refugee task force and my involvement with U.S. policy regarding Vietnam concluded when I began 100 hours of Hindi language training to prepare for an onward assignment to New Delhi, India in July.

ROBERT A. MARTIN
Political Officer
NhaTrang/Saigon (1974-1975)

Robert A. Martin was born and raised in Philadelphia, beginning in 1931. His

father was a Naval medical person during World War I and II. After finishing primary and secondary school in Philadelphia, Robert Martin attended Andover and Yale, where he majored in international relations. After graduation in 1954, he was drafted into the Army. When he was released from the Army in 1956, he entered law school at the University of Pennsylvania. He served in various positions in Washington, DC, as well as abroad in Belgium, Vietnam, Iran, and Germany. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on September 8, 1994.

MARTIN: In the early spring of 1974, we were assigned to Vietnam and went off there together to serve initially in Nha Trang. After about a month of that there was a need for an officer in the political section in Saigon so Joanna moved from Nha Trang to Saigon. About six weeks later, there was a need for someone in the Pol/Mil section in Saigon so I came from Nha Trang to Saigon and we were together again.

Q: Let's talk about Nha Trang, a port city. What was the situation when you went out in 1974?

MARTIN: We got out there in the end of May, 1974. We went from Saigon, after a couple of days, up to Nha Trang. Joanna was doing political work and I was doing political work, but they were quite different things. I spent much of my time going out and about the Military Region II area to the various other locations there to see what was going on with the people we had working as advisers. At that point there were very, very few military advisers, but the AID missions and that effort was ongoing. I also visited the South Vietnamese forces and the leadership in the various locations there to find out what was going on. One of the things I was doing was tracking the South Vietnamese forces and their losses on a regular basis. We got reports into Nha Trang from various liaison people we had in the key areas throughout Military Region II, and based on that I would put together a message each week on the number of casualties and what was going so far as these reports we got from our advisers.

Q: Was this a cease fire time?

MARTIN: It was after the major forces of the US forces had left, but there was still some military activity in this period. There had been an agreed cease fire before that, but that more or less broke down. At this time it was during a period when there were a number of engagements. It wasn't full war, but there was enough going on. There was a military situation between the two sides.

Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese forces that now had the responsibility of holding things together?

MARTIN: I must confess I didn't have much basis for having a very precise sense because I was so new. But certainly the sense I did get was that they weren't doing particularly well. Where they had a lot of men and matériel they were able to hold the situation, but they weren't making any particular progress in terms of expanding that situation or bettering their position. It was essentially a defensive effort, or so it seemed to me.

Q: When did you go down to Saigon?

MARTIN: In mid-September, 1974.

Q: What was your role then?

MARTIN: I was working in the pol/mil section in the embassy and was involved with liaison with our military group that was in liaison with the Four Power joint effort to try and add to the agreement and rein in the military activities. There was an Iranian group, an Hungarian group, an Indian group, and maybe Swedish, representation under the UN, if you will, that was trying to negotiate arrangements to tone down the conflict and to bring it more under control. There was also an effort to work out arrangements for solving questions of US missing in action and prisoners of war and I was involved in working with our military in that.

Q: Did we have much of a military contingent there at that time?

MARTIN: We had a rather sizeable headquarters military assistance group in Saigon, but we didn't have too much military out and around the country. It had by that point reverted really to the consulates general and the AID people in the field. It was mainly a civil representation on our part at that point. There were some military around and they got around the country to some degree, but the US presence was really almost gone at that point. Certainly in terms of fighting, it was all gone.

Q: What was the military's impression of what was happening in Vietnam at that particular time?

MARTIN: The US military was, I think, privately recognizing that the South Vietnamese were not very potent or very capable but they were doing everything they could to shore them up by providing them supplies. As you may recall, that was the period where support here at home for anything other than a complete pull out and stoppage of aid was very strong. Graham Martin was our ambassador then. He was doing a really noble effort towards maintaining Congressional support for funding the South Vietnamese following the peace agreement and the pull out of US forces leaving essentially the defense of South Vietnam and the military effort to the South Vietnamese. Ambassador Martin was very confident that if he could have gotten a mutli-year deal through the Congress that there was some hope that the South Vietnamese would pull of their socks and recognize that they did have support adequate to permit them to get on with defending and saving their country. Most of us thought that at the time and were somewhat abashed when that didn't come to past. But certainly in retrospect, it seems fairly clear that the South Vietnamese were never going to be able to do very much effectively to meet their own needs and that their defeat was essentially inevitable.

Q: How long were you there?

MARTIN: We all left, as you know, over the evening of April 29 and early morning of April 30, 1975. Joanna had gone off to Bangkok about ten days before that. The Deputy Chief of Mission, Wolf Lehmann, came to me about the middle of April and said, "You know we are at the point where we have to pare down more. I would like to send Joanna to Bangkok to help out with the

embassy there in the preparations that clearly will be coming along before too long with people coming out of Vietnam." I said, "Well, I had understood that it was coming." Joanna and I talked and I took her out to Mehrabad airport about a day later and she went off to Bangkok. I stayed in Saigon.

Q: Going back just a touch. When did you at your level in the embassy figure that the game was up?

MARTIN: Well, certainly at the point when we began to draw down, it was more than clear. It had really become pretty clear several weeks before that that it was probably about over.

One interesting interlude that we had early in March, which would have been six or seven weeks before we finally all left, was a visitation by a group of former American POWs to Saigon, including now Senator John McCain of Arizona who had been a prisoner for over six years, and several others who had been imprisoned even longer. I don't recall that it included Admiral Stockdale of the last Presidential election political fame. But there were 10 or 12 of these individuals including a sergeant who supposedly was the person who had been held longer than anyone else among American POWs. That was really a fascinating visitation. I was involved with supporting that visit. The principal person, outside of the ambassador and the DCM, was one of the principal AID people, George Jacobson. I worked very closely with Jake and went around the countryside with this group of POWs over the several days that they were there. They even were taken out to the island off the coast where the infamous tiger cages were.

Q: This was a South Vietnamese prison island?

MARTIN: Yes. It really was fascinating days. The Vietnamese were very gracious and they had a lovely large dinner for them the last night they were there and treated them very well. I was surprised at the degree of steadiness and stability and under control that these people who had gone through these horrible experiences evidenced. They really were well in hand and did not give any indication that I noticed that their horrible experiences were preying on them, at least outwardly.

Q: What were they out there for?

MARTIN: To provide an opportunity for the South Vietnamese to thank them for their effort and as a gesture towards the United States, solidarity and all of that.

Q: When had the Highlands started to fall apart?

MARTIN: That was about that time. A little earlier there were several crucial losses up in the northwest portion of MR II. Certainly by mid-March it was pretty clear that things were going very, very badly and it happened very, very quickly. There were several occasions when the North pressed a large Southern forces pretty hard and the Southern forces rather than holding, split and high tailed it and therefore suffered greater losses than would have been otherwise.

In tandem with that was all the reports coming from Washington that the Congress was not

prepared to play the game as Graham Martin was proposing, namely, providing multi-year package of support. So there didn't seem to be much heart in the Southern side of the equation at that point.

Q: There are many stories about Graham Martin's talking a game that things would hold and all. What was happening down in the political section?

MARTIN: It was fairly clear that things were going badly, but there was so much activity because...one of the things that was taking a lot of time was people in the United States of one sort or another, both American and Vietnamese who had got to the United States and had friends and relatives who were becoming increasingly at risk...there was a huge avalanche of inquiries about these people. People were coming from the States and other places trying to get involved and to assure the safety of this individual or that small group, etc. Of course, the Congress was getting involved in that as well and that compounded the difficulty. We didn't have much time to think about the military situation.

Q: Were your Vietnamese counterparts seeing what was going to happen?

MARTIN: I really didn't have any Vietnamese counterparts. So I can't usefully comment on that aspect of it. Although it seemed fairly clear generally that the Vietnamese were understanding that it was a very uncertain time and everything was a huge question mark.

Q: When were you basically packed and ready to go?

MARTIN: One thing I might mention in terms of the effort to do good works and save Vietnamese, etc., you will recall that about the middle of March that a C-5 loaded with children took off from (inaudible) airport in Saigon and very sadly had a problem before they even got fully airborne and crashed. A huge number of the kids on board were killed. The C-5, the largest transport plane we have was configured with two levels and all the people on the lower of the two floors were killed and most of the ones on the upper level were saved. It was a tragic accident. That obviously compounded the problem and atmosphere and the thinking of people at that time. Everything was going wrong.

We packed to leave some weeks earlier in terms of our household effects. The thought that we were going to be drawing down and probably leaving or at least be on a very limited basis had been fairly clear since about the middle of March. So the last half of March was a very frantic effort to pack up the things of the people in the embassy and get them on their way out of the country. Joanna was still there and we did that. We saw our effects off on a very rickety truck, piled up high and I thought as the thing turned the corner of the street we were living on that it was probably the last we would see of all that stuff. But happily our things did get out. Some others, particularly some of the people who had been up in Military Region I in Da Nang, did not have equal luck. One of our colleague officers, Theresa Tull, had her things packed up there and put together as a pallet and ready to go and then the pallet never got picked up and her things were just left. And there were other cases like that. Al Francis, an officer who had been involved on the pol/mil side in Saigon and then subsequently in the political section in Saigon was sent up to Da Nang to run the consulate general there towards the end and was involved in the

evacuation from there of all the Americans, but unhappily not all the American people's effects, subsequently out of Saigon in advance of the actual final departure.

With respect to packing up in terms of when I left, I never did pack. You may recall that, I guess it was the night of April 28, there was a plane that took off from a local military airport and came into the center of Saigon and flew towards the Presidential Palace and fired on it. It did not attack further, but that caused a lot of confusion and people were pretty tense even before that. They got hugely tense at that point and the DCM, Wolf Lehmann asked me to go with him and have dinner at his residence, which I agreed to since my wife had gone about ten days prior to that. We were driven in his car to his residence, which took us quite a while to manage because of the tenseness and confusion in the city. We got there and had dinner and were chatting about one thing and another and Wolf got a call from the ambassador about some aspect of something and the thought was that I should go back home. The DCM's car took me back through town and dropped me off at our place. I went to bed and woke up the next morning to get a call to say that a car would be coming. Just a note in that regard that those of us attached to the embassy and the consulates general around Vietnam, did not have at that time our own vehicles. We were all transported around on the basis of a motor pool and those of us who had individual needs, especially at the consulates general, could borrow a motor pool car to drive around to do what he had to do. In Saigon, all of us had to call up the motor pool and a car would come and pick us up and take us to where we had to go.

So a car was coming to pick me up early the morning of the 29th. I went off to the embassy and about mid-morning it became clear that this was virtually it and I did get a car to take me home and managed to pack up a small attaché case with a couple of things and went back to the embassy. I did not see the maid that we had during that brief return to pick up a few things.

About mid-day the ambassador's secretary, Eva Kim, asked me to go with a colleague, Brunson McKinley, in two cars to go out around town to pick up some people that the ambassador wanted picked up and brought to the compound to participate in the departure. So Brunson got his car and I was to go in the admin counselor's car. We tried to get out one of the gates and we were unsuccessful. We had to go to the back gate to get out and come around the embassy compound and I met the driver of the admin counselor's car in the front of the embassy where it was parked. We took off and McKinley took off and went our separate ways to places around town to pick up some people.

It was not a very pleasant experience. I went to one location where there were all sorts of people and, of course, they all wanted to go. They all had dozens and dozens of bags and baskets and this, that and the other. I said, "Look, we can't possibly take anything like that. One item per person." The idea was to get this lady and two or three of her kids. It was just really bizarre. At another location I was to pick up this elderly couple and they wanted to take what appeared to me to be a bird cage that was supposedly the treasure of their life. We managed to fit this into the trunk and the car was stuffed. We finally got six people into the car with some of their belongings and went back to the embassy and thought we would try to get in the back in the back gate of the compound near the staff club and swimming pool.

By that time that was so congested that that turned out not to be possible. We were able finally to

extricate ourselves from there and to go back around to the front of the embassy. The car had a radio in it and we were able to be in touch just across the grilled fence into the embassy itself. We were told to try to get in the pedestrian gate which was right near where we were parked and that a marine would come down in twenty minutes to open that gate to let us in. Well, of course, as soon as we got out of the car and all the luggage was unloaded from the trunk, people who were watching the embassy like hawks thought something was afoot and it was like the pied piper. We just had dozens and dozens of people.

So I said, "Look, gang, we are going to walk down away from this gate," which we did about 25 or 30 yards down the street to try and get the crowds away from the gate and wait. When I saw somebody coming finally to open the gate we tried to edge back along the sidewalk without being too obvious. But we were obvious and we just took everyone with us. We got to the gate and the gate was open and everybody wanted to come in. Of course, I was standing there sort of playing God, pushing people back and trying to get the people who I had picked up in, the ones that we were particularly interested in, and had people who had been former employees, Foreign Service Nationals who were no longer in the employ and hadn't been able to get in somehow asking to be let in. It seemed to me that if I once started doing anything like that, we would have a riot. So I kept pushing these people out and finally the marines pulled me in and we closed the gate. It was a terrible situation, not a pleasant one at all.

My colleague McKinley had been a lot smarter in some ways. He had recalled that there was a gate between our compound and the French compound, the two backed up to one another. So he had gone to the gate of the French compound and talked to the French, by then Foreign Legionnaires -- they had brought in about 75 Foreign Legionnaires to protect their compound and they were the biggest, toughest guys I have ever seen. He talked them into letting him in and he said that not only could they have the car, but there was a case of champagne in the trunk and they could have that too. So they let him in and he left the car and champagne there, got his group and went through the gate between the two compounds. So he had no problems. I hadn't been quick enough on that.

Q: And then what happened?

MARTIN: Then I got the people I had collected in the area back of the compound where I had been told to take them. I left them and went into the chancery, itself, and went back up to the ambassador's and DCM's area and told Eva Kim that my people were in the back with all the others. It was shortly after that that I was walking out in the area just outside the ambassador's and DCM's suite when I heard the telephone on the receptionist's desk ring. There was no receptionist sitting there so I picked it up. I almost fainted, because the voice on the other end was our maid. I just could not believe how she had happened fortuitously to call and it had come through on this phone just as I was walking by just about three or four hours after I had been home and got just a very few things. We had a chat about what I wanted for dinner and how were things going, etc. I told her what I wanted for dinner, knowing full well that I would never get there, and tried to buck her up a little bit. But it really was an eerie feeling to pick up the phone and have her at the end of it. I just couldn't believe that.

During the remainder of the afternoon, I helped out shredding papers and various things trying to

get our paper supply down, and helped out in the ambassador's area in all the things that were going on. Subsequently, at the end of the evening somewhere between 9:00 and 10:00, I was told by Jim Devine, who was the pol/mil counselor and in charge of getting people on the helicopters off the roof as opposed to helicopters that were landing in the parking lot just outside the chancery, that it was time for me to go. So I picked up my attaché case and walked up to the roof and got into the helicopter.

Q: Where did you go?

MARTIN: I went off to the carrier Hancock which had been put back into service for this particular chore in the South China Sea. I was in a CH-47 helicopter, picked off the roof and they didn't close the back door entirely and I was sitting next to the labor attaché and the helicopter was chockablock. We started off and the labor attaché looked back and said, "Gosh there are helicopters chasing us, they are after us." I said, "Come on, that is more of the same kind of gang that we are." He was very antsy about it and I finally got him calmed down. We ended up on the Hancock and I was able to get in touch with one of the officers who wondered if we wanted any thing and I said, "Maybe it would be a good idea if we sent a message off indicating that this group had arrived." So I drafted a message which was sent off to the Department in Washington and I guess we sent it also informational to Bangkok and Manila, which were the two principal places that were going to be receiving the evacuees. I then found where we were going to be billeted on the Hancock and just went to bed. I may have had something to eat.

I have a story in terms of the departure from the parking lot. A couple of days before the evacuation actually began, one of the problems that had to be taken care of was a tree that was right in the center of the parking lot. The admin counselor decided that he would take care of that tree in advance. So he was out there trying to get it chopped down and Graham Martin heard about this and was furious and said to stop that. The reason being, of course, was that if the Vietnamese saw this they would recognize that something was afoot. So that effort stopped. When the tree had to come down, it turned out that our doctor, who subsequently became the head of MED in the Department, a very wonderful person, was the one who actually took care of the tree and got it out of the way. But, it was funny the idea of not taking the tree down in advance because everybody will know that something is going to happen.

Q: I heard stories afterward that people at the embassy would sort of go by and pick off branches little by little because they knew something had to be done.

MARTIN: In any event, as I say, Jim Devine and mission people were in charge of the evacuation from the roof, and the US military was running the evacuation by helicopter from the parking lot and other places around the town and from the military compound which was essentially co-located out at (inaudible) airport.

Q: What happened to you next?

MARTIN: We spent a couple of days just going in circles in the South China Sea waiting for others who might come. And, indeed, on the second day a helicopter came in loaded with Vietnamese. A Vietnamese military person had stolen a helicopter with his family and as many

friends and relatives he could stow on board and landed on the flight deck of the Hancock. Because there was so much in terms of people and no storage space, they got the people out and pushed the helicopter off the Hancock, which was done just in order to save space.

Finally, after four or five days we went into Manila, into Subic and were let off there. We were supposed to be taken by helicopter to the chancery downtown, but somehow that got all fouled up and we went by bus someplace else. Ultimately we got back to the chancery. A colleague who had formerly worked for me was in the embassy in Manila at the time so I linked up with him. I knew the then ambassador, Bill Sullivan, quite well, so I called him. He was out at the residence and said, "Oh, come on out we are just sitting around the pool and having a drink. I have the Iranian Four Power people out here, the ambassador and the general." So my colleague took me out in his car to the residence and I sat around during the course of the afternoon having a couple of drinks and chatting away. It was at that point that Ambassador Sullivan said that he had been tempted, when the evacuation was underway, to send a telegram to Ambassador Martin in Saigon to commiserate with him but also to provide a reminder to insure that before he left that he turned out the light at the end of the tunnel. Sullivan chortled and said that he just didn't have the heart to send it. He might just have well, because the story, I am sure, has made the rounds many times since.

After a day or so in Manila, I flew off to Bangkok to join Joanna. From there, after a day or so, we began the trek back to the United States. We went through Hong Kong, Hawaii and finally through California and back to Washington.

LACY A. WRIGHT
Acting Consul General
Chung Tien Province (1973-1974)

Political Officer
Saigon (1974-1975)

Mr. Wright joined the Foreign Service in 1968 after earning degrees at Mendelien College and Loyola University. His foreign service took him to Vietnam both during and after the War. Other assignments took him to Milan, London and Bangkok as well as to the State Department in Washington, where he worked with International Organizations in matters concerning refugees, and UNESCO affairs. Mr. Wright was born and raised in Springfield, Illinois. Mr. Wright was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: *You left London in '72, and where to?*

WRIGHT: I came back to Washington, and I was in the economics course. That was a three-or four-month course at that time. It began in the beginning of the summer, the one that I took, and I did not finish it quite because I was called back to Vietnam. And that, I think, was a very interesting phenomenon. You know, I would say that almost all of us who went to Vietnam

initially went there kicking and screaming. That's the last place most of us wanted to go. In fact, a number of people, until they had gotten in the Foreign Service, I'm sure, had taken every measure they could to keep themselves from being sent to Vietnam. So there we all were, and most of us were sent there, and most of us didn't want to be sent there. However, in 1972, many of us were going to be asked to go back a second time, and I remember that we were called, those of us who were supposed to go, to the State Department Operations Center by U. Alexis Johnson, and he was the one who gave us our initial talk, briefing, about what we were to do and how this came about. I always have imagined that this presented the powers that were in the State Department with a bit of a problem. The whole idea was to send people to monitor the observance of the peace agreement, which was coming up and which, indeed, was signed in the beginning of 1973.

So as the signing drew closer and as the Department was preparing for it, it decided that it would send people out to do this monitoring. Well, it didn't make much sense to send brand new people to Vietnam to do this, they must have figured; they had to send people who had already been there. But how were they going to do this? They'd already asked people to go to Vietnam once; how were they going to ask them to go to Vietnam again? Well, I guess they must have thought, We will design a program that will be as attractive as possible. We'll only tell them they have to go for six months. They can have an R & R in the middle of that and either go back to their post or go to Washington, which meant in practice that you could go anywhere in the world that you wanted. And we'll give them the normal hardship pay of 24 per cent more than their salary. And then at the other end, we'll seal it off, however, by saying that if you're called, you have to go; this is not a volunteer situation. So having done that, they drew up a list of people, and they notified all of us, and do you know what happened? Something that I'm sure surprised everybody. Instead of having a hard time getting to go, people were coming out of the woodwork anxious to go back to Vietnam. In fact, the personnel bureau was getting phone calls saying "Hey, how come my name's not on the list to go back to Vietnam?" So the way it turned out, they had no trouble getting people to go back to Vietnam, so much so that those who really didn't want to go, as I remember it, were excused because so many people did want to go. And that is very revealing, I think, of the way that service in Vietnam grabbed on to people and turned people who were initially very reluctant to go into people who found the whole experience really fascinating.

Q: Also, I think, this is also at a certain point, having been through it once, and this is a new thing, and wanting to be—this is where the action was.

WRIGHT: That's true.

Q: But there is this attraction to that. You were there from really about '73, was it?

WRIGHT: Yes, the beginning of '73, January of '73, I believe, until the end, which was, of course, April 30, 1975.

Q: So this was not a six-month tour.

WRIGHT: Not for me, because I extended.

Q: *What about family?*

WRIGHT: I was not married then. I didn't get married until 1976, so that was not a consideration at the time. It was, of course, a consideration for a lot of other people.

Q: *Well, when you went out there in '73, what was the word of wisdom within the State Department of the Vietnam hands about these peace accords that were coming up and all. What was the mood before you got out there?*

WRIGHT: I think everybody was delighted that the war seemed to be coming to an end, did come to an end, at least temporarily. I think there was a lot of skepticism about how effective the peace accords would turn out to be, skepticism which proved very well founded. But I guess if you had taken a poll of the people who went out there, I'm sure you would have found a whole spectrum of views about what was going to happen, probably weighted on the skeptical side.

Q: *So you got out there in '73, and you were doing what? Did you have several jobs, or--*

WRIGHT: Yes, I had a whole series of jobs. I went back to Can Tho in the Delta, and we formed a new structure. At that point, with the signing of the peace accords, we founded consulates general in each of the four military corps, which became the focal point of our activities and replaced the CORDs structure which was there before.

So I went down to IV Corps. The man who was named to be the consul general was Tom Barnes. Tom Barnes was an extremely bright, very dynamic and idiosyncratic guy, who was, by the way, a close associate and admirer of John Vann. In fact he had been John Vann's deputy when Vann was killed up in II Corps. He was a terrific language speaker. He spoke Vietnamese and learned many other languages and was tough as nails and was probably an admirable choice for the job that he was assigned to. And I think that despite his having been a man who was really tough in his evaluations of people and in the way he did business—cold-blooded, I think, is the word comes to mind—he left that six-month stint held in very high esteem by those of us who worked for him.

I might tell you that one of the things that Tom Barnes did which I've never seen anyone else do in the Foreign Service—Barnes was, of course, a career Foreign Service officer—he had about 16 of us working for him, that is, 16 young officers who were his staff, as well as a deputy, who was Frank Wisner. And he first of all said that all of us were to be called vice-consuls. Well, this rankled some people who felt that that title was too low for them. Maybe they had had a higher one somewhere else. At any rate, some people didn't like it. He wanted everybody to be, first of all, on an equal footing and, secondly, easily distinguishable from himself, who was the consul general. But the thing that he did that really raised some eyebrows was in the way he evaluated people. He evaluated us against one another. That is, he would say, "I'm going to rank all of you. One of you is going to be first, one of you is going to be second, and one of you is going to be 16th," or words to that effect. And he carried that over, not totally but to some degree, to our written evaluations. He would say something like, "Mr. Jones did a fine job here. Among 16 officers, he was in the top half," or the top third, or maybe even better. I don't remember how he phrased

things for people who were in the bottom half or the bottom third. He may have been silent on that, but I don't know. But anyway, he'd let all of us know where he thought we ranked among our peers. As I say, he carried it over into our evaluations to some degree, which I've never seen done anywhere else in the Foreign Service. And of course, you had to be an awfully strong character to have even thought of such a thing, let alone done it.

Q: Let's talk about Can Tho. What were you doing?

WRIGHT: Several things. At first, I was down in Chung Tien Province, which was in the middle of the Delta. I don't think I stayed down there for very long, several weeks probably, and I reported back what was going on on the ground down there. Then I went up to Can Tho, to the headquarters, and I was one of the officers assigned to headquarters. And I guess I must have traveled around some. I had already been in the Delta, unlike a lot of other people there, and so I knew the lay of the land better than most people, although some of the other people had also been there in different provinces. Desaix Anderson, for example, was one of the young officers. He had been in My Tho, and he came back. Then I became a kind of reports officer, I guess, for a while, working with Frank Wisner, and then, as the six months drew to an end, I decided to extend, and I became, at some point, the person who was going to stay and be the number two at the consulate general. I'm not quite sure when Tom Barnes left, probably June or July. I believe then that Frank Wisner was acting consul general for a while. In fact, he was until the arrival of the new consul general, who was Wolf Lehmann. And then I think Frank left soon after Lehmann arrived, and I became Lehmann's deputy.

Q: What were we doing there, I mean, all over? What was the idea of this group down in the Delta and, by inference, what the other ones were doing?

WRIGHT: Well, we were doing a certain amount of the same things that we were doing before in a diminished way, but first of all, we were doing a lot of reporting. We were trying to report on the observance of the peace agreement. We were reporting, for example, any outbreaks of fighting that occurred. We were reporting the movements of the South Vietnamese forces and, to the extent that we could, of the enemy's forces. We were reporting the activities and watching the activities of the ICCS, the International Control Commission, which was composed of the Canadians, the Polish, the Hungarians—it seems to me there were four of them, had to be—I'm forgetting somebody—Indonesia. And for them, the Can Tho area was Region VII. And so we got to know a number of them, and we were very interested in what they were doing. At the same time, a lot of the world development effort that we had been doing in the Delta for some years we continued to do with, however, very much diminished personnel. We still had a kind of "rump" CORDS structure out there. We had AID people in the different provinces. But as time went on, that became smaller and smaller, so that by the time that Wolf Lehmann, after he had been there a year or so, went up to Saigon to become DCM, which was in about April of 1974, I had become acting consul general, and there were about 100 Americans working in the Delta.

Q: Well, what was happening in the Delta? The peace accords had been signed. Immediately prior to the peace accords, had there been much enemy North Vietnamese-Viet Cong activity there, and during the time you were part of this team, what was happening? What were the South Vietnamese doing?

WRIGHT: It started off quite well. The South Vietnamese were going around trying to clean things up, which they should not have been doing if they had been observing the peace accords strictly. But both sides were violating it to some degree. The Communists, too, were jockeying for position, trying to stash people here and there. The main thing that happened, however, I would say, over that year and a half period, was the progressive disarming of our side, so that I can remember, when I became acting consul general, in April or so of 1974, we did a long cable from the Delta, which I wish I still had. I remember it was 16 pages, and it was an analysis of the situation, and it was a very pessimistic cable because by that time the arms and munitions available to the South Vietnamese army had really gone down to a worrying degree. There were starting to be a lot more desertions. Whereas before a platoon, say, in an outpost which had been used to expending a huge amount of mortars and rockets as a matter of course, in fact, wastefully so, they were now down to maybe a quota of one or two mortars per day. And all this was starting to tell on the morale of the South Vietnamese.

Q: Was this a deliberate policy on our part, or what was causing this?

WRIGHT: I guess overall, the US Congress was causing it because they were reluctant to commit more funds to the Vietnam War. And I guess in the winter of that year, 1974, November, December, a Congressional delegation came out to Vietnam to take a hard look at what our situation was, and a huge amount of effort was expended by Ambassador Martin and the whole embassy to try to convince them that this was doable and winnable and that we had to stick it out, and that was largely a failure. They went back, and they greatly cut down the amount of aid to Vietnam.

Q: What were you getting from these congressmen? Were they essentially saying, "They're not going to win, and so we might as well just not put money down a rat hole"?

WRIGHT: Well, you had a certain number of them, like Bella Abzug, I think was here, who were against the war all along anyway. I'm not sure I can answer your question with precision. I don't remember conversations of that kind with members, and so I don't want to mischaracterize them, but I think the overall feeling was that this was enough. If they can't do it now, with all of the huge amount of help that we've given them, then giving them more is not going to do the trick. Now, one of the things, also, that I'm sure some of them thought, because it was an idea that was floating around at the time and afterwards, was that the South Vietnamese were just playing possum; that is, that they really had a huge cache of arms of various kinds but they were doling them out in a stingy way in order to give us an impression that they were on their last legs. This idea gained a certain amount of currency, and it has been addressed, very forcefully, by General John Murray. John Murray was the second to the last American commander in Vietnam, a logistics officer who was sent there, frankly, to bring about our disengagement from Vietnam. And John Murray is still very much alive, lives not far from here, and has written a number of magazine articles and other things addressing this question of whether the South Vietnamese army was in fact fat with munitions but choosing to behave otherwise. And he says absolutely not. In fact, he believes that our failure to stay with them was totally shameful.

Q: What were your relations and your impressions with the Vietnamese commanders, civil and

military, in the Delta, and their impressions of us?

WRIGHT: We had different relations with different ones. I think that overall there was a good deal of mistrust of us. On the other hand, they had nowhere else to go, so most of them could hardly say, "Well, we're going to stop seeing you." But there was a lot of mistrust, a feeling that we were, from the beginning, bending over backwards to play fair, to the benefit of the other side. And then, as things went on, that became more and more acute, so much so that when the final evacuation occurred, there was a great deal of fear that we would be shot at by our own allies as we departed the country. That did not happen, but the fact that the fear, the concern, was there shows you that there was a good deal of resentment on the part of many South Vietnamese at our policies and our behavior.

Q: Did the situation, while you were in the Delta, change?

WRIGHT: Oh, yes. It deteriorated greatly. You know, at the beginning of 1973, don't forget that we had come through a period of a lot of success for the South Vietnamese Government. I would say that from the time that I arrived there in 1969—don't forget that the last American ground troops left the Delta in 1969, that is, six years before the end of the war—and so all of the ground activity conducted in the Delta for the last six years of the war was done by Vietnamese troops. And there was a tremendous amount of progress made. There were big areas that were opened up to normal activity which had been under the control of the Communists. In 1974, when Terry McNamara, who has just written a book on this subject, came back to the Delta—

Q: It's called Retreat with Honor.

WRIGHT: That's right, and it's a very good book, I think. I've read about half of it, and it's excellent. But he describes his surprise when he came back in late 1974 at the degree to which areas that had previously been under Communist control were no longer so. So even that late, after all this deterioration near the end, McNamara could come back and see that things were still a lot better than they had been three years before. So what happened during that last year and a half was a very sad and rapid deterioration of conditions in the Delta, which of course, culminated in the takeover by the Communists in 1975.

Q: What was your and your colleagues' impression of the Control Commission during the time when you first started off there.

WRIGHT: Well, they were split along political lines, and that was very evident. The Communist members of the Control Commission were continually trying to see things in a way favorable to the Communist side, and the Canadians—who, by the way, dropped out after a certain point—and the Indonesians were on the other side.

Q: I know when we both were there in 1969-70, the feeling was the Canadians were pretty sound, I mean quite sound, and the Indians were wishy-washy and the Poles were agents of the other side, so--

WRIGHT: Yes, exactly right.

Q: --so that as a group this was really not an effective one at all.

WRIGHT: I guess that's right, and in fact, that's what impelled the Canadians to leave. They had been threatening to leave for some time, and I didn't think they would, but indeed they did.

Q: *Were there any reflections of what was happening in Cambodia. I'm talking about the time you were in the Delta.*

WRIGHT: Yes, there were. In fact, I would say in the second half of 1973, maybe early 1974—no let's say the first half of 1974 particularly—we were getting reports of killings—I'm not sure massacres is the right word, but killings—and people fleeing from Cambodia into Vietnam in northern Chao Duc Province. So much so that one of the people that was working in our consulate general, Ken Quinn, who is now ambassador to Cambodia, did a series of superb reports, which I think were the first intimation of what the Khmer Rouge were doing and would later do to a horrifying degree in Cambodia.

Q: *Did you have American military observers around who were able to feed in information about the effectiveness of the ARVN, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam?*

WRIGHT: Yes, I'm trying to remember whether we had military people attached to the consulate general. I know that we had people who came from Saigon, and I know, for example, that retired General Charlie Timmes used to come down from the embassy and talk with the commanders. His special job was to interface with the generals, the people that he had known before in Vietnam, and try to get their candid views of what was going on. So he would come down and make the rounds and talk to people and go back and write reports. So that's one way in which the embassy attempted to keep track of what was going on militarily.

Q: *As you were seeing what you felt was a situation beginning to deteriorate, were you, or at least your group there, sort of making mental plans about what to do if the thing fell apart? I mean, were you feeling that that could come about?*

WRIGHT: No, not at that point. We were worried about the situation, and in fact, in the cable that I told you about before, which gave a very pessimistic assessment... That cable went to Saigon but was never passed on to Washington. And Ambassador Martin, who ran things with an iron hand—that's the way he had the embassy structured. The consulates reported only to Saigon, and Saigon looked at it and decided what to pass on to Washington, and it did not pass that on to Washington. Once later, when I went up to Saigon to work, I was in a conversation with Martin in his office, I think I brought up why my cable had not been sent, and he was very much aware of it, and he said that he was reporting other things and he feared that that would have created—I forgot how he put it—a misimpression in Washington. Of course, that was very consistent with Martin's management of the news, which in the end did not serve him very well, because he became distrusted by the press and others for his consistently over-optimistic depictions of what was happening

Q: *You're talking about this cable, and just to get a feel for this, often when you have something*

of this nature that somebody sits on, it gets back anyway. A friend comes along or somebody comes along and you say, "Well, I did this cable; it never went out." Did you have the feeling that what you were reporting, was this getting back to Washington?

WRIGHT: Well, I think it was. I remember, for example, that we were visited at a certain point by the famous Moose and Lowenstein team—I think it was Moose and Lowenstein at the point.

Q: *Yes, it was.*

WRIGHT: Well, you know later it became Moose and Meissner, but I think it was Lowenstein. They came down, and I talked to them, and in fact, they mentioned my cable in one of their reports. They didn't have the cable, but they mentioned it. So I think that, as a constant during the Vietnam War, Washington had a good idea of what was going on. You know, Daniel Ellsberg has written an essay on that subject, wrote it a long time ago, in which he contended that although many mistakes were made in decisions on the Vietnam War through the years by the various presidents involved, none of them emanated from bad information.

Q: *Well, did the media come down to you? Did you see a difference in who the people were, superstars gone, and that sort of thing? What did you feel about it?*

WRIGHT: They did come down. That's a good question. I did see various media people in Saigon. I'm trying to remember. Yes, Peter Kann was still there, and I can remember once that Peter Kann came to the Delta, Wall Street Journal. I knew very well Gavin Scott of Time Magazine, who came down there once, although it was after I'd left. But yes, people did come down, and because there was still a large press corps in Saigon. I'd have to think some more about your question to compare it to what had been going on, say, two or three years before, but I think the general answer is yes, there was still a fair amount of interest in what was going on in the Delta.

Q: *You came up to Saigon when?*

WRIGHT: In I believe it was probably early September of 1974.

Q: *And you were there until, what, April 30th?*

WRIGHT: April 30th, 9 p.m.

Q: *What job did you come up to?*

WRIGHT: I came up to the job of deputy director of the internal unit of the political section.

Q: *How big was our embassy at that point. Let's look at the political section.*

WRIGHT: The political section must have had 20 people or so, and it was divided into the internal unit, the external unit—or was it? I guess the external unit was small and had with our relations with different embassies. And then there was the Pol-Mil unit, which was probably

three or four officers.

Q: Well, you think of this huge section with an ambassador on top who's trying to keep the news from going out, essentially, from accounts anyway, that he's essentially trying to create or control what news goes out, it's sort of an unworldly situation.

WRIGHT: Yes. Now don't forget that first of all, some of the people who were in the political section, at least—I don't want to overstate myself—were people whom Martin brought with him. In fact, a number of the people in the embassy were people whom Martin had brought with him and who were—I don't want to use the word *loyal* because that's probably over-dramatizing it and creating something that I don't necessarily think was true—but people that he had known for some time and who probably to some degree thought as he did. At the same time, the history of that last year or so has in it several instances of people who had a falling-out with Martin and left because of it. I can think of three or so right off the bat.

Q: Who were they?

WRIGHT: Well, one would have been the guy who was the head of the Pol-Mil unit after Danang fell and he came back from Danang: Al Francis, who was a long associate of Martin and had been brought to the country by Martin. He was a very strong personality. He became convinced, near the end, that there was no chance that the South Vietnamese could win. And I don't know any more what the specifics of his views were, but I think generally they were that we had to start to base our tactics on something other than the hope that the South Vietnamese could hold out. And he left some weeks before the end. Ken Moorefield, who had been aide to the ambassador and had very much distinguished himself in the final evacuation—again I don't remember the specifics, but I believe his transfer out of his job was accompanied by a bit of a falling-out with Martin. Another one, probably more dramatic, had to do with Lannon Walker, whom Martin had brought to Vietnam to be the administrative counselor. Lannon did have a falling out with Martin and left. Then there's the case of the Air Force general, whose name I don't remember, who jumped the gun on spiriting Vietnamese out of Vietnam who worked for him, who found himself on the next plane out, who was fired and attacked by Martin for having done that. I can probably think of a few others.

Q: When you got there in September of '74, did you find a different atmosphere in the internal political section than you'd felt out in the field?

WRIGHT: I suppose so, and particularly as the time approached for the evacuation. There was increasing tension and increasing worry, by myself too and others, that we were not starting preparations for the evacuation fast enough. Shep Lowman, head of the internal unit, was my boss. Shep felt the same way. Ken Quinn, by that time, was back in the NSC. He had been out, I believe, on a Congressional delegation. He too was worried. Some of these people were worried because they actually had families back in Vietnam, Ken Quinn being one of them, married to a Vietnamese so worried on that account and for broader reasons. But at any rate, Martin was very reluctant to begin overt preparations for an evacuation, and I think that, even though he's been greatly criticized for that, there were very good reasons why he should have been worried about that. We had just seen Danang fall apart in a horrible chaos. We had just seen more recently Nha

Trang fall apart and its people having to flee at short notice. And I'm sure that Martin had to be greatly worried at the prospect that there could be that kind of chaos in Saigon, which would have endangered the lives of all of us, as well as lives of the Vietnamese. So I don't fault Martin for being very, very careful here, even though I was worried that he was leaving things until too late.

Martin did do another thing, though, that I think was ill-advised. Martin had a kind of divide-and-rule approach to management, and he would have two different people working on the same thing, or he would have people working on things whose lines of authority were not very clear, and I believe that he did that very much on purpose. And one of the results of this was that the evacuation itself suffered from this kind of thing. I can remember that on the night before the final evacuation, we were all called into the embassy very late at night, those of us who were involved in the evacuation—that was 15 or 20 people—and at that late date it was not clear who was in charge of the meeting, who was in charge of the evacuation. And I believe that the two people who were contenders were Jim Devine, who was at that point, I believe, the head of the political-military unit, and—I'm trying to think of who else. Maybe it was the former colonel...

Q: Oh, yes. I know who you mean. We can fill that in later. He was the colonel who was in—

WRIGHT: Jake Jacobson. It was those two, and it was not clear which one of them was in charge; at least it was not clear to me. So that's an example of what happened.

A much more serious example of this lack of coordination was what happened on the day itself. I think particularly of what happened with Ken Moorefield, who, like me, was out riding buses around trying to take people to the airport. Some time before, a couple of the AID people, Mel Chaplin being one—I forget the other one—had what seemed at first like a crazy idea but was not, and that is that, added to airlift capability, we should have some barges down on the river to take people out. And these two guys helped set that up. It was their idea, as I remember it, and they helped set this up. And by the way, thousands and thousands of Vietnamese got out this way, in the end. But not everybody knew about the barges, so Ken Moorefield was unable for some reason to get the people on his bus, at least at one point, to the airport, and he had to abandon them. Had he known about the barges, he could have taken these people there and they would have gotten out. So that's an example of a very poor coordination that had a very bad effect.

Q: Could you talk about how this developed, the collapse, and how you were seen and what were getting?

WRIGHT: The collapse occurred because President Thieu implemented a policy, or strategy, which had been talked about for some time, but he did it in an extremely poor way. The strategy was, as things became more and more dire, and as South Vietnamese capabilities diminished, to cede the northern part of the country to the other side and pull back and defend the rest. I heard that this idea originated with General John Murray. In the event—and by the way, nothing more dramatically shows the distrust between the South Vietnamese Government and us than this—what happened was that Thieu decided on his own to implement this strategy. Our chargé d'affaires (Martin was in the United States), Wolf Lehmann, was over at the Presidential Palace,

if I remember correctly, on the very day that Thieu issued this order, and Thieu neglected to mention it to him. And Thieu, I believe, called his commanders down to Saigon and ordered them, within a day or two or three, to implement this pullback. And it turned out to be a horrible disaster, and as soon as it occurred, that is within several days, it was clear that everything was over, that it would only be a matter of a few weeks before the end would be definitive.

Q: Say, in the political section you had people out in the field all over the place. Were you making an effort without over-consultation with the Ambassador to get your people in and all?

WRIGHT: Well, I think events were taking care of that. I'm not quite sure of the time frames now, but I guess very early on must have occurred the fall of Danang, probably within a week or a shorter time of the decision to pull back. That occurred, I guess, as soon as General Ngo Quang Truong was drawn into this, and he had to reverse course on an instant's notice and lost his entire army. And I guess that must have involved the fall of Danang, so that it was events that were forcing all this. Now in the Delta, this was not occurring. There was no pullback there, for example, although I'm sure that as soon as this occurred this greatly heightened the need to prepare for their own evacuation. But I don't believe it involved the pullback of any personnel. But anyway, it was clear to everybody, I think, as soon as events occurred, what the dangers were. I guess one question is whether people started to be pulled back from Nha Trang at this time. I think that Nha Trang, if I remember correctly, was not overrun. I'm not sure about this; I don't quite remember that Nha Trang was overrun. I don't think so. I think that as the situation became very dangerous very fast, our people evacuated, if I'm not mistaken, but had to do so very, very quickly, not in much of an orderly way.

Q: Well, what was the atmosphere when all this was happening in the political section, and maybe from your CIA colleagues and others?

WRIGHT: Well, we were getting a lot of our information from our CIA colleagues. They're the people that at that point were getting reports from the field, mostly, so a lot of our information was coming through them. I was in a fair amount of contact with Frank Snepp at that point, and he was the source of a certain amount of our information.

By the way, one of the things that was occurring was that the South Vietnamese were, in a sense, the last to know, because their information was what they could get either by word of mouth or over official channels. And even though there was a great deal of alarm, I think it's fair to say there was not very good information coming out about all of this. And I remember at one point Ambassador Martin badgered Alan Carter to go on television and say, in effect, that things are under control. And Carter, I think against his better judgment, did this.

Q: Who was he?

WRIGHT: I'm sorry. Alan Carter was the head of USIS. And gained the opprobrium of a great many Vietnamese who later saw that this was not the way things were at all, but who, at the time, had a certain amount of faith in it because they thought, well, this is the official word of the American Government. It must be right.

But back to the political section, I think that once the retreat had been botched up, it was pretty clear to almost everybody that the end was near, and now it was a matter of trying to accelerate preparations for an evacuation and to move ahead like that and try to not delay things until it was too late. One of the things that we were doing that really sounds almost comical from this vantage point was to make lists of people—Vietnamese—that we were going to try to evacuate with us. The intention was good but the task was monumental. We were trying to look first of all at categories of people that we would try to evacuate—the legislature, the judiciary, the high-ranking military people, and so on, others who had been close to us, generally people who we felt would be in danger if they did not leave. And we had long lists of these kinds of people. I suppose that it was of some help at the end, and in fact, there was some order to the way we did things. In the final ten days, Martin put me in charge of getting out the Vietnamese families of Americans, and I did that, I and others, by choosing safe houses. We would get word to people, let us say, a mother- and father-in-law of an American officer and their family and tell them to appear at a safe house the following morning, and we would take them in a bus to the airport and they would leave. And we did this for about the last ten days, and I would say that we got out about a thousand people in that way. But of course that was only one of the things that was going on.

Q: Were you driving buses now, or did that happen later on?

WRIGHT: That happened later on. I usually stayed back at the safe house. Other people drove the buses, Phil McBride, for example, Art Cobler and several others who kind of came and went during that period.

Q: Were you having any problems with people like Lionel Rosenblatt and all, or problems with Foreign Service officers who had friends, family and all and just sort of took leave and appeared there. Did they work with you, or how did that work?

WRIGHT: Yes, they were there. I wouldn't call it a problem, although it was a problem for the embassy. I can remember Wolf Lehmann looking at me sternly and saying, "If you see Lionel Rosenblatt, you be sure to get back to me and tell me." I did see Lionel Rosenblatt. I neglected to get back to the DCM about it. Lionel did show up at least once at one of our safe houses, so I did run into him during that period.

Q: But they were getting his friends and family out, weren't they.

WRIGHT: Yes, not family, but people who had worked with him. I might tell you that years later I spent a day with Henry Kissinger in the refugee camps in Thailand, probably about 1986, so I had a long time to talk to him about the Vietnam War. And Kissinger said at one point, "You know, with regard to Lionel Rosenblatt and Craig Johnstone, when they came back, I had to lecture them about what they had done, but I privately admired them a great deal for having done it." So, yes, Lionel came, and I guess he was there for three or four days and then left.

Q: So how did this whole thing culminate for you?

WRIGHT: Well, we carried out our evacuation effort until the last day. As I mentioned, the night

before the last day we had a meeting, and by then I guess the intelligence was such that we knew there was only one more day. And so we were told to pull out all the stops the following day. And then, as if to confirm that, that night—in fact maybe we already knew this at the time, I don't know—the airport was shelled, rendering it unusable by big fixed-wing aircraft. The Ambassador drove out to the airport, against everyone's advice, that morning about 10, and came back and definitively ordered the final evacuation. So on that last day, there was still a 24-hour curfew in effect, so there was nobody on the streets, or practically nobody, at the beginning of the day. I was in the embassy early. I only lived about a block away, so I just walked over. In fact, I walked over very early because I could hear the airport being bombed, which is a disturbing sound. So I got in at six or seven o'clock, and there were a number of people there already, so we started gearing up to make our final rounds. I guess we must have already, the previous day, let certain people know to be at what was on that day our safe house, because there were people there. And starting, I guess, about noon or so, maybe earlier, Joe McBride and I started going to the safe house and driving people to the airport.

I can remember poignant scenes from that day. One occurred as Joe and I were there I think together at one point and taking people out from the safe house, and I guess we made about three or four rounds, and on the last one—I don't remember whether we knew it would be the last one, but it was—there were more people there than could fit on the bus, and so the bus quickly became full. Excuse me, it was probably not a bus—it was a van. The van became full. And I can remember one Vietnamese man who, I'm sure, knew it was the last one, but who stepped aside and gave his place to a lady and maybe some children and said, "Oh, don't worry, I'll take the next one," I'm sure knowing there would not be a next one.

I also remember that at one of the houses there were some people there who were left. I can't quite remember who they were, but I made one last-ditch effort to go around and see if anyone was there. And at that point I was driving the van, and it was so crowded that I actually had one of the children sitting in my lap as I was driving, and we came to the house and there sitting on the steps, having been left, looking very forlorn, was a lady who had been one of our employees in the Delta and who had been told to come up to be evacuated, and her husband and her children, and somehow they all piled in, but had I not driven by there to see if anybody was left, they might still be there.

I also remember that at a certain point, probably about three o'clock, we were radioed to come in by the Ambassador's office, because as the day progressed, the city became more and more chaotic, and it was clear that as time went on it was more and more dangerous to be out there, although it did not really fall apart. And as you drove around to some areas of the city, it looked almost normal. For example, I made one last attempt, as I had during the previous days, to look for the brother-in-law of one of our Foreign Service officers, Al Adams, and I went down into the little pathway where their house was. To do that I had to park the van out in front and walk down there. And there in the midst of all this turmoil, life was going on. People were hanging out their wash, and they were doing the other things that you would do on a normal day. I didn't find him, so I left without him.

But anyway, then I went back to the embassy. Joe and I were in different vans at that point. And by that point, the embassy was surrounded by people desperate to get in and become a part of the

evacuation. And I had a very hard time getting in. I had to be actually pulled in. One of the side gates was open, and I had to be pulled in by the marines, who were at the same time holding other people out. So I guess I got in there at three or four o'clock, and from then until 9 p.m., when I left, I was in the embassy, up in the Ambassador's suite mostly, watching things happen.

The telephones, by the way, were all still working. I can remember at one point I got a telephone call from a Vietnamese woman who said that they were at such and such a place and didn't know what to do and the buses that were supposed to get there had not come by. It was late by then. It was dark. So I said, "Well, look, the only thing I can tell you to do is to go down to the barges. There are barges." She said, "I'm afraid, I'm afraid to go down there." And I had no better advice. It was a very sad conversation, and we broke off. So it was really a dramatic day.

A little bit of comic relief occurred near the beginning of the day. Somewhere in the early morning, a Protestant missionary came up to the gate. Now at this point there was almost no one on the street, still deserted. I was called down to talk to him through the gate. He was an American, I believe, and he very politely said, "Listen, I don't want to bother anybody. I just want to see if everything's all right," or words to that effect. And I said, "Well, you know, this is probably going to be the last day. We'd be glad to let you join the evacuation. Why don't you come in?" He said, "Oh, I don't want to bother anybody." So finally I said, "Look, you better get in here." And he did.

But one of the saddest things that happened on that day was that the entire contingent from USIS, which was to have been evacuated, was instead abandoned. First of all, all the Vietnamese employees there had been told to stay until the end, and then they would be evacuated. And on the final day they were all told to go to one of their buildings and to wait, and somehow the buses that were supposed to appear there never did, and all these people were left. This was a terribly sad thing.

Alan Carter was the head of USIS, as I've already said, and one of the things that I remember was Alan was wringing his hands, going desperately around the embassy trying to figure out how to get buses to the people. At one point, early on in the day, he was wondering how to get his deputy or one of his officers back from there to the embassy, so I volunteered to go get him, because I knew from having just been out, that it was not dangerous at that point and that there were really very few people on the street. And I did. I went and got him, brought him back to the embassy. But then, none of the rest of those people were saved. And, you know it's amazing. We talked about Martin before, for whom I had a lot of respect, in some ways, but in other ways he could behave badly. And I can remember that after the evacuation Martin was on the ship and he was interviewed. He made some kind of a disparaging remark about Alan Carter and his failure to save his own people, or just enough of an intimation to let it be known that he faulted Carter for this. But at any rate, it was a very dramatic day, and as I said, I left at 9 p.m.

Q: You got out by helicopter.

WRIGHT: By helicopter off the roof, yes.

Q: What was your impression of the evacuation by helicopter?

WRIGHT: Oh, it was incredible. I mean, it was an incredible feat, when you think that—I think there were about—I don't want to over state this because I'm not sure of the figures—but a huge number of us were rescued on that day by those helicopters, which must have made hundreds and hundreds of flights. I think something like 10,000 people left in that way and were taken to the boats. Only one helicopter went down. I don't think any lives were lost. Those two pilots survived. And when you think of the complexity of that operation, the fact that this went on far beyond the time when pilots would ordinarily have been allowed to fly. Much of it was conducted at night. It was a phenomenal logistical feat.

Q: *You ended up on what ship?*

WRIGHT: I'm trying to think. Was it the *Ticonderoga*? I believe Martin was on the *Blue Ridge*. I think it was the *Ticonderoga*.

Q: *I was just thinking, this might be a good point to stop, at this thing, and we'll pick it up, because I would like to get your impressions and all of once you're on the ship. So we've got you on April 30th on the ship the Ticonderoga, and we'll pick it up there.*

WRIGHT: All right, great.

Q: *Okay, today is the 30th of March, 1998. Lacy we're on the Ticonderoga. Can you describe the scene there and what was happening and what you were doing?*

WRIGHT: Well, we seemed to be on there, first of all, forever. I guess it was several days that we were there on the ship before we landed in Manila. Although there was a lot of moving around and unsettledness, I think the mood was overall a bit somber, although I must say that my recollections of the ship ride are not very vivid.

I remember seeing some of the people on the ship that I knew. I'm thinking right now of a general whom I'd known in Vietnam for some time and who had been a province chief in Vietnam and was known as a very upright and charismatic guy who was always admired by the Americans because of his cleanliness and his zeal. He was not always liked by the Vietnamese that he served with. He later tried to go back to Vietnam. He was sent back by a group. This was well after 1975 was over. He tried to go back to Vietnam from Thailand; he was never successful. He was, however, a big success in the United States. I can remember reading newspaper articles about him after he went to California because he started out at the bottom and pretty soon had his own gas station and other businesses, as I recollect, and was one of the early examples of a Vietnamese success story. At any rate, he was on the ship. And I'm not sure that I can remember other people on there. Obviously, there must have been lots of Americans whom I knew and other Vietnamese.

Q: *Were you at this early stage—I mean obviously you were terribly busy before, but when you had a little time to reflect—your initial feeling was, What went wrong? Why didn't it work?*

WRIGHT: Well, I think we were, in a sense, beyond that. What I tried to do, what I did a little

bit of, was write a few notes about what had happened. I think I did that on the ship. They were really very sketchy, though. I still have them, but they're not anything to brag about. I wish now that I had sat down and tried to do a better job of that, but I didn't. But I think that it was kind of a rest after a long period of exhausting work, because in those last two weeks or so we really had little time to do anything except work all day and go back home and go to sleep immediately and get up early the next morning with no time even to write down what you were going through. So it was really a very draining time, and this was a kind of forced rest that we had put upon us, a little bit too much so, as I remember, because, as I said, it seemed like that ship would never get to Manila, where it was supposed to be going.

Q: *What happened when you got to Manila?*

WRIGHT: I think we were there for two or three days. People then split up. You could go wherever you were going after that. We were processed through the embassy, and I guess we filled out forms and things like this. One of the things I remember—either on the ship or right after we got to Manila—we were asked if we wanted to send messages to anybody, so I asked that one be sent to my dad in Springfield, Illinois, telling him that I was okay, and then I assumed that it was sent. It never was; he never heard anything saying that I was okay, so he worried quite a bit between that point and the time when I finally got in touch with him.

Q: *Was there any sort of bond between you—I mean, not just you, but the others, the people who came out of there. Us against them, or any sort of feeling, or were you all going your individual way?*

WRIGHT: Well, there was certainly a bond, but I don't know it was as operative at that time as it would become later. I think everyone was probably worried about his or her own situation at that point. For me, and I guess for any of us, now that I think of it, who were in the Foreign Service or in AID or anywhere else in government, our jobs had just disappeared. And so that was one—I won't say *preoccupation* because I don't think anybody, at least not in the Foreign Service, was worried that he was going to be cut adrift—but we were uncertain as to where it was you were supposed to go next. What I did was to go first to Hong Kong for a few days, and then, because I had no ongoing assignment, I went to Paris, where I stayed for six or eight weeks and studied French and lived with some French people and had a very nice time there and then went back to Washington to work on the new entity that had been set up in the State Department to handle the resettlement of all of the refugees who had come.

Q: *Well, you were dealing with the resettlement from when to when?*

WRIGHT: The one in Washington?

Q: *Yes.*

WRIGHT: I guess it must have lasted six weeks or so. It wasn't all that long. This would have been, let us say, from sometime in June of 1975 until July or August.

Q: *What were you doing?*

WRIGHT: Well, I was a small cog in a very big machine, and one of the things that I did was to attend to the reports—I think we did daily reports to the White House and other parts of the State Department —on how the resettlement effort was going. At that point, the Vietnamese who came out had been funneled into camps in various parts of the country. There were four of them. These were Indiantown Gap, in Pennsylvania; one of them was in Florida, one in Arkansas, and one in California. And these were, I believe, all headed by people who had been in Vietnam, Alan Carter, the head of USIS, was the director of Indiantown Gap, I remember. So the refugees went to one of those places until they could be sponsored out by some American, either some American individual or some group. And that is the way it worked, and gradually all of them were.

Q: How did you find dealing with the White House then?

WRIGHT: Well, I didn't deal with the White House myself, but I think it's fair to say that the Ford White House took a very big interest in this. Needless to say, it was the biggest thing happening at that point. You also had people in the White House, that is, in the NSC, like Ken Quinn, who had been in Vietnam, who had Vietnamese family, who personally were extremely interested in what was happening. So there was, I don't think, any lack of attention from the White House. And actually, I think that one could say in retrospect, that that whole effort, with all its bumps, was quite a good one. There was a policy, an acknowledged policy, of trying to spread the new arrivals around the country in as equitable a manner as possible—equitable, that is, from the point of view of the states, whose social service systems would be burdened in many cases by these new arrivals. And I think that worked fairly well, even though in our country nobody can tell anybody else where to live. So many of the refugees who went to places that they, for one reason or another, considered inhospitable, sooner or later packed their bags and went elsewhere, either to California or perhaps to Texas, where there are a lot of Vietnamese, or to the Washington area. Still, however, to this day, I think you will find all over our country that there are Vietnamese living still from this period. There is a very large group, for example, in Chicago. I would say almost anywhere you go you will find Vietnamese.

RICHARD E. THOMPSON
Diplomatic Courier
Bangkok (1974-1977)

Mr. Johnson, a Californian, was educated at the University of Southern California, the University of Madrid, Spain and Occidental College. Joining the Department of State as a Diplomatic Courier, his career took him to diplomatic courier centers in Washington DC; Frankfurt, Germany; and Bangkok, from which he serviced US Embassies throughout the world, collecting and delivering diplomatic pouches. His later assignments in Washington were of a senior managerial nature.

Q: And at the end of your Washington assignment, you went back to Frankfurt?

THOMPSON: I went back to Bangkok.

Q: Again as a traveling diplomatic courier.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: This would have been about 1974?

THOMPSON: Yes. So I went back to Bangkok. I had a total of four tours there, and this was my second tour.

Q: That was where you were the most, and in Frankfurt you were there twice?

THOMPSON: Twice.

Q: Four times in Bangkok. And this time, in the mid-'70s the Vietnam war was winding down or ending...

THOMPSON: It was winding down and I think I was the last courier to go in there.

Q: Into Saigon?

THOMPSON: Into Saigon. Yes. And also into Phnom Penh. I was the last, if not the last then certainly one of the last two to go in before it fell as well.

Q: Were either or both of those trips difficult for you to accomplish?

THOMPSON: No. It was a little bit stressful, because in Phnom Penh we had to circle in ever smaller circles to get down instead of flying straight down because the city was completely surrounded in those days at the last. But no, it wasn't difficult.

Q: You were on a commercial airline.

THOMPSON: Yes, it was Air Vietnam and I believe it was Thai International going to Cambodia.

Q: Okay. Those were just basically airport transfers I suppose and then you went right out on the same plane?

THOMPSON: No, if the plane went out, then we would have an airport exchange. I recall that the last two times that I went to Phnom Penh and Saigon I overnighted there.

Q: Because the plane left presumably the next day.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: Anything else about this second assignment in Bangkok?

THOMPSON: We interfaced with the Australian and New Zealand military to a great extent. We carried material down to Melbourne, Australia and handed it over to the Australians almost directly. We signed it over to a pouch clerk and in the same car he handed it over to the Australians. That was the first time that I experienced that.

Q: Did we do the same thing with the British? No.

THOMPSON: Well we might have, but I didn't actually see it. There was a cooperative military agreement where we actually carried classified material for them.

Q: And we would do the same for them. They would do it for us...

THOMPSON: No, to my knowledge, they never did it for us. We only carried our own material, but we carried things for them.

Q: Carried things for them and handed things over to them when we had gotten to the destination. So that was presumably that was arranged at higher levels, government to government.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: And then you would make sure that the person receiving it was the correct person and then that was it.

THOMPSON: Well, I would just sign it over to the Americans, and he would open the pouch and give it to the Australians. It was very interesting.

Q: And we would be kind of bringing material worldwide for them to Melbourne that they could pick up in various places?

THOMPSON: I don't know. This was just some kind of a special military intelligence material. What I'm telling you isn't classified because it was openly done.

Q: But you still had to go to Melbourne, to Australia, to Wellington, to somewhere in New Zealand?

THOMPSON: Yes, except that normally we didn't go to these consulates. Of course we had to go to Sidney because that was where the plane landed, and so we used that as kind of a central point. But normally we didn't go to consulates. But we did in this case just to move this material.

Q: Because of that special requirement.

THOMPSON: Yes.

CHARLES LAHIGUERA
Refugee Evacuation Officer
SS Blue Ridge (1975)

Mr. Lahiguera was born and raised in New York. After graduating from Georgetown University and serving in the US Navy, he entered the Foreign Service in 1963. Though he served outside the South East Asia, his primary duties concerned the Vietnam War and its aftermath, particularly refugees. His overseas posts include Germany, Curacao, Vietnam, France, Hong Kong, Thailand and Swaziland, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission. Mr. Lahiguera was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: Today is August 8, 2000. You're on the Blue Ridge. What was sort of the word of the people there?

LAHIGUERA: People generally were very despondent. We had Vietnamese aboard the Blue Ridge as well as Americans. We realized we had just lost this long struggle that many of us were so committed to. I was at a loss to understand what it meant and where I was going to go at this point. The people I was with in large part shared these emotions. We went from the Blue Ridge into Manila. I had no clothing but what I was wearing when I got on the helicopter. We landed in the Philippines and we managed to get to Manila and they gave me pants and a pay advance. I stayed there and got some clothing. Then they directed me to go to Guam. Dick Peterson was the consul general in Bien Hoa and had been the senior State representative in Guam. He had just left and I became the senior State person there. There were well over 100,000 refugees. An admiral in Guam was the principal leader of the operations of handling evacuees. Each of the agencies involved had to attend staff meetings. I spent a lot of time getting families together. We had a lot of military. The Vietnamese military had left Vietnam with Vietnamese aircraft. We encouraged that since it would take military aircraft out of Vietnam. I spent a lot of time trying to get the military personnel and their families back together. There were three or four camps. There was the problem of a person being in one camp and his wife and children in another. In fact I ran into Terry McNamara, he was the consul general in Can Tho. David Sciacchitano was also in Can Tho. I spent a month there. I finally had enough of it and I called the Department and said would you please get me out of here. The next morning there was a cable stating that I was required back in Washington on urgent business.

Q: Well, there must have been people who'd been evacuated that said hell I want to go back. I mean, you know, when you make a decision like this, it's done in a hurry and I would expect that there must have been some people who wanted to go back to Vietnam who had left family behind and all. Were there any indications of that?

LAHIGUERA: I don't recall anything like that. Certainly with all those numbers that phenomenon developed later. I know people on the staff of the consulate general who wanted to go back, but that came several years later, not immediately. Overwhelmingly the people were

very thankful to be out. No, I can't say, in those days immediately after the evacuation that I ran into anybody who wanted to return.

Q: No, I was just thinking I mean sometimes you know the families

LAHIGUERA: Second thoughts.

Q: Second thoughts and people have been left behind and all.

LAHIGUERA: I'm not aware of any cases although I wouldn't be surprised.

Q: How did the system work? Did there seem to be a developing system for moving the refugees on?

LAHIGUERA: Yes, we set up a camp in Pennsylvania, one in I think Florida and another one in Arkansas. There were three camps and we shuttled them from Guam into these camps. I didn't get involved in that operation. I just felt I wanted to get away from it at that stage. So, when I went back to Washington they asked me if I'd like to go to Hong Kong and be an Indo China analyst. They had originally intended to send me and Charles Twining to Bangkok. Charlie Twining just finished studying Cambodian and they were going to have him as the Cambodian analyst and me as the Vietnamese analyst. The Thais at that point were putting pressure on us and there was some cooling in our relationship. The Thais wanted some kind of guarantee that if the Vietnamese continued to try to expand that we would give them a commitment to come to their aid and that wasn't forthcoming. There was some coolness in our relationship. In any event, our ambassador in Thailand felt we should start to cut personnel and it was decided to move my job to Hong Kong. So, I was assigned to consulate general Hong Kong. I arrived in August of '75. Chuck Cross was the consul general. The place was heavily staffed by China watchers. John Anderson was the chief political officer and I worked for him. But I was the only person in the political section, which must have had six or seven officers, who wasn't working on China.

PARKER W. BORG
Assistant to Assistant Secretary Habib
Washington, DC (1975)

Ambassador Borg was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Cornell University. In 1965, after a tour with the Peace Corps in the Philippines, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his career he served in Vietnam and Zaire, and in the State Department in senior positions concerning Vietnam, West Africa and Counter Terrorism. He served as US Ambassador to Mali (1981-1984) and to Iceland from 1993 to 1996. Ambassador Borg was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: This would be...?

BORG: This is was in April of '75. We had started right after Buon Ma Thuot, we had begun talking, and then when I left Kissinger's office I began working full-time. I went down and I offered my services to Phil Habib, the Assistant Secretary, and said, "You know, things are happening in Vietnam, but you don't have a staff that's able to work on it. Can I be your assistant to work on this thing?" He was delighted. He picked me up in a moment. Then we continued our regular meetings which became daily meetings. Al Adams was in there too.

Q: Craig Johnstone?

BORG: Craig was not in this, no, but Lionel was. Craig may have come to a couple meetings, but he was not a key player. So we began trying to figure out what are the problems related to security in Vietnam that are different and not being taken care of through other channels. So we would formulate actions from the Deputy Secretary - I can't remember who it was at the time - who would send it down to EAP and ask for a response of what we were doing about this, and then the same group of us would get together and formulate what the response was. So we were doing the questions and the answers in the same office but sort of routing it so it got the bureaucratic chops. And we were concerned about such things as preventing commercial airlines from halting their flights into Vietnam because it was so dangerous, and encouraging the embassy to think about possible evacuation scenarios, and these sorts of things. We also pushed for the State Department to organize a task force, a State Department task force, that would formally just look at these sorts of things. Actually we had been pushing for an interagency task force with other agencies involved, and the State Department didn't want to go that far, and so we stuck with our sort of seventh floor deputy secretary office action group. In the meantime, I think, Cambodia collapsed and I was very much in with the Pentagon's planning process for the evacuation of Cambodia at the end. This all happened very quickly in April. We succeeded in getting an interagency group formed, probably by the 25th, or something like that, of April. Dean Brown became the head of it, and we had representatives of all the different agencies coming over to the State Department to talk about the end in Vietnam. We all offered our services. We all left our jobs. We took leave from whatever it was we were doing and en masse joined Dean Brown as the staff for his new Vietnam group. I think Craig was the head of the line at the time, but Lionel was down there with us. Lionel and Craig were both sufficiently concerned about what was happening - you must have talked with Craig - that they decided that they would go out to Vietnam and see what they could do to bring back as many Vietnamese, to seek the evacuation of the people that they felt had been loyal to us but who would otherwise be lost in a Communist takeover. One of the real frustrations was that the embassy was not even thinking, refused to think, about evacuation.

Q: Was this Graham Martin?

BORG: It was Graham Martin.

Q: Were you able to in a way bypass the ambassador and say, "Forget him"?

BORG: No. We could make policy proposals here, and we got a message at one point sent out to Graham Martin saying that he had to begin making plans for an evacuation. The response had

always been, “No. If we begin making plans for an evacuation, that would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. We can’t do that.” Finally we got a message out and we had the Deputy Secretary sign off on it, and Graham Martin went back with a message to Kissinger saying, “Some twerp, one of your subordinate twerps, is suggesting I’m not running my mission properly here. I work for the President, and I only respond to messages from the President,” just whole contempt for what was going back here. This is what, I think, provoked Lionel and Craig to decide that they wanted to go out to Vietnam and see what they could do to organize their own evacuation. If you’ve talked to Craig, you’ve heard sort of the details of what went on in the field. My job at this point, I was Lionel’s contact in the Department. Lionel was supposed to be working with us, but he didn’t want a call-back. He had various code names that he would use, because they would call in each day and talk about, “Here’s what we’re going, and here’s where we are.” The ambassador had found that they were there and was trying to locate them and get them thrown out of the country. People on the seventh floor were trying to find them and trying to figure out what had happened. One of my unofficial positions was to cover for them and say, “Well, I’m not quite sure where they are right now,” but in the meantime being in contact with them and keeping Lionel’s wife anyway informed of where he was.

Q: Was there any thought of removing the ambassador? It’s a little bit like the Caine Mutiny, you know.

BORG: I think it was happening too fast. This was all a matter of days that all of these things began tumbling apart. I don’t know if it crossed anyone’s mind that the ambassador was perhaps too emotionally involved. I know that the progression of collapse was, first, the South Vietnamese army had decided they could no longer support the various outposts that had been established by the Special Forces and so they pulled back from these. Again, we turned down a supplemental at about this time, so there wasn’t the money that was necessary to support these things that we had created in Vietnam, a huge military apparatus that required the same logistical tail that we had for our military forces, and suddenly we weren’t going to pay for that.

Congress had voted no on the supplemental, and so the Vietnamese, as one would imagine, would look at how their forces were deployed and say, “We can’t any longer afford to do some of the things we’ve been doing in the past,” so the first thing they did was abandon the Special Forces camps where there was pressure from the North Vietnamese. The North Vietnamese had decided in early ’75 to begin moving their units, their forces, in along the Cambodian border and from the north directly into the I CORPS in the northern part of Vietnam. After abandoning the Special Forces camp, they abandoned the highland provinces, Cong Tum, Pleiku, and then first the I CORPS and Da Nang, eventually moving down the coast, so that by the time Lionel and Craig went out there, all there was was the southern half of the country. I remember there was a message that came in a cable that came in from the embassy noting how Vietnam was a far more sustainable country now that it just had the agricultural heartland and didn’t have to deal with all of these highland places. We just sat there and thought this is ridiculous, these people have gone crazy. Now, what was Graham Martin’s perspective? I don’t know. I never met the man, but there were reports I think I’ve seen written somewhere that he had a son who died in Vietnam, and so I imagine that for him there was tremendous emotional strain. He had to win the war that his son had given his life for, and so he could not see that things were falling apart.

Q: You do have this. Here was an embassy led by a man who really at that point did not have the perspective that a true ambassador should have.

BORG: That's right. He was totally wrapped up, totally emotional, but again things were moving too fast for people to say, "You're out of there." If it had gone on for another month, perhaps, but it was a daily deterioration that was occurring.

Q: By this time did you have the feeling that Nixon was running - he wasn't out yet; he didn't leave until, I would say, around August...

BORG: That's right. He was President until August. This was '75. Nixon left in '76. Didn't Nixon resign in '74? So Ford would have been President. So was the White House involved? Things were happening so rapidly. Henry Kissinger was clearly in charge of foreign affairs. The action was with the State Department. To the extent it involved foreign affairs, it was with the Defense Department and CIA. I don't think the White House was a strong player in this. But Lionel and Craig returned, and I'm sure Craig told his story about meeting the Secretary and so forth, but we were the ones that put together the nomination for Lionel and Craig to be commended, because we knew they'd be in deep trouble, and a way to overcome the trouble was to receive some type of recognition. We were surprised that they won, actually.

Q: How did sort of the end game come about from your perspective?

BORG: In Vietnam?

Q: Yes.

BORG: The North Vietnamese moved gradually down the coast. There were no significant battles put forward by the South Vietnamese troops. It was an internal collapse, again attributed to the fact that there was no sense of nationhood within the country and no sense that people were fighting for something. The North Vietnamese had stronger forces, and the senior leadership of the South Vietnamese military was not so much a fighting force as a political force.

The regional forces and the popular forces that we had armed and trained weren't in any position to go against the North Vietnamese. I'm sure they hid their guns and pretended they had never been what they had been. So we knew that the end was near, it was just a matter of days, and I think we knew on the night of, I think, April 30th, that it was happening, that we were evacuating the embassy because we all stayed that night and we were in touch to the extent we could be with what was happening in the field. The helicopters were supposed to go in until midnight. They continued to take people off the roof until three in the morning. We were up all night back in Washington observing this.

Q: How did you find the Department of Defense, the military, responded?

BORG: I don't have any particular recollections of any difficulty. They had the ships that were standing by offshore. They had the helicopters that went in and picked up people. I had worked with them on the evacuation of Cambodia. I had gone over to a couple of the meetings on the

evacuation of Vietnam, and they had a very clear plan of how it would be done and that it had to be done, and it was implemented. I don't recall any conflicts or any difficulties in the interagency relationship there.

Q: Did you get involved in the planning for dealing with this mass of refugees?

BORG: Yes, that was our principal concern after the evacuation took place. We then switched our focus to the issue of the refugees, and we tasked each one of the services to come up with a temporary holding place for the refugees that would be coming out and coming to the United States. The Marines came up with Fort Pendleton. The Army chose Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania. There was Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. There was a place in Arkansas also.

Q: Camp Chaffee.

BORG: Fort Chaffee, that's right, in Arkansas. So the services came up with these locations, and we began the massive program of airlifting people, of organizing the legislation that would go through Congress to create the refugee program, and to convert our State Department task force into an interagency task force that was chaired by somebody other than the State Department, because once the refugees began arriving in the United States, we all thought very strongly that this was a domestic issue. I remember we sat around one night and talked about who can take this over. Dean Brown would be the State Department person, but we needed somebody to be in charge of it, and so we settled on Julia Taft, who was the representative of the Office of Health and Human Services. So we sort of selected her as a group and then informed her the next day that we were going to convert this State Department task force to an interagency task force and she was going to be in charge of it, and Frank Wisner agreed to be her deputy, stay on and be her deputy. Some of us, like myself, felt after two months or three months of this that it was time to move on, because as long as we stayed there doing the work, the domestic agencies wouldn't step in in the way that we felt that they needed to. There were others of us who felt that it was so important they should continue to work on the refugee questions. So I departed about June.

Q: So then what happened, June of '75?

BORG: Larry Eagleburger, before I had taken the job, said that when I left I could sort of have my choice of jobs at my level that were open and that I should identify a job that I liked. I had a terrible time over this and had a couple of meetings with him. He said, "Well, how about being a deputy economic officer?" I was in the economic cone. I hadn't known for a long time what cone I was. I was not very traditional in doing these sorts of things, but the system informed me at one point that I had been transferred from the administrative cone to the economic cone, and that was fine. As long as I got an interesting job, I didn't care what cone I was in. So I looked at all of these jobs, and I was perhaps sufficiently burned out that I looked at a place in Africa and I said, "I want to go to Africa." I decided I was not going to go back to China, that the world is much bigger than just East Asia, that I was going to try to expand my horizons, and I'd like to do it at a small post where I'm my own boss, in a place where there isn't much happening and I could just sort of meditate on all the things that had been going on for the last couple of years. So I selected Lubumbashi in Zaire, down in the southeastern corner, the former Elizabethville near the camp of what had been Katanga now, then known as Shaba. But that didn't open up for a while, so I

was going to take an economic course and then I was going to learn French, and I thought that was just fine. I was very pleased with that.

ROBERT V. KEELEY
Deputy Director, Task Force for Vietnam Refugees
Washington, DC (1975-1976)

Ambassador Robert V. Keeley was born in Lebanon of American parents in 1929. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956 and served in Jordan, Mali, Greece (as an officer and then later as ambassador), Uganda, Cambodia, Mauritius as ambassador, and Zimbabwe as ambassador. He was interviewed in 1991 by Thomas Stern.

Q: I believe that after your short tour in Cambodia, you returned to Washington to work with the Indochina Refugee Task Force. Tell us a little about that.

KEELEY: All the Embassy staff from Phnom Penh were "over-complement;" in other words, the evacuation of a complete mission had not been anticipated and therefore there were no permanent positions for us to fill. To our surplus was then added the whole Saigon Embassy and the Department had a huge surplus of people all unassigned. It seems a little strange in retrospect that people hadn't anticipated the exodus from Indochina, but I guess the downfall happened rather precipitously. I was told, after my return to Washington, that Dean had recommended me for the DCM position in Paris, which, however, in the meantime had already been filled. I certainly would have been interested in that; that would have been a great assignment for someone with my background. But Eagleburger told both Dean and me that he wanted to appoint me to an ambassadorial position, which was also entirely acceptable, regardless of where it might have been, particularly in light of my age, rank and experience. In the meantime, he wanted me to become the deputy director of an inter-agency task force on the Indochina refugees. I wasn't thrilled about that at all, but he made it clear that I would have to take it regardless of my own wishes. Otherwise I'd be left "to swing in the wind."

That task force had been set up in April 1975 as the refugees began to pour out, particularly the Vietnamese from Saigon. There was a tremendous exodus of Cambodians and Vietnamese in the wake of events in Indochina. We had about 150,000 to deal with by the time it was all over. They came by plane, boat or any other way they could get out -- some even over-land. I knew nothing about Vietnam; I had never gotten there. I thought the refugee operation was primarily for Vietnamese and I knew that there were a lot of other people who knew a great deal more about Vietnam and its people than I did. I knew nothing about refugee programs; it was indeed an "out-of-area" assignment. In fact, it turned out to be one of the more fascinating assignments of my career. It was certainly one of the more rewarding in retrospect, although it surely did not appear that way to me when Eagleburger sent me to work there.

Strangely enough, I had great difficulties in subsequent years getting that assignment listed on my personnel record. It is still shown as "over-complement" for the East Asia Bureau, even

though I worked in the job for nearly a year. The way the record reads suggests that I was unemployed and unassignable -- really in limbo; it looks terrible, as if I had done something wrong and had been put on a shelf. I complained in writing on a couple of occasions about this listing and would always mention it yearly when we were asked if we wanted our personnel records corrected in any way. It was explained to me later by Art Tienken, whom I knew well and who was at one time in charge of personnel assignments, that because I was on detail to another agency -- and there wasn't any code for that agency in the Department's computer programs, because it was a very temporary agency -- the computer could not record my correct assignment. That is just a footnote, but it tells you something about the condition of the Department's record keeping.

As I mentioned, I was the Deputy Director of this Task Force. I replaced Frank Wisner, who had been recruited by Dean Brown for it. Frank had had a lot of experience in Vietnam, and was the real spark plug of that operation from the beginning. He was particularly important to the evacuation from Vietnam. By the time I took the job in July 1975, the operation had begun to be primarily concerned with refugee resettlement. The evacuation was essentially over; those who had gotten out were the last. They had been brought to four camps in the U.S., and to Guam, the Philippines and some to points in between. Our job, as assigned to us by President Ford, who had set the Task Force up at the beginning, was to empty the four camps in California, Pennsylvania, Arkansas and Florida by Christmas. That was the specific time-table. The camps were populated primarily by Vietnamese; of the total number of refugees, less than 5,000 were Cambodians.

We succeeded. The camps were all empty by about a week before Christmas. Some people accused us of putting the last few in buses and driving them around the environs of the camp so that visitors could see that the camps were empty. That was a canard; all were resettled one way or another by Christmas. It took us several more months to close down the Task Force. The Director of the Task Force was Julia Taft; she was from HEW, which was really in charge of the operation because it was a refugee resettlement process working with voluntary agencies -- both religious and secular. They did the actual resettling: finding places for the refugees to live and jobs for them. They were all over the country. We had a lot of major problems, not the least of which was the fact that many communities did not want to accept these people. That was partly prejudice, partly fear. Rumors circulated that these refugees carried strange Asian diseases from which Americans had absolutely no immunity. People were saying that epidemics would ensue. There were stories that all the refugees were criminals of one sort or another. We had a major public relations problem.

On the other hand, there were many communities which really broke their backs to welcome the refugees. This was particularly true of church groups, who sponsored some refugees, took care of them, and in some cases housed them. I regret that there never has been a detailed write-up of that operation. We did some reporting on it, particularly to the Congress, which had established a number of oversight committees. The chief one was the Senate Judiciary Committee. The Senate Committee was the primary sponsor of the legislation authorizing the Task Force and it received a lot of interim reports as well as the final one. So there are documents available, but little has been written about the human side of the operation. There were obviously some press accounts, but I wish someone would have been assigned after the end of the operation to write a history of it, because it was interesting, with a lot of lessons to be learned which would indeed be very

helpful if there were a similar crisis again.

Q: What was the State Department's role in this operation besides providing manpower?

KEELEY: That was the reason why I was assigned to it. The Deputy Director of the Task Force was a State officer. The Department was interested in three matters. The first was the success of the operation for foreign policy and public relations reasons. So it wanted someone at a senior level to keep an eye on the proceedings and to make sure that the process went smoothly, and to report back to the Secretary, through Eagleburger, who was the Under Secretary directly responsible for the operation. The Department was also interested in assuring that foreign policy aspects were taken into account. Furthermore, the original concept assumed that some of these people could be settled abroad in "third" countries, as we called them: France, for example, which had had long-standing ties with Indochina, perhaps even some countries in Africa -- we resettled a group of fishermen in Gabon, for example. My main job was to find these opportunities abroad. I worked through our Embassies, but I must say that this was not a very successful part of the operation. Very few countries were willing to accept any significant numbers. They would take them if they had had a previous connection with Cambodians or Vietnamese; e.g., if there were some relatives of now-established residents, who could sponsor the new refugees and provide for them. But very few governments volunteered to take any large numbers. It was a disappointment, but by this time, the whole Vietnam policy had become very controversial and countries were not enthusiastic about bailing the U.S. out. These refugees were seen as our responsibility, created by "our" war, and so on. The Task Force was made up of people from a large variety of agencies. Many came from AID, particularly people who had served in Vietnam, and people who had served in CORDS. There were USIS officers who handled the press and public relations. There were people from HEW who knew resettlement and social welfare issues.

Finally, there was also a specific problem that was assigned to me. Julia Taft asked me to take charge of it, which made sense because it was essentially a foreign policy issue. There is no record of this particular story, which was an interesting one. The problem concerned approximately 1,600 "repatriates" as they called themselves. It was a made-up term, but it had a real meaning. These were Vietnamese (and a small group of Cambodians, about 25 of them, whom we handled separately) who had left Vietnam in the panic exodus at the end of the war, involuntarily from their point of view. They had been swept up in the mass departure; they included crew members of evacuated aircraft or ships. Somehow whole units of people got swept up and fled with the rest, in fear for their lives. Once they had left Vietnam, they had second thoughts; they had either left involuntarily or left in a panic and changed their minds later. The Vietnamese, as well as the Cambodians, had a strong sense of family -- the extended family in the Vietnamese culture. These people went into a psychological depression; they felt they had abandoned their families. These were mostly single men, mostly ex-military (army, navy, air force), but not all. They had left their wives and children behind and also their parents, brothers, sisters, etc. They felt somehow that they had betrayed their family responsibilities and wanted to return to Vietnam; they were determined to get back to Vietnam.

When people of that mind-set turned up during the interview or resettlement process (and these incidents were already happening by the time I arrived on the job), they were all assigned to one

set of barracks in a former army camp on Guam. There were, as I mentioned, about 1,600 of them. They were kept in a fenced-in area; well looked after from the point of view of food, health, recreational facilities, etc. But no one knew what to do with them. Since their requests were not being addressed in any meaningful way, they became increasingly depressed and increasingly angry and began to misbehave (to put it mildly). In fact, they began to burn their barracks to attract some attention; they hoped to get some results. The problem was a political one. The governor of Guam became very upset with these Vietnamese because they were causing trouble; he wanted them transferred from Guam. He also considered them traitors -- according to his sense of right and wrong -- because they wanted to return to Vietnam rather than resettle in the U.S.

So we were faced with the dilemma of having on the one hand a screaming governor, and on the other a rioting group of refugees who were threatening to tear down the fence and march into the city. Julia Taft told me to go to Guam to deal with the problem. She was going to go herself, but I think the White House decided it would be better if a lower profile official went instead, someone less "political" (Julia was a political appointee at HEW; her husband Will is the great-grandson of President Taft). It was clearly a nasty situation that no matter how it was resolved wouldn't do anyone much credit. I had never been to Guam. We had a local representative of the Task Force there, Colonel Herbert, a retired military officer. I conferred with him and with an American admiral, who was the senior military officer on the island. I spent several days looking into the situation and became convinced that the refugees had a valid position. They should have had the right to return to Vietnam if they so desired, although I and many others thought they were crazy for doing so. They would probably be killed upon return, since from Vietnam's point of view they were the traitors, particularly those who had been in the military services. They had fled and that would have been considered very disloyal. But the key element in my thinking was that these people were so determined that they had developed what I considered a fairly sensible plan. They wanted an opportunity to repatriate themselves without any assistance from us. There was a Vietnamese-owned cargo ship in Guam's harbor which had been commandeered during the Vietnam exodus. Hundreds or maybe thousands of people had arrived on that ship; it was anchored in the harbor. It actually had belonged to some Vietnamese trading company. The Vietnamese "repatriates" had organized themselves and had selected a crew, a captain and other ship's officers, from among themselves. Everything had been well organized and they presented their plan to me, as they had done to Guam officials previously. All they wanted from us was permission to board the ship and some supplies; they would then sail away.

Washington considered this a crazy idea. When I returned, I talked to Mrs. Taft and convinced her. She told me that I would have to convince the Secretary of State, who would have to approve the plan; it had to be done by someone senior to her. I wrote a much-too-long memorandum analyzing the whole problem, presenting various options, and concluding with the simple proposition that the U.S. Navy should be assigned responsibility and given the necessary resources to fix up the ship as a passenger ship by putting in bunks, galleys, toilets, an infirmary, and other facilities. The ship should be fueled and stocked with an adequate amount of supplies and charts so that it could sail back to Vietnam. I sent my paper to Secretary Kissinger through Eagleburger. A series of meetings were called to discuss the idea; I felt in a very lonely minority. Our intelligence people were unanimous in saying that my scheme was absolutely insane because the ship would become a modern day "Flying Dutchman." It would be sailing all over

the Pacific for the next ten years; no country would permit it to land; no one would want these 1,600 people. Eventually the ship would run out of supplies or run aground somewhere. The plan would produce a scandal making the U.S. look sick as the country that went along with such a crazy scheme. They thought that Vietnam would not accept the ship and its passengers and if it did, it would kill them all and we would be accused of helping these murders. That was the position of the intelligence community.

The arguments went on and on. The paper finally got to Kissinger; it was probably much too long for him. I don't know if he read it. It was in the typical State Department format with the "approve" and "disapprove" boxes at the end, where the decision-maker could render his verdict with a check-mark. No boxes were ever checked; I got the paper back unmarked. The whole issue was then sent to President Ford; he apparently read my paper, and he didn't mark it either, but he did approve the plan. The word came down to us that the President had decided to go ahead. I had drafted the paper in such a way that I didn't think there was any way it could be disapproved because there were just no other valid options. The result of maintaining the *status quo* would be potential riots, and bad publicity stemming from a visit of the Governor of Guam to Washington to raise hell; there was no good escape for the administration.

Having obtained the White House's approval, we told the Navy to proceed. With their own existing resources and perhaps some of our Task Force money, the Navy proceeded to fix the ship up in a magnificent way. Dormitories were installed in the cargo holds, toilets built in along the gunwales, the new galleys were equipped with the finest stainless steel appliances, the Navy trained the crew (the ship was taken out to sea on a couple of trial runs), they checked the engines, they loaded it with fuel, food, and medicines. There were some nurses and doctors among the refugees who knew how to use the medical supplies. It was a major operation and the Navy rightly so was very proud of what it had done. I went back out to Guam to launch the ship on its voyage and to wish the refugees "goodbye and good luck."

Some people still had very cold feet about the whole operation. They were principally concerned by the possibility of a group psychology having developed among these people; some of them may just have fallen victim to peer pressure and had agreed to return to Vietnam although they may not have really wished to do so. They may have even been afraid to say "No." There was a lot of tension in the barracks and the potential for real violence. Our group of counselors -- a very fine group headed by Lionel Rosenblatt -- who has left the Foreign Service and is still working on refugee issues today (he heads up a Washington group called Refugees International) -- were sent to the barracks in Guam. We set up an elaborate scheme which permitted each refugee to go to a counselor in a private room for an interview in depth so that we could verify what he or she really wanted to do -- return to Vietnam or resettle in the U.S. Each of the interview rooms had two doors: one led through a hallway down some steps into a bus which when filled would take the refugees down to the ship; the other door led to a holding room from which we would take them to another site so that they would not need to see their former colleagues again. We would resettle that group in the United States. We planned to be scrupulous in following the wishes of each individual.

We conducted 1,600 individual interviews with six or eight interviewers on hand. It took us all day. All 1,600 stated that they wanted to return to Vietnam; not a single one of them wanted to

stay in the United States. That relieved our fears, but also made us feel a little foolish. We had gone through a costly operation to assure that not a single refugee was being coerced to return to Vietnam. In retrospect, had we not done that, we would have had to live with a doubt in our minds that we may have forced a human being to take an involuntary action that might have cost his or her life. So we did the right thing, because we had no way of knowing what the eventual outcome would be.

I did have considerable discussions with the elected leadership of the Vietnamese group. They had elected their own leaders, although I will not vouch for the democratic nature of the process they used. We discussed all the alternatives, what might happen, etc. They made one major request, which was very intelligent on their part. They did not want any vessels escorting their ship; no American planes or ships were to go with them, because they were afraid that that would not be very well received in Vietnam. They wanted to sail alone; they were confident that they could make it on their own. They were well equipped; they had their charts and navigational instruments; they had been well trained. We warned them to avoid Philippine waters, which would have been the shortest route, but the Filipinos had heard of our plan and were not at all happy with the prospect that the ship would be coming through their waters, because they were afraid that it would stop there and the refugees would become their problem. So we advised the refugees to go around the Philippines, which made it a longer, but safer journey.

As I said, they wanted assurance that we would not accompany them. I so assured them. But my superiors thought that we should at least keep them under surveillance to make sure that they didn't stray from their objective, or that if they got into trouble some rescue effort could be made. We would observe them from a distance from the air and by other means. We did that.

We went out to see them off. They boarded the ship accompanied by their own cheers. They had earlier built a model ship which they had placed in a square in their barracks compound as a sort of shrine; I had seen it on my first visit to Guam; now it was lit up and they held services in front of it -- like religious services. I had a meal with the refugee leadership, at the end of which they presented me with a painting, done by one of their group, which had just been finished that morning. It now hangs in my house. It's a Vietnamese river scene with fishing boats and has in one corner an inscription that it was "honorably presented" to me by the painter "and 1,600 Viet repatriates. Guam, Oct 1st 1975" -- so I can't forget the date.

Colonel Herbert and I and the senior Navy officers boarded the Admiral's barge; we watched the repatriates' ship sail off out of Guam harbor. Within minutes of leaving the pier, they hoisted the Vietnamese flag on the stern of the ship, the North Vietnamese flag. The U.S. Navy people on the Admiral's barge were livid and they turned on me, wanting to know why we had let these Viet Cong people escape. They wanted to know how they got to Guam in the first place and why had we done anything for them anyway? The Navy people were very upset. I suppose the repatriates could have waited to raise their flag until their ship was over the horizon. But they didn't, and I suppose there was some symbolism in that, or perhaps they were thinking ahead and wanted it reported in the press that they had sailed away from Guam under the North Vietnamese flag.

I suggested to my Navy colleagues that they cool down. These repatriates were not likely to be

Viet Cong; they were mostly South Vietnamese military people who had fought side by side with us, but they were returning to their country, which was now under the control of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. They were going to sail into a Viet Cong harbor; what other flag would we have them fly, besides their own? These people wanted to go back and be accepted. I told the U.S. Navy officers that I didn't know what the repatriates' true loyalties were, but they were probably very mixed. Their main concerns were their families and staying alive. It seemed to me that flying their own flag was quite natural under the circumstances. There was absolute silence; everybody was glum. The barge turned around and went back to the pier and that was the last we saw of the ship.

Everyone wants to know what happened to the ship; is it still floating around the Pacific? In fact, it originally tried to land in Cam Ranh Bay, which was the largest naval port that we had built in South Vietnam. The ship was turned away -- gunboats came out and chased them off. So they sailed down the coast and landed at Vung Tau, the port for Saigon. This time, instead of waiting for permission, they sailed right into the port and dropped anchor. They announced their presence and their determination not to move on. That created consternation and there was apparently a lot of discussion. We got much of our information through satellite intelligence and other means. Eventually they were permitted to land, but were taken immediately to detention camps. Later we learned, through some very sketchy intelligence, that they were sorted out into various categories: those who were fully released, those who were considered war criminals, those who needed "re-education," where some languished for a considerable period. In general, they were treated by the North Vietnamese, as far as we could determine, like most South Vietnamese, according to their records, their military rank, their prior performance, their service, etc. They were probably thoroughly interrogated and many undoubtedly suffered. As far as I know, none were killed outright and they were treated like functionaries and officials of a defeated regime -- no better, no worse.

There was no effort to involve either the American judicial system or the Congress. We kept the Congressional staff advised on what we were doing. They didn't object and probably viewed it as an Executive Branch responsibility. We did become involved in a peculiar problem. I was sued along with Julia Taft and a lot of others for commandeering the ship. The former owners or their heirs or some other company claimed ownership of the ship. We had sequestered it and had taken legal title to it because the U.S. Government viewed it as an "enemy alien" asset. We thought we were on safe grounds using the ship, because by the time we used it, it belonged to the U.S. Government. But a suit was lodged, although it didn't have any merit. I never had to go to court or testify, but that was the only judicial involvement, and that was on the property and not on the action itself.

I found the Task Force experience very useful, even though I was a Foreign Service officer and the resettlement was essentially a domestic operation. As I said earlier, it was one of the more interesting and rewarding assignments I ever had. It enabled me to learn more about my country. For example, one of my responsibilities, which I shared with Mrs. Taft and others, was to supervise the four refugee camps. I went out to Camp Pendleton, in California, Fort Indiantown Gap, in Pennsylvania, and Fort Smith, in Arkansas, on several occasions to observe the operations. I spent several days in each place, watching how the voluntary agencies did their interviews, how the refugees were being taken care of -- the messing and medical facilities, etc.

These are the kinds of experiences that very few Foreign Service officers have opportunities to have, so that my tour with the Refugee Task Force was very educational. It was a kind of social welfare effort in which I participated in a minor way, which was a new and fascinating lesson. I had an opportunity to travel around the country, to meet different people, to see different kinds of work; all of that I normally would not have experienced in a pure Foreign Service assignment. I was proud to be part of that effort; it was very successful.

One of the most unusual aspects was that we did not spend all the money that had been appropriated to us. We turned back a substantial amount of money. We may have asked for too much money in the beginning, because we were anticipating working for a year. Then President Ford said that he wanted all of them resettled by Christmas, at the end of six months. The fact that it was speeded up saved us money. I think our appropriation was somewhere in the \$300-400 million range and we returned at least 10% to 15%.

JOHN HOGAN
I Corps
Da Nang (1976-1977)

Mr. Hogan was born in Maine, graduated from Mercer University, after which he served in the U.S. Merchant Marines. After World War II he went into the radio business in Portland, Maine before joining the U.S. Information Agency in 1949. He has served in a number of posts abroad including Cairo, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Tripoli and Saigon. He was interviewed by Michael Brown in 1988.

Q: You went from one quiet place to another?

HOGAN: Yes, Yes.

Q: Vietnam?

HOGAN: A lot of pressure.

Q: How long were you in Vietnam, John?

HOGAN: I was in Vietnam a total of five years. I served --

Q: You served in the jurisdiction of "I" Corps?

HOGAN: Yes, at Da Nang. There were CORDS and PsyOps representatives for the provinces up in "I" Corps Area, and for just about three years I held that job. Then I was transferred down to Saigon to take over the post as press spokesman for the embassy. That assignment was under Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, and later on, Ambassador Graham Martin. So, I stayed there a total of two years in Saigon, and three years in Da Nang.

Q: You were there in Saigon at the end, too?

HOGAN: Yes, that is right.

Q: What are your impressions of that--those last days in Vietnam?

HOGAN: Well, I will tell you they happened a little bit faster than we thought they would, frankly, but we were pretty well prepared for it. All day that last day which was the 30th, I believe, of April, we had to start evacuating a lot of the Vietnamese who came to the embassy.

We started the evacuation much earlier, really, of Vietnamese who had worked closely with us in Vietnam about April 4th, if not before then, and we were getting them out little by little.

I know I was responsible for the evacuation of all of the local employees of American news media working in Saigon, and their families. I managed to get out 598 of them before the whistle blew, and before they were caught. They would have been prime targets, I am sure, at the very least harassment by the Vietnamese communists.

Q: When you think of it now, 1975 seems like a long time ago, 13 years ago, but I am sure for all of you who were there in those days, in many ways, it still seems like yesterday, does it not?

HOGAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That was the very busiest day in my life, that last day in the embassy compound. Looking back at it, I was so busy that now I cannot remember what I did. But I remember being on the phone a great deal, trying to round up more people to get them into the embassy compound and thereby get them out of the country.

We succeeded in doing that. In balance, I think, very well. Indeed, however, some were left behind. There is no question about that, and we were certainly sorry about that.

EDMUND Mc WILLIAMS
Desk Officer for Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam
Washington, DC (1978-1980)

A native of Rhode Island, Mr. Mc Williams was educated at the University of Rhode Island and Ohio University. In the course of his diplomatic career he served in several South East Asia posts including Vientiane, Bangkok and Djakarta. Other assignments took him to Moscow, Managua, Kabul, and Islamabad. In 1992 Mr. McWilliams was engaged in opening US Embassies in the newly independent states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While his assignments were primarily in the Political and Economic fields, in Washington he dealt with Labor and Human Rights issues. Mr. McWilliams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005-2006.

Q: How did we view- the Vietnamese invasion was what? '79?

MCWILLIAMS: I'm trying to remember exact dates here. It was '79 because then of course it was followed by the Chinese invasion of Vietnam which was in December of '79.

Q: And you were at the desk at this?

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, yes.

Q: Well let's stick- we're getting confused here. We've got a war down south and a war up north.

MCWILLIAMS: Well, it was almost the same war. It was really a Chinese- the Chinese invasion was pretty clearly a response to the Vietnamese invasion of its ally the Khmer Rouge.

Q: Let's talk about how we viewed Vietnam going into Cambodia. I mean, we were saying was this ah ha, the domino has fallen or this was the Carter administration which had made a point of trying to distance itself from the Vietnamese war?

MCWILLIAMS: Well yes. There's a very important sequence here which I think we need to get into in the fall of '79. There was an attempt by Holbrooke to establish communications with Hanoi basically to begin to rebuild a relationship- to build a relationship with Vietnam. This was resisted in the Carter administration in part because also in the administration, particularly under the lead of Zbigniew Brzezinski there was an attempt to improve relations with China. And there was really a competition as to whether to move forward with Hanoi or to move forward with Beijing in the fall of '79. Holbrooke, because he was a very good political operator in part, was successful in moving and advancing the game with Hanoi even to the point where U.S. teams and Vietnamese teams were established to look at old- our old embassy facilities and where embassies might be established. There was a beginning discussion about establishing at least offices that would function as embassies and this is in the early fall of '79 and it was what was called the double track policy. That is, we're going to move forward with China and we're going to move forward with Vietnam. And that was the administration approach. And then of course came the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and in December the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. And this essentially scuttled efforts by Holbrooke at that point to reestablish some level of communication with Hanoi, to establish it and say reestablish. So it was a very interesting and frenetic diplomatic period. I'm not sure if it's been very well covered in the literature yet but it was a very interesting time.

Q: Let's talk about how we viewed Vietnam going into Cambodia. I mean, we were saying was this ah ha, the domino has fallen or this was the Carter administration which had made a point of trying to distance itself from the Vietnamese war?

MCWILLIAMS: Well yes. There's a very important sequence here which I think we need to get into in the fall of '79. There was an attempt by Holbrooke to establish communications with Hanoi basically to begin to rebuild a relationship- to build a relationship with Vietnam. This was resisted in the Carter administration in part because also in the administration, particularly under the lead of Zbigniew Brzezinski there was an attempt to improve relations with China. And there

was really a competition as to whether to move forward with Hanoi or to move forward with Beijing in the fall of '79. Holbrooke, because he was a very good political operator in part, was successful in moving and advancing the game with Hanoi even to the point where U.S. teams and Vietnamese teams were established to look at old- our old embassy facilities and where embassies might be established. There was a beginning discussion about establishing at least offices that would function as embassies and this is in the early fall of '79 and it was what was called the double track policy. That is, we're going to move forward with China and we're going to move forward with Vietnam. And that was the administration approach. And then of course came the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and in December the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. And this essentially scuttled efforts by Holbrooke at that point to reestablish some level of communication with Hanoi, to establish it and say reestablish. So it was a very interesting and frenetic diplomatic period. I'm not sure if it's been very well covered in the literature yet but it was a very interesting time.

Q: What were you doing when we were working on this dual track approach particularly on the Vietnamese side? What would the desk officer be doing?

MCWILLIAMS: Well at that time the really interesting work, of course, was being handled by Holbrooke himself and his immediate deputies. At my level it was essentially the scud work. I do recall I was involved in, as I say, the embassy questions as to what facilities might Vietnamese move into, what facilities might the U.S. team move into in Vietnam, looking at photographs from the air and so on of facilities and so. I mean, it was advancing quite well but we simply were overtaken by events, the Vietnamese invading Cambodia and as I say China-

Q: I mean, you were in the peculiar position of being a desk officer of two countries in which we had no representatives.

MCWILLIAMS: That's right, yes. And very little communication.

Q: Well, in a way did you feel that you had a hell of a lot of people with Vietnam experience around the department including Holbrooke, who had taken-

MCWILLIAMS: Sure, sure, Saigon experience.

Q: -amazed, I mean, he'd been a Vietnam hand, too.

MCWILLIAMS: And of course Phil Habib was, although no longer assistant secretary, still a very influential figure.

Q: He'd been deputy ambassador there.

MCWILLIAMS: Right. And he had been assistant secretary, of course, just before Holbrooke.

Q: Yes.

MCWILLIAMS: So he was, there were many people with deep experience on Vietnam and

probably a greater assemblage of current knowledge and experience on Vietnam than we'd ever had. And also it should be noted that many of these people, like Holbrooke himself, had emerged to some extent as critics of our policy in Vietnam so that it was a very dynamic and a lot of fresh perspective was being brought to the issues.

Q: What were you getting about internal politics within Vietnam? Was it based on newspapers, broadcasts, the usual stuff?

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. We didn't have any particularly good knowledge of what was going on in Vietnam. We had that window in Vientiane which periodically was helpful. The embassy in Bangkok continued to watch Indochina very closely. I actually took a job in that capacity just a year later. I know we monitored the media very closely and that was helpful to us to some extent.

Q: Had there developed the state-of-the-art of criminology as we had with the Soviet Union? Or was- or maybe it wasn't the same dynamics that you could play. Who stood where?

MCWILLIAMS: There was, there was extensive knowledge, of course, of these players because we'd been watching them for over a decade but I think the fact was that there wasn't at that time a great deal of movement within the Hanoi leadership. It was a united leadership and there wasn't a great deal we could learn, I think, about what the inner leadership felt and were doing.

I should mention at this point and I failed to mention earlier a critical issue that really ran through all of what we did on Vietnam, to a lesser extent to Laos and Cambodia was of course the MIA issue. It was an extremely important issue in the congress, in the American people, among the American people and in the administration and I think there was a sense that the Carter administration had to continually prove that it was genuinely concerned about MIAs. And I think it was almost a defensive effort because there was a tendency to believe that the administration wasn't serious in its pursuit of the MIA issue. So that was a very important aspect of what we were doing as well.

Q: When it happened, in the first place there was yet any foreknowledge of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia?

MCWILLIAMS: I think there were signs, yes, yes, yes. Yes, we did have some expectation because of course we were able to still to monitor Vietnamese military movements and-

Q: This was mainly by both radio and by satellite?

MCWILLIAMS: Intel, yes, Intel. But I do recall as it became clear that we were moving, that the Vietnamese were moving towards some sort of an invasion, some sort of military action, there was some frantic efforts on the part of the administration to get Hanoi to hold off making the point that if they were to invade it would be impossible at that time to move forward with any kind of a relationship, bilateral relationship, and I do recall efforts to communicate that to the Vietnamese. Obviously the Vietnamese felt that they had to address what they saw as a Cambodian problem.

Q: What was the- from the Vietnamese perspective what was the Cambodian problem? Why did they go in?

MCWILLIAMS: Well, it's important to remember the Cambodians, the Khmer Rouge were pretty aggressive. They had perceived Vietnamese living in Cambodia to be a threat to their national security, had forced many of them to return to Vietnam. There had been a number of skirmishes along the border over border questions between Vietnamese troops and Khmer troops. There had been a war of words of course. So it was a very bad relationship and quite clearly deteriorating for a couple of years. Almost immediately after the Khmer Rouge came to power the relationship between Hanoi and Phnom Penh was not good.

Q: Did- what were our concerns sort of? If the Vietnamese did this would they be, I mean did we see this as maybe putting an end to a really repugnant regime or did we see this as part of a- you know, we're talking about '79, a part of the occupation and Vietnamization of Cambodia?

MCWILLIAMS: Much more the latter. I think, once again, I don't think any of us really understood the extent of the horror of Khmer Rouge rule but much more important in our calculations in those days was the strategic question of whether or not Vietnam would come to control Cambodia and thereby pose a real threat to Thailand.

Q: When they went in did we do anything?

MCWILLIAMS: Well, of course it pretty much scuttled our attempts to establish contact with Hanoi.

Q: Yes.

MCWILLIAMS: I think, again, I mentioned earlier that the effort to establish some sort of contact with the Cambodians in New York I think that would have just preceded the invasion. So no, there wasn't much we could do at that stage. We were more concerned, I think, subsequently when the Chinese responded with an invasion. I'm just trying to recall if there was any effort to talk to Beijing to hold it back from what we anticipated might be a very negative reaction. I don't recall, I may simply not have known whether or not we were encouraging Beijing not to respond to this invasion forcefully.

Q: Okay. Well let's move to the other border of Vietnam. How did we view, from your as the desk officer and people around you, in fact well the whole bureau I mean, because China was the aggressor in this case, view the Vietnam-China, Sino-Vietnamese war?

MCWILLIAMS: With interest. Obviously we had no dogs in this fight in a sense. I think one of our concerns was the implications for the, for Soviet policy. Soviet-Chinese relations were not good. Soviet-Vietnamese relations had been good and I do recall, it's sort of ironic, we had had a massive snowstorm, I think it was just after the turn of the year, in other words January 1980, and 20-some inches as I recall, and I had fought my way in. I think I was in the bureau and I think Holbrooke was in the bureau and there was very few other people and a call came in from the desk that a Soviet diplomat was at the desk downstairs wanting to talk to someone about

Vietnam. And this is, he plowed through the snow himself and the State Department was essentially not functioning that day. So as the Vietnam desk officer I was sent down to meet him and we had this long conversation. And then Holbrooke had told me I want you to come in and meet Lee and tell me what he says. And I gave him basically what he had said and that the implication was that the Soviets were not going to react to this Chinese invasion and Holbrooke was sort of taking notes and barely paying attention. And I said oh I should say also at the very end of his conversation Mr. Holbrooke, he said something about I am now speaking for my government. And Holbrooke obviously sat up and said well don't you know what that means, junior officer? That this is a formal message from Moscow that they are not going to intervene in this. And I said oh, I guess, yes, I guess so. Really feeling stupid, you know, I blew my great moment. But I recall that very specifically the Soviets informed us early on that they were not going to take a role in this. And I think at that point we just decided let it go on. I don't think we played a role at that moment.

Q: Okay. Well let's move to the other border of Vietnam. How did we view, from your as the desk officer and people around you, in fact well the whole bureau I mean, because China was the aggressor in this case, view the Vietnam-China, Sino-Vietnamese war?

MCWILLIAMS: With interest. Obviously we had no dogs in this fight in a sense. I think one of our concerns was the implications for the, for Soviet policy. Soviet-Chinese relations were not good. Soviet-Vietnamese relations had been good and I do recall, it's sort of ironic, we had had a massive snowstorm, I think it was just after the turn of the year, in other words January 1980, and 20-some inches as I recall, and I had fought my way in. I think I was in the bureau and I think Holbrooke was in the bureau and there was very few other people and a call came in from the desk that a Soviet diplomat was at the desk downstairs wanting to talk to someone about Vietnam. And this is, he plowed through the snow himself and the State Department was essentially not functioning that day. So as the Vietnam desk officer I was sent down to meet him and we had this long conversation. And then Holbrooke had told me I want you to come in and meet Lee and tell me what he says. And I gave him basically what he had said and that the implication was that the Soviets were not going to react to this Chinese invasion and Holbrooke was sort of taking notes and barely paying attention. And I said oh I should say also at the very end of his conversation Mr. Holbrooke, he said something about I am now speaking for my government. And Holbrooke obviously sat up and said well don't you know what that means, junior officer? That this is a formal message from Moscow that they are not going to intervene in this. And I said oh, I guess, yes, I guess so. Really feeling stupid, you know, I blew my great moment. But I recall that very specifically the Soviets informed us early on that they were not going to take a role in this. And I think at that point we just decided let it go on. I don't think we played a role at that moment.

Q: Yes. Well, were we concerned at this point, I mean, while you were dealing with Vietnam, about I always think it was Camron Bay because, I mean, becoming a Soviet base.

MCWILLIAMS: Sure. Sure, that was considered and of course the Soviets did develop that base. And it was seen in the context of, you know, a communist threat to Southeast Asia, still part of old domino concept. But I don't recall us doing much of anything. I remember watching the issue very closely. I mean, we had satellite and so on, photos of, but I don't recall that we

undertook any measures to deal with that question.

Q: Did offshore islands play any role when you were there?

MCWILLIAMS: Well, one of the territorial disputes that the Khmer Rouge had with the Vietnamese dealt with islands. And I had mentioned sort of the border dispute, indeed there were skirmishes. I think there were also some naval skirmishes between Vietnamese and Khmer. You recall that much of the delta of South Vietnam was regarded as Khmer Krom territory, that is to say originally Cambodian lands. And I think the Khmer Rouge in their bizarre approach to current politics were essentially very interested in reclaiming the delta, the Mekong Delta. So I mean, it was a bizarre government and I can't say that the Vietnamese were right to attack but I think given the circumstances, Vietnamese belligerence was not surprising.

STEPHEN T. JOHNSON
State Department, Vietnam Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1984-1986)

Stephen T. Johnson was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1936. After serving in the US Army from 1956-1957 he received his bachelor's degree from Occidental College in 1960. He entered his Foreign Service in 1961 and his career included positions in Canada, Paris, Vietnam, Laos, Romania, and Kenya. Mr. Johnson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in January 1997.

Q: Well, then in 1984?

JOHNSON: In 1984 I became the Vietnam desk officer, back to the home country more or less.

Q: You did it from 1984 to what?

JOHNSON: 1986.

Q: Can you talk about relations, or lack thereof of relations during this 1984-86 period?

JOHNSON: We were now nine years after the war. There had been an abortive effort during the Carter administration, when my wife was on the Vietnam/Laos/Cambodia desk, to establish relations. That foundered depending on your point of view, on Vietnam's demand for reparations or our interest at the time in culling favor with the Chinese rather than the Vietnamese. In any case, we didn't have relations with them.

Needless to say, there was a lot of interest in Vietnam. By the time I got on the desk, the Vietnamese had been in New York for some time. They had an ambassador and a mission in New York, living rather austerely. Their budget didn't go very far. They were kind of the point of contact for lots of Americans. We, the Department of State didn't make use of it very much, but there were lots of private Americans who contacted them through that mechanism.

The big question when I was there (the idea of reparations had long since faded out) was the whole Prisoner of War/Missing in Action issue. This was still the Reagan administration and Mr. Reagan had made resolution of Prisoner of War/Missing in Action issue a matter of highest national priority. He never said "the" highest national priority. There was always a question in my mind of how many other things had "highest national priority," but anyway he would use those words.

The government was very active in trying to find out about missing people and also recovery of remains. We had a lot of contact with the League of Families of POW-MIA families. We worked closely with the White House and with the DIA. It was a very hot issue - and it took up a large part of my time as Vietnam desk officer.

Q: What was your personal feeling about this?

JOHNSON: Well, when I first came to the issue I hadn't paid that much attention to it. Over time, in reading all the reports and going to all the meetings, I came to the conclusion that it was highly unlikely that anybody was being held. It was the government's position, and may still be the government's position for all I know, that we were open minded, and that we didn't know whether there was anybody being held. There was no conclusive evidence that anybody was being held. Obviously, it is almost impossible to prove a negative, but it was extremely unlikely that anyone was being held by the Vietnamese, or the Lao for that matter, or the Cambodians. Even though I was Vietnam desk officer, I had to do it for all three of those countries.

But I think the government today spends about 100 million dollars a year on trying to resolve that issue. We were just starting to get a little bit more cooperation from the Vietnamese and the Lao at that time. While I was there we had the first excavations of crash sites and the like under agreements with them, so we were making progress at least in recovering remains.

There was a large part of the U.S. population which sincerely believed that people were being held. A slightly smaller part of the population thought that people were being held, that the United States government knew about it, that this had been kept secret - a great conspiracy, and that Mr. Kissinger had known about it all the time. This had started in 1973, I guess, when the other prisoners came home. Mr. Kissinger tends to be regarded as the "devil incarnate" by that kind of person. No activity is regarded as too base for him to be involved in.

Q: It later became a sort of a political issue of the Republican right. During this time was this more discreet rather than turning into an organized political movement?

JOHNSON: Well, there were different layers. Mr. Reagan, the President, obviously took it very seriously and harnessed the administration to do everything it could. Obviously, as far as I know, Mr. Reagan was not part of the silence within the government. Then, within the private community, the majority of the people in the League of Families, the most important group, though it is hard to say what they believed... In any case, the majority thought that the government was acting with good will, trying to do its best. They would prod the government to do more, but basically were pro-government.

One of the things about the League of Families was that because the way the war was fought, at least my impression from going to League meetings, was, that the people that were missing were mostly officers. In many cases, their fathers were also officers. So you had a kind of group of people who were predisposed to think well of the government, not entirely so but that was their general predisposition.

Then you had within the League of Families and outside the League of Families, people who thought that the U.S. government was being perfidious, that it really knew about prisoners of war and had left them - left people there and was working hard to cover it up. League meetings were very lively affairs, with the clash of these two basic philosophies and the nuances along side it. One of the things about the POW-MIA issue was [that] I never really heard anybody say that he disagreed with somebody else but respected their motivation and their right to say what they did. Everybody tended to accuse the other person of being a dupe or stupid or of the basest motivations. The amount of hatred that was generated at these meetings was really something, so it was an interesting area to operate in.

Most of kind of the really suspicious people I met with, well, like Ambassador Thunderburke back in Bucharest, saw the Department of State as the enemy; I am not sure why. So whenever I met them I would always say, "If the Defense Intelligence Agency tells us that someone is there, we will be galvanized into action and recommend to the President at the time whatever it seems wisest to do. But they haven't done so and therefore the question really doesn't come to the Department of State but to the Defense Intelligence Agency." There is within the Defense Intelligence Agency a large office which is larger still now and deals with this whole question, and which does the analysis of live sighting reports and other indications that come to them.

Q: What were some of the motives from the group that felt that the government was doing-was misleading or lying to them? What were the motives according to them of the North Vietnamese for keeping American prisoners?

JOHNSON: Well, they had lots of different motives. Well, the principal one was that they were to be used as bargaining chips, that President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger had promised 3.4 billion in aid or so and these people had been held back in order to get the United States to deliver on that promise. You could always reply by saying, "What are they waiting for? When are they going to bring these people forth to bargain?" It never happened. It had never been suggested. That was the principal reason that it was alleged.

There were others like revenge. Or [that] these were people who had particular scientific or technical knowledge that was being exploited or that there were wayward warlords off in the woods that kept these people around for one reason or another. But the principal reason thing was this idea of being held back to bargain about reparations.

Q: Did you run across during this time sort of professional con men?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. There were many exploiting these people. Two of my rules were that no con man, however, often exposed as the complete charlatan, never went away or was ever really disposed of. No story, however often shown to be untrue or a fabrication, ever went away. But

yes, there are people who are con men who were involved in the thing, who bilked people out of a lot of money.

Well, while I was there, there was kind of a side issue. There had been an American oil drill ship, I think, doing exploration south of Hainan Island in Chinese waters. This must have been 1983. It had been overtaken by a typhoon and sank, with no survivors. But all the time I was on the desk, there were rumors that some of the people had made it to Vietnam and were being hidden.

I remember one gentleman who was a lawyer in Austin, Texas whose son had been lost on the ship. I guess he was a Yugoslav, maybe now we would say he was a Croatian. But in those days he was a Yugoslav who passed himself off as a KGB agent to this fellow and bilked him out of tens of thousands of dollars with a scenario which had secret meetings hither and yon with always the promise that a little bit more and the son would be produced. Finally the father turned to the FBI, and the FBI stepped in, arrested him, and brought him to trial. Even then the father said that he thought the FBI had bungled it. Even though they showed he was a Yugoslav con man, he thought this fellow really did have the KGB contacts he alleged to be able if they just had gone a little bit farther that maybe the son would be produced. But the mentality was all through the issue.

Basically you could go to the Nana Hotel in Bangkok, and if you announced in a loud carrying voice in the bar that you would pay money for evidence that Joe Smith was alive, evidence would be produced. You name it and it was forth coming. Bones, or dog-tags or pictures. There were these various pictures that arose as well. But yes, there were lots of charlatans operating.

Q: When you on the desk, did you get the feeling that there might be establishing diplomatic relations then or was this something that there was no point in particularly planning for?

JOHNSON: Well, when I came to the desk I was hopeful that we would be able to establish diplomatic relations during my anticipated two years. But it was apparent that wasn't possible, early on, so I didn't worry about it too much while I was there. We certainly talked with the Vietnamese. We had lots of official contacts. I myself went with a congressional delegation to Hanoi while I was on the desk.

But given the climate of the times, it just wasn't a possibility of having relations. They would have made sense. Our embargo was going to hurt us as far as trade was concerned, though from 1984-86, Vietnam really wasn't doing that well. It was still relying a lot on Soviet aid and its economy. They had just a few years before decided they couldn't just continue in a monolithic command economy and were breaking out of that. But they were doing pretty badly economically at the time. But you could see the potential was there. Vietnam is a rich country with an intelligent, hardworking population. Other countries were getting interested, and of course the oil exploration was going on and the exploitation was starting at the time. But it really wasn't possible to do anything about that. You would just been wasting your powder for no reason.

Q: What was your impression both looking at it from Washington and traveling to Hanoi of the Vietnamese government during this time?

JOHNSON: Well, I am just trying to remember when all these things happened. The government at the top had become a sort of geritocracy. One of the problems with communism is that there is no retirement program. I was just trying to remember when Le Duan died. He was the successor as much as Ho Chi Minh had a successor. But in any case when he died it didn't make that much difference. It was a rather lethargic government struggling with the contradictions between its ideology and what it saw that it had to do in an economic way.

At the lower level, it was a tremendously corrupt and feckless Third World government, made all the worse because the government had a lot more power than it did in other countries. I don't know if you could buy them, you could certainly rent lower level officials. Almost every official act required a bribe of some sort, which was understandable given their rates of pay. It wasn't doing very well at that period-1984-86 from an economic point of view and a governmental point of view.

At the time, of course, they still had thousands of former South Vietnamese government officers and officials in thought reform camps that were a problem. Although they were allowing people to emigrate and had the orderly departure program, we were trying to stop the boat people. Of course, the boat people thing was tremendously dangerous for those who went that way, both from the authorities and pirates and then from the weather. So the orderly departure program was going, and the Vietnamese government was cooperating - and pretty successful, I thought.

Part of that was that we had Amerasian mixed-blood children of soldiers and Vietnamese women that were coming out. So we were doing a lot of business with the government, but the country was in pretty bad shape at the time given the war and that kind of un-wisdom of the economic policies they were following.

Q: How did we look upon the integration of North and South Vietnam? How was that going?

JOHNSON: South Vietnamese communists I guess we can call them-those people in the Vietnamese communist party hierarchy who saw themselves as southerners were unhappy with how things were going. They had really been imposed upon by the north, and a lot of them had really thought that the South Vietnamese would have a more autonomous role than they were allowed. They were unhappy with how quickly the country had been jammed together and also [with] the positions they were given.

There were a lot of North Vietnamese cadres that came down and were given jobs as provincial this or post master that who generally saw southern cousins as slow and crooked and not too smart and kind of lorded over them. That obviously sat ill with a lot of the southerners. There was never a rebellion or anything like that, but there was a lot of friction even within the communist establishment, let alone of course the South Vietnamese who were part of that establishment, some of whom were hunkering down; others who were trying to get out.

Q: Were we making any representations to try to help any former South Vietnamese officials and army officers and all in these reeducation camps? I mean, many of them had been our friends and all that?

JOHNSON: We were. We had a program which allowed them to come to the United States if they could get out of these camps and, generally speaking, they were getting out at that time. So, yes, we were helpful. We did bring it up. Obviously, we couldn't put too much pressure on Hanoi. But what pressure we could exert, we exerted.

Q: How did you find the officials you talked to from Vietnam at this time? Did they look upon the Americans as the great Satan or were they pragmatic?

JOHNSON: Oh, they were very pragmatic. I guess more so than we were. No, they saw China as the great Satan at that time. They just had that border war with the Chinese, and I think they were worried because we were friendly with China than we were to them. But no, they were always very pragmatic, and whenever they got the chance they would try to exploit the liberal guilt of Americans who would visit there and tell them about their own problems and the like. But no; they were businesslike.

Q: In Congress, did you find a strong cadre that was basically unforgiving of the "Vietnamese" ("Vietnamese" may not be the right term), that we had essentially lost the war and the Vietnamese were responsible for it and damn them to hell?

JOHNSON: Yes. I think that was the underlying attitude of quite a number of congressmen and senators at the time. I think that was one reason that the POW-MIA issue got the play that it did and the people that strongly backed the view that they were holding people came a lot from that kind of attitude that they were evil incarnate.

Q: Were we concerned at that time about Soviet use of places like Cam Ranh Bay?

JOHNSON: We were. The Soviets were in Cam Ranh Bay. They had some smaller bases around. Yes, we kept a very close eye on Cam Ranh Bay and observed the comings and goings there. The Soviets were also involved in oil exploration; they had a large kind of colony - people working in oil down at Cap San Jacques, I guess, to the old timers. The Vietnamese generally had a low opinion of the Soviets. They called them "Americans without money."

When I was in Hanoi and I was walking around the [market], little boys came up and called us "Soviets." We said, "No, we are Americans." They became very curious. But yes, we were following what the Soviets were doing. They were still giving considerable economic and military aid. They had the base; the base was both a naval and an air base, and they did reconnaissance flights out of Cam Ranh. They obviously faced across the East China Sea or the South China Sea, the American bases at Subic Bay-Clarke Field at the time.

Q: Were we feeling any particular threat or was this sort of general Soviet expansion? What did we think they were up to?

JOHNSON: Well, there was general Soviet expansion. There was some question as to how subservient to the Soviets the Vietnamese were. During the war, the Vietnamese had always been very careful to kind of keep an equidistance between the Chinese and Moscow, between Beijing

and Moscow. They really were independent. They weren't under the thumb of Moscow or under the thumb of Beijing, although I'm sure they had to take in the attitudes in those two places.

But this had eroded after troubles with the Chinese when they expelled a large part of the Chinese population of Vietnam. There were other problems. There was the Border War. They had signed a treaty with the Soviet Union, and the question was how much were they under the Soviet thumb? I think probably not that much. But the Soviets were giving them a considerable amount of aid - I think about a billion dollars a year at that time. So they obviously had to take it into account - Soviet sensibilities, and I assume the Cameron Bay place was a quid pro quo.

Q: Again, in this 1984-86 period, Vietnamese military any particular threat? Cambodia, Laos? Did you see Vietnam as an expansionistic power?

JOHNSON: I think we were still worried about it, but they weren't much. They still had some troops in Laos, and the Laotian government at the time was still pretty subservient to Hanoi. In Cambodia, there had been the December 1978 to January 1979 war in which they basically took over Cambodia. They set up their own puppet regime. There really was some concern, I think, in Thailand particularly, but by that time I think it was ebbing - the Thai pretty much taking care of their own communist insurgency. The Vietnamese had made pretty plain they didn't really have any ambitions beyond Cambodia.

By that time, I think they would really come to realize that they had a tar baby in Cambodia. It was expensive and was causing them lots and lots of problems. That was one of the most objective of our criteria for having relations with them if they get out of Cambodia. But they didn't know how to get out of Cambodia because if they got out any regime that resulted would likely be anti-Vietnamese. So we weren't really worried about them expanding at the time.

CHARLES H. TWINING
Office Director; Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia
Washington, DC (1988-1991)

Charles H. Twining was born in Maryland in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Virginia in 1962 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1964. After entering the Foreign Service in 1964 his assignments included Tananarive, Dalat, Abidjan, Bangkok, Cotonou, Douala, Ouagadougou, and Honolulu with ambassadorships to Cambodia and Cameroon. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Ambassador Charles H. Twining in 2004.

Q: Well, you left there when?

TWINING: I left in 1988. In 1988, I received a call from the State Department and was told, "We need a new director for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Things seem to be evolving in that area. We need someone with experience in the region and who can help move things ahead in the future." I became the Office Director in 1988 for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the Bureau of

East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Q: From 1988 to when?

TWINING: 1988 to 1991.

Q: How was your time working there? Could you look at each country in 1988 and summarize our relations and policies with each country?

TWINING: I think that is a very good idea. We almost have to think back as to what was happening in the world. You had three countries, all associated with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was clearly already weakening at that point. Vietnam and Laos had basically the leadership that had been in place since the 1970s and Cambodia since 1979. It was leadership that hadn't produced many results, and a leadership that was starting to wonder whether there should be some change in approach. I think you had a mood in the United States that was really starting to evolve as well. You had American liberals arguing that we have full relations with those three countries, treat them like anyone else, and let bygones be bygones. You also had people on the right who were convinced all of these countries were bad guys and we shouldn't be doing anything to help them.

There were several elements in the U.S. pressing for more involvement. There was the POW/MIA movement, especially the National League of Families directed by its dynamic director, Mrs. Ann Mills Griffiths. These were the people who wanted the fullest possible accounting of the missing Americans from the war. They realized that to do that, we had to be on the scene in those three countries. We had to have talks, relationships with them, to one degree or another. We had an active program of accepting refugees into the United States. That included an Orderly Departure Program office located in Ho Chi Minh City, staffed by American Foreign Service personnel. Pressure was on us to step up refugee processing as well as to deliver immigrant visas to immediate family members of former refugees who were now citizens. You had some people on Capitol Hill who were also saying that we needed to look at the future, rather than the past. In addition, some U.S. business sectors, such as petroleum, were anxious to begin working in one or more of the countries. Tourists wanted to travel to Vietnam.

Hanoi had evolved from occupying southern Vietnam and trying to reshape it in a communist mold after 1975 to realizing that that didn't work. By 1988 there was increasing openness and growth in the Vietnamese economy, both in the north and the south. Laos moved more slowly but was also trying to figure out how to become more open. At least we were able to talk with the Lao through our embassies, although not always very productively.

Cambodia was a very special case. The Khmer Rouge had been thrown out by the Vietnamese in late 1978 and beginning of 1979. But in 1988, there were still Vietnamese troops throughout Cambodia. What we considered a puppet government that the Vietnamese had put in place was running Cambodia. There was continued insecurity in Cambodia, particularly due to Khmer Rouge resistance, aided by the Chinese. We, along with other Western and Southeast Asian nations, were supporting two smaller non-communist resistance groups to make sure they at least didn't disappear. By 1988, all were wondering how much longer this sad state of affairs was

going to continue.

Q: You were there from 1988 until when?

TWINING: On what the Cambodians said was a real good luck number, I went in on 8/8/88 and stayed until the summer of 1991. The office was small but very busy. I had a hardworking deputy – Michael Marine, then Marie Huhtala – and desk officers for the three countries, Don Stader and Frank Light on Vietnam and Harvey Somers for Laos and Cambodia. Mr. Somers deserves lasting credit for having come up with many of the ideas for the Cambodian peace agreement.

Q: What was the attitude within the Asian Pacific bureau toward your operation at that time? They had Japan, and Indonesia, and obviously, there was a certain country called China, which was taking up their time. Had you sort of slipped from the radar, or what?

TWINING: You know, I'm not sure we ever slipped from the radar. People who worked on my countries even in the early 1980s told me how busy they had been. It was more than they ever expected. It was equally true for my staff and me, when I came in in 1988. I would say the pace increased particularly when a very interested Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific was named at the outset of the Bush I administration, Dr. Richard Solomon. From that time on, the Indochina and China portfolios were the two most important to which he devoted his time. We were often there at 8:00 at night, working on issue papers, working with him, working with the Deputy Assistant Secretary, David Lambertson. The China and VLC [Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia] offices would be there when the rest of the Bureau would have gone home.

Q: Well, let's talk about prior to your going there. What was this organization working so hard on?

TWINING: There was a panoply of things. You had close to one million Vietnamese refugees in the United States, creating family reunification issues. There were American companies which wanted to get more and more involved in Vietnam, such as those that had done oil exploration offshore, up to 1975. They wanted to get back in and complete that exploration. You had all the POW/MIA pressures. You would be bombarded by people from the American Legion to the National League of Families asking, "What are we doing?" They wanted to know how we were moving that issue forward. Cambodian-Americans and Lao-Americans pressed us to support the resistance. There was enough of a gamut of interests that, quantity wise, gave you a lot to do.

Q: Well, on the POW/MIA thing, this is 1988, thirteen years after we had left the area. Had, by this time, the focus gone more toward bodies or was there still a conspiracy cloud hanging over? That somehow or another, there were pockets of American servicemen being held in bamboo cages, somewhere out in the jungle?

TWINING: That is an excellent question. It was still a mixture of both attitudes. There was the feeling, increasingly that there were no live Americans any longer, and yet there were people convinced that there must still be some there. Senator Bob Smith of New Hampshire was sure there were Americans being held prisoner in Vietnam. There was a Congressman, who is still in

the Congress, who basically didn't believe what we were saying. He knew if he went to Laos, he would find out where the Americans were being held. We encouraged him to go, and he returned home far less certain of his views.

Q: What was sponsoring this? Would you say this was delusional? Was this political? Was this belief? Did you get any feel for this side?

TWINING: I think there were people who truly believed there were still live Americans, truly believed it. I don't think it was political. I don't know that it was based on very much except hope. You still had the rumor mill going. In Ho Chi Minh City, entrepreneurs were still manufacturing dog tags of American soldiers. You would hear about these dog tags. You would get one, and the Pentagon had to track down whether this person was dead or alive. Then, you would find the person was living in Toledo, Ohio, but his dog tag had just surfaced, so there were those who thought it was evidence of either his remains or that he must be held prisoner. You had that kind of thing happening. People who believed that live prisoners were still there would look for the craziest things. You had to deal with all kinds.

Q: I would think this would be very hard. For anybody, in my opinion, the logic is what is the point of keeping prisoners just to cause trouble, it's going to destroy things, and what are you going to do with the prisoners? Slave labor, if you're going to keep darts on them... It doesn't really come out. These guys never really did good work. So, here you are, looking at this thing in a logical way, up against the true believers. This must have been very difficult for you to try to explain or to deal rationally with them.

TWINING: We had nonstop, inter-agency meetings; the Pentagon, the State Department, the NSC, CIA. We worked considerably with the Congress and with private groups. Mrs. Griffiths of the National League of Families received a security clearance in order to attend our meetings and read all the traffic, as we worked together to agree on how best to deal with the POW/MIA issue. Note that Mrs. Griffiths worked with all levels of State, DOD, and the NSC, particularly Mr. Richard Childress at NSC. We may not have always been in agreement, but she worked with us fairly. It was clear early on that you could never deal with the issue fully until you had a commitment from the three countries that you could go anywhere, any time of your choosing, to investigate a rumor of someone being held in a Lao cave, for example.

Q: When you took over this job, was this a proposal that was conceivable at that time? Did you think you would get something for this?

TWINING: You never knew. At that time, we didn't have any assurance that we could do that. Yet, we realized we had to keep pushing for openness, openness of access, openness of government archives. It was simply something that you had to push for in diplomatic conversations, with the Vietnamese, with the Lao. We hadn't started yet in Cambodia, but even then, we would talk to the Soviets about talking to their Cambodian friends, to try to get the kind of access that was important to have, if you were going to resolve once and for all, that there were still live Americans.

Q: How were the different groups responding? I'm talking about the government officials.

TWINING: We generally felt that Cambodia and Laos would follow the lead of the Vietnamese. If the Vietnamese seemed to be opening up a little bit, we then felt, especially with the Lao, that we would have a chance of getting them to open up a little bit. Yet sometimes, we would propose having a meeting with the Vietnamese, Lao, and the U.S. military, just for technical talks. Then, we would find the Lao, and later the Cambodians didn't want to do it with the Vietnamese. They felt they were sovereign, and why should they be seen to be looking like they were under the Vietnamese thumb. So you had to play this at different angles. But, there were opportunities to talk, and during my time as Director of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, we would work on this issue as we would work on other issues, either with the regimes themselves, or through intermediaries. The POW/MIA issue was declared by President Reagan, and the first President Bush, as our highest national priority. So, you always had to incorporate this issue in any contacts you had.

Q: Well, talking about contacts, were we under restraints, such as we one time had with the PLO, that you couldn't talk to them, or was this a looser type thing?

TWINING: You never knew, but the point was a valid one. Because we kept relations going with the Lao, we could talk to the Lao, we could deal with them as you would any other country, even though there would be some hesitancy on their side – Lao diplomats being the cautious types – and sometimes a little reluctance on our side. At least there we could have normal conversations when the atmosphere was right.

With Vietnam, we had to look for contact points. In the 1988 period, for example, the contact point was through the American Embassy in Bangkok, talking with the Vietnamese Embassy. We also used the Vietnamese Mission in New York increasingly as a point of contact. Just as we deal with the North Koreans today, it would be the East Asian Bureau which would say yea or nay to any or all contact with the Vietnamese Mission in New York. We would not pass through USUN. Rather DAS Lambertson or his replacement, Kenneth Quinn, or I or a member of my staff would speak directly with the Vietnamese Mission in New York to pass on messages, to receive messages, to hear about complaints, and so forth. We often traveled to New York to meet with them.

With the Cambodians, on the other hand, we simply had no contact with the regime in Phnom Penh. The Reagan and Bush White House felt very strongly that as long as Vietnamese troops were in Cambodia, the Cambodians should not be considered a dialogue partner, they were simply “puppets”. That really limited any approaches to the Cambodians. In hindsight, that was unfortunate.

Q: During this 1988 to 1991 period, let's stick to the missing in action type thing. Was there any progress made?

TWINING: A great deal of progress was made. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Kimmitt took a particular interest in this issue. He provided us the political support to help move things forward. Retired General John Vessey was named a special emissary of the president and traveled particularly to Vietnam to negotiate POW/MIA issues, work out the

establishment of our POW/MIA office in Hanoi, and expand the extent of our POW/MIA activity. As a four-star general, he had considerable clout with both sides and helped end speculation in the U.S. that there were any live prisoners.

We also established a similar POW/MIA office of military personnel in Vientiane. Staff members weren't there as defense attachés, they were there for that one issue, only, to pursue leads and support excavation activity in areas of suspected losses. Slowly but surely we increased the number of search operations in Laos. After quiet contacts conducted by Chief of Mission Charles Salmon in Vientiane, the Bush Administration finally gave permission to our military specialists to have a non-political, quiet meeting with the Phnom Penh regime on this issue. But we had so few missing in action in Cambodia, military as well as civilians, that it wasn't quite the priority that Laos and Vietnam were. In all three countries, progress was made thanks to an increasing openness on their sides and a more flexible approach on our own. All three also wanted something from us: more normal relations. They saw POW/MIA activity as a kind of bargaining chip. I believe we can conclude that the POW/MIA issue helped drive the diplomacy leading to normalization of relations with Vietnam and upgrading of relations with Laos, as well as contributed to our determination to help settle the Cambodian conflict.

Q: Well, what were they doing? I mean, these missions?

TWINING: These POW/MIA offices that were formally in place in Hanoi and in Vientiane, were there to handle everything relating to POW/MIA. They would pick up and investigate rumors of missing Americans. Sometimes they would receive remains and get them back to Honolulu to a laboratory for examination. They handled investigations of dog tags. They handled whatever came up. Most importantly, they would seek permission from the Vietnamese or Lao for site surveys and excavations and provide logistical support.

Q: Did you get a feel for how the various Vietnamese/Cambodians/Laotians felt about all this? Did they look upon this as being an act of peculiar people, or did it fit with them? They have veneration for ancestors. Was this seen as almost a spiritual thing, or how would you say it was seen?

TWINING: It was truly a mixture of motivations. There were some who thought they could make money out of the operation, charging us two or three times the going rate for support of one kind or another, and pocketing the excess money themselves. You had people who really had sympathy for our guest, often reminding us that they would like to find out what happened to their missing and would like our help. This was true of the Vietnamese, in particular. Increasingly, we realized we needed to start looking in our own records to see where perhaps we buried the bodies of Viet Cong or NVA soldiers, to help satisfy their own search for their missing. Others thought that if they cooperated with us on MIAs, they would get visas. For many villagers in the three countries who actually did the digging for remains, it meant employment for cash.

Q: What about the dozen or so (you may know the figure, I don't) newsmen who were killed in Cambodia? I was in Saigon at the time. I remember going to the Continental Hotel where some of the newsmen resided, and packing up their belongings. Sean Flynn is one of the ones who

stick in my mind. What about those? Any progress with those?

TWINING: They disappeared, as you remember, in Cambodia, killed by the Khmer Rouge. We didn't really start exploring around Cambodia until I was Chief of Mission, starting in 1991. With wonderful cooperation from Cambodian authorities – who indeed agreed we could look anywhere, any time, for remains – we launched POW/MIA investigations, site surveys, and excavations to look for people like Sean Flynn. Due to the turmoil and devastation during the Khmer Rouge's period, we never really got very far. We tried to investigate any leads we had. We knew where people like Flynn had disappeared. We talked to villagers. I participated in the effort myself. After we opened up in Phnom Penh in 1991, an excellent Khmer-speaking military officer, Captain Rich Arant, established a small POW/MIA office there. All of us traveled around trying to help find where some of these people disappeared.

I remember going out to eastern Cambodia, in one of the big rubber plantation areas near Memot. Villagers told us that Flynn and a couple of others were killed right in that area, and their remains were thrown down a well. I remember looking at that well. Indeed, our people came in and dug up that well. I don't think it proved to have anything, but we were always looking. We weren't just looking for the remains of military personnel, but any civilian personnel, as well.

Q: In other aspects of this, when you got there, was the Bush I administration talking about looking at ways to establish relations, particularly with Vietnam? Cambodia would almost be another thing. We already had it with Laos.

TWINING: I might go into the evolution of the Vietnam relationship. Even before the Bush I people came into office, there was some feeling of the need to move forward. Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur was one of those, together with the career people, who thought we needed to advance the Vietnam relationship, though not quite knowing how. In 1989 the Bush administration took office and included a mixture of people who had been involved in the Vietnam war or were knowledgeable about Indochina. Some wanted to move forward only on POW/MIA but nothing else, particularly not until Vietnamese troops pulled out of Laos and Cambodia.

We realized we had to talk to the Vietnamese more than we had been doing. General Vessey was doing his thing, and he would tell us that beside POW/MIA, the message he was getting was Vietnam wanted more contact and more movement with the United States on other issues.

Q: By the way, had the Vietnamese long ago dropped the repatriation thing, which for a long time, was almost laughable? They thought we were going to pay them billions of dollars.

TWINING: Right. I think the figure they claimed they thought they were getting from President Nixon was something like two billion dollars. Yes, I think by my time, it had just been laughed off the street. But, there were converging interests. The Soviet Union was starting to fall. The Vietnamese were worried about Big Brother China, and yet also realized that they had to make peace with Big Brother China. I think they were a little worried about their Soviet backing failing, and with traditional enemy China on their northern border, perhaps they needed to find a way to improve things with the Americans to balance thing out. Indeed, if we Americans could

just allow trade, they thought that would be very helpful. There were Americans who realized that our interests required more forthcomingness on our part. I would say that apart from POW/MIA, it was the Cambodia part of the equation that helped move things forward.

ASEAN, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, was trying to find a solution to the continued fighting in Cambodia. It started organizing talks with all the Cambodian parties in 1988 following a December 1987 meeting between Prince Sihanouk and Hun Sen in France. But, somehow, this wasn't quite enough. We were pressing to get Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia. We too wanted to see an end to the fighting. It was draining for everybody, including the Cambodians. It was a source of divisiveness among the five permanent members of the Security Council, each with its own links to the various Cambodian factions. All were starting to get tired of this nonstop war. It was in July/August 1989 that the first peace conference on Cambodia was held in Paris. It was a month long conference. We knew we had to have discussions with the Vietnamese if we were going to make progress in Cambodia. That meant we had to persuade the Vietnamese that their troops had to leave Cambodia. We conveyed this message to Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach when Assistant Secretary Solomon met with him in Paris on the margins of the conference in July. At the same time we reiterated the need to advance our POW/MIA effort.

There were people in the Bush White House who even when the Vietnamese said, in September 1989, "Our troops have pulled out," didn't believe it. They would cite intelligence that proved the case, at least in their eyes. So, we had to keep finding ways to tell the Vietnamese that they had to get completely out of Cambodia, if they wanted to move relations forward. I accompanied a Congressional Delegation led by Congressman Stephen Solarz to Hanoi in the fall of 1989 during which he and other Members of Congress pressed Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach to get all Vietnamese troops out of the country. While I was not permitted by Washington to accompany the CODEL to Phnom Penh, it traveled there to tell Hun Sen the same thing. Secretary of State James Baker met with Foreign Minister Thach on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 1990 to reinforce this message and discuss the POW/MIA effort and a possible settlement in Cambodia. Increasingly, the Vietnamese, interested in moving the relationship forward, complained to us, "You're always changing the goal posts. We are cooperating on POW/MIA." We told them, "We want more cooperation, and we want you to open your archives more fully so we can do our research on missing Americans. We want to have freedom of movement in Vietnam and to be able to verify that you have no troops in Laos or Cambodia." Finally, as we made progress in Cambodia, we sat down and said, "The Vietnamese are right. They need something in writing from us, what we will do if they do something."

We wrote what was called a "road map." It was a tough ordeal. It took full NSC cooperation and Presidential blessing. There were nonstop talks among the State Department, the Defense Department, the NSC, and the National League of Families, as well as a lot of contact with Capitol Hill to assess Congressional sentiment. Finally, in early 1991, Assistant Secretary Solomon and I went to New York City, sat down with the Vietnamese Ambassador and said, "We now have a plan that will lead to restoration of full relations. It shows what each of us has to do, reciprocally." While the Vietnamese reacted to a couple of points or requested clarifications, that got the process going. I must admit that there were a number of us in the State

Department who thought that President Bush, as his last act in office, would announce the normalization of relations between Vietnam and the United States. By the end of the Bush administration, it was clear that there was a lot of sentiment in Washington that we were both moving forward well, and we could do this. Unfortunately, it did not happen.

I have to admit that I felt some personal satisfaction when I went to a reception 4-5 years ago at the Vietnamese Embassy here in Washington. The Ambassador, one of our most important contacts in trying to get the normalization process moving, Le Van Bang, was giving a reception for a visiting delegation for trade talks. The first thing he did at the reception was to introduce me. I was just there as a visitor, attending on the coattails of my son, Dan, who was working for Senator McCain. Ambassador Bang said, "I want everybody to know this is Ambassador Twining. He more than anyone worked quietly in the tough years to advance the process of normalization with us in Vietnam." Everyone applauded.

It was a nice diplomatic gesture. It was exaggerated. We all played parts. But I did feel a lot of satisfaction with that because we worked hard in that period of 1988 to 1991, with lots and lots of contacts, and lots of late nights. Just even doing the road map, I left the assistant secretary's office at 1:00 a.m., with my wife parked outside in the car waiting for me for hours. Dr. Solomon and I boarded the airplane at 7:00 a.m. to go to New York to present the road map. We all put a lot of time and sweat into trying to normalize our relations with Vietnam in accordance with the interests of the United States. We had to do it in a way that would fly politically, not just with the Congress, but also with veterans' groups and others.

Q: I would have thought that Congress and maybe the NSC would have feelings about this, because politics between them were a real problem. But, except for the fact that you were gobbling up resources, putting troops on the ground in the hills looking for bodies, I wouldn't have thought that the Pentagon would have any particular feeling about it.

TWINING: The Pentagon was more in tune with the sentiments of the various organizations involved in POW/MIA than any other part of the U.S. government. Every year, the National League of Families holds a meeting in Washington, D.C. The Pentagon participates fully, often led by the Secretary of Defense. Other veterans groups with often contrasting views have their respective supporters there, as well. POW/MIA is a very political issue.

We wouldn't move forward in relations with these countries unless you were really satisfied that the POW/MIA issue was moving forward. The State Department, I guess it is fair to say, had taken more of a multi-faceted approach. There has always been a sentiment in the State Department that you want to have relations with everyone. Henry Kissinger said that he would talk to the devil if it would bring peace to the Middle East. I think that is very much a State Department approach. The NSC was probably more on the side of the Pentagon than on the side of the State Department with respect to relations, but that is what made negotiating both time consuming and complex. Congressional views would be similarly varied.

Q: How did you evaluate, during the time you were doing this, there wasn't any development in this, the organization that represented the families? Because, it almost seemed to me that there is almost another agenda there, at least with some people, a conservative agenda, or not? How did

you see it?

TWINING: The National League of Families was not inflexible nor unreasonable. Its members wanted to be sure the USG left no stone unturned in the search for missing Americans. Its position was a fact of life, and not one with which we who were involved necessarily disagreed personally. There were other groups strongly interested in the POW/MIA issue, as well, some like the American Legion more conservative in approach, others like the Vietnam Veterans of America more liberal, the latter believing that we could accomplish more with Hanoi if we normalized our relations. You had to deal with all these groups.

The National League of Families, though, was the most active of the groups, and seemed to represent by far the greatest number of the families of the missing in action. Therefore, you dealt with them much more intensely. You realized as you were dealing with them and their dynamic leader in particular, Mrs. Ann Mills Griffiths, that as you spoke and related to one another, you could help her see other items on the agenda that also needed to be accommodated. She could help you understand, as well, the intricacies of the whole POW/MIA effort. It wasn't a one-shot thing, you go find prisoners, and you find any bones, and then that's it. Maybe there should be some effort made to give the Vietnamese information about where their missing might be for instance. As we grew to understand one another, there was more of a collaborative relationship, regardless of some of the more conservative people in that movement, or in the other organization.

Q: Did you find there was a hard-core group of people who really didn't want to see this thing resolved, because as long as there was the thought that there were maybe POWs, it gave them a sense of fulfillment?

TWINING: This is all very true. From 1975 on, Capitol Hill often represented the people, who for their own political reasons, or emotional reasons would be the hardest to convince to open the doors a bit. It was only thanks to people like John Kerry, Bob Kerry, John McCain, and Pete Peterson...

Q: They're all Vietnam veterans. A couple of them, McCain and Peterson were POWs.

TWINING: That's right. These were the people who often were more far seeing in the need to put the past to rest, and deal with the present and the future. Some of the people, such as Jesse Helms, had never ventured near that area. You also had people who were enlightened like Stephen Solarz and Jim Leach on the House side, Senator Richard Lugar on the Senate side. Because of interest and their intellectual capabilities, they wanted to move things forward. Such support was so important in that period. Senators Kerry and McCain were part of a group in the Congress of House and Senate members who chaired a POW/MIA task force.

Frankly, through that task force, they were able to educate some of their colleagues about not only those three countries, but about how we move forward, not only on the issue, but also more generally. I have to give them a lot of credit for that.

Q: Well, one has to look at World War II, where there are hundreds if not thousands of missing

in action in places like New Guinea, or Burma, of course at sea, but that is beyond the realm. Guadalcanal is one. Yet, there was never that movement. I still see firehouses, churches flying the POW/MIA flag, long after. It's been 30 or more years.

TWINING: I think the world had changed with the era of worldwide communications. The Vietnam War was the first war fought in the media. It was shown in the media nonstop. Also people were traveling more, and travel was easily done. Somehow, the mood in the world, particularly in the United States, had changed. We realized that we could find answers to questions. Explanations could now be sought as to the fate of soldiers who disappeared at Guadalcanal or in Papua New Guinea.

Q: What about some of the other countries, and the role they played? The French, for example. You mentioned the Paris means. The French have always maintained more cultural relations with the communists, Indochina governments than we have. Did they play a role, whether it be positive or negative, or not?

TWINING: *Are you talking just about POW/MIA?*

Q: No, I'm talking about over a broad range of issues.

TWINING: *Oh, gosh. It's difficult, because you almost have to talk about each country and what our interests were in each country, and with whom did we relate, as we tried to advance those interests. For all of the countries, the ASEAN countries were important dialogue partners. The other four permanent members of the Security Council were important. The French were important, as you say, because of their historic legacy. They felt they understood Indochina better than we, better than anyone else. They also had contacts. But so did the Chinese, so did the Soviets. The Indonesians were extremely important. The Thai were important. I'd say the panoply of players really were our friends in Europe, our friends in Asia, Southeast Asia, plus China and Japan, and the Soviet Union. You would talk to one or the other of them on various issues of interest. The Singaporeans and we, for example, would talk about the economic sanctions that we had on Vietnam, and their own sanctions. That impacted on our thinking.*

MARIE THERESE HUHTALA
Office Director, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia
Washington, DC (1990-1992)

Ambassador Huhtala was born and raised in California and Graduated from Santa Clara University. Joining the Foreign Service in 1972, she studied Thai and Chinese languages and became a specialist in East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Her overseas postings include Paris, Quebec, Hong Kong and Chiang Mai (Thailand). In Washington, she dealt primarily with East Asia and Pacific Affairs. From 2001 to 2004 she served as US ambassador to Malaysia and, from 2004 to 2005, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Ambassador Huhtala is a graduate of the National War College and the State

Department's Senior Seminar. Ambassador Huhtala was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: You were doing Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia from 1990 to when?

HUHTALA: To 1992. And we were trying to help nurture the beginning of civil society in Cambodia. As if those issues weren't interesting enough, we had Vietnam. At that point we had still not re-established diplomatic relations following the war, which had ended 15 years before. There had been attempts in the late '70s to negotiate something but there were two problems. One was that the Vietnamese were demanding war reparations, which we never pay, and the second thing was that in 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia and that put an end to any interest on the U.S. side in normalizing. During the 1980s there developed a potent movement of the POW/MIA families, which strongly opposed normalization.

Q: Missing in action. These are people who were concerned that there might be military men still prisoners of war.

HUHTALA: Let me just preface this. After every major war there are huge numbers of people who are never accounted for. Their remains are never found and their families never know what happened to them. After World War II something like 400,000 men were never accounted for, and after the Korean War there were 88,000. Those were wars that we considered ourselves to have won, or at least to have come out all right on. In the case of Vietnam, of course, we did not win that war, and there were some 20,000 or so Americans in the three countries, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Americans who had been lost and never recovered.

As a result there was a strong movement led by the National League of Families of POW/MIA to demand accountability. Many in that movement believed that there were huge stores of U.S. remains that the Vietnamese had and were cynically withholding from us – warehouses full of remains, they believed. Others, kind of fringe people, believed that there were still live Americans being held in the jungles of Southeast Asia. As long as there were such powerful emotions churned up by these families, with whom everybody sympathized after all, the two governments couldn't make any progress on normalizing relations. During the 1980s, long before Washington and Hanoi were ready to do anything, President Regan sent his Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General John Vessey, to Vietnam to begin a dialog on looking for at least the remains of our missing men. That effort took root. We were beginning to conduct joint operations for recovery of remains, not only in Vietnam but also in Cambodia and Laos. In exchange for that, which we had proposed to Vietnam as a purely humanitarian effort to address the suffering of family members in the U.S., the Vietnamese came back and said, "Well, we have humanitarian issues too. Our country was destroyed during the war. We don't have health facilities, and we're very poor." Thus the State Department was pressed into service to respond to Vietnam's humanitarian needs. The way that worked out, my predecessor as deputy director of EAP/VLC started this effort.

Q: Who was this?

HUHTALA: Michael Marine, our current ambassador to Vietnam. Anyway, he organized this

effort to rally all the big American voluntary organizations, NGOs, and interested individuals to offer assistance to Vietnam. We worked with Treasury to simplify the process for getting licenses to give aid to Vietnam (necessary because the embargo was still in place) and then led delegations every year or so to meet with Vietnamese foreign ministry officials and describe to them what we were doing to fill our side of the equation. So that is the job that I inherited. I went with Michael the last time he went to Hanoi, right before I started on the job, in June of 1990, and saw how it worked. The President of the League of Families of POW/MIA, Ann Mills Griffiths, was also on the delegation. It was very clear what the quid pro quo was – our humanitarian assistance in exchange for their cooperation on recovery of remains. And many wonderful American organizations had stepped up to the plate with great generosity. We had veterans groups building clinics in Vietnam, Save the Children was very active there, and Operation Smile went to Vietnam regularly to perform operations on children with cleft palate. There was a lot to work with, actually.

Q: Also how about we had the Voluntary Departure Program dealing with boat people. How did that go?

HUHTALA: That had been going on all through the '80s actually, based out of Bangkok. This was a process whereby we were trying to effect family reunification for people whose families made it out as boat refugees, with Vietnam cooperating in the interviewing and credentialing of these people to come to the United States as refugees. This was a very long and drawn-out process. That had been our only link with Vietnam during all those years – first ODP and then POW/MIA work.

Q: When you got there in 1990 was there the feeling that okay, we're going to have relations, I mean you didn't feel that?

HUHTALA: No, there was more to it than that. There was interest on both sides in having diplomatic relations but I think both sides saw that there were huge obstacles, the largest being the POW/MIA issue, but also just a huge wall of mistrust on both sides. There were several things that happened. Vietnam had an Ambassador in New York accredited to the United Nations, so we had a channel for dialogue. One very important step was a congressional delegation that was put together of Vietnam vets in the congress. Senator John Kerry, Senator John McCain, Congressman John Rhodes, Congressman Tom Carper, and others (I can't remember all the names) -- about eight or ten members of the House and Senate travelled to Vietnam, the first Congressional group to do so since the war, to explore the possibility of having relations. They were well received, not lavishly but seriously. That kind of broke the ice. Then they came back and Senator Patrick Leahy put into law a provision whereby we could offer humanitarian assistance to victims of war, specifically prosthetics, in Vietnam and other countries. There was a huge need in Vietnam for prosthetics and assistance to adults children who were war victims, and Leahy set aside about a million dollars a year for Vietnam. That was a very positive step on the part of the United States government. Then Kerry and McCain created a Special Select Committee on Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia to investigate the reports of live POWs and withheld remains in Vietnam. It was a very big deal, highly publicized, it went on for half a year or more. The Committee interviewed everybody and anybody who had anything to say on this issue, including the people who believed in the tiger cages and people who

believed in the warehouse full of remains. The State Department was tasked to provide boxes and boxes of documents on the issue, including years' worth of telegrams that we had to declassify and send over. We did, we just emptied out our archives. They went through every piece of paper and heard all kinds of testimony. At the end of this period, that Select Committee was able to declare that there was no reasonable evidence for any existing prisoners still being held in Southeast Asia and Vietnam was making (I don't remember the exact terminology) good faith efforts to help us find the remains, including the many, many joint recovery missions in which they had cooperated very well with us.

So because all this was happening, in the spring of 1992, the Administration – State, Defense, the National Security Council – together with the director of the League of Families, hammered out a road map to normalization of relations with Vietnam. By hammered out, I mean they were in the office of EAP/VLC till ten o'clock p.m. the night before the road map was presented to the Vietnamese Ambassador to the UN. It was the craziest document I had ever seen. It was quickly leaked by the Vietnamese so it's out there, it is public knowledge. It had four phases and each phase was very heavily weighted toward action on their part. For instance, in stage one, it said Vietnam shall do the following: open up their archives, conduct a large number of joint recovery activities, persuade the Cambodian government to sign the peace agreement calling for a United Nations peacekeeping force, and persuade Cambodia and Laos to cooperate in tri-lateral talks with us. In other words, these were huge things. If they did all of that then America would allow direct phone links with Vietnam. Then in phase two there was another long list of very difficult things for Vietnam to do in exchange for which we would allow American businesses to set up offices in Vietnam. Finally in phase three, we would stop voting against them in international financial institutions like the World Bank, and finally in phase four we would lift the embargo, establish liaison offices in each other's capitals and begin to normalize. I believe the opponents of moving forward were convinced we would never get past phase one or two. The Vietnamese, I think, swallowed hard and did all the things that were on the list for them to do. (By this time I had moved on to my next assignment. It was in 1994 that we had to lift the embargo, despite the political difficulties that created in Washington. In 1995 we established diplomatic relations with Vietnam.)

Q: While you were there were you running into sort of the bone trade in Thailand? I've talked to people who'd been involved particularly in Thailand but I mean there was a whole culture of swindlers essentially who were.

HUHTALA: Dog tags coming in. We had an office in the embassy in Bangkok that was devoted exclusively to that, just sifting through all this information. Eventually when they had our missions open in Vietnam they still get dog tags. People thought that if they presented a set of dog tags to the American authorities, they would get a reward or a visa. Unfortunately, many of them were faked, and in any case dog tags alone don't establish anything about the fate of a missing soldier.

Q: You still see the South Vietnamese flag flying here. Did you in your dealing with the League of Families and all, there must have been some people who were almost fanatics on the thing. Something like this, no rational explanation or logic will sway them.

HUHTALA: You have to feel sorry for these people because it is very traumatic to have lost your father, your brother, your son and never know what happened. This is really, really hard. So I always tried to keep that in mind. But some of them were just implacably refusing to ever agree to normalizing with Vietnam. We can't trust them they would say, we can't believe anything they say, don't give them an inch, they'll take a mile, we should never normalize. That's crazy. That just doesn't make sense. We normalized with Germany and with Japan after World War II. At some point you have to put it behind you for the sake of national interests. Some of those people I believe to this day are not prepared to see that happen. There was just a huge amount of emotion even as, through all this time, we were getting increasingly sophisticated forensic methods.

Q: DNA was really beginning to come on line.

HUHTALA: The U.S. Army has a Central Investigation Laboratory in Hawaii, CILHI. I visited it several times. It's fascinating what they can do. Even now they are getting 50-year old sets of remains out of Korea and identifying them using mitochondrial DNA. But if you're a family member and your loved one has been lost for 20 years in Vietnam and the Army gives you remains that they say they've positively identified but it's just a tooth or a finger bone, for example, that's not very satisfying emotionally. It's hard. It's just hard.

Q: Could you talk a bit about what you did, let's say we're coming up with the four points in that treaty, what was our role, your role?

HUHTALA: This was the most demanding job I had had up to that point. As deputy director I had to run the office, I had to make sure, that the three or four desk officers and two secretaries were working efficiently, make sure the work flow was proceeding as it should, make sure that papers for the Assistant Secretary or higher levels were tasked on time, and they had to be letter perfect. Unfortunately, I'd be kicking them back to the officers all the time for revisions. There was a huge amount of paperwork coming up because there was a lot of work to be done in supporting the Cambodian peace process which our assistant secretary, Richard Solomon was deeply involved in. The Secretary of State went to Paris with it for the signing of the treaty, as I mentioned. Then as the Vietnam normalization process came on line there was an increasing number of policy papers and decision memos to be worked. There was all of that mechanical stuff, plus a lot of dealings with the League of Families, and with Vietnamese diplomats coming through. Then I kept in touch with all of these charitable organizations and I travelled to Vietnam maybe two times a year to keep that process going. I also did a lot of public speaking, particularly to Vietnamese-American groups, most of whom were implacably opposed to normalization. A lot of them were former refugees, and they'd be flying the old Saigon flag in their hall, though I wouldn't go in there until they took it down.

Q: About once a week I go eat at the Eden Center here in Arlington and the South Vietnamese flag is everywhere, in fact a big one flying, there it is. It will be a cool day in hell before they put up the flag of the Republic of Vietnam.

HUHTALA: I imagine they never will. As a U.S. government representative I couldn't be there endorsing that. We had to draw a line, absolutely. All in all, it was really an exhausting job with

very long hours, but oh man, I learned so much. It was great.

Q: The Vietnamese groups, will they listen to you really or?

HUHTALA: Yes, they would. These were the more responsible groups obviously. There were some sterling examples of people who'd come here with nothing but the clothes on their back and they'd become wealthy businessmen and made a life here. They wanted to have U.S. policy explained to them and they wanted to have a say in the shaping of it, in the best American tradition.

Q: Was there a push on their part to say, okay this is over we want to be able to go back and see our family?

HUHTALA: Some of them did.

Q: And be safe.

HUHTALA: And make money. There are huge riches potentially available for our large population of overseas Vietnamese in this country. Many do go back every year. Others didn't want us to ever talk to those dirty commies. Most people I met were somewhere in between.

Q: Were you getting any feel for what was going on in Vietnam at the time?

HUHTALA: Some. We had our ODP (Orderly Departure Program) people going in to interviews potential refugees. And there were all these NGOs travelling in and out. I was in frequent contact with them. There were left-wing political groups that were militating for the restoration of ties, that kind of thing. There were educational exchanges beginning. So we were beginning to get a good sense of what it was like inside Vietnam; it wasn't a mystery or closed off or anything.

Q: Did you have much contact with Vietnamese officials?

HUHTALA: Sometimes when they came down from New York to Washington for talks, and of course when I went to Hanoi.

Q: We weren't under the restraints that we had with something at one point with the PLO, Palestine Liberation or Cubans. Could you talk to the Vietnamese officials sort of openly?

HUHTALA: At that time, during those two years, it was still relatively constrained. In their official role it had to be arranged in advance. One thing that was really helpful was while I was in that job there was a Vietnamese Foreign Ministry official who came on a six-month program with SAIS. His name was Le Van Bang and he was just there as a student. We knew he was a Vietnamese diplomat, he was their Western Hemisphere guy. He'd been an expert on Cuba and now he was being retrained to be an expert on America. During his time as a student some of us got to know him in a non-official way. I once invited him to an office party at my house. He remembers it to this day because he eventually, years later, became their first ambassador to Washington. Now he is a vice foreign minister in Hanoi and the leading proponent of continuing

to improve relations with United States. I really think that six months period was seminal in bringing him around, and his influence has been far-reaching.

Q: Was it difficult for him to get our approval as well as.

HUHTALA: No, we were giving visas at that point in the early '90s, particularly for educational exchange programs like those of the IIE.

Q: International Educational Exchange?

HUHTALA: Yes, and the Ford Foundation. They were bringing select Vietnamese over to this country as they do in China and in other places. It was so helpful because it was beginning to break down these walls of misunderstanding and ignorance, the mutual flaws that existed.

Q: Sort of looking at Vietnam at the time did we see, you know the Soviet Union was imploding, did we see sort of the communist glue beginning to lose its effectiveness or something in Vietnam?

HUHTALA: Oh gosh. The Vietnamese Communist Party was still pretty much a Leninist organization, very highly controlled, very hierarchical. As an Asia hand, I also quickly perceived the Confucian nature of the society and the strong continuity between Vietnam and China and Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Am I making myself clear? It still had the formal structure of a Leninist party and everything.

Q: Were we looking and sort of comparing the political situation in Vietnam with the last years of the Soviet Union saying okay the party in Vietnam is maybe got two or three decades and then it will go?

HUHTALA: No, I don't think we were making that leap. We were very interested when the Russians withdrew from Cam Ranh Bay and it became open again. It's a beautiful port. We've still not really gone and taken advantage of it. I think what really good observers were doing was comparing Vietnam with China. China, in 1990, had had 12 years of opening up, which was beginning already to transform the country and make it more economically successful. There they were already facing the contradictions of trying to open up economically and not open politically. We saw that Vietnam was beginning to go down that same path. I still think that's a more apt comparison really than with Russia.

Q: How did you see relations with China at the time?

HUHTALA: We had normalized by then. In fact we had been, we normalized at the end of the '70s. We had all those embassies and all those posts. We were still negotiating some very difficult trade issues for instance and human rights was becoming a big item on the agenda with China. Basically I think we were watching this transformation, unsure whether it was going to really hold and what was going to happen. The coastal cities were developing very, very fast, while the hinterland was very backward.

Q: Did we see China and Vietnam as being essentially antagonistic towards each other?

HUHTALA: They'd had a border war and that was in --

Q: The '80s wasn't it, no that was fairly close after we left, in the late '70s.

HUHTALA: No, Vietnam invaded Cambodia in '79 and then I think it was maybe '79 or '80 they had a border war. They had a thriving business trade back and forth. If you went into the markets in Hanoi back then, in 1990, they were full of plastic products and things like that from China. The architecture of northern Vietnam reminded me forcefully of southern China. The way the houses were shaped and everything, it looked so much like Guangdong Province and that region there, but also with beautiful French architecture. Really, it's a pretty city. It's got huge lakes in the middle of it, an interesting architectural blend.

Q: Cambodia, did that take a little of your time?

HUHTALA: It did also. Let me just add, before we leave Vietnam, a couple of things I was involved in especially the last year, were deliberate preparations for the day when normalization would come. We went and visited the old Vietnamese Embassy on R Street in Washington. It was in a state of great disrepair and we realized we were going to have to give it back. So we instituted some expensive repairs. It was one of those beautiful, old big houses. Then on one of my trips to Hanoi I was charged with trying to find where our old consulate had been in 1954 when we left Hanoi. There had been a little cultural center there too; I was able to locate both those properties. We were preparing for a very complicated property negotiation that would be part of the normalization process. Then I got down to Ho Chi Minh (Saigon), and saw the old embassy there and some of the compounds. The other thing I was doing was arranging for the first FSOs to come through Vietnamese training in FSI who were not for the ODP program; in other words people to go and be future political and economic officers in Hanoi. The language program here was very small and it was all southern Vietnamese, all the text books and the teachers, all using the southern dialect – not at all appropriate for people who'd be assigned to Hanoi. So we worked very closely with FSI and they found a northerner to come and be an instructor.

G. EUGENE MARTIN
Consul General
Guangzhou, China (1992-1996)

A Specialist in Chinese Affairs and a speaker of Chinese, Mr. Martin spent the major part of his career dealing with matters relating to China, both in Washington and abroad. His overseas assignments included Hong Kong, Taipei, Huangzhou (formerly Canton), Beijing, Manila and Rangoon. His Washington assignments also concerned China and the Far East. Mr. Martin was born in Indiana of Missionary parents and was raised in the US. and India. He is a graduate of Kalamazoo College and Syracuse University. Mr. Martin was

interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: What about Vietnam? While you were there, you would have been covering that border?

MARTIN: Yes, Guangxi Province was in my consular district. Relations were pretty frozen most of the time I was there. The legacy of the '77 war with Vietnam continued. It was still very icy. One of my favorite trips was going to the border of Guangxi Province and Vietnam, and visiting the Qing Dynasty era Friendship Gate, a very elaborate multistoried tower similar to those along the Great Wall, in the middle of Friendship Pass, a traditional trading route. The gate, particularly from the Vietnamese side, was riddled with bullet holes, absolutely pockmarked. And I thought this was an appropriate symbol of the state of Sino-Vietnamese friendship at that point. The Vietnamese had fired on it from their vantage points on higher ridges on their side of the border to prevent the PLA from using the pass to enter Vietnam. During my posting in Guangzhou, things did warm up enough for them to re-open the railway line that crossed the border into northern Vietnam. The problem was that Chinese and Vietnamese rail gauges were different. So they added a third rail so the train carriages could go to a border point where they were lifted up and transferred to a different width wheel unit. This is similar to what is done on the Mongolian border for trains entering the trans-Siberian railway system.

MARILYN GREENE
Reporter, USA Today
Washington, DC (1993-1996)

Ms. Greene was born and raised in New York State and was educated at Syracuse and Northwestern Universities. She also studied in France under the Junior Year Abroad program. In 1986 she joined Gannett World News Service and traveled with Al Neuharth on his worldwide JetCapade until 1989, when she joined the staff of USA Today as a reporter. Her first assignments included covering the White House and government Departments in Washington, DC. She later became foreign correspondent for the paper. Among her foreign assignments was the Gulf War, reporting from Saudi Arabia during the conflict and from Kuwait immediately after the War. In 1996 Ms. Greene joined the staff of the World Press Freedom Committee, serving as its Executive Director until 2003. Ms. Greene was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2012.

GREENE: I was a reporter for USA Today until 1996. With another fellowship in there, in 1993. Back to Asia with a lot of writing and story-filing from Japan, China and Vietnam. I did a fair amount of reporting from Vietnam regarding the lifting of the embargo. Our willingness to lift the embargo was linked directly to Vietnam's cooperation in handing over information about POWs (Prisoners of War).

There was also the issue of our use of Agent Orange during the war, and the impact this had on Vietnamese civilians. I visited scientists who had jars in their labs filled with deformed fetuses that they attributed to Agent Orange.

Children resulting from the intermarriage of American soldiers and Vietnamese women posed another problem. These people, many of them, especially the children of black men and Vietnamese women, were often discarded and abandoned by their mothers and either not recognized or even known to their fathers. A lot of these kids ended up in orphanages with very sad lives. They were shunned by both Americans and Vietnamese. So there was a wealth of stories there in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

Q: It's a very poignant situation there.

GREENE: It was. It was very touching. And then there was the political prisoner thing, too. Dr. Doan Viet Hoat, a dissenter, was in prison at that time. I visited his wife in Ho Chi Minh City. She took me around on the back of her little motorcycle to visit various other families who were involved in the effort get political prisoners freed. Dr. Hoat finally did get free, and he came to the United States and now lives in Virginia. He became quite a spokesman for free speech, and I think our stories helped to bring attention to that issue. Later on, the World Press Freedom Committee invited him to become a member of our executive committee.

Q: Well, on the issue of prisoners of war and not being released, I mean at one point this was a very political issue. In fact, the president, presidential candidates, Ross Perot made quite a point of this.

GREENE: Yes. Yes.

Q: It never made an awful lot of sense.

GREENE: Well, I don't think they ever came up with a definitive resolution of questions about POWs remaining in Vietnam.

Q: You know, there are still people who think that somewhere there's a prison full of Americans who don't know the war is over.

But it was very, very political.

GREENE: Yes.

Q: Did you run across people trying to prove their point to you?

GREENE: Well, mostly I heard about what happened to people, where the remains were. There was a major dig by the U.S. military while I was there. In one area they had found some remains and the remnants of an airplane that had crashed. They wanted information about what happened to these people. And I'm not sure that was ever satisfactorily resolved. It was presented as kind of a scandal. And I'm sure, you know, there were some situations in which that was the case. But I'm not sure to what extent.

Q: Yeah. It seemed that the awful thing was that -- I mean there were people, particularly in the

right wing of the political spectrum in the States, desperately wanted to prove that the Vietnamese had stables of American prisoners, which they would go out sometime, and the Vietnamese -- the main thing they were doing was identifying the dead.

GREENE: That's right. And there were a lot of identifications made. And that partially satisfied the question. Still, it was a messy ending to the whole thing.

Q: How did you find traveling around Vietnam?

GREENE: It was lovely. It's a beautiful country. I traveled the whole length of it, visiting a lot of old war sites and talking with people who had worked with the Americans, or not.

There was a war museum in Hanoi that purported to show all the atrocities that Americans had committed, which was kind of interesting. And then, you know, the north/south divide was still pretty evident in terms of people's attitudes.

Q: Did you have any problem with the Vietnamese authorities?

GREENE: Yes. I wanted to see Dr. Hoat, and they told me they didn't know where he was. "Dr. Who?" And when Mrs. Hoat was driving me around she took circuitous routes because she was certain we were being followed.

I also attempted to visit another imprisoned dissident, Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, an endocrinologist and pro-democracy advocate. Dr. Que has spent more than 20 years in jail since 1978, and is imprisoned right now for advocating human rights in Vietnam. But the authorities stonewalled me on that, too, and they weren't particularly polite about it. They just pretended or asserted that I didn't know what I was talking about.

Q: How did you find the prisons? Did you go to the prisons?

GREENE: Well, of course I want to Hỏa Lò prison -- the "Hanoi Hilton" -- where John McCain was held prisoner for more than five years after he was shot down in 1967.

By then, of course, it was an empty building. And no, I was not allowed to go to any active prisons, and authorities denied that they even existed.

Q: Were people coming up to you and whispering, "Go see this," or "Go see that?"

GREENE: The people who were in that little dissident community were doing this, but generally speaking people were just interested in making money. The big issue while I was there was, "Please lift the embargo, we need your business." There were people selling t-shirts that said, "Lift your embargo," and it finally was lifted in February 1994. The people were interested mostly in economic issues. This is not surprising, as most Vietnamese alive today were not even born at the time of the war. The median age is now around 28. They were really wildly interested in making money. There was a lot of activity going on with businesses and so on.

Q: Well, really when one thinks about the whole situation, I mean here we are, enemies at not necessarily swords-point, but then all of a sudden the name had changed and they're out to prove something to us and we're out to prove something else.

GREENE: Right. And I guess you know Terry Anderson and some of the other people who had been prisoners or soldiers during the war fought very hard to get that embargo lifted. Louis Puller, Jr. was one of them. Also former Navy Secretary James Webb, who was a combat Marine during the war, and James Kimsey, co-founder of AOL. But there was a really strong and active community working toward reconciliation with the Vietnamese. And Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, the man who ordered the use of the defoliant Agent Orange and whose son died of exposure to it, advocated reconciliation and assistance to victims.

Q: Did you get any chance to cover any Americans who chose to stay behind?

GREENE: Yes. I met and interviewed George Esper, the tenacious Associated Press correspondent who covered the war and declined the opportunity to leave Vietnam in the final evacuation. Although he had been back to the U.S. in the meantime, he was in Hanoi as AP bureau chief when I met him and heard his stories about the final days of the war. *[Esper died in February 2012].*

Q: Were they beginning to talk about having diplomatic relations at the time?

GREENE: Well, that was something I covered on this end. At that time, they only had an ambassador to the United Nations, Le Van Bang. And yes, diplomatic relations was very much a topic. Vietnam wanted to establish diplomatic relations and eventually that happen, and Le Van Bang did become the first post-war ambassador. And I think that was a very positive step.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the Vietnamese who were dealing with us knew which buttons to push, and we didn't know which buttons to push on the American side?

GREENE: Probably. I think on our side we were dealing mainly with the domestic view of the war and its aftermath and people. The families who were still wondering what happened to their loved ones or who were bitter about the fact that we had been there at all. So on our side, there was a lot of domestic opinion to deal with. And on the Vietnamese side, I think everybody wanted to be friends with the Americans, no matter which side they'd been on in the war. They wanted to finally have it just be over, and to move beyond that horrible time.

You were stationed there for some time, weren't you?

Q: Well, I was there. But the war was going on. I was there in the early 70s.

GREENE: That must have been a really tough time for you.

Q: Well, not really -- I mean things were essentially winding down. We were pulling a lot of troops out.

GREENE: Were there a lot of Vietnamese coming to the consulate trying to get out?

Q: A number, yes. But we didn't have huge lines. That came later on. But it's hard to sort those times out, I think, for all of us at the time. I thought that Vietnam was -- it was before they really started to unravel and I thought it would hold on. And it didn't.

DENNIS G. HARTER
Director, Office of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodian Affairs
Washington, DC (1994-1996)

Deputy Chief of Mission
Hanoi (1997-2001)

Mr. Harter was born and raised in New Jersey and educated at Georgetown University, Seton Hall and American University. He joined the State Department in 1966 and was assigned to the CORDS program of USAID in Vietnam. He subsequently studied Chinese and served in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Hanoi, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission (1997-2001). In his Washington assignments Mr. Harter dealt primarily with East Asian matters. He also served as Director of the State Department's Press Office in Washington and as State's Representative to the Washington Council on International Trade in Seattle. Mr. Harter was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: This is the 21st of July, 2004. Dennis, where were you? Still in Washington?

HARTER: Yes. I'm still head of the Office of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Affairs. At this point, beginning actually with the fall of 1995, after an EAP Bureau reorganization, Burma and Thailand desks were added to the office, but in the early part of 1995, we were Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (VLC). Normalization with Vietnam is on the table.

The Administration had decided to normalize relations with Vietnam but to do so in incremental steps rather than all at once. So as to minimize any potential opposition to this process, the strategy was to precede each step with a demonstration of improved cooperation on POW/MIA issues by the Vietnamese. The first formal step in this process was the establishment of Liaison Offices in Hanoi and Washington. Some months before opening the Liaison Office in Hanoi, we assigned some young Foreign Service officers to work in the U.S. MIA Office so they would assist us in getting the whole office opening process concluded more rapidly. But on one occasion, I think the folks in EAP went overboard in trying to keep things moving incrementally. When we established the Liaison Office in January 1995, I went to Hanoi to represent the Department for the opening of our new office facility. But then Jim Hall told me he had instructions from Peter Tomsen in EAP not to hoist the U.S. flag once we had completed our exchange with the Vietnamese. I called Peter and argued that this made no sense but he said "people" (not named) were concerned about the press coverage of the flag raising. I said the press who were there to cover the Liaison Office opening would be even more puzzled and were

likely to write speculative stories if we did not raise the flag. I couldn't convince him and so we had our exchange with the Vietnamese and just entered the building. Shortly thereafter, I went to the airport and returned to Washington. The day after I left, Jim Hall went ahead and raised the flag and there was no apparent press concern about the event or the delay.

After the Liaison Office was opened, we assembled another DPMO team to talk to the Vietnamese on the MIA issue. This one was headed by Deputy Secretary for Veterans Affairs Hershel Gober who had also been actively working with us on the MIA issue and had helped build support within the various veterans' organizations. The delegation included key members of the VFW, the American Legion, and the League of Families. I accompanied the delegation for this trip and was expected to write the trip report. This trip report was to be the formal presentation of the Administration's argument to normalize relations with Vietnam. Once again, the chief audience was the Congress, but we also intended this report to be used with the veterans organizations and the public. The report concluded that we continued to make progress on accounting as the result of enhanced Vietnamese cooperation and that it was therefore appropriate to move forward to normalize relations. When we opened the Liaison Office, we wanted to demonstrate to the Vietnamese that we were indeed moving the process forward toward normalizing relations and my predecessor in the Office of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Affairs, Jim Hall, was sent over to open up the Liaison Office in Hanoi in January 1995 and to manage operational activities until we could normalize relations. We augmented the small team of young Foreign Service officers with some administrative people who were sent to try to locate appropriate office facilities. Chris Runckle, the administrative coordinator for the APEC meeting in Seattle, had been lobbying for this position and he was assigned there. Chris located a recently constructed office building outside the old center of town which appeared to be the only reasonably modern facility that would meet our needs as a start-up facility.

As we were presenting our report on MIA progress to the Hill, the Administration was reviewing the next phase of the normalization process. The debate was over how we would open our embassy. The White House remained cautious and the Department was told to put together a memorandum proposing the establishment of diplomatic relations with the naming of a Chargé d'Affaires to head the Embassy. The White House believed that if we made it clear we were going to open the mission with a Chargé then the Vietnamese would do the same, not wanting to have sent a higher level official to the U.S. than we had sent there. This, they figured, would permit the U.S. to take an additional incremental step – and simultaneously show more MIA progress – and then move ahead to naming an Ambassador. So, even though we had now reached our objective of normalizing relations, the Administration wanted one more reassurance and our process continued to move forward at a snail's pace.

After the President approved the memo to establish diplomatic relations, he invited a large number of dignitaries to the White House for the formal announcement of the establishment of diplomatic relations on July 11, 1995. I was very pleased to be there to see the process finally concluded and to be part of what was clearly an historic change from our period of hostility with the Vietnamese during the war. All of the key players who had been involved in the process from the Congress, the Veterans Affairs Department, the Defense Department, the veterans and families organizations were invited and everyone was very positive about the announcement. Days passed and the newspaper commentary was also favorable and the public reaction was

blasé – no big deal, no big protests -- it was all simply another step in a process that the USG had dragged out for more than a year.

The State Department had already selected a candidate for Chargé, a career Foreign Service Officer, Desaix Anderson. Desaix had previously been the head of the VLC Office and was working in the EAP Front Office as the APEC Coordinator. The White House, after looking at the proposal did not raise any objections. Uncharacteristically, the White House had already been looking beyond the Chargé period to determine who would be named Ambassador later in the year, although they still had not revealed anything to the Department. So, for the interim, Desaix was named to go to Hanoi to be our first Chargé in the middle of 1995.

And so, once again we did at least demonstrate to the Vietnamese that establishment of diplomatic relations meant something more than our previous step of opening a Liaison Office. We didn't just continue business as usual with the person who had been there as Liaison Office Chief being given a new title. We sent out a more senior officer to go with the higher ranking title and responsibility. The Vietnamese, for their part sent their Ambassador from the UN Mission down to open up the Embassy in Washington. And, as expected, they gave him the title of Chargé D'Affaires and not Ambassador, matching our own designation in Hanoi. Now, there were a couple of really interesting little sidelights at this stage which deserve mention.

The first interesting issue was the Vietnamese declaration on the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States. You look at the text of the statement from Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet and there's nothing in it that says the Vietnamese have established diplomatic relations by recognizing the Government of the United States. Absolutely nowhere is there any mention of it! Prime Minister Kiet mentions the fact that the U.S. recognizes Vietnam, but there is no corresponding concrete statement that says Vietnam had recognized the U.S. So, after I had read the statement a couple of times, I called up the Legal Advisor's Office (L) and talked to Jim Hergen who had been our liaison in L throughout this period. I asked him if he had looked at the text of the Vietnamese statement. He said, "No." I said, "Look at it and see what you can tell me." After a few minutes, he called back and said "They didn't say anything. They didn't establish diplomatic relations." I said, "That's exactly what I thought when I read it. But, everything is all set. The statements are out and everybody has just assumed that it's happened and we've both established relations. There's no way we walk this back without a lot of problems." I said, "What are we going to do?" and he didn't have any response. I then proposed I call the Vietnamese Ambassador and talk him through the Vietnamese statement as it came out from the Prime Minister's Office and get him to say that this means they've established diplomatic relations. And then I said, "will that suffice?" Jim thought for a moment and he said, "Yeah, but you'll have to write it up." I said, "OK, I'll write it up as soon as we finish the conversation." A few minutes later, without letting anyone else in EAP know what was happening, I called the Vietnamese Ambassador and we talked through the Prime Minister's statement. At the end of the discussion, I asked him, "Is this then what you consider as your formal establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States?" And when he said, "Yes," I thanked him and hung up without indicating anything further about why I had called. I then wrote up the telephone conversation and with Jim Hergen's assistance made sure it was appended to the State Department's collection of legal documents associated with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Vietnam which of course included both President

Clinton's statement and Prime Minister Kiet's statement. Those papers are all part of the formal diplomatic record. And that's basically how we made the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam "legal." Outside of Jim Hergen and I, I don't think anybody else ever knew at the time what we had to do to "complete" the normalization process.

Q: Did you ever get a feel for why this wording? Was this just a legal problem?

HARTER: No. I have no idea, I have no idea what the Vietnamese intended. No one on the Vietnamese side ever came back to me and said, "Oh, we forgot to mention establishing relations," or "no, that's the way we always do it." There was just no exchange back and forth. I figured we were better off once it was done to leave it alone. The last thing I wanted to do was get a contrary explanation or get an explanation to cast doubt on what I had already put on paper and sent to the files. What I found most intriguing is that nobody in the press ever asked about it. You know how the press usually goes over everything with a fine tooth comb. But, in this case, they just completely overlooked it.

Q: Well, this could have thrown it back to Congress.

HARTER: Absolutely, absolutely. There was just no point in trying to go any further with it. I thought that was really a rather amusing way for the issue of diplomatic relations to end after all the concerns about making sure we did things in such a methodical way.

Q: Less than amusing at the time.

HARTER: Oh yeah. There was a mild sort of panic on my part, because I was afraid it would all come apart. But it was one of these things that come up from time to time in diplomacy and you just have to figure a way to deal with it. And, as long as can pull it off and nobody really complains about it, then it's fine and nobody is ever the wiser.

Q: Did the Vietnamese Ambassador understand your problem and what he was doing?

HARTER: I don't know whether he did or not. I did not try to make it clear to him that I needed him to say this for a particular reason. I just sort of walked him through it as though I was clarifying the text for the record. We knew each other well enough at that point and I probably could have asked him directly. But it was one of these things where I didn't want to get a different answer from the one I was guiding him to say. Therefore, my thought was to keep it as simple as possible. Once I got him to say what I wanted, I just wanted to end the conversation and create the record and let it go. I never really did go back to him and ask him about it afterward. Maybe sometime in the future I will do so.

Q: Where was the problem coming from about putting in an Ambassador? I mean, once both countries recognize each other and exchange Ambassadors, it doesn't strike me that an Ambassador is a big deal.

HARTER: Well, it shouldn't be, but we've had problems doing this before. Burma was a case in point. The Congress got all head strong over Burma. After we nominated an Ambassador in

1990, he got agrément and had his confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But, the Burmese pulled agrément over things he had said in his Senate hearings that were critical of the Burmese Government. After “punishing” the Burmese regime for a while by not naming another Ambassador, the Department tried to nominate another person and the Senate refused to consider an appointment because of Burma’s human rights record. We haven’t had an Ambassador in Burma since 1990. The whole issue of Tibet was an issue of contention during our recognition of the PRC and whether the United States was recognizing the integration of Tibet within the greater sphere of China.

From Congress’ perspective as long as Burma was controlled by a bunch of military thugs who refused to accept the results of a national election in 1990, then the bottom line was we’re not going to have anything to do with them. Even when various steps took place a few years later that suggested the military leaders were opening things up, there was no one in Congress willing to bite and allow the State Department to move forward. This policy was all dictated by a Congressional staffer whose wife happened to be from one of the minority tribes in Burma. He was the one who dictated the policy to block the sending of an Ambassador. Opposition to the Burmese military broadened out after that because of the regime’s repressive policies, but that’s how and where it all started. Obviously we deal diplomatically with a lot of regimes that are repressive and don’t represent the way we would like to see things handled, but we still manage to accredit Ambassadors to those countries anyway. Burma is the big exception.

While we’re talking about Burma here, I should note a story from the latter part of my time in Washington when the desk added Thailand and Burma to its portfolio. As often happens in the Department, there was an effort to cut down on staffing and EAP had to find some places to cut personnel. I was asked if I thought I could also manage to oversee Thailand and Burma affairs if the two offices were combined and I said yes. The Bureau cut the Office Director position from the Thai-Burma desk and moved the other two three officers there into our Vietnam Laos and Cambodia desk. I decided we needed to come up with a functional abbreviation for the group, like we had used VLC before. I didn’t want to put one group ahead of another so I decided to alphabetize the listings and so we became BCLTV – Burma Cambodia Laos Thailand and Vietnam.

While I was Office Director, I had the occasion to travel to the two new countries to meet with government leaders. The Thai visit was pretty straightforward and focused mostly on the state of our cooperative efforts to bring about a new government in Cambodia that represented the people but did not contain much influence from the Khmer Rouge or the Vietnamese. The Burma visit was another matter. As I said, we had not had an Ambassador in Rangoon, or Yangon as they now called it, since 1990. Our relations with the Burmese military were standoffish at best. And our chief focus was support for the 1990 elected government which the military had refused to permit to take office. The head of that group, the National League for Democracy, was Madame Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the founder of Burma. She had been under house arrest for most of the time since the 1990 election and it was not often any Americans had a chance to meet with her. I had specifically requested an opportunity to meet with her but there was no agreement for me to do so before I reached Burma. I had a couple of meetings with senior people in the Foreign Ministry and one of their development focused ministries. Both were former military men who had been seconded to the ministries. After my first day in Rangoon, I was told

that I had been given permission to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi at her residence. We talked for a couple of hours and I found her a very impressive and determined woman. I also came away from the meeting feeling that it was going to be very difficult to get any kind of accommodation between her and the ruling military. Her positions were as stubborn and uncompromising as theirs were. She articulated no give or signs of willingness to negotiate differences despite occasional comments to western media which suggested she would be willing to talk to the military about a restoration of democracy in Burma. Because her “image” was so positive in the U.S., I did not feel I would have much of an audience in the Department if I revealed my thoughts that her attitude might also be part of the problem of a “negotiated” or “compromise” solution for Burma’s move away from military domination. As a result, I did not put those kinds of comments in my written report on the trip, but I did try to convey my concerns about her uncompromising position in my talks with others in the Department. I don’t believe they had any impact, however, and there was never any sign I saw that Department officials were concerned that backing Aung San Suu Kyi likely meant a continuing stand-off between her and the military who ruled the country and little hope to bring about change.

The month after we established diplomatic relations, Secretary of State Warren Christopher went to Hanoi for the first visit of a Secretary of State to Vietnam since the war [August 5-7, 1995]. I accompanied him on the trip and we signed two sets of papers confirming the normalization of relations and announcing the opening of our embassies. At that point, we made clear to the Vietnamese we would be opening with a Chargé and that an Ambassador would not be named for several more months. By that time I’m sure the Vietnamese expected no different given our long history of small steps and there was no negative reaction from the Vietnamese side.

Anyway, once the whole step of normalization was out of the way, we then went through the mechanics of getting the Vietnamese established in Washington. I think I recounted back when I had been serving as the Deputy Director of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia Affairs in the late 1970s, I had gone into the then vacant Vietnamese Embassy and discovered that it basically was in the same state it had been when the South Vietnamese diplomats walked out and closed the door behind them in 1975. There were a series of problems with the building thereafter with the electricity off, and the heat off, and the water off, and there were holes in the roof. Subsequently, we fixed it all up using frozen Vietnamese Government assets and the Department actually used the building for a period of time. I think the office was used by the refugee affairs people. The Vietnamese officials at the UN came down and they were looking at it and trying to determine how best to utilize the facility. We, of course wanted to be very particular about how we were going to handle the property issue. The Vietnamese had returned to us the property that we had in Hanoi – the old site of the U.S. Consulate, and we did get back the old Embassy property in Saigon and a number of other properties. This was all a very detailed and complicated negotiation process with the Vietnamese. The only property that they owned was the Embassy Chancellery over on R Street, NW, just off Massachusetts Avenue.

Q: Did they have a residence?

HARTER: They did not, no. So, that was the only thing they physically owned. And of course, they had bank accounts and some other assets. We talked about that before and how we resolved the issue of the money that the Vietnamese had. This time, FBO handled all the property

discussions and I didn't get directly involved the way I was supposed to have been back in 1979.

Q: What about our embassy and all in Saigon? I know it turned in to the oil ministry or something.

HARTER: Right. There was a period of time after 1975 when the Vietnamese used the building as a government office building dealing with petroleum issues. But, it finally was abandoned by the Vietnamese, because they couldn't repair it. They couldn't repair the air conditioning system and the other US equipment in the building and so it basically sat there derelict for quite some time. When we looked at the various properties we had owned, some were clearly more desirable than others. The Vietnamese were willing to give us back all of the properties except for our Consul General's residence building in Hanoi which they had provided to the Polish Government. So we made a number of trades and exchanges and the Vietnamese owed us money for all the property we gave up. They paid us through the bilateral Claims and Assets settlement for the property we didn't want to keep. The Claims and Assets agreement was one of those other hurdles we overcame enroute to a normalization of relations. Our big advantage over a lot of other such negotiations was that we had more Vietnamese assets under our control than there were claims against those assets. Our negotiators were able to achieve the best ever claims settlement from the Vietnamese – better than 90 cents to the dollar – simply because the Vietnamese knew they were going to come out of the negotiations with money they didn't previously control. In the long run, it was better to agree to settle the American claims and end up with several tens of millions of dollars than to fuss and haggle over the amounts. The property transfers were all part of that process and we deducted the values of the property we didn't wish to keep in Vietnam from their assets before returning the remainder to Hanoi.

Q: Like our Consul General in Da Nang and things like that?

HARTER: Right, although that particular property and most of our consulate properties were leased and not ones we owned. There was also a property in Hue that we couldn't even find because it, along with a lot of nearby buildings, had been destroyed and the buildings had been reconstructed so that it was impossible to determine where our property had been on that street. So, there was no point in trying to do anything with that issue and that property went into the "sale" column. The people at FBO (Foreign Buildings Operations) were absolutely adamant, based on their experiences and dealing with other governments and particularly Communist governments, we had to be very, very firm about what we allowed the Vietnamese to have. We didn't want the Vietnamese to get all the property they needed for an embassy or a residence or whatever they thought they needed until we also felt we had an appropriate piece of property or a building we could use for the long term.

The Vietnamese looked at their old building in Washington and decided it wasn't adequate for a modern office facility. They thought it was too small and too cramped. They considered using it as an Ambassador's residence, but thought they might only use it occasionally, perhaps as a facility for guests or for entertainment programs. What they wanted was office space. So, FBO agreed to let them lease office space just as we had done some months earlier with the office building in Hanoi, though we actually bought the building as part of the property settlement. The Vietnamese accepted that arrangement and agreed to find us a site in Hanoi for a permanent

embassy compound within two years. Well, believe me, the two years came and went in a heartbeat and nothing was ever agreed to. We looked at a number of locations, but we could never make up our minds. Thus, a prime downtown location disappeared into another investment project. When I got there a couple years later, I was able to locate a number of places for consideration. Ambassador Peterson also located a very large empty space. Up until the time I left Hanoi in 2002, we could not get FBO to agree that any of the places we found were acceptable and the Hanoi embassy was just not high enough on the Department's priority construction list to require a decision be made within a certain period of time.

Q: What was it that they just didn't get around to it or did they have --

HARTER: They had too many other things on their plate, number one. Number two, they are probably the least decisive group in the State Department I've ever worked with. Finally, they basically don't like anybody else getting involved in the property business. When it comes to property, they want to do everything. And, if you have some ideas, it's the devil to try and get them to listen to you, let alone ever to agree to anything you think makes sense.

Q: I remember back in 1960, they put up some staff housing in Dhahran. And, despite the fact we pointed out the porches of these things were pointed in the direction of the prevailing sand storms. They said, we know better. Of course, there was a big sand pile in front of everybody's door.

HARTER: Yeah. I've already recounted my experience as Consul General in Guangzhou, China where we lived and worked in a construction site. And, going to Hanoi I went through the exact same thing in the office tower we had acquired. There we had no other facilities to use and so we did work in the building while it was being remodeled and adapted to diplomatic use. Moreover, the house we selected as a DCM's residence was a combination of two houses that had to be reconnected. We did most of that work through the owner and FBO didn't get involved in the construction effort there. But there were a lot of construction problems that emerged after we moved in so that we still experienced more construction work around our living space. FBO did not have the DCM property on its radar screen at that time, but it was heavily involved in redoing the Ambassador's residence, one of the building we had acquired from the Vietnamese. It was an historic building that had once housed the Governor of Tonkin, the northernmost of France's three Vietnamese territories. I'm obviously not a big fan of FBO. If there's a way to avoid dealing with FBO during your Foreign Service career, it ought to be avoided. I'd recommend anyone think twice about taking an assignment where you're going to end up having to spend a lot of time working with FBO.

Anyway, the property issue was a critical one and we did not, either during the time I was in the office of Vietnam, Laos Cambodia Affairs or the time that I was in Hanoi, ever come to a satisfactory resolution of the issue. The one property the Ambassador found was really an ideal property, but the Vietnamese were reluctant to agree to this site. It was 25 hectares and much bigger than they had permitted any other countries to have for their missions. Moreover, the Vietnamese by that time were pushing governments interested in opening new facilities to move into a diplomatic enclave they planned to construct outside of town on the road to the airport. We had no interest in that option, nor did anyone else while I was in Hanoi. The property

Ambassador Peterson found would have been large enough where we could have built recreation facilities along with the embassy building as well as some buildings for apartments to house the embassy staff. Otherwise, we would remain at the mercy of a very expensive housing market and most of the property was in the hands of members of the Government and Party elite.

When I was in Hanoi, for example, my residence was running five or six thousand dollars a month. It was a very big residence, ideal for entertaining, and really very nice in that sense. But, it was out of the question to be paying that kind of rent. When my successor, a bachelor, arrived, they dropped my residence. He went into an apartment, a very nice and expansive apartment over-looking West Lake; his apartment was still in the forty-five hundred, five thousand dollar a month rental range.

The property the Ambassador found was a difficult issue for the Vietnamese and FBO wasn't all that crazy about it either. I don't recall their objections, but we all suspected it was because people at the Embassy found the property instead of it being located as the result of an FBO survey. The Ambassador really wanted to get FBO to make a commitment and the senior staff at the Embassy had been kicking him from one end of the post to the other about the problems we were having in the office building we were using. But FBO basically sat on their hands and didn't do much about the issue. That was one of the bilateral negotiating issues that continued to plague people during my time in Hanoi. And, I suspect, although I'm not absolutely certain, it's probably still an unresolved issue today, knowing how long it takes to get things done with FBO.

The assignment then of a Chargé went forward and Desaix Anderson went out and the process then of looking for a new Ambassador was moved up to the forefront. The Department wanted to elevate Desaix, but that was not in the cards. By the fall of 1995, it was very clear that Pete Peterson was the Administration's choice for Ambassador. He was a loyal Democrat, member of Congress from Florida; he'd been a POW for six and a half years; he had a good relationship with other Vietnam veterans like Senator Kerry and Senator McCain and he had good relations with some of the more conservative members who were opponents, like Randy Cunningham. Peterson got along with all of them. He also worked reasonably well with Ann Mills Griffiths and the others among the veterans who were not supportive of normalization. But, he clearly supported normalization and was active on the Hill in tamping down criticism and misconceptions on the part of some of his fellow lawmakers. Peterson's choice was popular with most everyone. Once people met him and had a chance to talk to him they thought he was a good candidate for the job. From a Department perspective, if we were going to get a political appointee, this guy was OK. From the State Department's perspective we would have liked to see a career person like Desaix go there, because there were still a lot of tricky issues to handle. But, Peterson was a sensible, pragmatic fellow and the EAP folks, myself included decided he'd likely do OK. Well, as we talked through the process and the timing, the goal was to get Peterson to Hanoi as early as possible in 1996 and certainly no later than the spring, or early summer of 1996. Then, our idea was to follow his arrival by announcing the opening of the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City toward the latter part of 1996, from September or October to the end of the year.

I went over this timing sequence with Peterson and he agreed the timing made sense. For some time, I had been meeting with him as we proceeded with the final steps for normalization and

afterward we would provide him with material to prepare for his nomination hearings or we'd talk about plans for mission activities. I guess he felt comfortable with my background and work style and he asked me to be his DCM. I told him I would like that. However, based on the assignments schedule, I knew it would be possible for Jim Hall to stay in Hanoi until the early part of 1997. I was scheduled to finish in VLC during the summer of 1996 so I told Peterson I wanted to go to open the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City first. My thought was that Jim could help bridge the transition in Hanoi while I set up the new Consulate General and put that in operation. Then, when Jim departed in January or February of 1997, I would go up to Hanoi as Peterson's DCM. Peterson thought that made sense assuming the State Department agreed it could be done. I got EAP/EX on board and they convinced PER that it made sense based on the timing sequence we had worked out for Peterson's nomination/confirmation and the opening of the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City.

The next step was to get Peterson's nomination on the docket. As his name got floated for nomination on the Hill, somebody with an interest in the Constitution raised a question about whether Peterson as a seated member of Congress could be nominated to be an Ambassador when we've just established relations with the country? The question was posed in connection with Article 1, Section 6 and Article 2, Section 2 of the Constitution. In simple terms, the former says no member of Congress can be appointed to a position he had helped to create while the latter refers to the President's authority to appoint Ambassadors and other high officials. A legal opinion was requested of the Justice Department. I assumed this would be a brief formality and expected no problems. However, after a brief review, the Justice Department concluded the President could not appoint Peterson because he was still a member of Congress and he can't be seen as being appointed to a position that he helped to create." I immediately turned to our Legal Office and Jim Hergen and queried how the Justice Department could reach such a conclusion. What exactly did Justice think was Peterson's role in creating this position?

Q: He was at the Senate.

HARTER: No, he was in the House. Secondly, I argued, this isn't a new position; we've had Ambassadors in Vietnam before. Who did they think Ambassador Bunker was working with except the Vietnamese? I argued further there was never a one Vietnam or a two Vietnam issue involved here. Just because Bunker dealt with South Vietnamese, he was still the Ambassador to the Vietnam we recognized. I brought up the 1954 Geneva Accords, where one Vietnam was temporarily divided in half with subsequent elections to be held to reunify the country. When the elections didn't happen, countries around the world generally recognized one or the other of the Governments that were established in Saigon and Hanoi. But, they all were dealing with Vietnam. I said, "This is a crazy argument it makes no sense." But, Jim Hergen couldn't get the Legal Office to budge because it was unwilling to challenge the Justice Department ruling. I was still upset and took the issue to other offices in the Department, but I struck out with all of them. EAP, Congressional Relations, and the Secretary's office all concluded that we had achieved our objective by normalizing relations and if it took another year before Pete Peterson could become an Ambassador and go to Vietnam so be it. Even though it made no legal sense in terms of our history of Vietnam relations, nobody would challenge the Justice Department. But that decision turned the whole schedule of our next steps upside down and it prevented Congressman Peterson from being named as Ambassador to Vietnam until after his Congressional term ended in

January 1997. That was the second of the unusual circumstances which arose with our normalization of relations with Vietnam.

Q: Well now does the White House, I would have thought the White House would have been interested?

HARTER: They didn't care either. They didn't care because we had normalized relations, and that was the objective. For the White House, the issue was over, it was done with, the rest of the arrangements were just paperwork. The White House didn't care. I said earlier, Tony Lake was ambivalent about the whole idea and for Clinton the goal had been achieved. So that ended it.

From the desk's perspective, however, the whole timetable was now off schedule. We couldn't propose opening the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City without having an Ambassador in place. So, the whole process just drifted. We continued to send people to staff up the office in Hanoi. Since this had been an operation that had been planned for some time, we also had people in the pipeline scheduled to go to Ho Chi Minh City. They were learning Vietnamese or they were in consular training or some other training at FSI. Because we had no office in Ho Chi Minh City, we added them to the staff in Hanoi. Some we lost to other assignments. Those who went to Hanoi didn't have regular assignments or work there so they helped out where they could.

Ambassador Peterson had his hearings and there were no problems on the Hill and he went to Hanoi in the spring of 1997. But, I was also off schedule. I'd finished my two-year assignment as Office Director in the summer of 1996 and Jim Hall was still in Hanoi. So, I was put in Vietnamese language refresher training. Peterson was also there to learn some basic Vietnamese and so we continued to see each other regularly. In the spring of 1997 before he left for Hanoi, Ambassador Peterson told me he didn't think it made any sense for me to go to Ho Chi Minh City. Even if we could open Ho Chi Minh City immediately in the summer, it meant he would be without a DCM for several months and he did not want to do that. He concluded we were going to have to recruit somebody else for that position and that I should plan to go directly to Hanoi. As you well know, the assignments cycle is usually pretty much finished in the first couple of months of the year with everyone moving during the summer months. So, we had to go to PER and try to find out if anyone was available.

PER came up with an officer who had served in Vietnam in the military during the war. He had completed a military career of 20 odd years and retired as a Major. He then joined the State Department and had done ADMIN work, and had a decent ADMIN record. In his most recent assignment, he'd been a DCM in Africa. The Ambassador interviewed him and concluded his Vietnam service background and his service in Korea at least gave him an Asia connection and there was just nobody else even close to that. And that's how we got Charlie Ray assigned to Ho Chi Minh City. He's currently our Ambassador in Cambodia.

The person who was supposed to be the Deputy CG in Ho Chi Minh City was already in Hanoi so we knew we had a little bit of lead time before we dropped him in Vietnam. Thus we arranged to have Charlie start some Vietnamese language training at FSI in the interim. We figured that once we were able to open the Consulate General we could move the people who were over-

complement in Hanoi down there and let the Deputy keep things running on the ground until Charlie had some basic Vietnamese to work with. The Ambassador ended up with a gap at the DCM slot after all, because Jim Hall left earlier than planned and I didn't arrive until late summer. We were still not ready to send people to Ho Chi Minh City and the Ambassador made it clear he still expected me to oversee and manage the set up of the new office. I should point out that opening up the office in Ho Chi Minh City was another of these low-budget/no-budget operations because we really didn't have a functional building to put all these people in. Under the Orderly Departure Program, we had been doing resettlement/immigration interviews for the previous few years in a small building complex that had been part of our pre-1975 property in Ho Chi Minh City. I think it may have been USIA property at one time, but I'm not absolutely sure. This became the hub for our new Consulate General operation and we slowly shoe-horned several more people into an already crowded space while we again went back to FBO --

Q: Did they have the old embassy or not?

HARTER: Oh, yes, the old embassy and its property had been returned to us as part of the property settlement. But, as I said earlier, the old building was in terrible condition and we had long ago decided it was bad symbol to plan on refurbishing it. It would have cost more to try and rebuild it than it would be to tear it all down and start all over again. So, that decision, strangely enough didn't create a great deal of patriotic fervor. Still, whenever we had visitors to Hanoi who intended to stop in Ho Chi Minh City they would invariably ask about the old embassy in the south. The official visitors would come to the Embassy in Hanoi and during their briefings they'd always ask to see the old embassy when they went south.

This was one time when we had some priority attention in the Department for our building needs and EAP was able to get FBO committed to the construction of a new building. But at this time, there was a new wrinkle, FBO claimed they couldn't provide us with all the money needed to set up a classified facility and they proposed we start with an unclassified mission. This had come up some time before, while I was still in Washington, and I argued we should not get into that two-step process. I had already seen how poorly it worked in China in some of the Consulates we opened and I didn't want to see that replicated in Vietnam. Just from a security standpoint, it meant we would be compromising a great deal and I knew as a reporting officer people were going to try to bend the rules. They'd be anxious to get some information reported and they'd say the subject was unclassified just so they could send it directly without having to wait and take a flight to Hanoi and prepare the message there in proper facilities several days later. Moreover, the Department had stopped using the "limited official use" message category so you either said something was unclassified or at a minimum confidential. I thought I had won the argument against the unclassified operation while I was still on the desk, but whatever I thought had been agreed was revisited once we got closer to the actual planning. The Ambassador was talked into the whole idea by our EAP Executive Office and FBO. They guaranteed the new building would be constructed in such a way that we could add a classified floor on top of the new building once there were adequate funds and more people available to be sent to Ho Chi Minh City. So, in addition to having to work in the Hanoi office while remodeling operations were underway, I soon found it necessary to visit the construction site in Ho Chi Minh City from time to time to ensure everything there was on track.

As we were getting the Embassy running, Ambassador Peterson and I discussed how we were likely to be getting a steady stream of visitors seeking to reconnect with the war-time experience and that there was a lot of potential for changing the American mindset about Vietnam. We knew there would be a lot of veterans coming back, official visitors wanting to see what we had just done with normalization of relations, and that over time we would be getting Vietnamese Americans returning to do business, visit relatives, seek connections to what they had lost two decades earlier. These latter groups could end up becoming problems if they could not cope or deal appropriately with the changed circumstances. We decided the best way to handle this was to have a completely open door for dialogue with anyone coming to Hanoi who wanted to stop by and talk to us. Our goal was to bridge that two decade gap with a solid dose of practical discussions about what we and the new relationship were all about. Having a former POW as the Ambassador made just the right image for that sort of dialogue and outreach. Anybody who wanted to talk to us, we'd talk to them. Anybody who wrote and requested a meeting or a briefing, we'd set it up for them. He would meet them or I would meet them and sometimes we'd do it together. We established a country team briefing package that was available to official visitors, providing presentations by all the mission elements. We also decided to be pro-active and go back to the U.S. on a more or less regular schedule a couple of times each year to meet with groups there and discuss our new Vietnam operations. During the two years I was on the desk dealing with normalization, I had started going out and talking to groups in the DC area and around the country about why normalization made sense and how we were continuing to make progress on POW/MIA issues. Before he went out to Vietnam, Ambassador Peterson had also gone around and spoken to a number of different veterans groups and to Vietnamese-American communities. So, we took turns going back to the U.S. to make these presentations in different locales.

When we wrote up our budget EAP was very generous in providing funds for this travel. They gave us enough budget that the Ambassador and I could come back to the United States annually. He sometimes went back more often, because he had to go back to lobby on the Hill when we had other issues to talk about that had Congressional interest. Congress was always interested in having him come back and testify. We periodically then would go back to the United States and travel to a variety of different places, speaking at academic institutions and at conferences. We also specifically targeted concentrations of Vietnamese-American around the country. I used some of the contacts I had from my previous work at VLC and also the contacts that I had from APEC. There was a large Vietnamese community in the Seattle area, in addition to the more well-known ones in California and Houston, Texas. Members of Congress who traveled to Vietnam told me about other groups and so I added trips to the Chicago and New Orleans areas to our more standard stops. On the east coast, in addition to the northern Virginia group, I added Boston and Philadelphia sessions.

Q: What sort of reception were you getting from these groups?

HARTER: It was always mixed. You'd get a lot of people, particularly older people who were still immersed in the war issues and they didn't see any value in dealing with the Communists whatsoever. Many of them thought we were naive and very ill-informed about the Communists' intentions. They exaggerated all of the stories of human rights violations, talking up poor treatment of prisoners and especially prisoners of conscience, mistreatment of ordinary people

who opposed the government. They pointed to Vietnamese Government censorship, the lack of religious freedom, persecution of religious leaders who were trying to advocate greater openness in society. On the other hand, there was another generation of younger people who had come over as infants or ones who had been born and raised entirely in the United States. Most of them were much more open and they were much more interested in learning about their origins and the country that they had come from instead of just listening to the things their parents said. Now that's not to say that there were not also some younger folks who just took on hook, line and sinker the whole story that their parents had said about how terrible the Communists were. This group spouted the same line their parents had and they weren't willing to listen much to what we had to say. But for the most part, the generational difference meant a difference in outlook toward Vietnam.

I remember there was a young Vietnamese woman staffer for Congressman Tom Davis of Virginia and she fell into the group who got her beliefs from the older generation. Ambassador Peterson had convinced Davis to come to Hanoi for a visit since his district included the northern Virginia Vietnamese community centered around the Eden Center which has traditionally been very conservative. Congressman Davis agreed to come and promised to have an open mind about what he was going to see in Vietnam. He brought the staffer with him and she spent the entire time she was there trying to dig up negative stories to report to Davis' constituents in the Arlington area. And Davis, despite his promises to keep an open mind, got back to the States and denounced Hanoi's Government and society in his usual way. Congressman Randy Cunningham from California who was another of Peterson's Congressional friends who had served in the military in Vietnam also promised to come to Vietnam with an open mind and he did go away a lot more positive about things than Davis did. Cunningham was still not a full believer that we were seeing significant changes in Vietnam's behavior and in our ability to work with the Vietnamese but he didn't go all out to criticize them either. He probably didn't feel his re-election depended upon securing a lot of Vietnamese votes the way Davis did.

There were also quite a number of Vietnamese who grown up in Vietnam during the conflict and who later fled to the U.S. who had decided it was better to work constructively with the Vietnamese Government to achieve other objectives. Some of the people who worked the refugee issues or the family reunification issues decided it was better to be friendly and open and to develop a relationship with the Vietnamese government simply to make it easier to gain their refugee and family reunification objectives than it was to keep putting your thumb in the eye of the Vietnamese leaders. So, there were a number of well-respected community leaders, people in their late forties and early fifties who had this particular view and served as a bit of a contrast to the majority of the older generation. On the other hand, the leader of Boat People SOS was in that same age group and he was as rabid and active anti-Communist militant as any of the older generation who had been senior military or civilian leaders in South Vietnam.

On a couple of occasions, at the places I went to speak there were demonstrators and occasionally there were police outside the place I was speaking keeping the demonstrators at the required distance. On one of his first speaking tours, the Ambassador had run into a very vocal group in Orange County, California. The group was so vocal, so bitter and so nasty in their remarks in the auditorium that he could not deliver his remarks at all and he had to walk out. And of course for the negative audience that was a big victory. They had silenced "Hanoi's mouth-

piece.” On many occasions, both of us were referred to as spokesmen for the Hanoi government or “the Communist regime.” Orange County probably was the most rabid anti-Communist, anti-Hanoi, and anti-normalization center in the U.S. Yet while I was in Hanoi, the elder of the two Sanchez sisters, Loretta, who represent that area in Congress visited Hanoi and she was far less doctrinaire about things than Tom Davis was. She didn’t go off half-cocked in Vietnam, but she didn’t pull any punches against Hanoi when she spoke to her constituents in the Vietnamese community in California who kept her in office.

While we were in Hanoi, a youngish Vietnamese businessman hung up a picture of Ho Chi Minh in the window of his video shop in Orange County. That action created a huge furor in the community and demonstrations were held. The young businessman was spat upon and pushed around as he left his store; his car was vandalized, and after hours his store was trashed. He got a certain amount of sympathy and attention from the ACLU and a number of other rights organizations, but then it turned out he was pirating videos in the store and was mass producing video copies of Vietnamese and Western titles that got him on the wrong side of the law. He compounded that by getting arrested on a wife beating charge, so it just turned into a total circus. But, it was one of those stories which demonstrated how very hostile some of these Vietnamese communities were about anything that had to do with Hanoi-run Vietnam.

Q: Well, we live right here within a mile of the Eden Center where I go eat from time to time. They fly the old flag. In many ways, the South Vietnamese flag is still the sort of symbol of Vietnam. It seems from my observance you can’t fly what I call the North Vietnam, I mean the regular Vietnamese flag.

HARTER: Yeah. It’s very difficult to do that, yes.: Well, it’s one of these things that I’m sure everybody on the Vietnam desk groans over, because every time it happens, the Vietnamese government sends the U.S. Embassy a protest and the Vietnamese Embassy calls up the Vietnam Desk at State and says, “What are you going to do about this or what are you going to do about that?” And, it’s usually just impossible to do anything about it, because the flag is flying on private property, it’s most often not an issue the State Department can affect. We’ve had this same problem with China and the Taiwan flag over the years. When I was on the China Desk, I had to deal with local officials in Los Angeles and San Francisco a couple of times over promotions which the authorities had agreed to that featured Taiwan’s flag. And, I had to deal with the old South Vietnamese flag issue when I was the Director on the VLC desk. In fact, on one occasion, the Vietnamese community in Houston had petitioned sub-city authorities for approval to construct a monument which would have included a statue of Vietnamese and American soldiers surmounted by South Vietnamese and American flags and bearing a plaque dedicated to the Vietnamese and American veterans who had “fought together, suffered and died at the hands of the Communist invaders”. This was not just a proposal for an out-of-the-way location, it was designed to be placed on a highly visible thoroughfare on public land and, by the time I learned of it from Vietnamese Embassy officials, the request had already received the sub-city administration’s approval. The Vietnamese Embassy naturally came to me to get this project stopped. I explained to the Embassy officials that all I could do was to point out to the local authorities how this didn’t correspond to our current policy of recognizing and dealing with the Hanoi Government as the Government of Vietnam. I made clear to the Embassy that it was still a local decision and not one the federal government could direct. But, I did make a trip to Houston,

and I did sit down with people in the City Planning Office and I talked to other people in the Mayor's Office. I explained to them all the problems that might occur that would have negative consequences for the city if the memorial was built as planned on public land. As a result the Houston officials got the sub-city officials to change their minds and the proposal for a memorial on public land was abandoned. There was a movement to relocate it on private property but I don't believe that ended up raising much money.

Q: What were the problems if it had occurred?

HARTER: Well, for example, it could affect the Vietnamese willingness to cooperate and deal with business companies based in Houston. Vietnam was an up and coming oil exporting and exploitation site. Houston is a huge oil business center. The Port of Houston could have had problems getting its products or ships into Vietnamese ports. The Vietnamese certainly would not look favorably on Houston as a site for a Consulate. And, as you probably know, there is a little bit of a competition among cities in the United States to get foreign consulates established in their jurisdictions. It is seen as prestigious and more foreign consulates often means greater business connections. But the main argument I made was to get Houston to keep the project off public land. If local people wanted to put up a memorial on private property, the Houston authorities – and the State Department – would be off the hook. Ultimately, that was enough to convince them. The Houston City Government officials decided there had been some irregularities in the original vote to approve this project. The city authorities noted there were other competing community requests to use the public land for youth recreation. These plans would not work well with the installation of a monument and its associated walkways and seating. So, they were able to wiggle their way out of the whole issue. But, ultimately there's virtually nothing you can do to stop people from setting up their monuments, memorials and flags on private property. I shouldn't be so categorical. There's always the possibility you could make an argument about these memorials creating a public nuisance or a disturbance in a residential setting, but that's going to require more lawyers and more court actions to block those activities.

Q: Well, I may have this wrong, but we were talking about the Eden Center which is a big place. They had a ceremony there some years ago and I think some Vietnamese and Vietnamese veterans were there. A Vietnamese guy got quite drunk and urinated on a Vietnamese flag and he was killed. And, they never found out who did it. I mean, it was sort of a wild action.

HARTER: Yes, I remember that incident too. There are a number of Vietnamese-run organizations in this area that work with the disabled or with Indochinese refugees who counted on the Vietnamese community for their support. These organizations traditionally would also petition the U.S. government for funding and support. The groups would hold periodic social meetings and fund-raiser events out at the Eden Center or at some other big restaurant in the area. These events would all feature the South Vietnamese flag up on the wall. The program would start with the participants singing the old South Vietnamese anthem. Many of the attendees would wear their Vietnamese military uniforms and all their decorations and there would be patriotic speeches extolling the virtues of South Vietnam and attacking the communists. And, because the State Department and AID and other U.S. government agencies were all involved in these projects, we would also be invited. When EAP, or Refugee Bureau or

AID officials attended these functions we were often asked to deliver remarks on refugee and aid policies for the Vietnamese community.

Once we normalized diplomatic relations I went to several of these northern Virginia organizations and told their leaders nobody in the U.S. government would be attending any of the fund-raising functions or anniversary celebrations unless the visible links to South Vietnam were dispensed with. There was to be no more South Vietnamese flag on the wall, no more South Vietnamese anthem being played or sung, and no more anti-Hanoi speeches if they expected a U.S. Government representative to participate in the programs. I told them as representatives of the U.S. Government we couldn't attend a program and make a presentation with all of this contradictory material in the background. Nonetheless, I also made clear that whatever their decision about how they dealt with my requirements, I told them we'd continue to provide funds for their organizations because they met our objectives to channel money and programs into resettlement efforts for needy refugees or to help the disabled still in Vietnam. I also didn't try to alter how they conducted their regular business meetings. My concern was the community-wide promotional efforts where they wanted an "official" U.S. presence. For the most part, the organizations in northern Virginia complied and they kept the old regime paraphernalia out of their public events. The flags and uniforms and anthems probably continued as part of the regular meetings and more private gatherings but that wasn't my concern. I just didn't want more arguments with the Vietnamese Embassy about U.S. officials taking part in events that glorified the old regime. I had some objections from a few of the American officials about this policy, but once I discussed it with them they too realized it was no longer appropriate, even if they didn't like the arrangements and had their own hearts tied to the former regime in Saigon.

Now, from time to time when I went out and spoke at meetings of Vietnamese associations around the country I'd get to a place and there'd be the South Vietnamese flag up on the wall, often right behind where I'd stand to speak so it would appear in any photos taken during my remarks. I didn't have any choice about that. I used to advise groups where I was scheduled to speak about not putting up the old flags, but it was difficult to control from long distance. And, of course, many of these organizations needed financial contributions from their local Vietnamese communities to continue to provide social services so it was difficult for them to cut off their base of support. But, I didn't walk out or refuse to speak until the flag was removed. I told people when I got up and spoke that I knew the flag and what it symbolized, and that I too had served under the U.S. flag and alongside that Vietnamese flag during the war. But I also made a point of emphasizing it was not the flag of the Government of Vietnam that we recognized today and I left it at that.

Q: And you were in Vietnam from when to when?

HARTER: Summer of '97 until the summer of 2001.

Q: You initially were working in Ho Chi Minh City?

HARTER: No. I did not go to Ho Chi Minh City at all. Because of the long delay for Peterson's appointment and subsequent arrival in Hanoi, we were too far behind schedule with the opening

of the Consulate General for me to go there first. I was in Hanoi throughout my assignment. But, the Ambassador still put me in charge of getting the mission opened down there and asked me to handle all of the supervision and coordination activities until we actually got a Consul General on the ground. The Foreign Service Officer I had chosen to be the head of the Consular Section in Ho Chi Minh City was also to serve as the number two at the ConGen and she had already been in Hanoi for a few months. She went to Ho Chi Minh City with some of the consular and admin personnel to set up shop in the old interview compound and she held the reins in the interim until the Consul General actually arrived. She was not a member of the Senior Foreign Service, but certainly had a strong consular background and that was clearly going to be the main work for the operations in the south. As we had done with the Consulate General in Guangzhou in China, we centered all of our immigrant visa work in Ho Chi Minh City since all of our likely applicants were based in the southern part of the country. Once the office was open, I generally went down every six weeks or so to see how things were going operationally as well as to keep tabs on any problems that might have developed. During the early phase of operations, the cramped work space and lack of communications created a number of misunderstandings among the people assigned there that required a tempering hand from outside.

The majority of all the people that you're going to deal with for immigrant visas will be in the southern half of the country. But you still needed a Consular Section to cover the north. In Hanoi, the consular officers would provide services for Americans, handle official and diplomatic visas for Vietnamese Government personnel and provide visitors visas, the latter mostly for people who wanted to do business with the United States, and some student visas. But, the senior consular people, the ones with the most experience were assigned to work as unit heads for the Consulate General in the south.

Q: Could you give us a background in the organization of the Mission in Hanoi, main officers, and what you thought were the first problems to approach upon your arrival?

HARTER: When we opened in Hanoi, we committed to bringing in a standard mix of State Department functional elements – consular, political, economic, and administrative officers – and we had United States Information Agency, Foreign Commercial Service, and Defense Attaché personnel from other elements of the Government. The POW/MIA Office continued as a separate Embassy unit apart from the Defense Attaché Office. We also established a Marine Security Guard detachment at the beginning. After a few months, we added a medical doctor from the Center for Diseases Control in Atlanta to coordinate our medical assistance work in Vietnam. AID did not open an office during the initial phase of our set-up and it was only toward the end of my time in Hanoi that we had AID personnel coming into the country on a regular basis preparing to set up a permanent presence. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) personnel went to Ho Chi Minh City once the new building was completed and we were fully operational. The Drug Enforcement Agency did not have an office in Hanoi until later on. I am not absolutely certain, but I don't believe the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) established a presence in Hanoi when the Embassy first opened, but they were there well before I left. After the main Embassy building had been in operation for some time, FCS and FAS leased office space in a separate office facility near the Embassy building. When we took over that space, we also acquired another floor in the building to handle our consular operations. Despite our thoughts we'd need only a limited staff in the north, the volume of student and business visas

quickly surpassed our estimates and the Consular Section daily business activities outgrew the limited Embassy office space. USIA maintained its own separate facility in a more central part of the city.

Operationally, the first priorities for Embassy personnel were focused on making the office building into a functional Embassy. This meant upgrading most of the infrastructure, installing greater support beams to handle additional weight on the various floors. It meant reconfiguring space for public access for the consular unit until we were able to find a bigger facility for them to use. It meant installing all the basic security features needed to meet USG standards. As an office building on a main street, however, we had no setback, no gated entrance, no side or rear perimeter walls above six feet, and only about two or three feet between the perimeter walls and the building on the sides. We built a larger wall with a steel gate in front of the building, but the gate was probably only ten feet from the entrance door. At one point, one of our neighbors built a temporary structure up against our wall and also against our building. FBO and DS ignored our requests to install security barriers against this intrusion and the local authorities were deaf to our requests to have the structure removed.

Another early task required Ambassador Peterson and I to develop working relationships with many members of the Hanoi official community who were less open about the new relationship between our two countries than those we had previously been dealing with in the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Trade. But, by and large our efforts to get into contact with the national government officials went well. It was also very important to keep up momentum on the POW/MIA front. After Ambassador Peterson participated in the first few regular bilateral meetings between the POW/MIA Accounting Office and their Vietnamese counterparts, I regularly attended the scheduled sessions where the planning of future investigations and excavations was worked out. Ambassador Peterson and I also would go out to the excavation sites when the CIL-HI teams were working there and we both were always at the airport repatriation ceremonies when we boarded recovered remains on a U.S. military aircraft to take them back to Hawaii for identification. Our direct involvement in the POW/MIA dialogue often helped to smooth over disagreements and I believe it convinced the Vietnamese that the issue remained a serious one for the U.S. side even though we had achieved normalization of relations.

The biggest bilateral issue we had to deal with was to move from normalization of diplomatic relations to normalization of trade and economic relations. Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam had made this the centerpiece of his own bilateral dialogue with the U.S. When he came to the U.S. for the UN General Assembly session and met with American officials in the mid-1990s up through his dialogues with Warren Christopher in Hanoi after normalization and his first official trip to the U.S. in 1998, on each occasion he pressed for the normalization of economic relations. As a communist country, Vietnam was prohibited from receiving most favored nation treatment without a regular annual waiver of the Jackson-Vanik provisions of the Congressional Trade Act – I think it was from the mid-1970s. These provisions required certification by the President that the country in question permitted freedom of emigration and President Clinton did make that certification for the first time in 1998. Now one would think with the operation of the orderly departure program to facilitate emigration this would not have been a problem. But this again was Vietnam, a war-time enemy, and so nothing was ever very straight-forward and easy to achieve.

But even with the annual waiver, this still didn't get Vietnam Most Favored Nation (MFN) treatment. The trade agreement negotiations were especially difficult because there were very few sophisticated economists in Hanoi who could explain to the old-fashioned communist leadership all of the ins and outs of modern economic principles or trade requirements. Most of these communist leaders saw the capitalist trade system as anathema and so we spent probably two years getting through the basics. We even had an agreement in hand in the summer of 1999 only to have the Vietnamese leadership sit on the agreement for over a year because there was no will to follow through and because we had not pushed the issue effectively. When we finally did reach agreement we still had to get the agreement through the U.S. Congress. Moreover the President's certification of Vietnam's freedom of emigration policies was also subject to Congressional review and so that too had created a few skipped heartbeats each time it came before the Congress. Nonetheless, we did reach an agreement on trade and the U.S. Congress and the Vietnamese National Assembly ratified the agreement and it went into effect at the end of 2001, shortly after I left Vietnam. At least I was there when we signed all the agreements in Hanoi so I was pretty sure everything would be finalized when I did leave the country.

Q: When you got to Hanoi how did you find, first place, how did you find the Vietnamese government, the officials you were dealing with?

HARTER: Well, the people that I was dealing with when I was in VLC and when I first got there were initially all Foreign Ministry cadres. The Foreign Ministry people I was dealing with were all people who had been working on U.S. affairs for a long period of time. Le Van Bang, for example, who moved from their UN Mission down to Washington, DC as Chargé and then became the Ambassador, had been working on U.S. affairs for 20 some years. The head of the America's Department, Nguyen Manh Phong, had been educated in Cuba, had served in Cuba, but aside from one tour in South America, I believe he had spent all the rest of his time in the Foreign Ministry working on the U.S. A number of people who had leadership roles in the America's Department were fluent in English. Some others were not so fluent, but the majority of the folks we dealt with were all people who had been trained in English with the expectation they would move into diplomatic posts in the U.S. once normalization occurred. And of course, as I've mentioned before, we had talked about normalization as early as the late 1970s. And so there was already this momentum within the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry focused on eventual normalization of relations with the U.S. and the Vietnamese maintained it over the intervening decades. Then when it looked like there was going to be a possibility to complete the process in the 1990s as Vietnam gradually wound down its Cambodia adventure they added new people to the mix to build up their cadre base with some younger officers.

But, like the Ambassador, I went around to meet people in a lot of different ministries and government offices. A lot of the people in those offices were very narrowly focused and many had a very limited education. A lot of the "educated" cadres who had Eastern European and Soviet academic backgrounds in what we would consider the social sciences did not have a lot of depth. Their understanding of "western" ways was very limited. The people who had had technical or engineering training, even from Soviet bloc universities, tended to be more open and much more interested in rapidly building up a relationship with the United States. A lot of the people who were more narrowly focused, as well as a lot of the people who had leadership

responsibilities in party organizations were very narrow. There were also different cliques within the leadership. There were groups that were China-leaning; there were groups that were Moscow-leaning; there were groups that didn't want to have much to do with either China or Russia. But even those who were less ideologically-inclined remained very leery of us and very leery of what might come of a relationship with the U.S. Anything we did or proposed to do with the Vietnamese was always viewed with suspicion by traditionalist Party leaders. That group was also suspicious of any Ministers who were more open to western ideas and that's why we had so much difficulty with the Trade agreement. Nonetheless, even the old fashioned cadre shared the view the U.S. relationship was the key to modernizing the Vietnamese economy.

Once we had normalized relations, I believed it was important to keep up the semblance of momentum in the relationship. I was concerned once we normalized relations, most people in the Clinton Administration would have been just as happy to focus on entirely different issues and it would have taken us forever to get things done with Vietnam. So, right after normalization, I took advantage of the planned Asia travel of Secretary of State Christopher to attend the annual ASEAN dialogue meetings as an excuse to get him to Hanoi. Working with the Vietnamese Chargé, we worked out a "document" for Secretary Christopher and Foreign Minister Cam to sign which "formalized" the establishment of diplomatic relations. It wasn't necessary to do this but it was one of those things that we used to call a "deliverable", something you did which made the trip worthwhile because it created a symbol of activity and accomplishment. You'll recall I said the opening of the Consulate General in Guangzhou, China was a "deliverable" for Vice President Mondale. Nobody was quite sure how the relationship was going to evolve and on the U.S. side the only thing certain was everything was going to continue to move incrementally – find a building, send a chargé, find an Ambassador, wait to get him nominated and approved, etc, etc. So on the occasion of Christopher's visit, the head of the America's Department and I stood behind the two Foreign Ministers and passed the books for them to sign on the establishment of diplomatic relations and we had a very nice photo opportunity and a document to add to the normalization files in the Department. I don't think the photo got a lot of play in the U.S., but the signing shot was part of the Vietnamese History Museum's display of activities in the normalization of relations with the U.S. and it remained in a prominent display area in the Museum for a number of years.

I got off on this digression because I was talking about the trade issue and how it was important to the Vietnamese. During Christopher's visit, Foreign Minister Cam made the trade relationship issue the focal point of his discussions with the Secretary. And the trade dialogue became one of the momentum issues we were able to use to keep up a semblance of forward movement during the period when we only had Chargés in the two capitals.

Q: What were you observing there? You're saying that many of the ministers and people from the cadre looking with great suspicion on diplomatic or no diplomatic relations and the process of Americanization. You know, the jeans, the Coke, the clothing...

HARTER: When I got there, Baskin-Robbins (ice cream franchise) was already there – it had three locations inside Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Kentucky Fried Chicken was there. Baskin Robbins closed in Hanoi after only a short time, but I think KFC was still in HCMC when I left. McDonald's hadn't yet entered the market because they couldn't work out a steady domestic

supply chain of acceptable beef and potatoes.

Q: Young people, well attuned to everything? Had the pirated movies and --

HARTER: Yeah, the movies were there, but they all came from China. The Vietnamese had not yet fully subscribed to what the Chinese called “reform and opening” of the economy. They were still far more conservative than the Chinese. In the early 1990s, the Vietnamese made a few steps toward opening up but they quickly retreated. After normalization with the U.S., they again took some tentative steps but they again pulled back. Vietnam had another handicap, and that was in limited computer literacy and computer use. During the normalization era, say 1995 through 1997 or 1998, there still wasn’t much evidence of computers in the government or even in businesses and schools. It was 1999 and 2000 before you started to see more widespread use of computers, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City.

The country was also security conscious. We regularly had problems with the Public Security Ministry. The Ministry wanted to be involved in the decision-making process about how we operated in the country. Our Embassy people were being watched and followed and there was occasional harassment. Embassy local hire personnel were employed by the Vietnamese Government Services Bureau and they had to attend meetings and report on what U.S. personnel did in the Embassy. Some of us, I suspect, probably were monitored all the time. There were probably monitoring devices directed at our building from outside and we could see someone sitting in a building across the street from us watching our building. He sat in the shadows of a doorway on the second floor of that building and just watched.

One of the big issues for the Embassy in Hanoi, much as it is elsewhere in the world, was to get our officers out into the country to talk to people and find out what was going on. In Hanoi, it was a little bit different because we were coming in cold or out of the cold after a long hiatus with no exposure to the Vietnamese people or the country. And while to a certain extent we were a “novelty”, we were also potentially a “hazard” because somebody was likely to follow up on wherever we went and whomever we talked to to see what we had asked about.

The Ambassador led the charge to get out and to be seen around the country. He set a goal of visiting all of Vietnam’s 63 provinces and provincial level cities. He may have missed four or five before he departed. Because he did so much travel, I didn’t get out to the provinces very often, except when I traveled to MIA excavation sites. I’d occasionally go to one of the resort or tourist areas, so I did get to Nha Trang, Hue, and Da Nang in the south, and Haiphong, Sapa and Ha Long Bay in the north. I spent most of my time out of Hanoi working with the staff in Ho Chi Minh City. I made sure we had a good travel budget from EAP so that our political and economic officers could get out and travel. Most of these people were language officers and some of them were fluent in Vietnamese. A few were older officers who had been in Vietnam during the war and had Vietnamese spouses. Some of the younger officers had been doing refugee interviews in Ho Chi Minh City during the early days of orderly departure and they knew the language of the streets. Virtually everybody had some level of FSI Vietnamese training before coming to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Overall the officers assigned there were top notch.

Q: Did some from the street scene, which was seen in society in Hanoi and what you would see in Ho Chi Minh City, was there distinct contrast or not?

HARTER: Oh yes, there was definitely a contrast. In Hanoi, you still had a much more rigid, less open society. You had the start up of small businesses, street-side stalls and houses where the ground floor had been converted into shops with the owners engaged in some commercial enterprise. This was part of the Vietnamese economic modernization effort which permitted individual “capitalist” enterprise activity. In the South, you had private factories; you had large scale trading businesses; you had real entrepreneurial creativity and not just the basic, start-up street-stall or shop-house. You had a much more freewheeling and open society and people who sought out restaurants and places for entertainment and recreation. There was more money from business activity. And, very importantly, there were large amounts of remittances from Vietnamese relatives overseas. These remittances created a cash and investment flow that sped up that economic activity in the south. The south was also more prosperous agriculturally than the north. The north had some raw materials and a mining, extraction industry component which the south lacked until there was some development of the oil industry. But basic food supply for the population was a problem in the north and it was virtually never a problem in the south. Even if you had terrible floods and damage from typhoons, the southern provinces could still maintain self-sufficiency in foodstuffs. Subject to similar natural phenomena, the north was in crisis and even in the best of harvest years it had to count on the southern provinces for food staples. In the south, there was a more open appreciation and response to the presence of foreigners, not just Americans, but everybody. You had the opportunity to be more socially engaged with people. People were much more willing to initiate a conversation or to respond to questions about general issues and problems. There were occasionally people in the north who would do the same, but that was not very common.

One of the things that I tried to do while working in the Embassy was to identify a few people in responsible positions and different parts of the Vietnamese Government I could go to and talk to in an “off-the-record” manner to try to prep them on issues or to get a feel from them how certain actions might be perceived. I’d go in to a couple of these people and say “Look, we’ve got a potential problem coming up in our relationship. I need you to make sure that people on your side understand the U.S. approach and where we’re going with this proposal or what’s going to happen, or I need to get a feel for how you think the Vietnamese authorities will react to such and such.” There was a person I could talk to like this in the Office of the Government who proved to be especially important in this regard. The Office of the Government was an Executive Secretary type of office for the Prime Minister with a combined NSC and domestic policy focus. It provided policy advice and recommendations for the Prime Minister based on its own research work and on its tasking of various ministries for information. The Prime Minister in Vietnam held a much more important power position than the President. So, I used this contact to go back and forth on issues of importance.

I also dealt with a person in the Foreign Ministry in the same way. He looked at overall foreign policy issues, and another person in the America’s Department of the Foreign Ministry who I could meet with and give him a heads-up on an important bilateral issue that was about to break just to see how we could make sure it didn’t disrupt our relations and mutual understanding. I tired very hard to establish the same kind of contact with a military man in the Public Security

Ministry but he was much more elusive and very hard to pin down. I probably met with him alone on only two or three occasions during my entire tour. I suspect he had to be more cautious because of the Ministry he worked in. And, I occasionally met with another individual who was primarily a contact for other people in the mission, but he was still someone I could go to in that same vein and say, "You have a different set of contacts and different set of people that you work with, how is this going to play, or we've got a real problem coming up, what do you think?"

I found that using this informal system of contacts and pre-emptive discussion of potential problem issues did help to lessen misunderstandings and limit Vietnamese over-reaction to some of our activities. This was particularly important when we were dealing with the visit of President Clinton to Vietnam. I knew from previous experience there were certain things the White House staff would cram down our throats in terms of how they wanted things done and how they expected the Vietnamese to handle certain requirements. I was able to use this informal contact arrangement and go to a couple of key Vietnamese officials and say, "Look, you don't like this plan, I don't like it either, and a lot of us think this is a silly arrangement, but this is the only way "they" will let it happen – we just have to do it this way, because "they" (they being the White House staff) will not take no for an answer." I mean that's one of the reasons I guess the Clintons' visit was as successful as it was. By going through this back channel, I was able to make the Vietnamese understand that ultimately they didn't have a choice on how certain scenarios would play out if they wanted the visit to take place. Obviously, there were other issues where the Vietnamese wanted certain things to be done a certain way that we were able to compromise on. These were issues considered unimportant by the White House and by agreeing to those conditions when they were proposed by the Vietnamese it made it seem as though there was a bit of a balance.

Q: We're talking about Secret Service stuff aren't we?

HARTER: Well, no. Some of the issues involved the Secret Service, and their security requirements, but some of it is just -- it's the whole play of events and how they would be organized and how White House staff wanted to manage just about every phase of every activity. For example, one of President Clinton's events was a public address to the Vietnamese people, just like he had done in China on his first visit there. Embassy Hanoi sold this idea to the White House and the Washington bureaucracy. So, it was in the Embassy's interest to make sure it would work, even though the Vietnamese were really very, very hesitant about agreeing to his making the speech. But, after a lot of negotiating on how and where it would happen, the proposal worked. The President addressed a group of students at a prominent university and the speech was broadcast throughout the country – unlike in China where it did not go beyond the immediate auditorium audience. We worked through all the problems and the speech came off well and the Vietnamese in the end were not unhappy with it.

But in spite of all our efforts to create this opportunity to communicate with ordinary people, there was still a major screw-up as the speech was delivered in a language that most Vietnamese didn't understand. Language Services in the Department assigned a stateside interpreter to go along with the President, rather than rely on the Vietnamese-American interpreter we had in Hanoi. The interpreter in Hanoi was a State Department Language Services employee assigned

to work with the Ambassador, just the way we had an interpreter working with our Ambassador in China. The man Language Services assigned to interpret for the President had virtually no experience dealing with the language then being used in Vietnam. His terminology was all wrong and he used old language styles common to the wartime era in the south. He didn't know the current northern terminology and he spoke in the southern dialect. This created a negative reaction among a lot of people when they heard the President's speech. The university audience and the majority of the Vietnamese, all born since the end of the war, did not understand a lot of the words he used and older people were unhappy that he was using the old terminology.

Vietnamese officials were originally upset by this but because we had worked on this issue for so long in advance of the visit, we had permission to distribute a printed version of the speech – something which again the PRC officials had not permitted for Clinton's China speech – and we made sure the printed version of the speech was translated by our interpreter at the Embassy. The Vietnamese Government left this arrangement entirely to us and there was no effort to censor or alter the speech. Once the text of the speech was out in print, the initial negative public reaction faded and the overall impression of the Clinton remarks was highly favorable.

Now, in fairness to Language Services, part of the problem was because the White House made the final call. The Ambassador's interpreter had been pulled into an earlier one of the President's bilateral meetings with no forewarning and somebody on the White House staff didn't like the way the translation activity worked out at that meeting. So, White House staff said, "we're going with our guy (the Washington interpreter) for the President's speech." The Ambassador never had a chance to tell the President or the staff why that was not a good idea. So, even with your best organized plans, with your best intentions, things can sometimes get messed up. In the end Language Services agreed with us, they should have been more attentive to the language differences and they instituted a plan to train their Vietnamese-language interpreters to better handle the current language. Fortunately too, as I said, the initial audience negative reaction quickly became a positive one once the speech text was widely circulated.

Q: Well, as long as it's terrible, I mean it's something we have all run into and that is after you have an expatriate community the language changes and people start picking, I mean it just doesn't sound right.

HARTER: No. To start with there is a distinct Northern and a distinct Southern pronunciation of the language. There's a whole different vocabulary set for a communist political and economic system. The U.S.-based interpreter had missed out on a 25-year evolution of his native language and he simply didn't know the current patois. Our interpreter in Hanoi experienced this same situation when he arrived to work for the Ambassador. He started out using the wrong words and some people were offended. Some of the people in the Foreign Ministry explained to him what was wrong and he adapted. He studied the new terminology and listened to the way the people in Hanoi spoke. When Clinton arrived, he'd already had a couple of years experience under his belt, but the fellow assigned from Washington to go on the trip came in cold and was at a terrible disadvantage which he didn't seem to recognize.

Q: Did you while you were there, I would think that this, you're talking about the rather rigid orthodox, nomenclature or whatever you want to call it of the governing party you brought up

and strictly sort of Marxist principles and all. But changes have swept through Russia, Eastern Europe, China, I mean Marxism was no longer even an issue. And, here is Vietnam with a very clever; I mean these are not passive people as we all know. What was happening there? Were they questioning and asking you or anybody?

HARTER: When we were there, the top leaders were still the war-time generation leaders. The people who were in Hanoi and the party, in the government, in the military, those top people were all first generation war-time leaders. They were Ho Chi Minh's lieutenants; they were Ho Chi Minh's comrades-in-arms. The Prime Minister, Vo Van Kiet, had been the head of the underground political movement in the South. The most well-know Hanoi military leader, General Vo Nguyen Giap, who defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu and then developed the strategy to oust the Saigon regime was still alive, but he was actually becoming an outspoken critic of Party orthodoxy. He was generally kept out of sight. But, the military who had been commanders of the brigades and divisions that had launched the invasion of the South were the current military leaders. Party General Secretary Do Muoi, Presidents Le Duc Anh and Tran Duc Luong, and Prime Ministers Vo Van Kiet and Phan Van Khai all represented the war-time era.

The first change in office from this war-time leadership was the election of a man who turned out to be an absolute disaster as the Party General Secretary. Le Kha Phieu was from the security apparatus of the Vietnamese military. He was from the commissar or party side of the military. He started out trying to cultivate an image of openness for the Party and after his selection he went out to meet people around the country. He asked questions about issues of interest to the people in the cities and the countryside and he tried to appear sympathetic and understanding. But in no time, you could see he was totally insecure and uncertain about himself and he became more and more isolated within the leadership. Neither the Party nor the Government seemed capable of making a decision on policy issues with him in charge.

The Party and Government decision-making process had been in the hands of a collective leadership, but one in which the top leaders were expected to carry more weight than others. Le Kha Phieu carried no weight at all. He was clearly a last-minute fill-in as General Secretary because the collective leadership could not come to a decision on how to balance the two competing power blocs in the leadership, which one traditionally categorized as the modernizers and the ideologues. While the ideologues had kept the modernization process moving ahead at a very slow pace during the leadership of Do Muoi, under Le Kha Phieu things seemed to stagnate. The Vietnamese could not make concrete decisions to do much of anything. The foreign business community was totally frustrated. The U.S. and European governments who were trying to deal with the Vietnamese government on development assistance and the World Bank which was committing large amounts of money to assist the Vietnamese in developing modern economic institutions and some development projects were just running their heads into brick walls.

The international financial institutions (IFIs) had a major effort underway in Vietnam to assist in modernizing the economic operations and organizations in the country. The man who represented the group at large was the Vietnam Country Director of the World Bank. He believed the Vietnamese would not respond to criticism, so all he did was say how wonderful the Vietnamese were working at reforming the economic system and then suggesting a few tweaks here and there that might make it better. The donor community, the nations who put up the

money that was provided for the Bank and other IFI groups, was increasingly frustrated, and both the Ambassador and I were very outspoken in these donor gatherings about how things were not just fine and that the Vietnamese were not getting anywhere on instituting reform measures. The Vietnamese happily basked in his praise but nothing was getting done. Money that had been allotted for projects years before was still unspent because the Vietnamese couldn't make decisions on finalizing the projects. Projects that were being identified as clear targets for infrastructure development and for which there was money, didn't get started on time. No decisions were made. I talked to a friend of mine a month ago about what he's been doing recently in Vietnam. He is a consultant to a big U.S. engineering firm. He said he's still working to try and get a portion of a World Bank funded hydro-electric power grid in the northern part of Vietnam for his company. That project should have been underway in 2000. It was postponed time after time, perhaps half-a- dozen different times between 2000 and 2001, while I was still in Vietnam. The Vietnamese leaders decided the first plan created a dam that was too big. They said they wanted something smaller. Then the next design was judged to be too small – it ought to be something in between the two previous designs. First it was an issue of the large dam creating too big of a flooded area behind the dam so that too many people would be displaced and too many hectares of land would be swallowed up by the man-made lake. Then there was a concern that the smaller version wouldn't produce enough electricity, even though all of this was being created against an estimated “potential demand” inside Vietnam and a good part of the project was initially being designed to provide electricity that would be sold in neighboring Laos. There was always a reason, there was always an excuse not to do anything and to put off making the decision. And, now here we are in 2004, and my friend is still working on getting a share of a project that should have been decided on and launched four years ago and now should already be producing electricity. This exemplified how the Vietnamese weren't, and in some cases still haven't been, making decisions.

Q: What was happening in the universities? One, did we have much contact with them and was sort of, the dead hand of Marxism dominating?

HARTER: The “dead hand” was there in the universities, but it really wasn't that pervasive. The schools and the universities were really teaching in a much more open way. The focus was on technology and economics without the Marxist interpretations. A lot of U.S. institutions, European institutions had come in and established relationships with various universities in Vietnam. They sent teachers and professors and they even sent students to the Vietnamese institutions. U.S. and European universities accepted Vietnamese students for extended periods of time. The schools in the south were also much more open than those in the north. The academics and students from abroad said they had the feeling they were involved in a more technological, more modern society than you would otherwise expect from what you saw day to day on the streets. Yes, they still taught the old ideology, Marxism and Communism classes and they talked about the role of the state in directing the economic operations of the nation. But, in fact the rest of what they did in the classrooms was pretty open. There wasn't much of a focus on Western literature or Western social sciences, but you still had a lot of programs focused in the technical areas, and on modern business practices and economic theory, and these elements opened up still more opportunity to learn about the Western world. That was very, very prevalent in schools. I mean, we had a lot of kids at the Embassy, and I say kids, because these were people who came to work at the Embassy and at the Consulate General who were in their 20s.

Most were high school graduates and some were college graduates who were very much more flexible and more open in the way they reacted to everything. They were curious, inquisitive about the kinds of things that were going on in the rest of the world. They saw working at the Embassy as an opportunity to learn more and to get a better understanding of what had been happening outside Vietnam. They didn't have any experience or direct impressions of the war and they were very certainly not looking backwards, they wanted to move ahead.

Q: The computer and the internet has become so prevalent almost everywhere.

HARTER: Yeah, and that was to be the case in Vietnam, certainly much more so after 2000-2001.

Q: I mean, this is almost the last barrier. I mean once it gets fully integrated into a system, it's very difficult to --

HARTER: But, see the Vietnamese had controls, even more effective and stringent than the ones used by the Chinese. They had official nets that filtered and screened all of the material that was available and restricted what was accessible before it got to the audience at the computer terminal. There were a very limited number of opportunities to go beyond the controlled net. Now, I know people at the embassy who said with a little bit of expertise you can get around anything. And, with a little bit of, you know, fooling around you can get around the firewalls and into the restricted sites. But, a lot of people didn't have their own computers. People went to cyber cafes or small shops to access store computers. The few times I went into cyber cafes or went into shop houses, I saw more people playing games and sending e-mails than actually studying and using the computers as a vehicle for learning. So, while yes internet use and access was growing and there was more opportunity to use it, the internet was still not the big revolution in Vietnam that it was in other parts of the world until the time I was about to leave Vietnam in 2001.

Q: How about employment?

HARTER: Employment was still largely government-controlled, but more and more people were able to go out and seek work on their own. Employment was an issue that the Embassy had to deal with right from the beginning. As in most communist societies, the government wanted us to hire people through them and their labor exchange, the Services Bureau. Initially the first few people we took, we did hire that way, because we didn't have time to go out and interview. But, as soon as that first batch was in and we got our first American staff organized, we started recruiting directly. We went out and we negotiated contracts with the individuals. We did not negotiate contracts with the State labor office. After I arrived in Hanoi, I spent a lot of time arguing with the Vietnamese security folks and those who ran the Services Bureau. Our Admin team dealt day-to-day with the official labor office and their security people, but every time it came down to the issue of signing the labor contract, I was the heavy. I would go to the meeting with the Vietnamese officials and tell them we were not going to hire exclusively through them. We agreed we would interview the applicants they recommended but we would not commit to hire any of them in advance. In addition, we couldn't stop the Vietnamese Government from requiring the people we hired to join their official labor unit, the Services Bureau, but we

categorically refused to be forced to hire people from that labor unit to start with. Most of the employees at the Embassy and the Consulate General were individuals who applied directly to work for us when we advertised openings in the local media.

I also began a process to turn our Vietnamese local hire employees in a different direction. I began by organizing the Vietnamese employees of the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and later those at the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City into an employees association. Our first group of employees in Hanoi had put together a sort of a welfare association to provide mutual assistance to one another when individuals had financial problems. I expanded their focus so they could meet with me to deal with their interests as Embassy employees. They could talk about job mobility, wages and salaries, supervisory relationships. Then I took it a step further and started discussing their relationship with the Labor Department and the Services Bureau. I explained how we would deal with those offices for them and how we would protect them if they had problems with those units. Chris Runckle had started the first local employees selling Liaison Office Hanoi T-shirts as a way of earning money for their welfare association. I got them to expand this to coffee mugs and other Embassy Hanoi labeled items which were always a big seller with delegations and visitors to the Embassy.

I took that same idea from Hanoi and went down to Ho Chi Minh City where we had five times as many local employees and created the exact same type of organization. Strangely enough, in more liberal and open Ho Chi Minh City it took more time down there to convince people to create the association because they were actually concerned about how the Government would react to this sort of an organization. They hadn't created their own internal welfare organization and so I had to convince them to start that as the first stage. Once I convinced them it made sense to have a way to deal with employee emergency situations, the rest of the idea gradually coalesced and they too formed a more broadly focused organization. By the time I left, the two associations were working together. In addition, I got the more activist Hanoi employees to go out and liaise with their counterparts in other embassies in Hanoi. I urged them to organize among themselves for mutual support whenever there were different disputes or contentious issues with the Services Bureau. I then met with a number of other DCM-equivalent officials in the bigger embassies to create a dialogue on labor issues that affected all of us. The dialogue group included the Australians, the Canadians and Brits, the French, and the Dutch, and I talked with them about creating a new labor hiring operation that was independent of the government. Once they got into the idea of the association and its potential as an advocacy group for better employment conditions under the Vietnamese Labor Bureau, the Ho Chi Minh City employees became even more aggressive than the employees in Hanoi. Our Ho Chi Minh City employees went out and made the connections with the other locally hired Consulate staff and they started a similar dialogue there to the one I had begun in Hanoi.

Q: Well, I would have thought that the Vietnamese government would have stepped right in and squashed it.

HARTER: They didn't, or at least they didn't do it effectively. They tried to intimidate people, but they did so with old fashioned methods that people weren't going to put up with anymore. Society had changed enough so that their intimidation effort wasn't effective and it only built resentment against the government. The local employees were not afraid to step up and say no

when the government pushed in a direction they did not want to move. This didn't happen immediately. It took time. I told the people in Ho Chi Minh City about the Hanoi T-shirt operation and pushed them to do the coffee cup design, pointing out how there would quickly be far more American visitors in the Ho Chi Minh City area than there would be in Hanoi. And, they did it and soon they were making a good deal of money for their employees' welfare association. Once they saw the benefit they could derive from working together, the Ho Chi Minh City employees really got into the whole idea of developing their own employee related initiatives.

Q: What was your relation with the other major embassies? I'm thinking of the French. I would have thought the French would have wanted to jump in with both feet. They'd been there the whole time.

HARTER: The French were a little bit of a problem in the diplomatic corps, but they had great Bastille Day affairs. The first French Ambassador Peterson and I dealt with was "old school". He was an older fellow, with white hair, and very dignified. His successor was younger, but more pompous than his predecessor, and very full of himself. His goal was to demonstrate that France was still an important player in Vietnam and a first-rate world power. While we were there, he organized a Francophone summit meeting in Hanoi. It was hilarious the way things worked out. All of the various Francophone countries sent their top leaders for several days and it demonstrated to the Vietnamese just how bad a big state visit could be. There were 30 or 40 different heads of government at this meeting. And, of course, it was de rigueur they had to do everything in French. But, the Vietnamese hadn't been doing much of anything in French since the 1950s. At the famous Metropole Hotel, an old-fashioned French owned and managed hotel in Hanoi, the story was the only person the French speakers could converse with was the General Manger because he was the only one who spoke French. Of course, he was the only one there who was French. So, the Embassy and the Metropole instituted a crash language program to train all of the employees to be able to say a few basic phrases in French. Every time a foreigner came into the hotel, someone tried to practice their French but few people understood them. As soon as the summit ended, all of the French phrases and greetings disappeared at the Metropole and people went back to speaking English and Vietnamese.

To give you a better idea of how little the language was in use, a Vietnamese newspaper in Ho Chi Minh City published an article about the number of students studying French. According to the paper, there were 140 junior high school students in Ho Chi Minh City studying French, all of whose French studies were paid for by the French Government. By contrast, as the paper pointed out, there were several tens of thousands of students studying English, most of whom were paying to study English in special language institutes. The U.S. didn't run any special language program in Ho Chi Minh City or in Hanoi except occasionally to provide some teaching materials. Our USIA team would also work with the various educational institutions to assist them in setting up their programs by providing advice and directing them to US academic institutions for other support and exchanges.

But, the French were really very adamant about creating the image of a strong bilateral relationship between France and Vietnam. The most useful Francophone Summit contribution to the city came from the French Canadians who contributed a lot of signage that went up around

Hanoi. It was really very helpful, because it was in French and English and Vietnamese. And, it basically enabled a visitor to find any of the major places you might want to get to in the city. But, overall the Francophone Summit was a laugh, except for the monstrous traffic jams it produced. There were 30 to 40 heads-of-government motorcades running from one part of the city to the other with everybody flying their national flags and all trying to move from a handful of big hotels to a central conference point and back during the day. The French Government brought in a fleet of Peugeot automobiles to help the Vietnamese handle all the VIPs. Before the summit got started, the French and the Vietnamese authorities ran practices moving the motorcades in the city and, sure enough, the first day they were practicing, they had a huge traffic accident and three or four of the Peugeots were totaled in downtown Hanoi. The French left most of the Peugeots behind as a gift, so the Vietnamese Government did get some benefit. But, I'm convinced the biggest "learning experience" was in giving the Vietnamese a little bit of a feel for the kind of circus you have when the U.S. President comes to town for a visit.

Actually, I was quite fortunate in my relationship with the French. The DCM, Paul Jean-Ortiz, had been my counterpart as French Consul General in Guangzhou. We had consulted each other frequently in Guangzhou and we worked very well together in Hanoi as well.

Q: What about while you were in there was there a significant number of Vietnamese who had left Vietnam coming back to visit families and all that?

HARTER: Yes, there were a lot of them coming back, but not as many, of course, coming back to the north. Most of the U.S.-linked overseas Vietnamese had their family ties in the south.

Q: What was the impact of that?

HARTER: There were some problems. But, by and large everybody seemed to get along pretty easily. Even while I was still in Washington, there were always older Vietnamese-Americans saying, "Oh, the only way you can get into Vietnam is to put a twenty-dollar bill in your passport when you get up to the immigration window and then everything's OK. You'll get your entry stamp and they'll let you go about your business." Well, that was nonsense, but quite a few Vietnamese actually did it. Like every country, the Vietnamese had their hit lists and they closely scrutinized people who came back to the country, particularly those people who didn't just gravitate to Ho Chi Minh City or one of the other big cities like Da Nang, Nha Trang or Hue. People who were going into the Highland areas of the south were given closer scrutiny. Occasionally when someone returned from abroad the Vietnamese trotted out "crimes" that had occurred in the past and the people were detained. We had one such situation in one of the Mekong delta cities where an individual Vietnamese-American was detained by the military. I can't remember exactly how we learned about this detention, but it was certainly via the typical backhand way you find out about these situations. In spite of our consular agreement requirements for prompt notification in the event of a national's arrest, the Vietnamese by and large didn't notify us. So, you find out about an arrest or detention through a family friend or a friend of a friend who comes in or writes to the Embassy and informs you someone's been arrested. Or, some relative in the United States says so-and-so went somewhere in Vietnam and hasn't been heard from – though they usually add they believe the person is being detained in some specific location. So, you go through this whole process of investigation with the

Vietnamese authorities trying to locate a missing American. And, 99 times out of a hundred, yes the friend's story or the relative in the U.S.'s information turns out to be accurate. In this particular case, the man had been detained directly by a military unit and the civilian side of the government didn't know anything about it. After the Consular Section got nowhere with the Consular Department of the Foreign Ministry and I got nowhere on a follow-up visit, I went to the Americas Department. But they backed up the Consular Department and said they had no information on the case. I then turned to my contact in the Defense Ministry, and, after some time, he arranged for me to meet with a more senior Defense official. Initially, the meeting produced another denial. The senior military man said "We don't know anything about this and you shouldn't be talking to us in the first place. You should talk to the Foreign Ministry, we don't have anything to do with this." Well, it turned out in fact they did have something to do with it. Several days later, I was called back to the Defense Ministry and the official told me the missing Vietnamese had been detained by a local unit and they supposedly had not informed other local or national government authorities. This supposedly explained the lack of information about the case in the Foreign Ministry or elsewhere in Hanoi. According to the Defense Ministry official, the local unit claimed this young man, his brother and father had killed people when they stole a boat to escape from Vietnam. The unit, part of the Vietnamese Navy, claimed this Vietnamese man was going to go on trial for robbery and murder. The Defense official concluded this was a heinous crime and I should not get involved in the issue because this individual deserved to be punished by the Vietnamese courts.

Nonetheless, I went back to the Foreign Ministry with the story and complained about notification and access and they promised to work on the case, though they too by then had learned enough to suggest this individual was going to be tried and likely sentenced to a considerable time in jail. Perhaps only a week later the Vietnamese-American in question showed up at the Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. He said he was getting ready to go home and that the whole issue in the delta with the military had been "no problem." As he explained it, it was only a question of getting some money to the right people and the whole case was dropped. He further explained that the local military authorities demanded something like \$150,000 or some such astronomical amount of money. The Vietnamese man said he kept talking the issue over with the authorities and he gradually got the local authorities to keep lowering the figure in question -- I think it finally was six or seven thousand or eight thousand dollars, something like that. The man was allowed to contact his family and friends in the U.S. and he got the money into the country and paid it to the local naval unit. Good to their end of the bargain, the Vietnamese Navy unit released him and canceled the prospective trial. The man seemed to think nothing of his experience and told our Consulate officers "I'm going to come back next year with my brother and my father." I told the Consular officers to tell him he was out of his mind to do so and that he shouldn't even think about doing that because the Vietnamese unit could decide to arrest the other family members for the same reasons just as they had arrested him. But, whether he or they returned or not I don't know, I never heard anything further about this particular story. One thing I'm more certain of is our "interference" in the process probably cost the local navy unit some of its US dollar payment. Once the higher authorities were made aware of the issue, I'm sure they also collected a share of the funds the Vietnamese American deposited with the local officials.

This was a particular Vietnam war-connected issue. But, by and large, the problems we had with

Vietnamese-Americans or non-Vietnamese Americans were the kinds of problems you'd have in any American Citizens Services case file abroad. A couple goes abroad and they fight the same way they do at home and maybe there's an injury or a death involved. People get drunk and disorderly. People get into fights or get beat up on the street and robbed. These situations happen anywhere abroad. There was one situation involving American males in the south that was worrisome. We thought there might have been a gang operating in Saigon, giving people lethal injections after they robbed them. We had two or three people between their 30s and 50s who wandered out of a bar area in the city and were later found dead quite far away, suggesting they had been deliberately taken elsewhere. I don't recall the Vietnamese authorities solving this case, so I can't tell you whether anyone ever determined what happened or who was responsible.

In general, I think the Vietnamese-Americans tended to be pretty cautious. The younger ones who knew about Vietnam from their parents and elders started out being very circumspect because they'd grown up hearing how bad the communists were. The older Vietnamese arrived with that fear of being detained and they tried to make sure they didn't attract any unwanted attention. With all of the anti-communist rhetoric in the Vietnamese communities abroad, surprisingly you didn't have people coming back and trying to pass out anti-communist propaganda materials. Sure, sometimes people were detained because they were found with anti-communist literature when their baggage was screened but rarely did you have to visit somebody in jail who had been actively spreading the anti-communist message. There was one notable exception to this generalization. One Vietnamese-American who had flown over Cuba a few years earlier dropping anti-communist material turned up in Vietnam during President Clinton's visit. And, he did the same thing he'd done in Cuba. He hired a plane in Cambodia and flew over Ho Chi Minh City to drop his material. Well, the Vietnamese got him and put him in jail awaiting trial and more than a few Vietnamese considered this something that we actually intended. Embassy and Consulate officials spent a lot of effort over the next several months trying to convince the Vietnamese to let him go so we wouldn't have him as a long-term prison case. Eventually, we were successful in getting him out of the country.

Q: How did you work that out?

HARTER: We convinced the Vietnamese his actions were in no way connected to the Clinton visit and that he was really not all there -- he was not mentally sound. The Vietnamese did some investigating and they questioned him extensively, but they didn't go ahead with any prison sentence. They held a trial and he was convicted and sentenced but he was then expelled. His only punishment was the amount of time he spent in prison from the time of his arrest to the time he was released.

Q: How about missionaries?

HARTER: Foreign missionaries were generally not permitted to operate in Vietnam. But, we had a lot of folks who tried to do some proselytizing on the side, just like we did in China.

Missionaries who were active in Vietnam during the war were predominantly Protestants and they generally worked in the highland areas. The minority tribes in these areas were predominantly anti-communist and had worked closely with American military forces. After the

unification of the country, they continued to resist Hanoi's intrusion into their lives and territories and they were targeted for special attention by the communist authorities. Former missionaries wanted to go back and work in those areas and this made the whole process seem more sensitive to Hanoi. You may have noticed in the newspaper just last week, there was a Washington Post story which alternately said, five thousand and then fifteen thousand Hmong were coming out of the refugee camps in Laos and Thailand to resettle in Minnesota. Well, this was one of those highland groups who had been connected to the U.S. military.

The highlands were considered sensitive areas, in part because the highland regions were close to the borders -- the Laos-Vietnam border, the Cambodia-Vietnam border, the China-Vietnam border. And, even before Vietnam invaded Cambodia and the Chinese got involved in support of the Cambodians by attacking the Vietnamese border regions in the north, Hanoi had to deal with Montagnard rebel groups, anti-communist Lao fighters, and a few South Vietnamese holdouts, all of whom were active close to the international frontiers. While most communist states try to suppress religious activity, there was still a good deal of Buddhist and Catholic religious activity in Vietnam. Neither of these religious groups were favorably inclined to Protestant missionaries, so this too helped to solidify Hanoi's stance against any resumption of religious activity in the highlands.

Catholic Church activity was quite interesting. Catholicism was still actively practiced in Hanoi. When the two separate regimes were established in the north and the south after the French defeat, most of the people who fled from the north to the south were Catholics. Nonetheless, there were Catholic churches in Hanoi that remained open during the war and other churches in the north had reopened in the 1990s. Traveling in the countryside in the north, you would see a lot of shuttered churches in the villages, and most of these were the ones that had shut down when whole villages fled Ho Chi Minh and the communists in 1955. The Ambassador and others in the diplomatic community would regularly attend services with the local Catholics in Hanoi, and he was married in the Catholic Cathedral in Hanoi. I don't remember whether we actually discussed that wedding before. It was interesting to see how the Vietnamese Government played this situation.

When he arrived in Vietnam, Ambassador Peterson was a widower. His wife had died of cancer some years ago. Shortly after he arrived, he attended a summertime dinner party at the Israeli Ambassador's residence, and he found himself seated next to a Vietnamese-Australian who was then the Australian Embassy's trade officer. She had gone to Vietnam a few years earlier as the representative of an Australian bank but had been recruited by the Embassy to promote Australian trade opportunities. The Ambassador and the Trade Officer soon were "the couple" of Hanoi. Vietnamese officials were very pleased because the American Ambassador was going to marry a Vietnamese woman and the whole idea of a big diplomatic wedding was thought to be quite wonderful. There was also a fair amount of public knowledge in Hanoi about the two of them being together. But, this public awareness also seemed to cause the Party and Government officials some concern. I think these officials thought it would suggest too close a relationship between the US and Vietnam if the authorities gave too much attention to the wedding.

When it came to the actual day of the wedding, there was absolutely no mention of it in any newspaper in Hanoi -- no photographs, nothing at all. And there certainly was no mention in the

TV news coverage for the day. A very, very small number of Vietnamese from the immediate area near the cathedral, attracted by all the vehicles arriving there, did gather around the church. The cathedral is right in the middle of a residential and shopping area of Hanoi so it would have been very difficult for the activities there not to be noticed. But, the government certainly kept people from outside the immediate area of the cathedral from coming into the square. So, only a few local people were outside the church at the time of the wedding. And, for the most part, Vietnamese officials did not come to the wedding or the reception. One of the receptions held by the Ambassador and his wife did include a smattering of Vietnamese friends and a few medium-ranked “token” officials who were assigned to go. The vast majority of Vietnamese invitees were simply told they couldn’t attend.

While the Vietnamese did appear to have deliberately downplayed the wedding, the concept of “token” representation was a standard policy for foreign functions in Vietnam. When you had a reception, a national day function or some special visitor in town to introduce to Vietnam, Vietnamese officials had to get permission from their work units to attend the function. For most ministries or departments, people were designated to attend the function, even though they might not be the individuals who had the closest working contacts. When it came to a national day reception, it was usually the official who was in charge of the “friendship association” between Vietnam and the foreign country who attended as the “official” representative to present Hanoi’s toast to the foreign Ambassador. The other Vietnamese official attendees would be designated ministry representatives. At Vietnamese Government hosted functions, the ministry and department representation was much larger, but it was still based on the attendees being assigned to represent their offices.

Q: You mean even at a Fourth of July?

HARTER: Yes, or any other National Day or any big visit reception you had. Vietnamese attendees were authorized to go or told to stay home. You would have an event where, for example, we would invite all of our major contacts for the Fourth of July to the reception. We would deliberately hold the event in a hotel ballroom so nobody would be concerned about having to go to the Embassy or the U.S. Ambassador’s residence. It was always at a venue the largest number of people could go to. We would invite all of our working-level contacts in the Government, some people who were primarily Party cadre, as well as key ministers and other Ministry people you frequently worked with. If you got two ministers beyond the person who was officially designated by the Vietnamese to handle the toasting requirements, then you had really been blessed. Otherwise, you got only a handful of the invited contacts; interestingly though, you’d get more of the military contacts than the civilian ones. There was an established military attaché corps which interacted with a set group of Vietnamese military officials. And, that set group of Vietnamese military went everywhere, to all of the national day receptions. But, on the civilian side, on the party side, on the government side, it was not like that.

Q: I would imagine that attendance, then, became a political barometer of, who was doing what to whom, or even that they were loosening up? Do you know what I mean?

HARTER: Well, a lot of the problem was trying to figure out the relationships and the alliances and how the various leaders dealt with one another to get things done. It was very much the same

as when I'd been a China watcher in Hong Kong and later in China -- looking at the national and local government leaders trying to figure out how decisions were being made and who was lined up behind whom. When this fellow, Le Kha Phieu came into office, he had clearly been a last minute choice for the leadership --

Q: This is the assertive-type guy?

HARTER: He's the Commissar, Political Commissar from the military who came in when Do Muoi stepped down as Party General Secretary. He'd clearly been a compromise candidate, he was not really known to very many people at all. He started out, as I said earlier, trying to make a public relations push for the Party, trying to establish himself as a man of the people. He talked about changing this and modernizing that and then went back into the Party headquarters and gradually retreated into a shell where he just didn't do anything. The Party and the Government started to open up things a bit more and the new leaders all began to talk about more changes. But, in fact, the decision-making process didn't get any better. The three elders -- the Communist Party General Secretary, the Prime Minister, and the President (a top military leader) -- during the previous period had agreed to step down simultaneously because none of them trusted the others or wanted them to have stronger roles in naming their successors. So this trio, more or less decided who would take over those three positions. And, although they all stepped down at the same time, they didn't remove themselves from decision-making. They sat behind the scenes and got involved in all of the decisions. And so, the new Party General Secretary and the new Prime Minister weren't the chief arbiters of policy. You got people elevated into positions of prominence but these younger, up and coming leaders got titles before they got power. The current Party Chairman is not even an ethnic Vietnamese, he is from one of the northern minority peoples. He had been a leader in the National Assembly and was a very impressive, very savvy fellow. But, I don't know that he has been given the freedom to reset things in a more open fashion, even though he is certainly so inclined. Foreign business people and those involved in the international aid programs were very frustrated by their inability to get the Vietnamese to make decisions.

Q: Were you seeing sons and daughters of the Cadre moving up?

HARTER: Yes. That's the norm, just as it was in China. The so-called "cadre kids" got opportunities the ordinary Vietnamese never had, entrance to the best schools, overseas study opportunities, options to start businesses which immediately had "contracts" to provide services to the Government or Party. And yes, you heard stories of corruption and cadre kids getting away with, in some cases, murder. An ordinary Vietnamese would have never been able to avoid prison or execution. On the other hand, there would be periodic crackdowns and some lesser lights and some junior cadre would get slapped on the wrist or, if the corruption issue was particularly egregious, they sometimes were severely punished.

Q: What about American business people who came in there? I mean, one thing they want to know is what are the rules and are the rules abided by? Was this happening?

HARTER: The rules weren't followed. But, even worse, the rules were constantly being revised and rewritten so it was hard to know what regulations you had to comply with. The Vietnamese

never had a legal system which clearly established one law superseded another. So, the old law remained on the books along with the new one, even though they might be mutually contradictory. And, with those kinds of contradictory laws on the books you had to depend on somebody's interpretation of the law to decide, in each particular situation, which of the contradictory laws might be applied. American and many other foreign businessmen found this situation unacceptable.

Q: Well, one of the big reasons that we push for recognition was that all of our Western competitors and Japanese had gone in there and we wanted to get in there. But, when we got in there I take it, it wasn't that great a place to --

HARTER: Not at all, it wasn't a good place to do business at all.

Q: I mean, this would be true for our competitors too?

HARTER: Absolutely, absolutely. Deals did get done by a lot of these other businesses which did not have to operate under the terms of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. They were able to open some factories and produce products for the local market as well as for export and some of them made money. But, most of them didn't make a lot of money. What they did get was what the business world calls "market share" and "brand identification". For many of the Japanese firms, that was what they wanted. They tended to take a longer-term view of market opportunities than a lot of the U.S. people did.

We had huge problems with some of the companies that came in. I had worked with the Proctor and Gamble folks in Southern China when they opened up there and they had gone through a very exhaustive process of looking for a partner to work with. They had done a very good job of putting their business model together and they had been exceptionally successful in China. They came into Vietnam in the same way and with the same due diligence. They had to find a partner and they were given a number of suggestions on which company to choose by Vietnamese officials. P&G started relying on one consultant, a person who was related to a high-level official, and who provided them with a lot of "inside" information about how the company could get things done. This is the kind of thing a lot of the cadre kids got involved in, brokering deals for foreigners with Vietnamese partners. This particular consultant made the local P&G team feel they were on the right track. So, Proctor and Gamble got themselves set up with a partner. Once the partnership was concluded, P&G discovered that this partner was also the local partner of their chief international competitor and their chief foreign competitor in Vietnam, Unilever, maker of the original Lever Brothers products. P&G soon discovered their local partner was passing on all of the P&G plans to the local Uni Lever officials. Because the Unilever people weren't under the same Foreign Corrupt Practices Act restrictions, they were making under the table payments to the local partner for this information and, as a result, they were able to undercut virtually everything that Proctor and Gamble wanted to do.

P&G came to the Embassy for help and we had to assist them to arrange a divorce from their local partner. P&G wanted at that point to be a hundred percent foreign-invested company. This was not to the Vietnamese liking, because they had not wanted to have any fully owned foreign ventures. They always wanted partnerships, because in this way they would have an opportunity

to help elevate local businesses, and to have an opportunity to pirate the information and technology that the foreign companies had. For the Vietnamese, it wasn't just a question of the foreign company coming in and paying some taxes for the benefit of the Government, but they would get the knowledge and the technology to help them modernize their own industry. For P&G, it was a costly procedure but they were finally able to operate independently, though I'm not sure it would have been possible without the interventions of the Embassy. Smaller companies without the financial clout or global reputation of P&G had a much harder time making things work so that they could stay in business and earn some return. They were constantly being pressured by one organization or another to do things that were not exactly legal. Some of them I guess did what they were asked to do, others didn't.

Q: Well now, the company was getting pressure, particularly a smaller company, in a way it couldn't take care of itself. Would they come to you and tell you about you it?

HARTER: Sometimes they would, yes.

Q: Could you do anything?

HARTER: We could basically counsel them, as we did in China, about the problems of staying within the lines of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Without fail we would suggest they take a hard look at who they're using for advisors and consultants and to try to ensure they had more reputable people to work with. This was about the most we could do.

But, for the big companies that were trying to develop natural resources or to get involved in government projects, it was the decision-making process I told you about earlier that was probably more frustrating. During the time I was there, many of the U.S. oil companies that had hoped to resume their pre-1975 explorations finally give up and just left. They decided there was no possibility of getting anywhere. In spite of the total collapse of the Soviet Union and the fact there was no Comecon Bloc supporting them, the Russians were still very influential and dominated the exploitation of the Vietnamese oil resources. The U.S. firms and the Embassy kept telling the Vietnamese, "you've had declining production for years in these existing oil fields because neither you nor the Russians have adequate technology to exploit the fields properly. We have technology that will enable you to extract more oil from these fields. We know what's down there and you know what's down there and we can bring in the needed technology to exploit those resources." But, the Russians blocked it every single time. When it came to letting out new exploration blocks and encouraging the search for new fields, the only place the Vietnamese were willing to let American firms go was in the ocean areas between China and Vietnam. Sometimes, the Vietnamese would approve an exploration arrangement where a few lesser US firms had only a very small minority interest in a package primarily being handled by South Koreans and Vietnamese and other international partners. So, it was a very difficult for the big oil players and they finally gave up and closed their Vietnam offices. And, just as they had been once before in China, the oil companies had been the biggest U.S. investors in Vietnam; so when these companies left, the U.S. share of the Vietnamese investment market plunged dramatically.

Q: Today is the 14th of October, 2004. Dennis, let's talk about the Trade Agreement. Once

again, you were in Hanoi from when to when?

HARTER: I got there in the summer of 1997 and I stayed there until the summer of 2001. I was Deputy to Pete Peterson and then for about the last four months I was chargé, awaiting the arrival of the new DCM and the new Ambassador.

Q: OK. Well now, let's talk, we've covered everything, I mean you said a long time convoluted trade things. Start from, how did this trade get in the works and how did it develop?

HARTER: When we first started talking about normalization of relations with the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese wanted political normalization, but what they wanted more than anything else was trade relations and most favored nation status. They wanted us to end the embargo and other restrictions which had been imposed as the result of their invasion of Cambodia. And, as we began the process of normalization, once we did make certain basic progress on their withdrawal from Cambodia and on MIA case resolution, President Clinton ended the embargo and we continued on with the normalization discussions. Once we had completed normalization the Foreign Minister said, "Now we have to go on to normalize trade relations and get most favored nation status." We set up a series of meetings and discussions for USTR representatives to meet with the Vietnamese so we could learn more about their economic system. As part of this process, I went on one trip to Hanoi with an officer from EB (Economic Bureau) in State to talk to the Vietnamese about their economic system and the rules and regulations they had in place regarding trade, investment, and business operations. And, that was ultimately the crunch test, we had to evaluate what changes were necessary in the Vietnamese economic structure that would make their system compatible with the rest of the world. The U.S. tried to create a set of standards that Vietnam would have to meet in order to make it possible for them to be a part of the international trading community. As we advertised it to the Vietnamese, everything you're going to do with us in a bilateral agreement to open up your trade and investment system will ultimately assist you in getting into the WTO, the World Trade Organization. Vietnam, of course, was not a member of the WTO and they knew they needed to take that step too to get into the global trading community. The Vietnamese acknowledged what we said and recognized that getting trade relations established with us would help to ease the problem of meeting WTO standards.

We had many discussions with the Foreign Minister and with the Trade Minister. Trade Minister Triet came to the United States soon after the normalization of diplomatic relations and had a series of meetings at the State Department, at Treasury, and at USTR and Commerce to review the basic issues. There was a considerable degree of difficulty in comprehension. The Vietnamese just simply did not seem to understand how much was going to be involved in getting their economic system into the mainstream of international trade. While part of this may have been a problem of translation, it was clear to me and a few others on our side that many of the Trade Ministry people, including the Trade Minister, didn't understand the concepts. Fortunately, a couple of more savvy people from the Foreign Ministry and from the Office of the Government in Hanoi had been included in the delegation. They had a much broader level of international experience and better understood the economic issues.

Q: What was his background, did you know?

HARTER: I don't know that much about his background. He was certainly a senior member of both the government and the party. He was only Trade Minister for about a year to a year and a half after normalization and he retired. But the new Trade Minister, Trade Minister Tuyen, who succeeded him was an absolute disaster. He was a political choice who clearly knew absolutely zero about trade and moreover, was basically dense. No one except a few sycophants in his own Ministry had any respect for him whatsoever.

But now I'm getting ahead of the story. After the first round of meetings for Minister Triet, it became clear to myself and a couple of others that the Trade Minister and his Ministry colleagues just did not comprehend the basic issues. This convinced me we had to try to set up another more private session for Triet to see if the issues could be simplified and presented more directly. Some of these earlier meetings had large numbers of people involved on both sides. And yes, the Trade Minister was the key person and was the head of the delegation, but there were so many other people involved in the initial meetings that it was very difficult to really focus the discussions. So, I went to the people we worked with in the Economic Bureau to ask Alan Larson to chair a smaller session with Triet and a few other Vietnamese delegation members. Larson at that time was the Under Secretary for Economic, Energy and Business Affairs at State [Ed: served from November 1999 to February 2005]. Larson had chaired the first State Department meeting with the large group from Vietnam and he too thought a smaller meeting made sense. I also went to one of the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry people and one from the Office of Government on the delegation who I believed really knew the issues and understood the western concepts better than anybody else on the Vietnamese side. Both of these people had been educated in the United States for extended periods with graduate degree level courses. They understood English and they understood western economics, and they had enough stature in the Vietnamese delegation that if they said something different from what the translator had said, they would be respected for both the translation and the substance of what they were explaining. And, once we got Minister Triet in that smaller meeting, you could almost see the little light bulb go off over his head. Larson did an outstanding job of simplifying complicated issues and you could tell by the different type of questions Triet asked he understood the concepts. You could see he was focused now on really what the key problems were going to be for the Vietnamese Government. He was beginning to conceptualize how the Vietnamese had to break down the State-managed system and open things up to competition and what this would mean, if in fact U.S. businesses were allowed to come in and set up joint ventures or fully-owned ventures in the country. At that session, the U.S. side gave Triet a draft outline of a prospective trade agreement.

The next meeting which was to take place in Hanoi did not occur as quickly as we had originally projected because Triet had such a big job to do to explain the depth of change and breadth of change that was going to be required in the Vietnamese economic system. The Vietnamese at this time were also transitioning in a new party and government leadership which meant not everyone could be fully devoted to the trade agreement issues.

As I've already related, the three top Vietnamese leaders had agreed to step down together and a new group of leaders would assume their positions. The three who were stepping down were key leaders from the Ho Chi Minh-era who had earned their status and stature through the war and

their relationship to Ho. Anybody else who was coming up after them would have been minor or mid-level party, government or military men during the war-time era. They did not have any real stature, except perhaps locally or within a small bureaucracy. They could not directly assume a leadership mantle based on association with Ho Chi Minh or from their leadership roles in war-time service. Those of us who were watching the political situation expected there to be a period of relatively uncertain leadership and one that would be very cautious. That new decision-making apparatus turned out to be even more cautious, because the person who was made the head of the Party and hence *primus inter pares*, had no real understanding of international politics, let alone, how to get the country's economy going domestically. As a political commissar, his background was ideological, and, based on his public remarks you did not have the impression he was a person with a breadth of understanding of modern society, economics, or politics. So, a lot of getting him to understand the trade agreement issues was going to involve a basic education – it was probably more primitive than Economics 101.

When we started out the next round of meetings, we again had the large delegations involved. But, starting with our follow-on visit to Hanoi, these were large delegations focused on working-level people. We didn't bring ministers along for any of these discussions – no Secretary of State, or Secretary of Commerce. We had a USTR (U.S. Trade Representatives Office) negotiator as the head of delegation. Behind him we had people from Commerce and State and Agriculture and a number of other groups within the State Department bureaucracy, the Economic Affairs Bureau, people like that, who were part of this overall discussion. And they didn't all just meet together at the same time. They spread out and had smaller sessions on their own, exploring, from the U.S. perspective different economic operations so we too had a better understanding of the Vietnamese system.

Q: As you put this together, even the first set of meetings, but the second meetings, was the attitude, you know, this is really a two part or one. This is to get the Untied States and Vietnam going, but this really is to get Vietnam into the World Trade Organization. Was there a difference? Was there a discrepancy between these two goals?

HARTER: There was only in the sense that we, the U.S., didn't care about the second issue whatsoever. We weren't worried about that. That was something the Vietnamese were going to have to deal with and they were going to have to conduct their own negotiations with the WTO in Geneva. They were going to have to respond to questions from the WTO members about their economy. We simply explained to them that there wasn't anything that we were going to do bilaterally that was going to hinder that WTO entrance process and in fact, it would facilitate whatever they had to do to meet those requirements. So, we pretty much stayed out of that issue. We told the Vietnamese if they wanted help we'd be willing to provide it, but in fact they ended up going for help with their WTO membership to other organizations. They got help from the World Bank, they got help from the IMF, they got help from Europeans to facilitate their dealings with the WTO. Unless things have changed in the last year, Vietnam is still not a full member of the WTO. Their negotiations with the WTO were, as they often were with us, hard to comprehend. The Vietnamese would come in and lay out responses to WTO questions and they'd present a plan on how to meet WTO obligations and both we and the Europeans would sit there and say, "But this doesn't answer the question." At times, you had the feeling Vietnam was like a ship passing its destination in the night without any clear signal of where it thought it was

going.

Q: What about China? I mean, China had, I realize the Chinese and Vietnamese aren't exactly on the best terms. Was there a Chinese, I mean China at this time was going through some of the same?

HARTER: Correct. They're still doing the same --

Q: Could there be any crossover?

HARTER: There may have been. I just am not aware of anybody saying the Chinese and the Vietnamese were ever really talking about this among themselves. Clearly the Chinese were getting a lot more help from us on the WTO and a lot more support from a lot of countries, because of its size and economic clout. Vietnam was basically one of the also-rans in the whole process. Internationally there was a feeling it would be nice to have Vietnam in the WTO to keep up the idea of universality. But if they weren't in not a lot of people would care much about it. At the time, in terms of its economic clout, the Vietnamese economy would barely match one of the major provinces of China. On the other hand, everyone wanted China to sign on to the WTO in order to better ensure that it operated more according to the international trading rules – though I'm not sure anybody has yet gotten China to play by rules other than its own. The Chinese and the Vietnamese may have exchanged some information about what they were hearing from the WTO just to make sure that we weren't fiddling them about what they had to do to meet international standards. But, beyond that I'm just not certain there was any real cooperation.

Q: Well then, you were talking about sort of the working level? What were some of the issues particularly as you got into the nitty gritty?

HARTER: The first basic issue was just simply a discussion of the Vietnamese system, finding out exactly how it operated, how trade worked, how companies were set up to do business, and how subsidies occurred, and how the government supported various industries. We actually still haven't sorted all of that stuff out. We're still objecting to the volume of Vietnamese exports to the United States on the grounds of them being from a non-market economy. Since they are not a market economy, we end up creating artificial models of how the economy operates to then measure how they are subsidizing their exports to the United States. Using these formulations, we have recently pretty much clobbered the Vietnamese on two basic seafood exports to the United States. One is shrimp, but the biggest one is catfish exports. The Vietnamese had managed a fairly substantial increase in their sales of both products to the United States, but they were still only a small portion of the overall U.S. market. Based on the U.S. analysis of their non-market economy model, we calculated such a high degree of government subsidy of these industries that we were able to impose stiff tariffs which severely cut into the Vietnamese export effort.

But, I'm off the track again. During the discussion round in Hanoi, the range of issues was quite considerable. Our delegation would split up and we would have some small agriculture-to-agriculture, commerce-to-trade ministry talks. And then, you'd have the plenary sessions where all of the visitors would follow the USTR and Trade Ministry representatives outline of issues as

they tried to find common ground for an agreement. After three or four of these meetings, where we seemed to be reviewing an awful lot of very basic things, it seemed we were having to repeat discussions that had been held months before. There were still concerns about comprehension problems on the Vietnamese side. Some of us began to try to define the problems on the Vietnamese side and it all seemed to come back to the new leadership. We weren't sure the trade discussions were actually getting reported back into the hierarchy in a way that they could understand. There was also a possibility some of the trade people who were reporting back to the leadership were reluctant to talk about how big the gaps were between the two systems, fearing they might be told not to pursue the trade dialogue because it was so antithetical to the communist system.

Look at it from the perspective of this new leadership in Hanoi. They are inherently more conservative and cautious about breaking new ground. They're not very knowledgeable about the international system. Told about the changes that have to be made to meet the US expectations, they could just throw up their hands and say the Americans are trying to screw us again. It would not be illogical for them to simply walk away from the talks and to try to soldier on the way they had in the past. In fact, once we had completed the negotiation of the agreement, that's exactly where we ended up, with the Vietnamese not following through with the signing. But, again that's going a little bit ahead of the progression of the talks.

After one of my trips to Hanoi, I went over to see Joe Damond who was the Trade Representative Office designee to conduct the negotiations with Vietnam. I said to him, "We've already got a trade agreement process worked out with the Cambodians and we've been at this with the Vietnamese for a certain amount of time, but nobody has talked about doing anything with Laos. Why don't we take a look at Laos and see what's going on there?" He said, "Well, I suppose we could. It would be a nice package to get it all done and take care of the old Indochina or Vietnam War era countries, but nobody knows what the hell is going on in Laos in terms of the economy or anything else." I said, "Well look, I have enough flexibility in my travel time here and I have the State desk responsibility for Laos; I'll take somebody else along who's more knowledgeable on economic issues and we'll talk trade issues with the Lao and see what might be possible."

And so, along with an EB officer, Bill Heidt, I went to Laos and started talking with some Lao Ministry officials. We explained about how we'd negotiated a trade agreement with Cambodia and they knew we were talking with the Vietnamese. When we asked if the Lao Government was interested in a bilateral trade agreement they agreed, at the working level, it would be a good idea. Up the line, more senior Lao officials decided they should have a trade agreement with the U.S. since the two countries had never broken relations and they should have an agreement if the Khmer and the Vietnamese had them. So, as we started reviewing the basic issues and were getting answers to our questions about the Lao economic system, we learned that none of the obstacles that had to be overcome in the system in Hanoi existed in Laos. They didn't have any of the rules or regulations or any of the communist control systems. The Lao economy was just "functioning" without a lot of rules or regulations. There weren't any problems in the sense that everything had to be done a certain way that was inconsistent with the international trade regime. And, the Lao Government and Party regulations didn't set up a lot of absolutes which fixed how the economy was to be managed. So, I went back to Joe Damond at USTR and told him that

Laos appeared to be wide open in terms of their economic system. They were interested in having a trade agreement, they would like to have us help them get into the WTO, and all it needed was for him to convince USTR to expand his authority so he could talk to the Lao. And, sure enough USTR did authorize him to talk to the Lao and I think it was less than nine months, maybe even less than six months of talks and exchanges and we had negotiated a trade agreement with the Lao. Everything was really going along quite smoothly.

Once it was all pulled together, there were questions in the Administration about the timing of when the agreement was going to be sent up to Congress for ratification. Unfortunately, we ran into a problem with Congress which made it very difficult to get anyone there willing to consider it. Some Lao-American highlanders disappeared in Laos while on a visit. The Lao Government claimed to have no understanding or knowledge of what was going on. But, it was believed this group was working with the resistance movement in the highlands against the Lao Government. The U.S. Government, human rights advocates, and certainly the U.S. Lao-American Montagnard groups believed the Lao Government killed them. So, as soon as there was some thought of sending this trade agreement forward for Congressional review and approval, the issue of the missing Lao-Americans was raised and the agreement was side-lined. As far as I know, the US-Lao Trade Agreement has still not been submitted to Congress on the grounds the Lao Government has still not answered “our requests for information and details on the disappearance of these individuals.” It’s unfortunate, because as I said, the Lao agreement was a snap. It was an absolute slam-dunk. The Lao wanted it, we wanted it, and there were basically no obstacles to negotiating it. Whether it would be an effective trade agreement was still to be determined. As I said, the Lao Government didn’t have a lot of sophistication and it wasn’t the most effective governing body. So whether they could have enforced the terms they had agreed to was still an open question. But, at the time, we certainly could have had a completed trade agreement with the Lao and wrapped up another of the wartime problems from the 1970s.

Going back to Vietnam, the Vietnamese kept saying to us, “Give us a draft, give us a draft.” And we kept saying, “You’re not ready for a draft. You still haven’t indicated a comprehension of the basic issues enough to be in a position to start altering your own rules and regulations – in fact, so far you haven’t even indicated you’re ready to alter them.” And the Vietnamese kept saying that, “If we don’t have a draft, we can’t get the ministers or the Party to focus on it. They’re not going to talk about changing this or changing that until they can absolutely see what is involved and how it stacks up against other things that we’ve done.” So, that was a bit of a problem for our side. It wasn’t easy to get USTR to give the Vietnamese a draft. Other agencies had some input, but USTR was the primary drafter and creator of this document. And, I believe Joe Damond actually did virtually all of the writing himself. With both the Vietnamese and the State Department working on USTR, we eventually did get them to submit a draft.

Q: Well, isn't there a basic standard that we can take off the shelf? I mean are these things that have to be handcrafted?

HARTER: I think there is a basic draft, but the agreements have to be hand-crafted and tailored to the individual country, because in fact they require countries to take away certain rules and regulations that are country-specific. And, as part of the negotiating process we try to determine from U.S. business and industry what the subjects are of greatest interest to them in that

particular country and focus some of our requests for changes and modifications to meet their areas of greatest interest.

The trade agreements are in a sense standard. But the agreements have to be tailored so that you can alter the specific laws and regulations in a particular country, so they will meet global standards. In addition, the USTR and Commerce folks like to have a dialogue with U.S. business interests to determine areas these businesses find most appealing for investment or trade and, thereafter, tailor the agreement to reflect those interests. For example, one of the chief U.S. interests in Vietnam was the telecommunications sector. So, in negotiating the trade agreement we wanted to include a specific schedule of opening up of the telecommunications sector in Vietnam to foreign investment and foreign competition. We wanted some very specific things done with regard to the banking, finance, and insurance industries. These were all industries American companies were interested in and where we wanted to try and get some leg-up for American business to operate in Vietnam. Now, of course, while the trade agreement is designed to provide some boost for American business, in fact the new trade regime you create is not entirely U.S. specific. It is actually a global agreement. Because the global trading system is so inter-connected, when you open up the insurance sector in Vietnam for American business, Japanese and European and other nation's firms are also able to go in at the same time and under the same terms, because, for the most part, all nations have what is known as most-favored-nation trading/investment status with Vietnam in their own bilateral agreements.

Q: Well tell me now, how far, I mean in our analysis, how far had France, Japan, England, UK and others, how much progress had they made in agreements or were we kind of the point person?

HARTER: We were definitely on the point for trying to develop a full-fledged comprehensive trade agreement. But, a number of other countries had very basic agreements established well before ours. The basic agreements were enough to give them the MFN (Most Favored Nation) status that thereby applied to their trade relations whatever we specifically negotiated. It was very clear once we broke open, under very specific terms, various sectors of the Vietnamese market we were in fact opening it up all the way to the rest of the world. And, of course, this was one of the things we kept selling to the Vietnamese. Getting the U.S. trade agreement concluded would enable them to extend the same treatment to other countries and all of that in turn would enhance their WTO membership opportunities. One of our chief objectives was "leveling the playing field" for American businesses and American investors, because in some cases certain foreign trade partners with Vietnam had obtained special advantages which we could not tap into because we did not have MFN status there. But all of this "leveling" of opportunities for foreign business worried the Vietnamese. Throughout our discussions, the Vietnamese were very concerned about how the onslaught of international competition would swamp some of their basic industries, many of which were getting into a global market for the very first time. The trade embargo and the isolation imposed on Vietnam as a result of its invasion of Cambodia in 1979 had really shut down Vietnam's access to the international market system until the early 1990s. There just was no real understanding within the Vietnamese banking and finance and commercial systems about much of the international trade regime or international finance and banking. As a result, during the various negotiating rounds, the Vietnamese were trying to negotiate phased, and I should say long-term phased, opening of virtually every sector of their

economy – the industries, the financial and commercial institutions – to global competition.

After a series of marathon negotiations, we concluded an agreement in the summer of 1999. A senior USTR representative, Ambassador Richard Fisher and the Vietnamese Trade Minister, Minister Tuyen, signed an “agreement in principle” in July. All of the elements were in place and the terms were as clear as they could be made. Once we had initialed the agreement, the Vietnamese, and we had a great celebration and everyone was feeling very positive. On the US side we said everything is all set and we can just proceed to a formal signing ceremony. And the Vietnamese officials initially all said, “Yes, that would be very, very good.” But the Vietnamese couldn’t follow through. Trade Minister Tuyen couldn’t really comprehend a lot of what was in the agreement and the agreement basically languished in the ether for several weeks. Nothing moved, and the Vietnamese trade officials were not responsive in follow-up discussions. The more we talked about it with the people on the ground, the more we talked about it with sources that we had inside the Vietnamese government who themselves were anxious to see the agreement move forward, the more we were convinced the Trade Minister just really wasn’t conveying the material in a realistic way to the leadership. He was mischaracterizing some of the elements of the agreement and, because many of the top Party leaders didn’t really understand what the international trade regime was all about, they were reluctant to move forward.

From the U.S. perspective, we believed we had talked through all of the elements and that moving forward should be straightforward. As a result, the US negotiators proposed putting the whole package together for signature as we approached the end of the Clinton presidency. On the U.S. side, we thought it would be fitting if we could wrap up the agreement by the time the President visited Vietnam in November 2000. But the Vietnamese still weren’t moving. We finally decided that we needed to make another direct push. The Ambassador, myself and a few others went to the Vietnamese Ministry officials and to other Party and Government leaders and said, “We need to get this trade agreement process back on track. President Clinton is interested in visiting Vietnam. The President’s visit and Vietnam’s re-entry into the international community could be a great symbol for our two countries to finally mark the conclusion of the entire war era antagonism. We ought to re-energize this negotiation process.” We convinced enough people in the Foreign Ministry and other Ministries and also some in the senior leadership of the government that this was the way to go. We resumed talks and there were some changes made in the originally concluded agreement, even though both sides had been satisfied with it a year earlier. After concluding the agreement once again, however, the Vietnamese still felt uncomfortable with some of the terms, and we conceded on a few additional issues they were interested in. None of the changes had much substance, but at least they made the Vietnamese a bit more comfortable. At this point, we made a tactical mistake; but we didn’t recognize it as a tactical mistake until it was too late to salvage the agreement for that year.

The tactical mistake was in pushing the Vietnamese to finalize the agreement quickly. There was to be an APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting in Wellington, New Zealand and both President Clinton and the Vietnamese Prime Minister would be there for the leaders meeting. We said, “This is the way to do it. We’ll get the President involved; you can get your top leadership involved; the two leaders will meet and we’ll sign this agreement. It will bring the relationship into a completely new era. It will be a great symbol, etc etc. And, of course, you realize this is only X number of days away, so we’ve really got to get going and get this

arrangement confirmed.”

That approach and pressure set off all the alarm bells within the Vietnamese system that you can imagine. All they could think of was, there’s something in the agreement that’s a problem and the Americans are trying to slip it past us and push this thing through. Our leaders still don’t really understand what this is all about, and when they discover the problem, we’ll get blamed. So, even the Foreign Ministry and the Trade Ministry became hesitant about getting involved. In more or less typical American fashion, we didn’t slow down and try to work things out in a diplomatic fashion: “Well, tell us where you think there’s a problem or is there somebody we can work with in the leadership to help deal with these concerns. How can we help you make this approval process work? Is there some way that we can facilitate whatever it is you need to get approval to do this?” Instead of all those, expressions of concern to facilitate their process, we just kept saying, “It’s X number of days away, we really ought to get this thing signed and we ought to really commit. The President wants to do this.” The Vietnamese just sat on their hands; they just would not do it. After the APEC meeting, the White House was a little ticked off at the Vietnamese, and probably also at the Embassy and USTR because we’d been so certain we could get the Vietnamese to agree to highlight the APEC meetings with our own bilateral event. White House organizers were particularly upset because they were looking for “deliverable” events and ways to emphasize the President’s global responsibilities and his involvement with Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation nations. There were a couple of other APEC-related deliverables, but none that had quite the same kick as the US-Vietnamese Trade Agreement would have provided. But, as I said, it just didn’t work out and the agreement remained in limbo.

Fortunately, over the next few months, while the Vietnamese were still sitting on their hands, there was a decision to change some of the Vietnamese Government officials and change some of the leadership within the Communist Party. The man who had been at the top of the Party, and the man who had been appointed by him to be the Minister of Trade, both departed the scene. Finally, we had someone who was knowledgeable on trade and economics and global relationships running the Ministry. The new Minister of Trade, was previously a Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. He knew the global diplomatic system; he knew about international negotiations; he knew trade issues. The Party hack who had been managing the Ministry before was shunted back to the local provincial administration where he had previously served and he was no longer in the national leadership councils. The new Party leader came from within the National Assembly leadership and thus he too had a better understanding of the economic issues facing the country – and certainly he knew national and international issues far better than his predecessor who only had a military commissar background.

Once again, the Vietnamese suggested it might be useful to have a few other changes to the agreement to ease their leaders’ concerns and also to make it more reasonable for us to move forward after this second delay. We fiddled with a few of the terms – though I don’t recall the specifics. The changes made it possible for the Vietnamese to suggest they had toughened their stance and had convinced the Americans to alter some terms of the agreement to Vietnam’s advantage. That was enough to tip the balance. Nonetheless, even then, there was still a debate among the elderly “advisors” who had previously been running the country directly about whether this was the right way to proceed. The former Party leader, Do Muoi, who had become an advisor, did not really understand the economics of the agreement and he was also the most

conservative of the old leaders. The former President, Le Duc Anh, was also in this conservative group and it took the new Prime Minister, Phan Van Khai, the advisor/former Prime Minister, Vo Van Kiet, the new Party leader, Nong Duc Manh, and the new President, Tran Duc Luong to pull it all together and push the decision through. Prime Minister Khai and his predecessor, Prime Minister Kiet, were themselves both forward looking individuals from the southern part of Vietnam. They had a better understanding of where things were going economically and a better understanding of international issues in general. They were the ones who helped bring the agreement to a successful conclusion.

Stepping back from the negotiations, the trade agreement was not in itself anything particularly remarkable, and it did not immediately make things significantly easier for American businesses to operate in Vietnam. But, I think the process convinced the Vietnamese that we were sincere in our efforts to assist them to modernize and rejoin the world trading community. It probably also convinced the Vietnamese that they could continue to hang tough on issues and the US and other western nations would eventually meet their negotiating demands. When it came to signing the trade agreement, there was again some toing and froing about how high a level of leader might be involved or if we could tie the signing to some particular bilateral event. But none of that worked out and I believe the way it ended up we signed the agreement simultaneously in both capitals.

The Vietnamese, of course still had unrealistic expectations about what this agreement was going to mean in the short-term. They saw it as giving them a leg up on getting into the WTO. With the U.S. trade agreement in hand, the Vietnamese assumed WTO entrance would be a formality. So, even though they were conducting many dialogues with the WTO headquarters in Geneva during the period of our bilateral trade agreement negotiations, they thought all the WTO problems would disappear once they signed the U.S. trade agreement. The WTO, however, was not prepared to roll over because the Vietnamese signed an agreement with the United States. In fact, the WTO felt the Vietnamese had largely been unresponsive on most of the WTO standards they felt the Vietnamese had to meet.

The Vietnamese also seemed to feel they would immediately be shipping huge quantities of Vietnamese products to the United States as the result of this new trade agreement. But they found that, too, was not so easy. Throughout the negotiations, we had advised the Vietnamese there were many issues they had to understand in order to get into the U.S. market successfully. We talked about the lack of quality control in Vietnamese factories and farms, Vietnam's limited understanding of the U.S. market, and its inability, at that time, to design items for the U.S. market on their own. We tried to explain that even though they were selling product X in Japan or product Y in Europe, Vietnam couldn't just simply ship the same product to be sold in the United States. We tried to explain how there were different interests in product design, or there were issues of safety standards that differed in the various markets. For example, the Vietnamese were exporting all kinds of baby clothes to Japan. They expected to sell the same items in the American market, but they didn't meet fashion standards, design standards, safety standards.

All those issues were new to them. So, none of those immediate expectations were gratified. And, you soon got a lot of grumbling among the Vietnamese manufacturers who wanted to know what good the trade agreement was. In the initial phase of operation, the Vietnamese

manufacturers weren't having any success at all. The ones who were successful were the Japanese and Korean firms that invested in Vietnam and immediately produced items to meet American standards.

On the other side of the spectrum, the people who were in the agricultural business as opposed to manufacturing had a sudden opportunity to supply products to the big Asian grocery markets in the U.S. and, soon thereafter to other U.S. markets where seafood and other products had a more universal appeal. Soon the Vietnamese fish industry got linked to the distributors who worked for the major seafood chains in the United States. Red Lobster, Chesapeake Bay Seafood, Long John Silver and other seafood chains were getting large supplies of fish from Vietnam. How it was labeled as a fish, other than that it was from Vietnam, varied from one chain to another once it got in to the United States. Within a couple of years, however, most of the focus was on catfish. Catfish had been specifically discussed and negotiated during the trade agreement. With the agreement of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the term "catfish" was extended to a Vietnamese variety of fish that looked in fact, like a U.S. catfish, a bottom dweller fish with "whiskers" and the sort of flattened head characteristic of the U.S. species. In actuality, it's not exactly the same genus of fish and our Agriculture Department thought perhaps it could be distinguished by calling it basa catfish. The Vietnamese thought that term was OK. This was an U.S. Agriculture Department suggestion and it was worked out during the trade agreement talks. Once the Vietnamese fish were marketed in the US, you could find it in the Asian markets and then in the U.S. supermarkets as well. I first saw it in the U.S., I guess it was 2000 or 2001, in live fish tanks in Houston, Texas in an Asian community grocery store complex. Houston has a series of Asian supermarkets that dwarf the Asian supermarkets in this region. They are almost the size of a Walmart and carry all kinds of Asian food products and cooking implements -- bowls, dishes, chopsticks, woks, charcoal burners, etc.

But let's get back to the catfish issue. Over the past few years, the U.S. Catfish Association spent a lot of time and promotional efforts developing the domestic U.S. market. Catfish became a really popular food item in the United States. The Association became very concerned about the Vietnamese catfish being marketed in the U.S. So, they put a request in to the Commerce Department – not the Agriculture Department – about the Vietnamese exports, charging that the Vietnamese were subsidizing these exports and they were undermining the local U.S. catfish market. The U.S. Commerce Department then was required to conduct an investigation. The case rapidly became politicized and it all went against the Vietnamese.

If it had been agreed Vietnam operated a market economy, Commerce could have conducted a direct investigation on the ground and determined if there were subsidies or not. But Commerce decided Vietnam was still a non-market economy, meaning the Government exercised a lot of control over and direction to economic activity. Because it was a non-market economy you couldn't just simply determine there were no subsidies involved in this particular industry. Commerce was required to compare the costs of raising the fish in Vietnam to other economies where fish are being raised for export. Commerce created some model of India or Bangladesh as a fish raising country and it looked at the costs there as compared with the costs in Vietnam. Commerce concluded Vietnam was subsidizing the export of catfish because the costs for raising the fish in this other "model" were higher than they were in Vietnam. The Commerce decision completely contradicted the survey done by our own USDA representative in Hanoi. He had

gone out to the fish farm areas and prepared a very detailed analysis and report on the catfish industry, basically concluding there were no subsidies. Moreover, the USDA report concluded most of the farms that were exporting to the US were local, private entrepreneurs or groups of private entrepreneurs who had banded together to cut costs and export abroad. These farms were not being run by government-directed companies and they weren't getting any special incentives for exporting. Vietnam couldn't believe the Commerce conclusions. I think the catfish struggle began to sour the Vietnamese a bit on the whole value of the trade agreement and to bring some realism to their expectations of how they could exploit the international market. The end result was Vietnam could no longer brand it as catfish or basa catfish, and it had to market the fish under a different name. You'll still find the fish in U.S. Supermarkets, but it is branded as swai. And the U.S. catfish industry has been "saved."

Under the trade agreement, U.S. businesses going into Vietnam couldn't all just pour into Vietnam pell-mell. Each of the various sectors of the economy were opened up under a timetable and investments and individual business operations had to be approved by the Vietnamese Government. Moreover, the Vietnamese still were concerned that situations not tilt overwhelmingly in favor of an international presence and business activity within the country. The Vietnamese felt it was better to balance with some Europeans, some Asians, and some American participants in each of these various sectors. A prime example of this balancing effort in the early phase was the insurance industry. The Vietnamese approved the participation of a European company, a Japanese company, a Taiwan company and an American company to begin to do insurance business in Vietnam. And, each of the companies was permitted to operate in only one segment of the insurance industry. The Vietnamese then did the same thing in banking. Banking licenses were limited, some French, some German, some English, some American, some Japanese banks were permitted to open but the terms of their operations were all different. Some could be in Hanoi, but not in Ho Chi Minh City. Some could be in both. Some could do all types of banking business in Hanoi and more limited business in Ho Chi Minh City. Some were permitted to do all varieties of banking business in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Thus, even though there was a timetable when the various sectors of the economy would open to foreign investment and operations, in actuality it became a question of balance and staging by the Vietnamese Government. Just as the Vietnamese were disappointed by their inability to move quickly into the U.S. market, U.S. companies were disappointed to find business operations were a good bit more restrictive than they had imagined, even once they accepted the idea they would have to wait for various sectors of the economy to be opened over time. The U.S. had insisted on our companies having the option under the trade agreement of opening wholly owned businesses because of the problems U.S. companies had initially with their local partners – like the ones I described earlier concerning the Proctor and Gamble partnership. However, the Vietnamese are still not fully comfortable with the idea of foreign companies being completely independent as solely owned firms. And, as a result, they have delayed a number of such applications for such a long time that a number of firms either went away or agreed to operate in conjunction with a local partner.

Q: Did you find that at a certain point, you might say the entrepreneurial chromosomes started to kick in, I mean the Orient is a bit like also the Levant?

HARTER: Yes, very much so and particularly in the southern part of the country where there already was a capitalist and market-oriented tradition from the pre-1975 era. Manufacturing for the international market place was focused there as well. Provincial authorities in those areas picked up on the old Taiwan and Chinese models of export zones and special processing zones. They weren't anywhere near as successful in their efforts as either the Chinese or Taiwanese had been but the zones that worked the best were all in the south. The southern efforts were aided by a larger pool of labor, better ports around Saigon and good agricultural products to use in food processing industries. Once local authorities saw this was a useful model for development, every province and region tried to have its own export development or processing zone, whether it made sense to do so or not. The central authorities did not try to create any planned approach, at least not while I was there. As a result, there was no real sensible pattern of development in these zones. The PRC went through a similar phase after they had opened up the first three or four test zones in southern China. Once the Chinese authorities decided to transfer that model to other parts of China, there were lots of regions that wanted to set up the zones. But, the Chinese had a better system of control and didn't allow it to get out of control as the Vietnamese did. I think at one point, the Vietnamese had development zone projects in every province and in some provinces in the south there were more than one. As a result, most of them were doing very little business. Even the zones that were established in primary marketing and export locations, like Haiphong on the coast outside Hanoi, couldn't get off the ground. The zones created in the north often appeared to be the least well planned. They had very large spaces set aside for factories to be constructed, and they put in some basic infrastructure, but even in Haiphong only two or three companies were actually operating after several years of trying to attract investors.

Q: How about the overseas Vietnamese in the United States, particularly of France, but also Australia. Were they beginning to come in and bringing their skills they had learned, in France, United States, or Australia?

HARTER: There was a certain amount of that, particularly among younger Vietnamese. The older Vietnamese, particularly the older generation in the United States and Australia, New Zealand, Canada, – those who were adults when they left Vietnam – were much more negative about doing anything with the Communist regime. This was less of a problem for the Vietnamese in France who had left the country in 1954-1955. They had an additional generation away from the Communist regime and 35 and 40-year old Franco-Vietnamese had less of a direct connection to the Communist past.

Those among the older generation of Vietnamese-Americans who did return tended to focus on social welfare issues rather than trying to engage in commercial activities. Most of them were treated respectfully by the local authorities, but the Vietnamese Government tended to be suspicious of this group and watched them closely. Over time, however, many of them were given more freedom to operate and these Vietnamese-Americans gradually established a basis of trust among the local authorities. Certainly younger people did indeed come back to reconnect with their roots and to see if there was an opportunity to use their "overseas" expertise to make a good living. Some of the youngsters also got involved in social work and tried to focus on education opportunities to help the Vietnamese society to better deal with the outside world. I don't think any of the ones who came to Vietnam looking to make a lot of money actually did, but some of them certainly got some small business operations off to promising starts. Actually, I

don't think anybody in the international business community was making lots of money in Vietnam.

Over time however, the Vietnamese successfully adapted to the needs of a market driven export industry and were able to get into the textile and other such basic industry markets in the U.S. They adjusted to U.S. and other global marketing requirements for style, safety, and produced different products for different markets. You can see today even major woman's clothes labels, like Jones of New York and Ann Taylor market products made in Vietnam. In the lower-end apparel lines, items that sell in T J Max or in Kohls or Walmart there is a much wider range of products made in Vietnam. You see a lot of handicrafts or household use items from Vietnam in stores like Pier One or Tuesday Morning. At this time, you don't see much in the way of Vietnamese made electronics or small appliances. Those products with the now well-known Japanese or Korean brand names are generally still made in the Chinese factories. That sort of manufacturing has not moved into Vietnam to any significant degree. Instead, you are seeing Chinese brand names competing with the Korean and Japanese brands, but the products are still largely made in the PRC.

The most specialized of the apparel manufacturers who came to Vietnam were the athletic shoe manufacturers, like NIKE or REEBOK, for example. Over the previous decades, these shoe manufacturers linked up with shoe factories in Asia – initially in Taiwan and Hong Kong, then in Korea, and finally in China – and gave them the designs and the production requirements and let these factories and foreign entrepreneurs make the NIKE or REEBOK shoe. NIKE, for example, generally did not have a direct involvement in the ownership or management of the factory in these overseas locations. Their big contribution to the production process was quality control and ensuring the factory product would meet their international standards. NIKE said, “Here's the shoe we want, the quality standard we want and we want X number of dozen pairs a month to ship abroad.” As the costs began to rise in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the big firms went to Korea. Then Taiwan and Korean entrepreneurs moved factories to China and set up new factory operations there with lower cost Chinese labor. While I was in Vietnam, some of the Korean, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong entrepreneurs started setting up these factories in Vietnam to produce for NIKE among others.

The NIKE operation in Vietnam created a big problem for the company's corporate image and the Embassy ended up very involved in the process of trying to smooth over the difficulties the company had with the Vietnamese Government. Some of the Korean and Taiwan Chinese factory managers were pretty rough with their local Vietnamese employees and it got attention from the local and international media. You'll recall this was the era when there was a lot of international media attention to clothing chains that had factories in Central America that resembled old fashioned sweat shops – poor working conditions, poor health conditions, abusive treatment of employees, underage workers, etc. Some major “name brands” and “celebrity owners” had to get a lot more involved in overseeing what was happening in the locales where they were doing their manufacturing.

NIKE wasn't so smart when the issue first got some public attention in Vietnam. NIKE's comments seemed like they were stonewalling any criticism of the Vietnam operations. As they got more criticism over what was happening in a couple of the factories, NIKE seemed to be

more defensive and even less responsive. I must say, I have never seen a more ineptly handled public relations effort than the one NIKE tried in Vietnam. They just simply inflamed the overall issue in Vietnam for better than a year, making the situation progressively worse, rather than better. NIKE eventually “got the message” and took more responsibility for what was happening in factories that produced for the brand. But, the company had to commit additional personnel, tighter US supervision and oversight and finally had to revise corporate requirements for a number of its partners who were operating in Vietnam. The Embassy reported on the issues during several factory visits and helped NIKE deal with the Vietnamese authorities and provided advice on how best to overcome their negative image.

Q: What a major cartoonist, Gary Trudeau really hit them hard on this. It became, I mean it was very much in the forefront, because you had these big athletic stars of basketball and all and they were being castigated for being associated with sweat shops.

HARTER: I visited a number of these shoe manufacturing facilities, both in Vietnam as well as earlier when I was in China, and you could readily see where problems could occur. I’m not referring here to NIKE or any particular brand’s operations, but as you walked through a shoe manufacturing line each separate production stage had its own hazards and problems. In the area where they heated up the glues that held the different pieces of the shoe together the odor was really difficult to deal with. Lots of workers on the line just weren’t wearing protective masks and nobody was insisting they had to do so. In the places where machines did the sewing, or the assembly of various elements of the shoe, the production line was so crowded and the people so close together you wondered how people managed to stretch without banging into somebody else and upsetting the rhythm of the production. Lighting in some of the factories was often terrible and there were many areas with inadequate ventilation so that in the cutting areas there were clouds of dust and fabric particles in the air. Floors were often littered with all sorts of production remnants which were hazardous for safe movement.

Nonetheless, in Vietnam as well as in China, there were a number of factories that were much better and were a lot closer to proper conditions for worker safety and the operations were conducted in a healthy environment. There were fewer factories in Vietnam that had large worker dormitories as they had in China. When I was in China, much of the labor in the Guangdong processing factories came from outside the province. The workers, in many cases young women, were put in these big dormitories that were attached to the factories. A factory shift ran from 8 to 12 hours and the workers would move from production line to bunks which had just been occupied by the young women who were now starting the next production line shift. They did this all year long, with the exception of the two or three week break they got at the Lunar New Year holidays when the trains filled up with all of the workers taking home their gifts and money for the families they left behind in the rural provinces of the Central and Southwest regions of China.

China had big production-line cafeterias in their factories which provided meals on a regular basis all day long. The Vietnamese factories also had cafeterias because the workers needed a meal during their regular work shifts, but there were not many places that operated all day long with different shifts of workers. Over time, the factories began to install health and infirmary rooms with some trained personnel to treat illnesses or take care of minor worker injuries. These

improvements were largely introduced by the international firms and Vietnamese firms soon found they had to copy these “benefits” in order to attract good workers. So even though there were some problems here and there, the opening up of the Vietnamese market did provide some real benefits to the general labor situation as well as providing opportunities for Vietnam to absorb new techniques and technologies.

Q: Well, sort to sum up Dennis, did you see this whole trade thing must have put tremendous strains on the Vietnamese government. It was an old style Communist government where it had all the controls and all this. You have to be competitive and almost to survive in the modern world, you pretty well got to accept these things. But, this is not to just say, OK fine, we'll have these rules, it means all sorts of things, including sort of bringing real managers into some of the party apparatus. Were you watching this?

HARTER: Yes, and the Vietnamese answer to that threat to their control was simply, in large part, to delay the whole evolutionary process. The Vietnamese government and the Communist Party still had to make the ultimate decision about what project or corporate operation was going to be approved. If project X was to build a large dam for hydroelectric power that would lead to opening new agricultural areas and new factory construction and development of a particular isolated area, the Government and the Party were involved in all of the individual decisions that had to be made about the project -- the financing package, the size and scope of the project, the composition of the international participants, etc. If the Vietnamese found it difficult to make these decisions, they simply postponed them or set up short-term obstacles that had to be overcome before anything else would be permitted to move forward. In some cases, major infrastructure projects that had adequate international financing to develop power plants or to utilize off-shore gas resources were just postponed year after year as the Vietnamese debated how to proceed. There are projects being looked at today that were originally on the books to be done in the 1990s. While I've been out of Vietnam now for a couple of years, my impression is this situation has not changed significantly and Vietnam's modernization and growth to date could have been a lot bigger and a lot faster if the Vietnamese leadership had really committed itself to moving forward.

Q: Was there a feeling that you got to wait for the war fighting leadership to almost die out? I mean, was there a feeling that the new people coming on board or maybe another generation or so that sort of the Gorbachevs of Vietnam had begin to come in or was it still, was the party still a pretty rigid and sort of narrow-minded organization?

HARTER: I think for the most part the Party leadership still was rigid and narrow-minded when I was there. I also think it was not so much a product of the war-time hardships as much a product of the ideology itself. The Vietnamese political and Communist Party leaders were remarkably tolerant of Americans. They showed very little hostility to us at all. There were occasions when you could see some hostility among the military men that likely was a holdover from the war. But, beyond those few occasions, the general population in the northern part of the country did not express resentment towards the US and Ambassador Peterson and his marriage to a Vietnamese clearly gave the US a positive image in Hanoi. But, you are correct, they needed to have a few more Gorbachevs to come in and shake up the ideology, to break the stereotypes and molds of communism. You needed people in positions of influence who had a broader range of

education and an understanding of the way the rest of the world operated before things were going to significantly change. These people were ready to see change.

The people who were most anxious for and most understanding of the need for change were the people who'd had this international exposure. Many of them were technocrats, engineers, people who had had training in Eastern Europe or in the Scandinavian countries that had remained open to Vietnam during the embargo era. They were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Trade Ministry people who had been abroad and who had spent time in Western countries, not just within the socialist bloc. They had a better understanding of where things were going on the outside and what needed to be done for Vietnam to be a part of that process. Presently, there are people moving into middle levels of the government and business firms, people who obtained advanced degrees and technical training in Western countries, including the United States. These people are going to make the difference and give impetus to change. I think within this next decade, even the first years of the decade, those people will begin to influence the changes and the speed of development will pick up more rapidly. I think the changes will take place and I think Vietnam will soon be one of the Southeast Asian tigers.

Q: Now, here in Northern Virginia, where there's a significant Vietnamese population, it seems every other high school valedictorian is of Vietnamese origin. Were you seeing, was this manifesting itself in the home population?

HARTER: Yes, you were seeing some of that. The overall education levels of the Vietnamese were expanding, but the basic education for most Vietnamese, particularly in the rural areas, didn't provide for very much school time and didn't provide much real world knowledge. The domestic education system really stopped short of junior high school and you got narrower and narrower percentages of people going on to high school and to college within Vietnam. There is now greater investment in education but the brighter people are all trying to get out and go abroad to study. More foreign funding, more cooperative programs between Vietnamese institutions and foreign institutions are helping to improve the domestic education system, and that will show results in another several years.

Q: Well, you left Vietnam in 2001?

HARTER: Summer of 2001.

MARIE THERESE HUHTALA
Deputy Director, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand & Vietnam Affairs
Washington, DC (1996-1998)

Ambassador Huhtala was born and raised in California and Graduated from Santa Clara University. Joining the Foreign Service in 1972, she studied Thai and Chinese languages and became a specialist in East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Her overseas postings include Paris, Quebec, Hong Kong and Chiang Mai (Thailand). In Washington, she dealt primarily with East Asia and Pacific Affairs. From 2001

to 2004 she served as US ambassador to Malaysia and, from 2004 to 2005, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Ambassador Huhtala is a graduate of the National War College and the State Department's Senior Seminar. Ambassador Huhtala was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: Well let's then go to Vietnam.

HUHTALA: Okay, Vietnam. By this time we had completed the normalization process. One of the big efforts during my tenure in VCLTV was to get approval to open a consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. We already had our embassy set up in Hanoi. Ho Chi Minh is the major economic center in Vietnam, of course, and a very vibrant city.

Q: According to my lights I use to live there, it's called Saigon.

HUHTALA: Well a lot of the people there still call it Saigon too, but the official name is Ho Chi Minh City. It is amazing the hoops you have to jump through to get a new post set up, especially so in the '90s when we'd been closing so many posts and when the fiscal climate was so austere. But there was a real need to open up in Ho Chi Minh. We knew that the day it opened it would be number one or number two worldwide in terms of the backlog for immigrant visas. There were over a million American citizens of Vietnamese descent, many of whom had filed petitions for their relatives to come over.

We also still had the Orderly Departure Program going. And there was a new program for refugees; I use to call it Son of ODP but it was actually called ROVR, standing for something like Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees. It offered one more chance for people to apply for resettlement in the United States as refugees. The point of the Orderly Departure Program for years had been to interview people in camps in third countries, find out if they had any grounds to apply for refugee status, and resettle them either to the U.S. or France or wherever they wanted to go. Those who remained in the camps, those who had been effectively screened out, had to go back to Vietnam. By 1996 they had done so, and the camps in Southeast Asia were all closed. The groups who advocated for refugees with our Congress had persuaded the State Department to offer one more opportunity and it was called ROVR. It involved going out to the communities where Vietnamese had been resettled and asking them questions and giving them one more opportunity to show that they should be allowed in. The conditions had been relaxed greatly so it didn't take much. Basically they just had to say "I really want to go." I was shocked to find out about this. I had hoped that by then we would have been able to put the question of refugee resettlement behind us because we had invested many years of effort, and I believed the people who truly faced retribution upon return had been resettled. Besides, the Vietnamese authorities resented it and it was very intrusive; it had the potential to make all our other programs, including immigrant visas, that much more difficult.

Q: Had by this time the re-education camps been pretty well finished?

HUHTALA: Oh long ago closed.

Q: So I mean you didn't have people sitting around in barbwire in camps.

HUHTALA: No, no that was all finished. That was one of the grounds for coming to the United States. If you'd been put through that re-education process you could claim refugee status, and we were taking people who had endured that. In any event, ROVR wasn't proceeding too smoothly. The Vietnamese were very tired of cooperating with us on refugee settlement for their people. We had problems getting access to interview them, especially people who'd settled in remote areas and in the highlands. They needed to have a Vietnamese passport before they came in for their refugee interview and local officials were slow to grant those passports. Money had to cross hands, and this was viewed as an outrage on the American side. So it was a very tricky set of issues. We knew that having a consulate Ho Chi Minh with a refugee officer posted there would help very much in the effort. We also wanted, frankly, the demonstration effect of a consulate that was issuing NIVs and immigrant visas so that it would be clear to all concerned that there were other ways for people to come to the United States. If they had a brother or sister in the United States they could get a petition and they could get a visa. We wanted to move it away from the refugee platform to a more normal relationship. We also had growing commercial interests down there in the south.

It took me about a year to get the post opening memo approved. You wouldn't believe the page full of clearances I had to get from around the whole Building. But we did finally get the authority to open the consulate in Ho Chi Minh on the grounds of our old embassy in the middle of town. The first thing we did was to raze the old embassy building, which had been iconic, seen in so many images as a symbol of American failure in Vietnam. We still owned the property so we tore down the old building and made plans to build what was eventually a very attractive consulate on the property. Because of the fiscal austerity at the time, we were not able to get a classified post; it's only an unclassified post. I remember arguing, this is still a communist country; this is still a counter-intelligence threat country. It did not seem like a good idea to be without classified capabilities in the consulate. Every time we had any information to share with Hanoi we were going to have to send an officer up to Hanoi, which is what has happened. It was primarily for cost reasons that we didn't include classified communications. The idea was, if we find ten years down the road that we need to have classified operations there we can add on a story on top of the building. What has happened now, ten years down the road, is that the need for classified communications has become obvious so they are building a classified annex, rather than something on a top story. It has probably been much more expensive to do it this way.

Q: What was your impression of what were we getting from reports about whether the Vietnamese government was at this time still an elderly group of people and that where did it seem to be going?

HUHTALA: They seemed to be going down the same path that China had trod in the previous decade of opening the country economically but trying to maintain political control. I think they will have about as much success at that as China is having, obviously. The relationship with the United States was definitely warming. We were negotiating a bilateral trade agreement which I think was eventually signed in 2001. The negotiations were very serious while I was on the desk there. Attached to that too was the promise of our support for Vietnam's entry into the WTO (World Trade Organization). We were telling them that the draft trade agreement was a tough

document (from their point of view) because we were applying WTO standards, which would make it easier in the long run. If they concluded the BTA (bilateral trade agreement) with us it would make it easier for them to get into the World Trade Organization.

We also began to normalize the military relationship during this time. A deputy assistant secretary of defense, Kurt Campbell, led a delegation to Hanoi in October of 1996, and I was on that delegation. It was fascinating. We met with the minister of defence on the Vietnamese side and all of his generals on one side of the table and Kurt Campbell and the ambassador and the military attaché and a Pentagon delegation on our side of the table. We began the process of moving towards formal mil-mil ties.

Q: What does that mean?

HUHTALA: It meant for instance, there was a whole menu or whole roadmap (dare I say) of agreed-upon steps that were going to take place. We were going to start with exchanging visits to military schools, for instance our National War College was going to send some students out the following spring. Then we were going to have experts go back and forth. At some point farther down the road there would be an exchange of visits of ministers of defense. We would have a U.S. ship visit at the end of it. It was all laid out. It was interesting, there is an English language newspaper that is published in Hanoi, it's a very thin document and it's not very interesting, it's of course government controlled. At the time it was the only thing available in English. On the very first day of our delegation's visit, a copy of this paper was delivered to our hotel rooms and lo and behold, on the front page was a picture of a big warship calling at Cam Ranh Bay, saying what a nice place this is for military ports of call. A very unsubtle signal, I think, towards our side. In any event, those were good talks. They were not very acrimonious. We talked about the POW/MIA effort ongoing because for us that's fundamental. The Vietnamese side promised to continue to work on that. Then we had a banquet. It was a good start.

Q: Tell me how much did, when one thinks about this, Cam Ranh Bay is a damn good place, the port of port. The Russians use it as a calling station on their way when they sent their fleet around in 1901, I don't remember, during the Russian Japanese war. I would think of all the places around it would be a damn good place to be able to use for our ships. Was that something that developed, that our military was considering?

HUHTALA: You know we never really pursued that. They were obviously dangling it. We did eventually have ship visits, I think we've had two so far, but I don't think either one of them was at Cam Ranh Bay. The first one was at Ho Chi Minh City and then I think maybe Da Nang. Is that near Cam Ranh Bay?

Q: It's above it. It's not really much of a port.

HUHTALA: I think our military's been trying to signal, thank you very much but that is not our main interest. Right now we are trying to negotiate an IMET (International Military Education and Training) agreement to train with them and promote inter-operability and coordination. That concept was still very far down the road back in '96.

Q: Well in '96 and '98 were things like the Spratly and other areas, I mean this is sort of in your bailiwick, kind of.

HUHTALA: The Spratlys and the Paracels, those islands in the South China Sea, are claimed by five or six countries but not by the United States. Our position has always been that we will support whatever settlement the claimants come up with. There have been little skirmishes every once and a while between the Chinese and the Vietnamese. But that is not an issue that directly affects us.

Q: It didn't?

HUHTALA: No. So that was a good development. That was the year, late 1996, early '97 that we finally reached the point of exchanging ambassadors. Le Van Bang, who I talked about before, was in Washington as Vietnam's chargé d'affaires when I came back on to the desk; he returned to Hanoi to be given the official portfolio as ambassador to the United States. The president nominated Pete Peterson to be the first American ambassador to the unified Vietnam. Pete Peterson was a brilliant choice. He was a Congressman who had been a prisoner of war, held in the Hanoi Hilton for six years along with John McCain and others; a verifiable war hero, somebody with every reason to be bitter towards the Vietnamese but who was instead very focused on the new, positive relationship. He was an outstanding first ambassador. His nomination was difficult to confirm because of holdouts in the Senate opposed to normalizing relations with Vietnam. It was a long and difficult battle and we didn't get approval until, my recollection is that it was around April of '97.

Q: What did you ascribe, looking at it the opposition to relationship with Vietnam, within both Congress and the greater body politics?

HUHTALA: It's the same old story. This is the war that we didn't win, it was a national trauma. And the country is still communist, so why did we want to have relations with them? Our answer to that was to note that for many years the Soviet Union was still communist but we had relations with them, we'd never broken off relations with the Soviets. Diplomatic relations is not a reward for good behavior. It's an agreement to talk to someone and to have exchanges. We made all of those arguments. Some of the people who were most adamant in opposing Pete were very worried still about the POW issue and were being fed arguments by the League of Families and others that Vietnam was still not cooperating fully.

Q: Tell me, I mean this whole area you dealt with from Thailand to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, what was your involvement with POW thing at that time?

HUHTALA: There was an office set up in the Pentagon called DPMO, Defense POW/MIA Office. We provided a lot of support to them, as did the embassy in Hanoi. There was a detachment in Hanoi that was still conducting many different recovery activities every year. We attended and spoke at the annual conferences of the League of Families who were still very resistant to the fact that we had normalized. The issue had taken up a life of its own. The search for remains was primarily a military activity, but it was also, always, the first talking point in any discussion we ever had with the Vietnamese. They understood that this developing, mutually

beneficial relationship was founded on continuing cooperation on POW/MIA.

Q: Were they as well responding to or saying well you help us?

HUHTALA: Yes they were. They were saying that while the U.S. had 2,500 still unaccounted for, Vietnam had 30,000. Will you help us? We coordinated with the Pentagon and there was some information provided by DOD to the Vietnamese to help them locate their missing. In Vietnamese culture, if a loved one has died and you aren't able to find the body and bury it and pray over it then the soul wanders in limbo forever. That's what they believe. So this was a very painful issue for them.

They were also raising the issue of Agent Orange at this time. They were very unhappy that we had given compensation to our Vietnam vets who had been exposed to Agent Orange but we had offered nothing at all to the Vietnamese. They have a very high incidence of birth defects and problems, even now into the third generation, that they attribute to the use of Agent Orange in napalm during the war. We have never been prepared to provide any kind of compensation for them, but in the late '90s we were offering to set up a bi-national Science and Technology Commission to look into it. There was a need to figure out, if we could, what the baseline exposure to dioxin had been like in Vietnam before the war and then what, if any, had been the accumulated effects of our use of Agent Orange. More importantly, what could be the right treatment for the genetic damage that was claimed to have occurred in the population (it has never been proven). A lot of fundamental scientific questions needed to be answered; for example, there could be a lot of other reasons why children were being born with deformities. We didn't know yet. This became a big issue in the bilateral relationship.

Q: Yellow rain, was that a dead issue?

HUHTALA: No, that was dead. That was in the '70s. Claims of yellow rain or aerial poisoning had been pretty much debunked.

Q: Did you, when you were looking at Vietnam as an issue, how did you see the economy developing and what were we sort of predicting for the whither of Vietnam?

HUHTALA: The economy was doing very well. They had not been terribly affected by the Asian financial crisis because they still weren't very well integrated into the regional economy. I don't remember what the growth rate was but it was impressive, and the population was growing fast too. They'd gotten up to I believe around 70 million at that point. A lot of our companies were interested in investing. They were having problems, as they did in China, and that's why the BTA was so important. It was going to get us agreement on things like intellectual property protection and the rights of investors and the ability of foreign companies to come in and really participate in the economy. There was a lot of oomph behind the effort to get the BTA negotiated because it was seen as having tremendous potential. It still is seen that way.

Q: Were we seeing the same situation that, you know better than I, correct me if I'm wrong, that was happening in China where you had the government ruling but things had evolved into sort of almost corrupt money lords or something. Provincial rulers were allowing the economy to take a

life of its own.

HUHTALA: I'm not sure how much of that took place in China but that's not my field really. In Vietnam there was certainly corruption. There were problems, but sense was that it was not out of hand. The country was going through a process they call "doi moi," which means renovation. They were trying to effect economic reforms and open up the country to the outside. They were buying American jet planes for their national airline. They were trying to come into the mainstream economically, not politically but economically. They joined ASEAN in this period (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations). In general, they were becoming good citizens in the region, both politically and economically.

Q: Last question, you were there when the Vietnamese set up their embassy?

HUHTALA: Yes.

Q: It's always difficult to set up an embassy. Did we help get them started?

HUHTALA: We had been managing their property for years. We had seized it during the war, so now we renovated it and turned it over to them in the mid '90s. It's a beautiful building there on R Street. They did fine by themselves. You have to respect the Vietnamese, they are smart and able and Le Bang turned out to be a fabulous leader for the first embassy.

Q: I'm just thinking, I'm off in a few minutes to meet a friend of mine and we're going to have lunch at the Eden Center where they still fly the South Vietnamese flag. Did you have a problem with, here in northern Virginia we have a very large, very active, the Vietnamese are a very capable group of people but they have certainly not accepted the new government.

HUHTALA: Some of them have, actually. There are all kinds of Vietnamese Americans here and some were very supportive of what we were doing. Others to this day have not accepted it. There's been a continuing problem of Vietnamese communities around the country passing local statutes calling for the flying of the old South Vietnam flag or giving grief to the Vietnamese leaders and diplomats that come through. They demonstrated against Pete Peterson in southern California. The Vietnamese authorities have a very hard time understanding why we allow this. Now that we have diplomatic relations they believe we should not allow anybody to insult them. They don't really understand our system and the right of free speech that people have in this country.

Q: But anyway you didn't find this as a group that you were particularly worried about security and all that, of the Vietnamese diplomats?

HUHTALA: Not here in Washington. They eventually set up a consulate in San Francisco and they've been the target of some problems there. California has a very high number of Vietnamese citizens.

Q: Although they don't abut on each other, there's Laos in the way, but what about with Vietnam?

HUHTALA: The relationship was warming when I was there. The Thais had always feared Vietnam as an aggressive nation and had always regarded Cambodia as a buffer state, which is why when Vietnam invaded Cambodia in '79 it was a huge concern for Bangkok. By the time I got there Vietnam was engaged in its own economic development and its renovation program called "doi moi" and had reaching out in the spirit of friendship to the other countries in the region. Thailand was taking them up on it. Not without some misgivings of course but I think, again, Thai businessmen were beginning to invest in Vietnam and they saw a lot of potential there.

Q: I mean Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

HUHTALA: It was a continuation of the previous trends that I have described. With Vietnam we had been forced to call them a "country of particular concern" in our religious freedom report, which was the first time that we had had to do a negative thing like that during the normalization process. Being designated a CPC can involve certain sanctions. Because we were in the process of negotiating this first-ever visit by the Vietnamese prime minister, it was very delicate. We eventually worked out a way to get them to agree to improve their performance on religious freedom under a so-called binding agreement, which is also provided for in the legislation as an alternative to sanctions. Having gone through such a laborious process to lift all of the sanctions resulting from the Vietnam war, nobody wanted to be back in the business of imposing sanctions on Vietnam. Nevertheless there are real problems with religious freedom there, they do have to be addressed, and they are being addressed. Although I saw that they were again named a CPC again this year. I guess they are not out of the woods yet.

Q: Did you feel that Vietnam particularly was beginning to feel the effects of actuarial tables getting rid some of the old guard?

HUHTALA: No, they are still trying to pursue economic liberalization without political liberalization. But what I saw in my visits there (I visited a couple of times in my last year) was that the political leaders are becoming a little bit irrelevant. With the bilateral trade agreement in force and American and foreign investment coming into Vietnam, there is a certain dynamic that is developing there that will eventually make that kind of political system obsolete. It will probably take another generation.

Q: Again, instant communications are in place.

HUHTALA: Sure. They've got the Internet, they've got cable TV. We're doing the right thing there; we're bringing a lot of their young people for education in the United States and then sending them back. Again, they remain very industrious, very intelligent people.

THOMAS R. CARMICHAEL
Vietnamese Language Training, FSI
Washington, DC (2001-2002)

Public Affairs Officer
Hanoi (2002-2004)

Mr. Carmichael was born in Iowa and raised in Illinois and Florida. He was educated at the University of Florida and Florida State University. In 1984 Mr. Carmichael joined the USIA Foreign Service and served variously as Cultural Affairs Officer and Press Officer in Madrid, Le Paz, Poznan, Kuala Lumpur, Ulaanbaatar and Hanoi. He also served several tours at USIA Headquarters and the State Department in Washington, DC. Mr. Carmichael was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.

Q: So you took Vietnamese. Is it five tonal?

CARMICHAEL: A six tonal language. I tell you, it was a struggle. We have good teachers over here, hard working, and they are proud of their language. It worked out OK.

Q: Was there a point in doing this where all of a sudden you could tell the difference between the tones? Did it just suddenly dawn on you?

CARMICHAEL: I would say that sounds too easy. It was more of a real struggle to internalize that sort of thing, and it was easier to understand eventually others than it was to speak. Americans don't speak clearly and the Vietnamese demand you speak very clearly with the tones and pronunciation, or they can't understand what you are saying. A lot of it is just like anything else; vocabulary work, vocabulary work, vocabulary work.

Q: I had just a touch of it before I went to Saigon. This was '69, '70 and I didn't make an inch of progress.

CARMICHAEL: I could get along a little bit on the street, and I could read and I could watch Vietnamese TV, and get basically what was going on which was quite valuable, because their TV represented government policy and government attitudes.

Q: You went to Hanoi and you were there from when to when?

CARMICHAEL: That would have been '02 through '04.

Q: How stood things with Vietnam at that point?

CARMICHAEL: We had our first ambassador just before I got there, Pete Peterson, and when he left and Ray Burghardt took over, and Ray was a long time Asia hand. I must say, I felt blessed to have had an ambassador that really understood the country and appreciated it for all of its

complexities and difficulties. It had all been getting better. Things had all been moving well after President Clinton had left, the embargo had ended, and the Vietnamese wanted to be close to us in a balanced way, moving forward with the Chinese to the north, but they want to do things on their terms and, of course, when it has to do with human rights and religious rights, we just have to move them along slowly and surely. We were moving forward, and, of course, Americans want to go in there and move right ahead, and the Vietnamese, particularly because they have a structure with the Communist Party in so much control, when wanted to move sometimes results were unpredictable. It wasn't a consistent policy throughout the government to be friendly to us. Certain parts of the government got more advantages working with us; certainly the health sector for instance, and they were open to a lot of different programs – and USAID had a very good director there that was active and wanted to move forward.

The military was there for the first time. While I was there we had the first U.S. military ship visit since the war ended down in Saigon, in Ho Chi Minh City.

Q: What did people call it? Was it "Saigon" pretty much?

CARMICHAEL: They called it Ho Chi Minh City, but there is a port in Ho Chi Minh City that is called Saigon. Up in the North where I was, that was my perspective on things, and my folks would call it Ho Chi Minh City, but if somebody slipped and called it Saigon, nobody had any dire problem with that.

Q: I was there when Ho Chi Minh was not a word you bandied about.

Public affairs officers; could you explain what your major concentrations were?

CARMICHAEL: We have the biggest U.S. government-sponsored Fulbright program in the world there. There are other countries that have bigger programs, if you include host-country contributions, but ours had the largest U.S. government sponsorship. Plus while I was there, when things were getting better, Congress developed a fund called "Vietnam Education Foundation," which was another five million dollars a year for scholarships for science and technology studies. This was a congressional fund, a congressional program, not an executive branch initiative and so we had congressional visits and the Foundation's oversight board wanted to open up an office there, separate from the embassy, not supported by the embassy. You are thinking, "How could they do that?" And they had a hard time doing it. It was a difficult thing to do.

Q: What was the idea? They didn't trust the embassy or was this a power grab of somebody on a staff somewhere wanted?

CARMICHAEL: I think they just wanted the freedom to do things differently, and without the program restraints the executive branch must acknowledge, and I have no reason to think poorly of their motivation, except that no one wants to get involved in all the rules and regulations that executive branch must follow, but we have to live by them. We do get results, and others in the government should be able to acknowledge the validity of rules they impose on somebody else.

Like most places, we had plenty of speakers that would come over, often speaking on foreign policy issues, a question of U.S. activity, U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, our observations and our trying to explain our policy toward China and policies toward Southeast Asia, so the Vietnamese could understand our actions. With China on the north, the Vietnamese did not want their understanding of our presence to stand still with the Vietnam War.

I was in FSI when 9/11 occurred, taking my Vietnamese, so when I got over there, and there was the invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq, those events took up a lot of media space in the government media. We could explain our policy there, but they weren't really interested in explanations. The government media found that it was a good time to hammer us pretty hard about going into another country.

Q: How does one counter that?

CARMICHAEL: You really have to counter some of truly rabid government sentiment through your programs and contact with institutions, because the press was pretty much closed to us. I could write letters to the editor, and I felt wrote some pretty good letters to the editor, but they were not going to get published; they're simply not going to get published.

What our thing was and what I started to do was to start being factual in terms of releases about what our two countries were doing together. When we brought in military advisers on mine sweeping or bomb cleaning or anything on training or disaster relief, we made sure news of this activity ended up in the paper -- and papers would accept factual releases on our USAID programs, on our health programs, and on our cultural programs.

But they wouldn't accept opinion pieces or policy discussions. For example, as I recall, USAID could do programs on HIV/AIDS and we could place releases on the programs, but when we sent a "letter to the editor" from the ambassador, talking about AIDS and the way we need to work together on the issue, speaking about our cooperation, they printed the facts of cooperation, but dropped the major text with our ambassador's words on our international AIDS policy. The piece hardly controversial, but they were not interested in a policy statement in the paper or were not permitted to print.

Q: You've been sort of around the block on this. How Communist was the country, you know the ideology and that sort of thing?

CARMICHAEL: The Party was still in control. I could have a program, my colleagues in the military and other places could have a program, and there could suddenly be an unexplained "complication" that would prevent it from going through. Most of the time that was because someone or some group in the Party would insist upon a cancellation, but you wouldn't know who had the objection or know where in the Party it came from. Someone could say, "This cannot happen" and it wouldn't happen. If you say, Vietnam is a Communist country, well, what is called the Communist Party makes those sorts of shots on things, modulating the pace of how our countries get together.

Some of the economic rights that the people could enjoy were increasing, so some of the things

people there miss, we don't even think about here in terms of human rights - like being able to work in another part of the city than the one the government has specified for you. Those things were cleaning up and were changing. Economic rights were increasing, but in political rights, it was still considered a monopoly of the Communist Party.

One other thing about the ideology, in terms of being able to start your own business; I think one of my staff said it pretty well. That was, "Here in Vietnam you can start your own business now, you can start making your own money, but you just don't want to get too big because once you get too big and too successful, the Party or the government will look at what you are doing and say, "I'd like a little of that", "I want some of that." You would lose your business.

Q: It sounds as what has happened other places before really almost the revolution of turning down Communists that the real ideology was over and now it was a matter of power or a piece of the action.

CARMICHAEL: Some people feel that was the case that you saw there. There were still some people in my analysis, after all, in the Communist Party who could claim indeed that they had won a war, that they were the ones that brought independence to Vietnam, and we were the people they had been fighting -- among others. As you know, it was a coalition; it wasn't just the Americans there. They of the old cadre, the revolutionaries, they need to maintain that myth of their being about able to run the country. They led it down a pretty nasty economic road, before it was able to recover. Until they died off, they wanted to maintain their position as liberators of the country. They have to do that under a Communist ideology and the Communist Party, so they are going to always keep up that façade, even though it may be for their sons and their daughters. Their families are the ones that are really benefiting from this economic wealth.

Q: Who were the exchange people sitting in a big exchange program, Fulbright? What were we doing?

CARMICHAEL: They were perfectly happy, we had both master's degrees, and we had a full, open competition -- that was something which we held as a principle. We couldn't get the Vietnamese government involved in competitions, because they were not merit-oriented. Their merit is 'have you supported the Party lately?' The embassy didn't have a bi-national commission, because there was no partner there who could provide money, but, more importantly, could follow merit principles.

We also would entertain nominees from the different universities, but, once again, we couldn't just take those students that had been nominated by the universities themselves, because they didn't necessarily nominate by merit.

One of the things my executive director had to do was make sure when a teacher from a university applied for a Fulbright, that he would not be ostracized when he came back -- that his position was still there. There were some deans, some university presidents who understood that sending somebody over to the U.S. and ensuring they would have their position upon return was a chance to enhance their faculties. Other people saw that as 'I want to send the person I want to send, and if I can't send that person, then nobody is going to be going, because I am weakened. It

seemed sometimes that the Communists were more interested in using access to the outside for their own internal political agenda. I saw that in Poland too. They use access to the outside as one of the perks of being a good Party member, being a loyal citizen to the Communist government. You know, that's what you earned for following the party line. It was a patronage game.

Q: One of the things I noted, this goes back to the early '60s in Yugoslavia for example, we would send bright, young people to the united states in exchange and they would come back ready to pass on their knowledge and their way of doing things and find they are completely frozen out because Herr Professor who was head of the faculty and probably studied in Austria during the '30s or so, that's not the way he wanted to do it because he'd lose control. It takes a generation to get rid of the old farts.

CARMICHAEL: It's not just under a Communist system but this is a country that is not very far from some real economic destitution, and university and student exchanges were a way to get hard currency and to reward people. In a way that is even a little bit different what happens in other countries where university administrators and entrenched faculty just don't want a Fulbrighter returning from the U.S. saying, "Hey, I just returned from an American university with some really new ideas about studies that can make a difference." – even the returnee can offer real insight in areas such as American Studies.

Q: Did you sense that Vietnam, here it is sitting in the middle of all these little tigers like Singapore and Thailand and Malaysia, all of whom with well developed electronics businesses, getting tied to the international IT technology villages' world. In a way I would think this would be kind of difficult for Vietnam to fit into that because of its ideology.

CARMICHAEL: In terms of being part of the manufacturing, I think what a company wants is a productive, reasonably well-trained labor force, and Vietnam could provide that. There was some standard that is used in shoe manufacturing that indicates how quickly the work force can meet world standards of quality. The Vietnamese reached an acceptable level much more quickly than the Thai, for instance. They can be incredibly detail-oriented and productive. In computer and other electronics assembly, this is more important than intellectual freedom.

Q: Yes, the Nike and

CARMICHAEL: Yes, and I can remember this businessman telling us that what Thailand took five years to develop a skill level that Vietnam was able to do in three. So they are hard working, and there is still some Confucian respect for learning, that would do them very well. Most people, when they look at Vietnam, say these people work hard. I don't think technology in terms of manufacturing was a difficult thing for them to do.

One of the problems that you had, interestingly enough, was the Vietnamese were very, very careful where they would buy their electronics - whether it was a DVD or CD player - because if a Vietnamese had repaired, re-boxed, and resold it as new, it may work like a charm for a bit, but might likely fail in the long run. The Vietnamese could fix these things and put them back, but if they were really fixed – that would be a question. They were very, very nimble that way

intellectually to do that sort of thing.

Their problem is that China is right next door.

Q: Was there when you were there, was the internet an issue, a problem?

CARMICHAEL: In terms of whether we could get access?

Q: No, I mean for the Vietnamese? Not so much the government, but the individual Vietnamese. Were they plugged in or not?

CARMICHAEL: They weren't plugged in to the extent that they could be. They had internet cafes, but when I was there, they were only reaching the point where more and more could own their own computer, and there would be a chance at some access, but most of the internet access was done at internet cafes with very narrow bandwidth. They weren't quick machines, but I remember I always checked to see if VOA website was blocked or not. There were supposed experts who insisted. "Oh, they blocked the VOA website." I would go to small towns, even up in the mountains on our vacation, and I would take a little time and go to the internet café and see whether I could get on eBay and also check if the VOA website was being blocked. It was really never blocked. There was access, but it wasn't the broadband access that is anywhere near what many others countries have and could support much work – but the government there had prosecuted their citizens for very basic access to U.S. government, and basic democratic thinking.

Q: It was a matter of more or less development rather than government policy that was trying to keep it down?

CARMICHAEL: Yes. They were very, very wary of the internet. There had been some cases of Vietnamese activists downloading USIA and State Department material, like the human rights documents. I forget if they downloaded our constitution or whether it was one of our human rights pamphlets, but the government ended up tossing this type of dissident in jail for quite a while for doing that. It was a big case, an important case but at the same time I could go down to the internet café and see that same document was still there, of course, on our website, available to anyone else who wanted to download it.

Q: Did you get any sense of a real generational change that was happening through the university and all with the college kids and early graduates sort of comparable to the other ones that you met elsewhere or were they more reserved?

CARMICHAEL: I would say that they were really just about as open. When I would take a speaker and, of course, that's what you'd do, you program a speaker in a host country institution. The goal for me was not to listen to our, but watching the young people and listening to their questions. The young people were reserved, but you would have one or two who would be more aggressive in asking questions. That would be pretty similar to anyplace else. I wouldn't say there was much more classroom aggressiveness. Vietnamese students are not a particularly aggressive group of people.

Q: Was there much sort of in a way, push back from Vietnamese here in the United States? We have a hell of a lot of them here and obviously they don't have too friendly feelings towards the government in Vietnam. Was that a problem or not?

CARMICHAEL: These things were always moving towards the more and more positive. I was there five years ago, so I am sure some things have changed, but there were some Vietnamese groups that were interested in coming back, interested in investment. Their families were buried there. Their religion says they should honor those graves, and so that access was an important thing. You would see more of that in the South, as you know, rather than in the North where I was. The Vietnamese government still was not as open, and saw the Viet Que, as they were called as "cash cows" for investment, rather than as another generation of Vietnamese. The government's attitude was 'We have nothing against these people. We can forgive their betrayal. All they have to do is say that they were wrong, that they are on the wrong side of things and that we can let them back' -- this without understanding those people fought for what they believed in too. They were just on the other side, that's all.

Q: How did Saigon or Ho Chi Minh City play? I imagine you had a branch post there? I would think that the people there had been brought up on Armed Forces Radio and American stuff that would have been a really active place.

CARMICHAEL: Yes, you know, under USIA the branch post, the branch PAO in Ho Chi Minh city would have reported to the country public affairs officer in Hanoi, but one of the arrangements they made when they moved USIA into State Department is that the public affairs officer in post reports to their the principal officer. So he reported not to me, but to the consul general in Saigon. All the cultural stereotypes which they talk about seemed to hold true; they lived in a culture that was more comfortable with free enterprise and entrepreneurial. They were a bit more open, more aggressive as individuals - the Foreign Service nationals and such. But they had their limitations down there in Ho Chi Minh City, as well, but their staff wasn't necessarily that much smaller than the staff in Hanoi. We had one more American. I was the public affairs officer, and I had a deputy public affairs officer in Hanoi, and the public affairs officer down there in Ho Chi Minh City had a junior officer trainee working with him. The staff wasn't that much smaller either. There was a lot of interest in Saigon on the part of Americans, because, as you would expect, there are more business opportunities; it is a more open climate and that sort of thing. The public affairs officer there was an active and real positive guy down there. Hanoi had more congressional visits that wanted to visit the president and the government up there in Hanoi.

Q: How was the ambassador?

CARMICHAEL: I thought he was great. We had an ambassador that was in a State Department officer class that was assigned to Saigon when he came into the Foreign Service. Afterwards he went back to Vietnam to work on negotiations concerning the demining process up in Haiphong. He worked in Beijing and was consul general in Shanghai and then the director in AIT Taiwan. He was an Asian hand with an appreciation for the culture. So it was very good. It is nice to have somebody who's got some depth of understanding. He knew we weren't going to solve

everything with the Vietnamese while he was there. He had a long view on things.

Q: What was your impression of Chinese influence and reactions in Vietnam?

CARMICHAEL: What we always noticed is if we had a major visit of an American official or a Vietnamese president, or premier going to the United States, there would be a corresponding visit with China. They balanced their demonstrations of closeness and interests pretty closely. In terms of, I thought it was interesting, is the sort of situation that Chinese products have there. One would think the Vietnamese who could work hard and work for very little would be able to compete, but I remember going in looking at ties in shops and finding Chinese silk ties in Vietnam and, of course, they have their own silk industry. The Vietnamese had little Vespa-type and small motorcycles, but they really preferred Japanese over the Chinese products. I was told over and over, that the Chinese look nice, but they just don't have any real guts to them, they were not sturdy enough for their needs.

They're concerned about China – and they'd be nuts if they weren't concerned. The last war that the Vietnamese had was with China - they are naturally concerned about China. They are not going to be that open all the time with us – and they have a ready excuse to say 'we are doing this because of China.' They have to respond to geopolitics.

Q: The universities, did they have a defined American Studies program?

CARMICHAEL: Oh, no. We had one Fulbrighter who we were going to send to the United States in American Studies, and that was what you'd call a "triumph" for this fellow, and it is a long shot in terms of his returning to Vietnam and teaching or occupying an administrative role equal to his achievement – but we felt it was worth the gamble. American Studies is not an established field, and in a lot of countries and certainly in Vietnam, active interest in the U.S. would bring the questions, "Why are you studying about America? They are still our enemies."

Q: I can remember being in Germany and the Germans, I mean, for God's sake. We deluged the place with X and all that sort of thing but they really didn't fit in, you know in the 19th century when they drew up their thing, America didn't count for much and are still working on a 19th century schedule. That's a problem in Europe.

CARMICHAEL: I know in Poland and even in Mongolia, if there was any American Studies it was within American literature or in the context of English teaching. It wasn't in the context of sociology or international relations. It was all sort of down the totem pole in their minds.

Q: It represents a major problem really with our relations with the world. We study Europe and we study Asia but other people don't study us and we are an important factor in the world and what makes us the way we are is important.

CARMICHAEL: Sometimes you think they have this mistaken notion that the media provides them all they need to know. It is so silly, it is so wrong. But here, this was something where they could actually study the United States, but it was something that was very suspect, so it didn't develop. The number of wild ideas that foreigners have about the U.S. is astounding, as well as

just factual mistakes, but I have heard too many times, “Americans are so isolated and ignorant. We know about the U.S., but they know nothing about us.” Well, we don’t know much about the world, but that doesn’t mean the world knows about us.

Q: In Vietnam. Did you run across were the scars pretty recent? Every once in awhile somebody say, “I lost my family due to your bombing” or this sort of thing come up?

CARMICHAEL: Oh, yes. We did not have, ‘You Americans, you’re animals and I lost my such and such during the bombing.’ I know that I had a one of our Foreign Service nationals tell me she could not use the word American in her house, in her father’s house on the other side. Most of them are not bitter -- they like Americans. Who did they have? They had the Chinese? Why would they like the Chinese? The Chinese are this dark cloud that hangs over them. Americans were quite popular. In fact someone made the point that we were probably more popular in Vietnam than any other Asian country. Most American visitors said that they were treated well by the Vietnamese -- which I personally think really was something that the old Communist Party cadre really had a hard time accepting, I would think. After all they supposedly had grabbed independence from the Americans, but now the Americans were increasingly popular. A pole had indicated that President Clinton was the most popular world politician in Vietnam when my wife and I arrived.

Q: How did our, President Bush, the Second and the going into Iraq, how did that play?

CARMICHAEL: That was a chance for the Vietnamese government to really hammer us. They hammered us on that constantly in the press and they really hammered us on Abu Ghraib.

Q: Abu Ghraib being the mistreatment of prisoners by our prison guards.

CARMICHAEL: Yes. When that happened they laid out a full anti-American propaganda package in the newspapers, but you can’t get upset about the editorials in the Vietnamese papers. That’s just what they do; they just sort of hammer us. I ran into many Americans and Vietnamese who’d say, “But nobody reads this anymore, because they are always so one-sided, that there is no nuance to them, and the Vietnamese don’t trust their own government, so most Vietnamese don’t really take into account those editorials.” I really never really believed all that. I believed that, eventually, that is how stuff somehow does stick. I would write a letter every once in a while when an editorial went over the top. You expect criticism. But in Abu Ghraib, after those pictures came out and such, the tone was really remarkably more vitriolic than anything we had seen before.

Q: How about the missing in action issue? Was that still going on in your time?

CARMICHAEL: Oh, yes, absolutely. They still have a very active program trying to find the missing in action at that time. The low hanging fruit was being picked, that is, the more easily found and accessed remains had been uncovered, but they were still finding them, they were still tracking them. There was still a separate armed forces element in Hanoi, that wasn’t inside the embassy, but had their own group of people that would search and recover remains. A lot of this had to be really logistically heavy; that is to say, for example, to locate a jet fighter that had

crashed with bombs on it on the side of a mountain, or full of fuel, and send in an expert on a risky mission to search around in it. In some instances, and they would have to rent the land where the remains were located, and get permissions, which was costly, to excavate the site. They had to hire engineers. They would have to hire labor to dig through the property, and some of these caustic chemicals might mean that they had to wear special hazmat suits, so these were not just guys finding some remains; they were caring out mini-engineering projects. The helicopters that crashed in rice paddies have been found long ago, but helicopters that had crashed into the side of a tree-covered mountain might still not have been found. They required specialized U.S. crews to repel down the mountain to get their crash site. That's the type of really difficult stuff that they were still doing. The Vietnamese cooperated very well. They could not afford politically to not be cooperative in that mission. And they made good money too.

Q: I still see these missing in action flags flying around, particularly firehouses and all but it was sort of the issue of the right in American politics that somehow or another there were prison camps in the middle of the jungle with Americans there. It made no sense at all but

CARMICHAEL: There might be somebody that said that, but I never got any sense that there was any chance, no matter how remote, that this was true.

There were though quite a number of Americans who had fought in the war and wanted to go back and visit the places they had fought and that sort of thing. Most of them were, trying to reconcile their memories and that sort of thing. It wasn't generally coming back with hostility.

Q: I read a book by a North Vietnamese soldier obviously in translation called, The Sorrows of War. Did you ever read that?

CARMICHAEL: Yes.

Q: Very powerful, an interesting book.

CARMICHAEL: That book came out finally in Vietnamese while I was there, but for a long time that author had not been recognized and the book was banned. He was not popular with the regime.

Q: He slams, he talks about war rather than, he talked about coming back. They were supposed to say the South Vietnamese didn't fight well and screw this. They did fight well.

CARMICHAEL: That book was banned in Vietnam, but while I was there, I'd go in the bookstores and just see what types of books were available to the Vietnamese public, and I happened to find the book on the shelves, with a different name, and I took it in to my staff. They told me it was the same book. One told me that this was a major step forward, because the book talked about the Vietnamese war, but didn't portray it as a heroic enterprise. Instead, it underlined that the Vietnamese people were deeply affected, and some soldiers didn't come back from the war full of gratefulness to the Party and their leadership. They came back traumatized and became drunks. They came back and not everybody at home was in support. They learned their wives had run off with somebody else -- and that sort of thing.

Q: Were you seeing an ability to have a more realistic view of the war, more memoirs coming around or was that?

CARMICHAEL: Somewhat, but it is a slow process. There was another lady who wrote a series of books that talked about the war in realistic ways. She still was not popular with the regime. On the other hand, I could still watch on TV or in the cinema contemporary programs, recently produced, about the bombing of Hanoi and the Vietnamese's great fight bringing down the American aircraft. And, of course, the Vietnamese had preserved for all to see a couple of U.S. jet fighters in Hanoi that had crashed landed in the town during the bombing. Those planes were upright, stuck nose-first in this little lake in the middle of town, maintained as a display. So there was an element that wants those things, the war, to be seen in the same way. It serves their purpose. They can say to their citizens, "Look, you may like the Americans now but this is what they did to us."

Q: In a way say, fair enough. We haven't let go of some things.

You left there when?

CARMICHAEL: That would have been in 2004.

End of reader